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INDIAN HISTORY AND CULTURE, 1995

Memory, History and the Question of Violence

Reflections on the Reconstruction of Partition

Gyanendra Pandey

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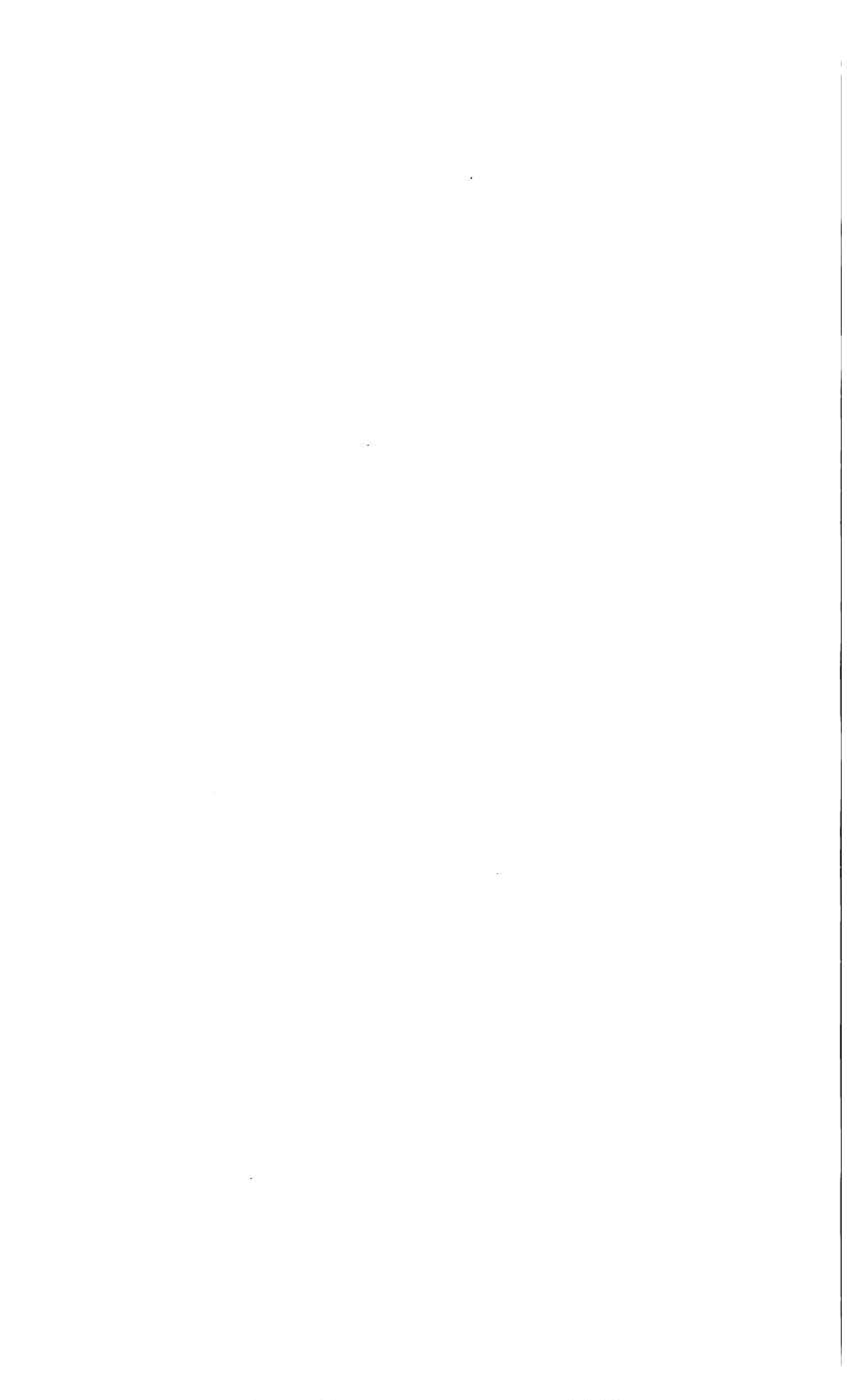
CENTRE FOR STUDIES IN SOCIAL SCIENCES, CALCUTTA



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I. 'VIOLENCE' AND 'CIVILIZATION'*

A curious feature of our academic work on the history of religious communal violence in India is that, until recently, most of it has had little to do either with religion or with violence. One particular political circumstance goes a long way towards inducing caution in this aspect of our self-reflection. 'Communalism'—"the opposition to each other of religious communities", as Dumont provocatively, if inaccurately, described it[1] —has found a place in our political discourse as possibly the most important obstacle to be overcome in the evolution of a just, progressive and modern society in India. The battle against 'communalism' has thus been at the centre of the struggle for nationalism and democracy in India, no less notably in the last decade and a half as fifty years ago. This has deeply and understandably coloured all our most serious historical work.

Indian historians are right to maintain, Dumont notwithstanding, that 'communalism' is not in the main about 'religion'. Indeed, Dumont acknowledges as much when, immediately after proffering the definition cited above, he goes on to speak of 'communalism' (in W. C. Smith's words) as "that ideology which emphasizes as the

* I am deeply grateful for the honour done to me by the Director and Fellows of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, in inviting me to deliver the S.G. Deuskar Lectures for 1995. I wish to thank those who heard the lectures in April 1998 for their comments and questions ; as also the Indian Council for Historical Research, New Delhi, and the South Asia Research Unit, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, Western Australia, for grants that enabled me to carry out extensive oral histroy research, which provides the basis of much of my argument in Lecture II.

social, political, and economic unit the group of adherents of each religion, and emphasizes the distinction, even the antagonism, between such groups."[2] Yet, by a curious and insufficiently examined substitution, the Indian historian has passed from a rejection of 'communalism' to a fear of 'religion'.

To put this in perspective, consider for a moment the investigation of the 'religious' element in Natalie Zemon Davis's well-known essay entitled 'The Rites of Violence', dealing with the practices of religious violence in sixteenth century France. Davis writes in this essay of the many deeply-held beliefs and urgent admonitions that incited 'religious riots' during this period. She describes the 'religious riot' as "any violent action undertaken against religious targets by people who were not acting officially or formally as agents of political and ecclesiastical authority,"[3] and emphasizes that the conflicts she speaks of were "essentially religious".

> In general...the crowds in religious riots in sixteenth century France can be seen as acting out clerical roles—defending true doctrine or ridding the community of defilement in a violent version of priest or prophet—and sometimes acting out magisterial roles [directed towards the same ends—GP].

"Clearly, some riotous behaviour, such as extensive pillaging done by both Protestants and Catholics, cannot be subsumed under these heads," she writes further ; "but just as the prevalence of pillaging in a war does not prevent us from typing it as a holy war, so the prevalence of pillaging in a riot should not prevent us from seeing it as essentially religious."[4]

Whatever reservations we might have about the assumed constancy and reproducibility of the 'rites' of violence that are the subject of Davis's essay, it is noteworthy that the category of 'religious riot' and of 'religious (or holy) war' practically does not exist for Indian historiography, and the notion of "essentially religious" would rarely be applied to

anything that went beyond matters of (individual?) faith and worship. The specific historical conditions that have made for this difference between 'Europe' and 'India' are, in general terms, fairly well known. On the one hand, Europe's gradual secularization—the separation of Church and State and the consignment of matters of religious faith to a separate sphere, as a result of an extended contest between an organised political and an organised ecclesiastical authority, and aided by the advance of Enlightenment Reason, scientific 'development', and nationalist-imperialism—have made it possible for European historians to speak openly of religion and conflicts over religion in their past. In India, on the other hand, the rather different relationship between 'church' and 'state', religion and worldly affairs—in the present as well as the past—and the cataclysmic advent of a colonial modernity that constituted a sharp break with the past but, consciously or unconsciously, also helped to reinvigorate 'traditional' moorings and beliefs, has not enabled any such ease in the writing up of 'religion' in history.

Thus, even in writing of avowedly 'religious' movements in the pre-modern period, the most sophisticated of our historians have played down the 'religious' element in order to highlight the 'political', 'agrarian' or other 'class' bases of the struggles. It is not 'religion' that is at work here, but—at most—the shadow of religion, it is suggested. There is no serious investigation of *jehad* in historical writing relating to the period of the advent of Islam in India, for example, in spite of the fact that medieval chroniclers and hagiographers have used the term in several senses and that Indian sufis particularly adopted the concepts of *jehad-i-Akbar* and *jehad-i-asghar*. *Jehad* still appears in our modern historiography as nothing but a rhetorical cover for political, economic, 'material' interests.[5]

The aspect of religion is muted also in discussions of the rise of militant sects, even in the face of evidence of their self-constitution (as in the case of the Sikhs) on the basis of stories of torture and martyrdom suffered by their

forefathers in defence of their faith against Muslim rulers. Irfan Habib's remarks in his classic *Agrarian System of Mughal India* are not uncharacteristic.

> When radical ideas, such as the contempt for caste and the sense of unity under a new and convincing faith, established themselves in the minds and hearts of the masses, the sects could not always remain confined within their old mystic shell. In the event, they provided the inspiration for two of the most powerful revolts against the Mughals, viz., those of the Satnamis and the Sikhs.

Habib goes on to add, significantly, that "while the ties of castes and religious communities helped to enlarge the scale of peasant uprisings, they also tended to *cloud or obscure their class nature.*"[6]

The avoidance of religion is, if anything, even more evident in academic writings dealing with religious communal conflict in nineteenth and twentieth century India. "Essentially", we are told again and again, these are 'class struggles', 'peasant rebellions', 'revolts of the poor', misdirected by the leadership or misrepresented by the authorities (then or later) as sectarian, ethnic, 'communal' strife. In a slightly amended form, with the replacement of 'class struggle', 'peasant rebellion', etc., by something called 'modern politics', the same point is made for Partition violence, although the religious communal character of the massacres, rioting, rape and abduction, is no less evident here. Across the board, as I shall try to show a little later in this lecture, Partition historians have sought to underline 'politics' (political instigation) and negligent administration as the *real* causes of the violence of 1946-48.[7]

* * *

So much for the place of 'religion' in accounts of violent popular struggle. What is at least as noticeable as the avoidance of 'religion' in writings on 16th or 17th, or 19th

or 20th century religious communal violence in India is a neglect of the question of violence itself. Historians do not directly address the 'violence' for reasons perhaps not unrelated to those that apply to 'religion', having to do with nation-building and claims to modernity. This statement requires some qualification today. In the wake of the anti-Sikh 'riots' of 1984 and the series of anti-Muslim pogroms of the 1980s culminating in the Babri Masjid related violence of 1992-93, there has been a spate of important investigations and writings on collective violence. Following from that, and stirred up to some extent too by the celebration of the 50th anniversary of Indian Independence, there has also been a renewed interest in, and considerable new writing on, the history of Partition violence. It is worth reflecting a little on the reasons for this new visibility of something that was long invisible.[8]

Again, a small detour, through the scholarship and scholarly debates of another country, may help to clarify circumstances in our own. In an important new study of religious/ethnic/communal strife in Sri Lanka, Pradeep Jeganathan investigates the question of how 'violence' has emerged as an analytical problem in social science, and an object of enquiry in his own discipline of anthropology. His findings are instructive.

Jeganathan notes that the constitution of 'violence' as an object of enquiry is very recent. In the not too distant past, anthropology's concern was with "the non-modern, the specific, the local and the indigenous, that is to say [with] 'culture'"; its subjects, animate and inanimate "were located in the *interior* of Ceylon"; and there was something of a neat, if obviously crude, division between 'political science' and 'anthropology', between "government on the one hand and social or cultural organisation on the other."[9] '1983' changed all that : it was a moment of 'truth', not unlike '1984' for Independent India. A "nightmare" for all the upholders of the idea of a new, civilized nation, the Sinhala-Tamil 'riots' of that year exposed the "dark, secret, uncivilized underbelly of [the new] Lanka."[10]

The "horror" of it all, the impossibility of reducing the outbreak to a problem of law and order, as had been done with earlier 'riots', the loss of political meaning : one word, 'incomprehensibility' lies at the bottom of the emergence of 'violence' as the new object of anthropological enquiry, in Jeganathan's view. '1983' is a moment of incomprehensibility in the narration of Lanka's modernity," he writes. "Twin elements make up the equation here : the perceived collapse of the state, and the concomitant rise of cultural passions" (p. 51). The site of 'violence' is marked by a "breakdown in political narratives" (p. 73). "The condition of possibility of 'violence'as an anthropological category...is incomprehensibility : *political* incomprehensibility" (p.52). "In '1958', 'horror' is transformed into a problem of 'order'; in '1983', given the crisis in the apparatus of order, it becomes an analytic of 'violence'"(p. 50).

These two related propositions, regarding the breakdown in political narration (or narratibility) and the crisis in the apparatus of order, provide us with a crucial insight. I wish to carry this a little further by pointing to a particular colonialist trajectory in India (as in Sri Lanka) that serves to make the state even more central to the narration of modernity, and therefore, to the question of political incomprehensibility, than it perhaps is elsewhere. In its most common self-representation, modern civilization may be said to be equated with a state of non-violence, where mature, adult human beings negotiate with one another and determine their rights and duties through rational argument. Elias's account of the 'civilizing process' is one that feeds comfortably into this representation. Through the 'civilizing process', Elias has suggested, the "necessary control of impulses" is increasingly transferred from "an exterior prohibition, imposed if need be by force, to a stable mechanism of self-restraint." Further ,

> the peculiar stability of the apparatus of mental self-restraint which emerges as a decisive trait built into the habits of every 'civilized' human being, stands in the closest relationship to the monopolization of physical force and the growing stability of the central organs of society.[11]

'Civilization' is the absence, then, or at least the strict control, of violence. However, in the duo, the (modern) state and self-restraint, the former appears to have a somewhat more privileged status : for it is the State and its laws that ultimately ensure self-restraint. The State, one might say, is Civilization; and, of course, it is History. Hegel puts the argument squarely. History is the progress of Freedom. Freedom is possible only in the State. The life of peoples, as individuals and even communities, before the State belongs to prè-history."[12] Or as a translator of the philosopher has it, for Hegel "the story of individuals alone, and even of individuals in the still emotional, irrational community of the family, is not yet history."[13]

The State is a condition of History for Hegel. "We must hold that the narration of history and historical deeds and events appear at the same time." "It is the State which first presents subject matter that is not only appropriate for the prose of history but creates it together with itself."

> Only in the State with the consciousness of laws are there clear actions, and is the consciousness of them clear enough to make the keeping of records possible and desired. It is striking to everyone who becomes acquainted with the treasures of Indian literature that that country, so rich in spiritual products of greatest profundity, has no history. In this it contrasts strikingly with China, which possesses such an excellent history going back to the oldest times.

And further :

> India not only has old books of religion and brilliant works of poetry but also old codes of law—which above were mentioned as a condition of the formation of history—and yet it has no history. In that country the impulse of organization, which begins to differentiate society, was immediately petrified into the natural distinctions of caste...Because of that bondage of the caste system, in all historical relation there is wild arbitrariness, ephemeral bustling, indeed, raging without a final purpose of progress or development.[14]

Imagine, then, what this country would have been without the institutional restraint and codes of caste. Abbe Dubois does just this in an early chapter of his memoir on *Hindu Manners and Customs,* and comes up with the following vision. In such a condition, he writes, the 'Hindus' would soon become like their own Pariahs or outcastes,

> who, checked by no moral restraint, abandon themselves to their natural propensities[*sic*]....The whole country would necessarily fall into a state of hopeless anarchy, and, before this generation disappeared, this nation, so polished under present conditions [for the author, this includes without doubt the providential dispensation of British rule in India], would have to be reckoned amongst the most uncivilized of the world.[15]

This vision is not easily distinguished from Hobbes's vision of the state of nature, when, before the compact that established the modern state, there was no property, no notion of justice and injustice, only war.[16]

This was, of course, in line with the predominant colonial view of Indian society before the coming of the British : with or without the restraining influence of caste, this was a society of un-Civilization, pre-History and primitive passions. Violence, untamed, and pretty much indiscriminate, was the mark of the Indian past, until India came up against the civilizing influence of British administration and a western education in temperate manners. Unfortunately, that predominant colonial knowledge went on to assert, that 'past' lived on in the colonial Indian 'present', in spite of the best efforts of British rule and western enlightenment. James Mill's comments on the 1809 'riot' in Banaras, which I have cited elsewhere, bear quotation again, for they are a classic in this genre : "the disturbance was characteristically illustrative... of the discordant elements of Indian society, which are alone

restrained [*sic*] from frequent and destructive conflict by the vigilance, vigour, and impartiality of the ruling power."[17] And again :

> The resort of persons of all descriptions from every part of India, and the dissolute and riotous conduct of a large proportion of its inhabitants or visitors, rendered the maintenance of order and tranquillity in the sacred city of Benares, for some time at least, a troublesome and imperfectly accomplished task; but the unrelaxing firmness of British rule, a better knowledge of the British character, and the improving intelligence of the people, gradually lightened the labour, and, ten years after the transactions described, Benares was regulated with as much facility as any other city in the territories of the Company.[18]

Hunter's account of *The Indian Musalmans* written fifty years later is informed by the same understanding of the seeds of Civilization. It was only through rigorous statecraft, careful education and "the sober and genial knowledge of the West'' that the anarchic violence of the East could be curbed.

> By this path, the rising generation of Mohammedans would tread the steps which have conducted the Hindus, not long ago the most bigoted nation on earth, into their present state of easy tolerance. Such a tolerance...has freed them, as it would [free]...the Musalmans, from the cruelties which they inflicted, the crimes which they perpetrated, and the miseries which they condoned, in the name of mistaken religion.[19]

Let me briefly recapitulate the argument about 'violence' that I have been trying to build up to this point. The discourse of 'civilization' may be described as a discourse—negatively —of 'violence'. Violence is Civilization's other, as it were. It is what Civilization and History are not. The phenomenon of violence belongs to a domain of *pre*-history : this is why it has not been, until recently, a significant category of historical (or more generally, social scientific) thought in India, or elsewhere.

Even if we were to dilute Hegel's proposition about the State being History, we would, I think, have to acknowledge that History follows the organisation of the State (and its archive) to produce a coherent narrative of 'progress' 'civilization'. In doing so, it speaks of conquest and war, oppression and resistance, but not in general of 'violence'. State violence (barely described as such, except by a handful of observers) is written into the narrative as the unfortunate but necessary cost of progress.[20] 'Real' violence, however, of which the 'riot' might be said to be the quintessential form, lies outside the domain of the State, outside Progress and History. It is this disorganised, chaotic, 'irrational' violence —'rioting'—that the historian of medieval and early modern Europe encounters time and again. It was this that the colonial state supposedly encountered in its Indian colony, as elsewhere in Asia, Africa and the new world. And it is this that has threatened to surface once more, whenever modern state power has been weakened or has broken down. Indeed, I would submit, 'violence' has now become a part of History, something that we cannot escape from in our political work or our social science research, precisely because the modern state is now supposedly ubiquitous. Nothing is meant to be outside its realm, and therefore, nothing now is categorically outside History.

But the entry of this category into History does not make it less 'primitive'. A contemporary account of Partition violence in Delhi will serve to make explicit the connection between the state, rational order, war and civilization upon which so much of our inherited 'modern' political understanding is based. Nirad Chaudhuri has recently published, in the second volume of his autobiography, a detailed private account of events that he wrote in September-October 1947 after living through some three weeks of horrifying violence in Delhi. "Periodically," he wrote then, "...a situation develops in India which neither Prime Minister nor Grand Vizir is able to control."[21] When looting continued in spite of the personal, even physical intervention of Prime Minister Nehru, and under the very

noses of the military pickets on duty, it was, according to Chaudhuri, not the first time such things had happened.

> In India, when empires decline, such things inevitably happen [*sic*]. In 1729, when the Mogul Empire was breaking up and Muhammad Shah was Emperor, there was a notorious Hindu-Muslim riot in Delhi, which has passed into history. Its centre was the great Jami Mosque built by Shah Jahan, which was nearer to the seat of the Emperor—the *Qala'-i-Mubarak, 'Fortunate Citadel'*, present Red Fort—than Connaught Place [where looting occurred in September 1947] is to the seat of the Governor-General. At the request of the Emperor the Grand Vizir himself, Qamar-ud-din Khan Itimad-ud-daulah, went down to the Jami Mosque to quell the riots, but all he could do was to stand helplessly near the north gate, while even the men of the Imperial artillery joined in the fray.[22]

The writer wishes perhaps to signal his own modernity (and masculinity) when he expresses his personal preference for organised war over what some might call 'infantile disorder'. "Today," he wrote in his reflections on those three weeks of violence and the reactions to them,

> war is outlawed by solemn treaty and public opinion, [but] there is neither Kellogg Pact, nor Covenant of the League of Nations, nor UN Charter to outlaw riots. So, while *honourable war is in disgrace*, dishonourable rioting can be extolled as an instrument of policy...There is interminable and sickening bluster in the true Nazi manner from men who do not possess a hundredth part of the only virtue the Nazis had—guts [*sic*].[23]

Nine months earlier, too, in a piece written for *The New English Review*, Nirad Chaudhuri had compared conditions in early eighteenth century India, when the Mughal Empire was in decline, with those existing in late 1946. Three of the seven points he set down as showing the similarity of the two ages (nos. 1, 6 and 7 as published in his autobiography), concerned the collapse of state power and its consequences; another three (nos. 2, 3 and 4) were only a little less directly related to the decline of state power and probity. Here are some extracts from the former three :

1. Complete ineffectiveness of the state. It could not resist foreign invasion, put down internal rebellions, suppress Hindu-Muslim riots (there were Hindu-Muslim riots even in those days [*sic*]), could not ensure efficient administration, and was not successful in any project it initiated...
6. The effect of the decline of the power of the state on the masses was twofold. It made one part predatory and the other panicky....
7. Lastly, there grew up a habit of tolerance of anarchy and corruption, or at all events resignation to them....[24]

Historiography in general, historical writing in India included, has, of course, long shared this same association of statist order, masculinity and 'civilization'. One needs only to re-read Jadunath Sarkar's account of the fall of the Mughal Empire to have the point forcefully demonstrated.

> The Mughal Empire and with it the Maratha overlordship of Hindustan, fell because of the rottenness at the core of Indian society. This rottenness showed itself in the form of military and political helplessness. The country could not defend itself....

War, he writes further, is "the supreme test of a nation's efficiency" : it is a view that has been echoed over and over again in India since 1947. Happily for India, Sarkar went on to say, the 'middle ages' here (in the form of the Mughal Empire) gave way directly to the 'modern' (i.e., British colonial rule). "In Europe the fall of the Roman empire was followed by a thousand years of disorder and darkness, out of which Europe struggled back into light only in the fifteenth century." In India, on the other hand,

> the death of her old order was immediately followed by the birth on her soil of modern civilization and thought... First of all, *an honest and efficient administration was imposed on the country* and directed by a British agency to ensure peace and economic growth... [25]

The historiography of India has since moved a long way away from this slavish delight in the benefits of British rule. Nevertheless, it has remained faithful to certain fundamental tenets of the colonialist narrative on History, Violence and

Civilization. The state is order. 'Violence' lies outside the state. It is also—by a common assumption—'primitive', [26] even if the most sophisticated weapons and techniques are now used in its execution and the institutions of the state are thoroughly implicated.

Hence, in the accepted judgement, the practice of violence, its understanding and its justification,do not really require study. Let me make it clear, lest there be any confusion on this score, that what I am asking for is not the constitution of an objectified violence into an object of social science enquiry—for 'violence' is never available to the scholar or other concerned citizens in some abstracted, isolated form. What I am concerned with are the discourses in which the figure of violence appears. What is it that people do when they talk about violence, and what else are they talking about at the same time? What other objects are achieved, or constituted, in discourses dealing centrally with violence?

It is not such issues that have induced research and debate among Indian historians.[27] It is the question of what external forces bring 'violence' into our midst, into our recent history and our present day—where it supposedly does not belong. It is this question that animates much Partition scholarship too : and it is now time to consider this in some detail.

* * *

The question asked over and over again in Partition historiography is : 'Who was responsible for the partition of the subcontinent? How did this (implicitly 'unnatural') partition occur?'[28] And since the most 'unnatural' part of this 'unnatural' Partition is the occurrence of violence in an incredible manner on a horrifying scale, in a society that was apparently civilized, the enquiry sometimes devolves to the question, 'Who or what was responsible for this extra-

ordinary, undreamt of, violence?' The answer appears in the form of a paradox where the 'modern' and the 'pre-modern', 'politics' and 'nationalism' on the one hand, and 'religion' and 'violence' on the other, are thoroughly imbricated, even as the historian tries to hold them apart.

For official Pakistani historians, of course, as for right-wing Hindu and Sikh writers in India, much of this violence is assimilated into a thoroughly 'historical', and historic, war of resistance.[29] But the point about the historical privilege of modern politics and modern nationalism will be seen to apply to historians across the board, from Sumit Sarkar to Ayesha Jalal, from Anita Inder Singh to Mushirul Hasan and Joya Chatterjee.

Sumit Sarkar writes, in this context, of "the transformation of patriots into power-hungry politicians",

> the bait of complete transfer of power by a definite and fairly early date proved too tempting to be refused —particularly as the only real alternative for the Congress was to plunge into another mass confrontation, difficult in the context of communal riots and very dangerous socially in view of what appeared to be a growing Left menace.[30]

And in another summary statement in the same essay :

> Indian business groups... [also] fell short of the 'national bourgeois' ideal-type...in their frequent preference of sectional over country-wide class interests. This became very important indeed during the last years of British rule, for, as the events of 1945-47 tragically proved, the price of a negotiated 'transfer of power' was an encouragement of divisive forces culminating in Partition.[31]

Ayesha Jalal's account does not differ significantly from that of Sarkar in this respect. It was the short-sightedness and selfishness of Congress leaders that led to the Partition of 1947, she argues. Jinnah himself never wanted Partition : it was the Congress and the Hindu Mahasabha that insisted

on it.[32] Joya Chatterjee demonstrates this proposition for Bengal, suggesting that *bhadralok* Bengali Hindus, who thought of Bengal as *their* province, were unprepared to live under the "permanent tutelage of Muslims" (as Shyama Prasad Mookherjee put it) and were persuaded by events in the period of Suhrawardy's Permiership that Partition was necessary. "In 1947," she writes, "bhadralok Bengalis, once the pioneers of nationalism, used every available stratagem and device to demand that their province be divided."[33]

Anita Inder Singh, like Mushirul Hasan and others, draws attention to the generous doses of 'religion' that laced the propaganda of different parties in 1946-47. As one example, she quotes from a pamphlet written by S.M. Usman, Muslim League mayor of Calcutta :

> In the month of Ramzan the first open war between Islam and Kafirs started and the Mussulmans got the permission to wage Jehad...and Islam secured a splendid victory...According to wishes of God, the All-India Muslim League has chosen this sacred month for launching this Jehad for achieving Pakistan...We Muslims have had the crown and have ruled. Do not lose heart, be ready and take swords...

On 16 August 1946, Singh informs us further, the day when the 'Calcutta killings' began, the *Star of India* and the *Morning News* advised their readers that the pamphlet was available from the local Muslim League office.[34]

However, it is not the popular 'reading' of this appeal that the historian wishes to investigate. What Anita Inder Singh emphasizes—and she is, as I have noted, hardly alone in this —is the 'political' character of the instigation to violence, and the failure of the administration to do its duty.[35] Overwhelmingly, indeed, 'violence' and 'Partition' ('riots' and 'politics', the 'primitive' and the 'modern'?) are seen as being two quite separate things in this historical scholarship, and the well-springs of Partition 'violence' are represented as being hidden somewhere 'out there'.

Thus Jalal writes of "the Calcutta underworld and its volatile *goondas*", of "pent-up forces of disorder of... [great] magnitude" and "unthinking mob [s], fired by blood-lust, fear and greed". She suggests that the 'disorders' were a sign of 'more generalized...unrest'

> that *endemic* rivalry in a society of scarce resources,...of 'have-nots' against 'haves', debtors against creditors, landless against the possessors, workers against jobbers and employers, and above all the hired hands of factions and clientage networks who unilaterally declared their independence from their patrons' control and forced their way through the fragile crust of order.[36]

Sarkar, in his turn, points to the gross dereliction of duty on the part of the British Indian Government in the face of the "unprecedented communal riots" of 1946-47—"the British, who as late as June 1946 had been making plans to bring five army divisions to India in the context of a possible Congress movement, made no such move while presiding over this awesome human tragedy"—and the growth of "lumpen elements" (as a result of years of famine-related malnutrition) who provided "ample combustible material for communal riots on a totally unprecedented scale from August 1946 onwards."[37]

Suranjan Das's study of the 1946 Calcutta riots, one of the most detailed scholarly accounts we have of Partition violence, follows Sarkar's account closely. He borrows the very same phrase that Sarkar had quoted from Penderel Moon for a more general characterization of the times—the 'edge of a volcano'—to describe the condition of Calcutta in mid-1946 :

> Destitutes collected from the city streets almost doubled between March and June 1946. and the months preceding the August outbreak witnessed a steady rise in Calcutta's mortality rate...These developments reduced the value of human lives. There was a brutalization of consciousness on a mass scale...[38]

He stresses too the prominence of *goondas*—"an umbrella-term used to denote a broad spectrum of social groups, ranging

from various marginalized elements to habitual criminals"—in the actual carrying out of violent acts; and the abdication of responsibility by the State : "Important British civilians reportedly 'enjoyed' themselves in the Calcutta Club whilst the city was ablaze."[39]

Where Das makes his distinctive contribution is in his close attention to some of the details of the violence (and to the composition of the crowd, which I shall not discuss here). The rioting in Calcutta in 1946, he tells us, had an "unequivocally communal character" (p. 172). "Religious symbols of the rival community were targets of collective violence. Burial and cremation grounds and cattlesheds were subjected to depredations" (p. 174).

"This is not a riot," Das approvingly quotes a *Statesman* editorial : it is more like a "mediaeval...fury" (p. 177). He also cites the following contemporary account from the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* as an example of common occurrence : "Another victim is brought to the scaffold. On his bended knees, he asks for mercy, but his innocent head, bent down in humility, makes a better target and is smashed" (p. 175); and refers to reports of the "devilish dancing" that accompanied the butchery of men, women and small children as indicating a "particular rite of violence" [*sic*] (p. 176).

When all is said and done, however, what distinguishes this most "unequivocally communal" of outbreaks, in the historian's account, is its unequivocally *political* and *pathological* character. "Lootings by the crowd sometimes had a distinctly political dimension" (p. 174). "What...most clearly distinguishes the 1946 violence from earlier outbreaks was its highly organized nature and direct links with institutional politics" (p. 176). "There was also a pathological element in the crowd behaviour. In the history of Calcutta there is no previous record of such sadistic violence ; all national norms were at a discount." (p. 176).

'Violence', like 'religion', disappears into the underbelly of the nation. It is just another 'relic' that survives into the

'modern' age, and occasionally affects its development, but does not actually belong. In Indian historiography, the violence becomes the work, in the main, of underground, irresponsible, 'pre-modern' elements, enabled by the breakdown, or negligence, of the State.[40] At the same time, it is represented as being pathological, a symptom of disease, only tenuously related, if related at all, to our normal condition. Our 'real' history, our modernity, is actually nothing like that—not in 1947, nor in 1984 or 1992-93.

* * *

Over the last fifteen years or so, there have been numerous important studies of sectarian violence, including the violence unleashed by state forces against members of so-called 'minority' religious communities, and of the conditions that have allowed examples of such violence to multiply and the violence to become far more pervasive geographically and socially. Activists in the women's movement, in anti-communal struggles, and a few scholars in disciplines other than History, have taken the lead in these efforts[41] : historians have been typically backward.

Yet it is not historians alone who are bound by a deeply conservative view of the meaning of civilization and the task of a critical intelligentsia. The ghost of 'civilization' re-appears in unexpected quarters to haunt us—and to challenge any 'unusual' attempt to take account of the contradictions of our modernity. A recent intervention by an important left-wing scholar, political scientist and political activist, Javeed Alam's ruminations on the ethics of collecting Partition memories, illustrates the point very well indeed. Alam is unhappy with recent scholarship which, in its concern to record the voices of those who experienced Partition, forces people to 'relive' the trauma of the times. Asking people to "recall what they went through, to recount the trauma, I have a lingering suspicion that this is something which ought not to be done, that it is morally not sustainable." And again : "When we go

to people and ask them to remember all that had happened, to recount it for the record, for many others to read what one did to the other, it seems to me morally indefensible."[42]

The reasons for this feeling of outrage are expressed forthrightly. "A new generation has emerged for whom the Partition is a distant historical event. It has gone back into their memory [*sic*], which is important for our politics, for our social lives, for normal interaction between communities. The everydayness of life becomes normal when you forget this experienoe." This sense of the 'normal'—a 'normally' peaceful, 'secular' society, a humane, civilized people—is crucial to the argument. "Looking at Partition'', Alam says, "there is something which strikes us as a particularity. There are innumerable cases of large-scale massacres mutually indulged in by people at a moment of loss of judgement, of a sense of proportion, at a moment of frenzy. There is no involvement of large organisations or the state as the instrument of mass killings. You can't therefore talk of these events as a general phenomena [*sic*].'' The work of Suranjan Das and others suggests different findings on the involvement of 'large organizations', but that is not the point I wish to make here. Let us attend, instead, to Alam's notion of the 'general' and the 'particular', which is readily translated into the 'historical' and the 'unhistorical'.

It is not that every instance of violence should be forgotten : indeed there are certain kinds that we are enjoined to remember. Javeed Alam distinguishes three different kinds of violence. In a time when the complicity of the state in acts of brutal and apparently meaningless violence is very well documented, the first kind he identifies is when a state or state-like body directly carries out genocide or massacres : as in Germany, Serbia and Russia, he tells us ; 1984 provides a variant, when "the state became a part of the violence against the Sikhs". A second kind of violence is witnessed in 1992-93, when the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, "a very large organization", incited mass killings over the Babri Masjid issue : "the state wasn't there

as perpetrator but it could have controlled [the violence] and it did not."

There is a third category, however,

> wher. p.o.ple become victims of violence where at a moment of a loss of sanity they start killing each other. It is this third type of violence which we saw at Partition. This should be left behind, should be forgotten, so that people may live in peace, *socially normal everyday life*, politically as well as individually...

"What remains crucial," Alam concludes, "is the presence of a state which is the perpetrator [as in Nazi Germany]....It is right, even morally necessary, to institutionalize the memory of the Holocaust."

One point that is perhaps not adequately emphasized in discussing the possibility of institutionalizing Holocaust memories is that the Holocaust occurred 'there', not 'here', even for the Germans : it is an event in the past, having little to do with the present, as the claim goes, and it was perpetrated by a distorted state, of which even 'we' (the historians of today, and 'ordinary' Germans) became victims. This is, the Germans might say, not our history.

Indeed, where 'we' are implicated, where an (objectified, otherised) state is not involved, 'violence' becomes mere "particularity", inconsequential and best "forgotten". The crucial point that emerges from Alam's account, as from so many others, is—precisely—the unqualified centrality of the state. It is only what the state does negatively as well as positively, that is History. The violence perpetrated by the state or state-like organizations obviously qualifies. What the people reveal in their own violent actions does not : these are merely moments of frenzy, of loss of sanity, and the (possible, if provoked) memory of these.

"When we go to people and ask them to remember all that has happened, to recount it for the record...it seems to me morally indefensible." Here colonialism's passive victim returns : the innocent masses who (astonishingly for a radical perspective) have no will of their own, from whom anything may be prized out and in whose heads apparently anything

may be planted; who have in addition only 'violence' (frenzy, insanity) as a possible mode of action on their own : they have to be given History—by the state and other 'large organizations'. How far this vision of passivity is from the contentions of real, concrete lives, and how judiciously and subtly people's memories are constructed—no less so than historians' histories—will be the subject of my next lecture. But before I close this one, I wish to say one word more about the necessity of studying 'violence'.

"I have difficulty with this mode of doing history," Alam says in his critique of those who would take Partition memories seriously. "There are large historical forces behind the little events... [which include 'Partition,' one has to conclude from Alam's comments]. The breach between Hindus and Muslims in the 19th century, it becoming politicised, leading through a very tortuous course to Partition. I think, for example, of the role of the British state and its policy of systematic divide-and-rule, of playing one community against the other..."

Such an argument, one might suggest, could be extended to questions of gender, for example. Since, so far as we know, there was no systematic policy adopted by the British colonial regime or other 'large organizations' to divide men from women, presumably the 'little events' of rape and abduction at 'Partition' do not deserve much attention. Perhaps what recent studies have told us about the suppression of women's voices (and of women's choice) through the considerable incidence of state violence in the so-called 'recovery of abducted persons' programme, does not much matter either.[43] Yet, as these same studies have shown, this violence, like the violence of rape and abduction, had more than a little to do with the values and attitudes promoted in the 'socially normal everyday life' that Javeed Alam wishes us quickly to return to, instead of dwelling on memories of Partition violence. It seems to me that the conclusion is inescapable : the violence,

values, attitudes of this everyday normality are also crucial subjects for historical investigation, alongside the state policies, the long-term (institutionalized) political and economic processes, and the Partition-like 'little events' that have been the object of historians' enquiries for a long time now.

Alam's critique of this method of "doing history...via memory", posits a distinction between 'memory' and 'oral history'. The latter is, in his reckoning, perfectly acceptable, for it "has been a part of the larger historical project. It helped fill up the paucity of data or to enrich it, but it never positioned itself as an alternative to conventional history." It is precisely there, I suggest, that the difficulty lies. The "historical project" is already given to us, and apparently unquestionable. Anything that positions itself as an alternative to it, or to its flag-bearer, "conventional history", is unacceptable. Yet it is just that—an alternative project and an alternative history—that may be the primary need of our times.

I have argued above that it will no longer do to consign violence, and religion, to the primitive and pathological (that is, the *pre*-historical). It is necessary rather to recognize them as characteristic parts of the 'modern' ('historical'). The task before us, then, is not so much to change or root out the 'primitive'/'pre-historical', as to challenge the (religious, nationalist, other exclusivist) values of the present and especially their particular representations by modern states and organized institutions, political parties included. An attempt to understand the complexity of human history in ways beyond those that the organization of the modern state allows may not be entirely irrelevant to this exercise. It is to some of these non-statist ways of reconstructing the past that I shall turn in my next lecture, asking again : how is 'violence' presented in these non-disciplinary accounts of the past, and what else is described in the very act of describing violence ?

II. 'COMMUNITY' AND 'VIOLENCE'

In my previous lecture I spoke of the ideas of 'civilization', history and violence as these have been handed down to us. In this I wish to address the subject of 'community' and 'violence'. At the risk of oversimplifying what is an enormously complex and fluid body of articulations, found in the non-disciplinary accounts of the past that are the focus of my attention in this lecture, let me anticipate the general propositions that I wish to make. They are as follows : that the discourse of violence here is at the same time a discourse of community, that 'community' and 'violence' constitute each other, and that the borders of community like the borders of violence are always uncertain.

In standard historical work, as in common; everyday speech, 'violence' is often assumed to be something obvious, self evident, known : and, as we have noted, its 'causes' quickly become the primary object of social science investigation. Yet the matter plainly requires a little more reflection : for 'violence' is not simply *there*, awaiting historical, anthropological, or social scientific enquiry. Activities and behaviour considered 'violent' in one context, or by one set of observers, will not be so characterized in another context or by another set of observers. Much 'violence' remains 'invisible', and many forms of it acquire other political names, 'war' being the most obvious example: indeed, we have argued, 'violence' appears as a category of historical/social scientific thought in peculiar circumstances, in recent times.

Precisely for this reason, one needs to focus on what Pradeep Jeganathan has called 'practices of recollection' [44] : how do diverse recollections—oral accounts, memoirs and so on, which form an important part of the historian's sources and the basis indeed of much of the historical record—deal with the question of violence in the community's past ? In turning to these, I treat History too, as I think it must be treated, as one kind of practice of recollection.

'Violence', I suggested in my last lecture, lay outside History. The proposition that it is, in fact, not here, but 'out there,' is found in non-disciplinary reconstructions of the past as well—the oral accounts, memoirs and the like, which I mentioned earlier and which I shall now for convenience call Memory. This 'distancing' of the subject from 'violence' has something to do, I will suggest, with the 'community' that is the subject both of Memory and of History. Yet, as I should also like to suggest, the 'communities' at stake in the two modes of recollection are markedly different : I hope the following pages will help to make this clear.

Let us begin by making a broad, initial distinction between historical writing (History as practised in a professional academic mode) and Memory. An 'event', perhaps the most frequent object of historical investigation, might be said in Memory to be part of an "undifferentiated eternal present"[45] : that is to say, the individual or community in, or to, which this event occurs, lives on in the present, almost unchanged. History, on the other hand, is firmly of the belief that its object lies unambiguously in the 'past' : a past which is like "a foreign country", from which we have now moved away.[46]

In History, again, the 'event' is the point towards which the narrative converges. The 'historical narrative' leads up to the 'event' "explaining", in the words of Dipesh Chakrabarty, "why it happened and why it happened at the time it did."[47] Historians of 'the Partition of India' look for causes and explanations for the occurrence of 'partition' in '1947'. Pushed further, as it has

been in many instances, historiography may displace a particular event somewhat, but the exercise of explanation remains unchanged. In the case of Partition, 'violence' might be said to cause the 'event' (which, in this case, is often maintained as something separate from the violence), and the 'causes' of violence then become the concern of historical enquiry.

Non-disciplinary practices of reconstructing the past function rather differently. "Conceived within a sense of trauma and tragedy," as Chakrabarty goes on to say in his analysis of one set of essays recalling the Bengal that was before its partition in 1947, "these essays maintain a completely different relationship to the event called the partition. They do not lead up to it in their narratives, the event of the partition remains fundamentally an inexplicable event."[48] These 'non-historical' practices of recollection are of course, less uniform than historians' histories, and less easily catalogued—partly because they have been less carefully studied. Let me emphasize, however, that they are more often than not collective representations, even when articulated in a singular, personal voice. And, by contrast with academic history, they most frequently use the event (which, in the Partition instance, is the violence) to describe a set of other relations and constituencies—which I am going to label 'community'.

It goes without saying that these two kinds of practice—History and Memory—do not exist in completely separate, water-tight compartments. There is a considerable overlap between the two, and a noticeable transfer of motifs, themes, ideas, vocabulary from one to the other—perhaps especially so from an 'authoritative' History to 'ordinary', 'popular' Memory.

'Violence', I have noted, is in both cases, more often than not, 'out there'. The violence, it is commonly suggested in local, community accounts of religious communal strife, came from the outside. The attackers, those responsible for the disturbance

and mayhem, are described as being 'outsiders'; occasionally, they are 'troublemakers' so cut off from the mainstream of the community as to be very like 'outsiders'. Or again, in a more resigned mode, it is claimed that the evil was of a passing moment—an exogenous import, rather like an epidemic or a flood that carries all before it : the 'violence', the 'evil' is not really in us.

Indian historiography advances an analogous proposition in its accounts of Partition. British administrators were responsible for the violence that brought about the Partition. A handful of short-sighted politicians played into British colonial hands for the promotion of their selfish interests. These (administrators and politicians) were the people who unleashed criminal elements and whipped up religious frenzy to serve their own ends. The mass of the people, even those among them who participated in the looting and killing, were innocent dupes. They were (and are) fundamentally broad-minded, tolerant, peaceable and 'secular'—like 'India' itself. The violence of Partition was an aberration, an accident or a mistake, for which at bottom 'others' were responsible. The violence was indeed 'out there'—in time past, in a moment of madness, the handiwork of 'outsiders'.

Why, we have to ask, is there this insistent theme in accounts of violence in our past? Before I propose a tentative answer to this question, it is necessary to bring in a dimension that some will insist I have overlooked, that of 'what really happened' : not 'words' but 'things'—'real' happenings on the ground as these might be encountered in the historical or contemporary record.

It is important to note that sometimes, indeed perhaps in a remarkable number of instances, even in the midst of great tumult and civil strife, the proposition that the guilty party were 'outsiders', that 'nothing happened here' or at least that 'the worst excesses did not occur here', seems to have considerable force. Old communities hold, secure groups or individuals defend insecure neighbours and protect them from

the worst of the violence. At other times, however, the claim is patently false—and falsifiable. Yet, even against all the evidence, accounts of what happened struggle to consign the violence to a domain 'elsewhere'. The narrative of violence tends to a similar point in both cases, I suggest : it is a narrative of community.

What I wish to do in this lecture is to focus on a set of non-academic (non-Historical and non-statist) reconstructions of 1947; to read 'popular' (oral as well as written) accounts of the violence as, first, just that—*accounts*, narrations, constructions of events; and, secondly, to read this narrative of violence as a narrative of community.

* * *

I shall begin my analysis here with the story of 'revenge attacks' in a small part of the erstwhile Patiala State in east Punjab. The various accounts of these attacks and the events surrounding them, which I have collected in the main from the inhabitants of one village—Gharuan (some 20 kilometres from Chandigarh), illustrate several of the points I have listed above, employing a variety of techniques to elide the violence or consign it — against their own evidence — to happenings somewhere else ('out there'). The most detailed accounts I have come from a male civil servant and distinguished Sikh scholar, now retired from the bureaucracy, who was a college student in Amritsar in 1947; from his mother; and from his mother's brother, who is seven years senior to the civil servant and was at the time a student in Lahore.

Forced to flee from the west Punjab, where the future civil servant had gone to be with his parents for the length of the 1947 summer vacation, mother and son arrived in the mother's natal village, Dhamot, where the uncle (mother's brother) had already gone from Lahore for his summer break. Here and in Gharuan, the village from which the civil servant's father came and where mother and son went a week

or so after their arrival in Dhamot, these respondents were surrounded by, and to some extent caught up in, the situation of vicious attacks and counter-attacks against Muslims that had begun in east Punjab by August 1947.

The civil servant tells the tale of these attacks with shame, embarrassment and self-questioning. His is a well-constructed, reflective statement about revenge-killings; brutality; complicity; the abduction of Muslim girls and women; his uncle's role in the attacks; his mother's upbraiding of his uncle for that role; and the incomprehensibility of it all. The scholar in him asks what in the Sikh polity allowed the Sikhs to act in this way, and to feel no compunction for it even now; and recognizes somewhere that the question is unanswerable.

The civil servant's uncle, a robust farmer as he appears even now in his seventies, and a retired Inspector of Police, in his turn, provides me, as interviewer, with a clear-cut and confident account, which suggests nothing about any personal involvement in the attacks against Muslims. He is brought to tears when his nephew reminds him of one or two incidents, and informs him that I already know of them (through the nephew). "Don't talk of these things," the uncle says, almost to himself : "they are too painful to recall." For the rest, his story is one of attacks launched by the Muslims upon an unsuspecting and innocent Sikh and Hindu population (in Lahore, where he was studying, as elsewhere); of subsequent preparations by the Hindus and Sikhs; of counter-attacks and revenge, especially in the eastern part of Punjab where Hindus and Sikhs were present in strength; of his own status as one of the most well educated youths in his village, and his consequent leadership of 'defence' squads and 'defence' statements (in front of investigating officials) when the village and its surroundings came to be caught up in the violence.

The civil servant's mother speaks all too briefly. In part because such an interview is somewhat unusual for her, in

part because I cannot altogether escape the historian's agenda of asking about 'grand' subjects like 'Partition', and 'Jinnah', and 'Patel', and 'Gandhi', she responds repeatedly with the proposition that she has nothing to tell, that she knows nothing about 'politics', that her son can answer all these questions and, if he has already spoken to me, then surely there is little left to say. She informs me also that "nothing happened in our village," that all the attacks (against the Muslims) occurred "outside", that she herself never left her home and, therefore, knew nothing of what was going on outside, and that, no, there was no discussion of these things among the women inside the homes.

It is only on being specifically reminded of this by her son, the civil servant, and indeed needing to be reminded twice over, that she recalls having stopped her brother from killing a poor Muslim family whom they found hiding in the fields as they walked from the railway station to the village of Dhamot, on the last leg of their journey from west Punjab. "Have you gone mad?" she now recalls having said : "Is this a demonstration of your Sikhi [Sikh *dharma*] ?"

The civil servant had told me the story of two young Muslim girls, one perhaps in her late teens, the other even younger, who had been abducted and kept in a house neighbouring his father's in Gharuan; and of how, when he had been asked to take some food over for them, they had mistaken him (a college student) for a buyer; and also how, in the little he saw of them, the older girl did everything she could to protect the younger from their abductors. To this, the mother added the story of a *badmash* of the village (a known 'bad character', here referring to someone who has a 'police record') who had brought and kept with him seven young women and girls. She mentioned the case also of a little girl (her recollection of the girl's age was 6; the civil servant thought it was more like 10—but the difference is insignificant) who had been abducted and brought to their own house by a relative of theirs. The civil servant told me that this

was a grown-up man who was mentally handicapped, he had remained unmarried and seems to have found in the Partition 'disturbances' the opportunity to solve his problem of finding a wife.

The mother went on to say that, when she found this little Muslim girl in the house on her arrival in Gharuan, she kept her by her own side "day and night" : "I didn't let her out of my sight...she became part of the family." Many months later, when the 'recovery' officials came (to recover abducted persons being held on the wrong side of the new international border), and "we pointed out all the houses" in which abducted women were being kept, the little girl too went away ("cheerfully", as this recollection has it).

There are other people of Gharuan, however, who tell the story of Partition violence very differently. I shall cite two examples. One is that of Babu Khan, who became 'Babu Singh' during Partition but has since reverted to his Muslim denomination, along with the majority of the small group of Muslims who stayed on in the village rather than migrate to Pakistan. Call me 'Babu Khan', 'Babu Singh', whatever you like, "what difference does it make?" he announced, when I pressed him for his full name, and others sitting around prompted him to specify 'Khan' or 'Singh'?

"They told us to eat 'meat'," he went on to say, using the same euphemism as the other villagers had used : "We ate it. We had to, to save our lives." "I still get scared thinking about it all," he adds with an embarrassed laugh. "You asked me—so I'm telling you." Unlike that of the Sikhs of the village, his account referred to "rivers of blood" and "thousands of corpses," and to the consternation, fear and uncertainty that prevailed for a very long time. The hyperbole was evident but it was a different hyperbole from that employed by other informants from the area.

My last example from Gharuan comes form a person who was a student in Calcutta in the 1940s, who lost his uncle in

the 'Calcutta riots' (of 1946 or '47), returned with his father to Gharuan in August or September 1947 but then had to escape again to Calcutta—which seemed relatively safe after what they had seen in Punjab. Several people from the village had asked me to meet him because of his unusual personal history : he had been a Muslim, who was converted to Sikhism in the "dreadful" days of 1946-47 (as he himself described them) and who had—unlike many others—stayed on with the new religious affiliation even when circumstances improved. Now the owner of a fleet of taxis, a local Congress leader and a municipal corporator in a town not far from this village, he spoke of the "huge", "terrible" slaughter of the time. "Why does it always happen in Punjab?" he asked, pointing out that the same kind of violence had broken out in the region again in the 1980s. It is the Sikhs who take arms, he went on, elaborating this last point : they go out in *jathas* (gangs) and they kill.

This 'Sikh' spoke in the most fundamental terms about love, religiosity and the need for universal humanity. He declared all religions to be the same essentially; condemned them all for their narrowness and for their excessive expenditure on temples, *gurdwaras*, and the like; but singled out Christianity, and its notion of charity, for praise, citing the example of Mother Teresa's work in Calcutta.

With all that, and through a longish interview in which I asked many questions that were guided by what I had been told about him, he refused in any way to acknowledge that he had once been a Muslim, later 'converted' to Sikhism. In the course of the conversation, I scribbled in my note-pad : "This is just like rape." How does the rapist, or the raped, talk about the experience of rape ? And how does the interviewer ask about it ?[49] Here is a history which the 'victim' denies—through his subsequent success in business and the political world, through a barely concealed sense of shame, and through suppression of that that was in his own reckoning most shaming.

A 'denial' may occur in several different ways, however. The standard story I heard in Gharuan was that of the ('exceptional') peace and harmony of this large Sikh village. "Nothing happened in the village;" "our Muslims were unharmed"; "not a single woman or child was touched [abducted or raped] here." Whatever violence occurred, occurred outside the village, I was repeatedly told. Yet it is from the very same Sikh respondents' accounts that I learnt of the many women and children abducted from surrounding villages and kept by local Sikh men : and there is considerable agreement on the large numbers and extreme youth of many of the women and girls involved. We are told also of 40-50 (or 20-30 : the figure varies with different respondents) Muslim women who were captured in some 'raid' by local squads, brought to the village, kept at the village *gurdwara* (Sikh temple) for a night or more, and then killed in the compound of the *gurdwara* which lay on the outskirts of the village.

The location of the site of violence 'outside' the village—even the precincts of the *gurdwara*, which appears to have been the shared property of several villages, might technically be considered 'outside'—seems to be a matter of some importance to the informants. Not a single Muslim of the village was harmed, the point is made again and again in the general account; they were only made to eat "meat" (a euphemism for pork, the eating of which symbolised the Muslims' 'conversion' to Sikhism)—this for their own safety. It is asserted, indeed, that Muslims were safe wherever they were a minority in a village : they were attacked only where they lived in hamlets or villages separated from the rest of the population. So, "our Muslims" were untouched. However, numbers of male villagers, younger and older, went out in gangs (or squads) to settle scores with Muslims at large : they killed large numbers of them in the surrounding countryside, in a nearby camp where they had been herded together, in the fields where they hid, and on the roads along which they fled,

not to mention the score or more of Muslim women and girls killed at the village *gurdwara*.

There is an acknowledgement here that bears reflection. It suggests a will to truth which we perhaps need to recognize, and even underline—a part of the struggle, waged by everyone of us, to come to terms with our pasts. There are 'of course' different nuances in the different Gharuan accounts. But the 'will to truth' surfaces in all of them. It is to be found in the uncle's tears—why dwell on things "so painful to recall"—and in Babu Khan's parallel suppression : "You asked me, so I am telling you. I still get scared thinking about it all." The civil servant/scholar's narrative is unusual because of its reflectiveness, but also because of its specific acknowledgement of forced conversion (however symbolic), and the retention of abducted 'girls' in the village. His mother's account is different too from the majority of the men's accounts, in its reticence and repeated avowal of a lack of knowledge, but also in its sensitivity to the fate of abducted women and children. She provides many details of the number of abducted women, where they were kept in the village, and how they were treated (to the extent that she knew about this).

Yet, the will to truth is accompanied by the need to forget. In the mother's denial of any discussion amongst the women, or any knowledge of what was going on in the way of 'revenge', in her statement that it was a *badmash* (a known 'bad character') who abducted and kept seven girls or women, as in the civil servant's generalised account of men from the village going 'out' to attack Muslims, and in his explanation that it was a demented relative who had taken a little Muslim girl and held her captive in their house, there is a complicity with the collective statement that 'our village' was something of an exception, that the violence did not take place here, and when it did, it was 'outsiders' who were responsible.

The mother's story of the little girl who was kept in her house and "became a part of the family", and of other

abducted persons kept in the village, going away "cheerfully", when the 'recovery' people came to take them, achieves the same effect—of 'normalizing' the experience—in another way. A good deal of evidence has by now come to light which shows that in instance after instance, women and girls had been repeatedly raped, passed on from hand to hand, sold, auctioned, cheered, petted, used, thrown away, before some of them were lucky enough to be 'taken in', find a home, perhaps be married and in time even have children and raise a family. There is much evidence to show too that many abducted women, separated from their husbands, fathers, brothers, and other male and female relatives, for a few days, or weeks or months, found it difficult to gain acceptance back in their original families and communities. Consequently those among them who had found something of a home and a minimally 'settled' existence in these troubled times were often reluctant to risk everything again, and expose themselves to the same uncertainties and insecurities and pressures, when the 'recovery' operations began.[50]

The bland suggestion that the abducted persons held in Gharuan went away to Pakistan "cheerfully" when the 'recovery' officials arrived to take them, several months after their abduction, and even though some—like the little girl—had got fairly well integrated into their new households, sounds in this context like another effort to wish away the violence of the times and the terror that so many had to negotiate. It is something more than guilt, I would like to suggest, that leads to such recollection and such forgetfulness.

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Before discussing this point more fully, let me put by the side of the above set of recollections a Muslim recollection of Delhi around the same time. Shahid Ahmad Dehlavi's *Dilli ki bipta* ('The misfortune [or 'calamity'] of Delhi'), is a hastily written memoir, first published in 1948.[51] Differing in numerous respects from oral accounts generated through interviews, it resembles them nevertheless not only in its

passion, and its vivid and detailed description of the terror that Muslims had to live through in the Indian capital, but also in what it tells us about the 'community' of Delhi—or Shahid Ahmad's sense of it—at the time of Partition.

As a result of the rise of political tension and the outbreak of violence in many parts of the country in the period leading up to August 1947, Delhi's Muslims were a besieged, demoralized and terrified community by the date of the official transfer of power from British to Indian and Pakistani hands. Curfews had been imposed in the old city, where the majority of Delhi's Muslims lived, off and on for months before this. Now they lengthened into seemingly interminable periods. When the curfew was lifted for a few hours, there was a desperate rush for supplies. Food and other necessities soon ran out, black-marketing and cheating increased, people began selling whatever they had in their possession and searched for alternative sources of sustenance : poorer Muslims even began to sell, and to eat, their pet sheep, goats and ponies.

The situation in the capital deteriorated sharply in the first week of September, a month that stands out in the recollections of many Muslims who were in Delhi at this time. "We had heard accounts of the [1857] Mutiny from our elders, and also read the stories about that time written by Khwaja Hasan Nizami," recalls Shahid Ahmad Dehlavi. "And we thought that such destruction had never before been visited upon Delhi, nor ever again would be. But [even] the devastation of [18]57 paled before the ravages of September [1947]." (p.145)

'September' marked a new stage of violence in Delhi, moving beyond individual stabbings and looting to the systematic marking out of 'enemy' houses and shops and concerted attempts to drive out Muslims from every part of the city. The police too became openly partisan. By mid-September, we are told, there were as many as 121,000 Muslim refugees; and their number was to grow to 164,000 within a short while. In early October, figures of 62,000 and

63,000 Muslim refugees were quoted for the Purana Qila (Old Fort) and Humayun's Tomb refugee camps respectively, though some put the figure in the Old Fort at 80,000 or even higher.[52] Already, by mid-September, perhaps 60 per cent of the Muslims of Old Delhi and 90 per cent of those in New Delhi had fled, seeking refuge. Between 20,000 and 25,000 were said to have been killed. Towards the end of October, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ lakhs (150,000) of Delhi's 5 lakhs Muslims remained.[53]

Shahid Ahmad Dehlavi was caught up in this storm like virtually every other Muslim of Delhi. *"Jab Dilli mein hangama hua..."* : when the disturbances broke out in the Old City "on 5 September," a bomb was thrown at the Fatehpuri Mosque, crowds gathered, the police opened fire, one or two people were killed and several injured in the exchange, local militias formed on both sides, slogans were raised and people began running helter-skelter, Shahid Ahmad was caught in his office in Khari Baoli. Amidst rising tension, he and his co-workers managed to escape through back-ways and alleys that they knew reasonably well. But they breathed freely again only when they reached the point from where "Muslim habitation" started. "*Bas us din se aaj tak dubara Khari Baoli jaana naseeb nahin hua.*" Shahid had hoped to return to his office within a day or two, at least to sort out some urgent papers, but "from that day to this, I have never been able to go back to Khari Baoli." (p. 151)

Forced out of their *mohallas* and their homes, Muslims like Shahid Ahmad, and many who were far less privileged than him and his family, fled to the torrid 'safety' of the refugee camps where conditions were, if anything, worse than where they had come from—some 80,000 people crowded into the grounds of the Old Fort, with a handful of tents to accommodate a few lucky ones; one tap with running water, as the writer describes it; no provision for lights, lavatories or bathrooms, and heavy rains to compound the degrading dirt and disorder : veritably the Day of Judgement was at hand (*"Purana Qila*

hashr Ka maidan bana hua tha", p. 165)—and from there, if they were lucky, to the torrid conditions of the trains to Pakistan.

"*Dilli Musalmanon ka shahar tha.*"[54] Delhi was a city of the Muslims, a Muslim city unparalleled in the subtlety and beauty of its culture or the grandeur of its public displays. The streets of Old Delhi were so busy and crowded that it was difficult to walk on them, writes Ebadat Barelvi. "*Yahan khoye se khoa chhilta tha.*" "From morning to night, there was such gaiety at the Jama Masjid that it brought to mind the age of Akbar and Shah Jahan."[55]

Delhi was a 'Muslim' city in a quite unusual sense, and in that sense not a city of Muslims alone or of Muslims in general, but of the cream of Muslim society. More precisely, it was a city of élite Muslim culture—for non-Muslims and even sections of the non-élite might (and did) share that culture. While asserting that "Delhi was a Muslim city," Barelvi observes that Hindus also lived here in large numbers : there were Hindus providing numerous services, businesses and capital ; they were also moneylenders, bankers and landlords. However, he adds, most of the Hindus shared the culture of the Muslims. "They (dressed and) spoke like Muslims ;" they shared the same festivities and etiquette, and they thought of Urdu as their own tongue.[56]

That Delhi was a 'Muslim city' is another way of saying, as these accounts do over and over again, that Delhi was a 'cultured' city. All this was to be destroyed in 1947. "*Behayai aam [ho gai] hai,*" as Shahid Ahmad Dehlavi was to put it. Meat was now sold openly, and even the Hindu women were afraid of going out into the markets. "*Dilli ab bhi baqi hai, aur vahan Musalman bhi baste hain, lekin ab vaḥ Dilli kahan?* (Delhi still exists, and Muslims live there too, but where is that Delhi we knew?)" (pp. 179 and 189)

Delhi was 'home', 'our' city, 'our' *vatan*, a community Shahid Ahmad had never contemplated leaving : "*Dilli mujh se bhala kaise chhoot sakegi* ?" "The scars of this forced

separation will never disappear," he writes further. It was like torture, like nails being pulled out of the flesh (*''Dilli ka Dilli-valon se juda hona gosht se nakhun ka juda hona hai''*). "Delhi which had now become like a *dayan* [witch]...., even though she had become a *dayan*, she still remained a mother." (pp. 179-80)

* * *

A common tendency in these two sets of memories may be noted here. In the first set, the recollections of people from Gharuan, we may note the attempt to promote the idea of a composite community, which had survived at least in part, and in which the respondents had to continue to live (and hope). In the second lot of memories from Delhi, we see the nostalgic construction of a community that was obviously being torn away 'right before our eyes'[57] —as the narrators struggle to define a new home and a new community.

Shahid Ahmad's fiercest diatribe is reserved for those Hindu and Sikh refugees who had flooded into the city from outside. The refugees, especially the Sikhs, seemed to be everywhere. They had taken over the streets and the footpaths, the deserted buildings, the mosques and the graveyards. Every bazaar now had several bazaars in it, because the refugees had set up stalls and platforms on the footpaths and on the streets to sell all kinds of goods. For 700 years before this time, the people of Delhi (Hindus and Muslims) had never had to experience the vulgarity that was now everywhere, Shahid Ahmad noted. "*Behayai aam hai*". Meat was now sold out in the open, women bathed in the streets, even the Hindu women had altogether stopped going out into the markets. "Nothing remained of that speech and that etiquette," as Shahid's fellow Delhi-*wala*, Ebadat Barelvi, put it, "that generosity and that humanity, that warmth and that colour by which Delhi once used to be recognized."[58]

The newcomers were prepared to do anything to make a buck, Shahid Ahmad tells us, and resorted to violence on the slightest pretext. The "Hindus of Delhi" and the "Muslims of Delhi" both suffered at their hands : and "in the riots that followed, the Hindus of Delhi took no part" (p.146). At the insistence of the Hindus of her locality, Shahid Ahmad's mother had returned to Khari Baoli. She was still living there, along with his younger brothers and sisters, when he wrote his memoir sometime after he and his immediate family had moved to Pakistan. "Not a single Muslim was killed in Khari Baoli," writes Shahid. "And my mother is still there." Indeed, once relative calm had been restored, his mother urged him to come back. "She writes to us saying that all of us fled unnecessarily : 'you should come back now'....This is but a trifling example of how Delhi's Hindus behaved towards Delhi's Muslims." (pp. 146-7, 180)

Not all of the writer's own evidence points in this direction, however. Even the lowest caste Hindus joined in the looting and terrorising of Delhi's long-standing Muslim residents, and the latter rarely felt secure in areas where they were not the majority—and, later on, not even there. Given this undeniable evidence, Shahid Ahmad has to add a significant rider to his claim about the non-participation of the Hindus of Delhi in the violence against the Muslims : "except for those who were carried away by a religious [read 'communal'] madness" (*ibid.*)—and we might add, those who were carried away by the desire for loot and property, and political advancement, too.

Ebadat Barelvi, who managed to escape to Lucknow in September 1947, and later wrote of the miracle Gandhi's martyrdom brought (when "the world...changed" and it seemed as if "strife had never occurred"), and who returned to his teaching duties in Delhi College in April 1948, encouraged by Abul Kalam Azad, Zakir Husain and others as part of their effort to restore normalcy, reflected a similar

sense of loss, of nostalgia and bitterness in his memoirs published forty years later. Delhi had become a veritable "refugee-istan", he recalls.[59] Delhi College was soon full of Hindu and Sikh students and professors from Sindh and Punjab—"good human beings" but of a culture far different from that the college was used to (pp. 135, 151). After Jinnah's death and the Indian Government's take-over of Hyderabad in September 1948, Hyderabad became another scene of mass killing of Muslims and the mass rape of Muslim women, he writes. "The eyes shed tears of blood (*Aankhen khoon bahati rahin*)." (p. 131)

Ultimately, as Shahid Ahmad and his family had been earlier, Ebadat Barelvi too was driven away from Delhi—to find a home in Lahore, where he rediscovered that "treasure of peace and security", that "wealth of respect and honour", the desire for which had been eating into his soul for a year or eighteen months prior to his migration (p. 177). And he wrote of the beauty of Lahore, the "city of lights" and "grace" and "bounty" and "romance", which now "appeared to us like the land of fairies" (p. 164). 'Delhi', that 'magical' city which he describes in almost identical terms earlier in his memoir, was indeed now very far away; Lahore had become the new 'Delhi'.

* * *

It is this sense of loss of community, of the struggle for new community, and of the meaninglessness of life without it, that many of these narratives signal. Let me, very briefly, cite one more account of Delhi in the same period, this time from a Hindu businessman and social worker who escaped from Baluchistan by a tortuous route to arrive in Delhi a few days later in September 1947. The businessman's family had been separated from him, and news had reached him of the massacre of the train by which they were supposedly travelling to the safety of India. "I was a dead man for one month", he says, speaking of the time when he believed his whole family had been killed. His is a deeply moving, even

'poetic', account of personal and family losses, and the delirium and death that were the mark of the time. Yet there is a different tenor when he comes to speaking of scenes of loot and murder in Delhi.

On his arrival in the city, this man first stayed in an area of Old Delhi with the brother of a Sikh who had escaped with him in the long journey from Baluchistan. There was rioting in several parts of Old Delhi, such as Sabzi Mandi, he recalls : "we also went to see the area...so many people were killed." He then goes on to recount an incident involving rape and murder in a quite matter of fact way, almost without a change of tone. It is this manner of telling that captures something of the extraordinary character of Partition violence : that is to say, of any violence that takes place outside the context of recognized, or recognizable, community.

In those early days of his time in Delhi, when 'riots' were still going on, the businessman recalled, the Sikh they were staying with went out with two friends to

> some Muslim house...and there was only one girl left [there], of the age of 16 or 17......They brought that girl. And now, they kept her for three or four days in the house, and [then they were] perplexed to think what to do with her—either to kill her... [or ? the sentence was left hanging]. Ultimately they took her in a *tanga* (a horse-drawn carriage) or a jeep...and killed her at the road that goes to Qarol Bagh, from Panchkuian to Qarol Bagh on the way there is a jungle...After four days...In those days nobody was too troubled about such matters, that have they killed her or not killed her ? [*kisi ko yeh takleef nahin hoti thi, ki usko mara hai ke nahin mara hai*][60]

The breakdown of community, as I have termed it, brings with it a breakdown of all normal communication and explanation. "Who can tell what evil spell the city [Delhi] came under as the sun of independence dawned on its horizon? Such violent storms arose that they shook this city of unparalleled grace to its foundations..." (Barelvi, p. 19). It was all "too dreadful", "much too dreadful", as the Muslim-turned-Sikh municipal corporator and taxi-owner from Gharuan kept repeating.

One may multiply examples of such incomprehensibility as a consequence of the breakdown of all inherited senses of community. It will suffice, perhaps, if we return for a moment to the civil servant with whom I began my account of Gharuan. The scholar/civil servant explains away many of his own actions of that time—such as his trailing behind some groups of men and boys who had gone out to attack Muslims, or along with other boys from the village chasing ('just for fun') some 'miserable', 'starved' Muslim women who had strayed from their refugee camp in search of a few vegetables or edible leaves—as a result of 'youthfulness' and 'lack of understanding'; much of it still remains for him a puzzle. Indeed a striking motif in the civil servant's narrative—one that surfaces again and again—is that of "sleeping through it all", even through the roughest and most dangerous moments of the journey from west to east Punjab.[61] His is yet another comment, I would argue, on the collapse of given notions of community, and the resulting incomprehensibility (remembered as 'sleep') while the search for a new order takes place in his mind.

* * *

Everyone who is part of the narrator's community in the foregoing accounts appears in the position of 'victim'. In the recollections of the Sikhs of Gharuan that I have quoted, 'attacks' are almost always represented as 'defence' or, when the respondents are being more forthright, as 'counter-attacks'. It is obviously not my contention that this is always the case, that every account of remembered violence is equally coy about acknowledging a part in aggressive actions. Clearly one may find contrary examples in recollections of Partition in India today, and it is time to consider some of these.

The recollections of a Captain in the Alwar army, recorded by Shail Mayaram in 1993, are couched in very different terms from any that I have cited above. The Captain

speaks of his army's "operations" against the local Muslims in 1947, and it is worthwhile quoting him at some length :

> I was the ADC to HH Tej Singh [the ruler of Alwar]... It had been decided to clear the state of Muslims. The orders came from Sardar Patel [the Deputy Prime Minister of India]. He spoke to HH on the hot line. The killings of Hindus at Noakhali and Punjab had to be avenged. All the Meos from Firozpur Jhirka down were to be cleared and sent to Pakistan, their lands taken over. [Because] the refugees from Pakistan were coming in. They told us all sorts of stories of what had been done to them. We did whatever was happening there, like parading women naked on the streets in Tijara and Naugaonwa after their families had been killed....

In Tijara, after a battle that lasted eighteen hours against a force he describes as consisting of 10,000 Meo Muslims, the Captain and his troops managed to take the town. "We killed every man, all of them." And again, speaking of other sites where the Meos were reported to have gathered in large numbers :

> The women — if they were of marriageable age, were all taken. They were *shuddh* after drinking *ganga jal* [water from the sacred river Ganges] and could be taken....Not a single Muslim was left in Alwar. Alwar was the first state to clear all the Muslims. Bharatpur followed....[62]

One may indeed gather such accounts of aggressive assertion of 'us' against 'them' even in Gharuan and other villages and communities where there is a general proposition of 'peacefulness' and 'harmony' within the locality. Indeed, I suspect this would apply to virtually any village or town in eastern (now Indian) Punjab, from where the Muslims were largely, if not entirely, driven out in 1947 : and I have little doubt that the same would be true of western (now Pakistani) Punjab where the violence and the refugees flowed the other way. The accounts in these cases often become accounts, not only of pride in how successfully the operations were carried out, but also of the *necessity* of this obliteration and eviction :

"it was war, wasn't it ?", "they were doing the same thing to our people on that side", "who began it all?" The idea of *revenge* clearly had a great deal to do with the ongoing cycle of violence in 1947 and the years before and after.

Two aspects of these stories of revenge and aggression require further discussion, however. One is obvious enough : how are the 'us' and 'them' constituted—or, as I shall argue, reconstituted—in and by these accounts ? Secondly, why is there not simply a note of celebration, but also of defensiveness in so many accounts which are indeed discussing something like a state of war, and where the 'enemy' has in many instances been completely wiped out ? I suggest that this too has to do, at least in part, with the constitution of the 'us' and 'them', the notion of the 'community' whose narrative this is.

There can be no doubt that the greater or lesser 'defensiveness' of different accounts stems in part from the differing circumstances of different field interviews. This includes the question of the degree of trust established between interviewer and interviewee, and the particular physical and social setting of an interview. It has something to do, no doubt, with the personal circumstances and careers of the respondents : their military or professional training, the extent of their involvement in 'public' debate, or of their non-involvement. It has to do also with political context : the time and place in which accounts are collected; the extent of political militancy at the time, among specific groups and classes, in specific regions; the readiness, consequent on some of the above, to propound radical (in the India of the 1980s and 1990s, exclusivist, right-wing) solutions, or, on the contrary, the disillusionment that sometimes creeps in when goals that once seemed laudable fail to produce the benefits they were meant to produce.

It seems to me, however, that there is another factor at work here too. What is perhaps being recounted in tales of violence constructed in a frankly assertive way is the actual or anticipated disappearance of particular senses of community and the emergence of others. Frequently, 'our people' and 'theirs' are being reconstituted, different senses of 'us' and 'them' are in

contention, new notions of the community are struggling to be born, in the course of the very same narrative. In Rahi Masoom Raza's 'divided-village' called Gangauli, as in the Mewat, the Punjab, the Alwar of 1947, one understanding of the local community appears at a certain historical conjuncture to have much reduced..... : in Raza's searing prose, "for some time now, in Gangauli, the number of the people of Gangauli has been declining, and the numbers of Sunnis, Shias and Hindus have been increasing."[63]

What appears to count more and more in the context of Partition, are 'believers' and 'non-believers', 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' and 'Sikhs', and even the usually remote 'India' and 'Pakistan'. Violence—indeed, excessive, unforgiving violence—is sometimes thought to have been needed in the effort to establish these new communities on secure foundations : and it is no shame to declare it. Consider the following letter written a fortnight after the official Partition of India by a Muslim subaltern (non-commissioned- officer) to a fellow-villager or kinsman, about his platoon's "destruction" of Hindus and Sikhs in the villages of the Gurdaspur region :

> Whosoever from the Hindus and Sikhs came in front of us, were killed. Not only that, we got them to come out of their houses and ruthlessly killed them and disgraced their womenfolk. Many women agreed to come with us and wished us to take them, but we were out for revenge...this Indian government cannot last much longer. We will very soon conquer this and on the whole of India the flag of Pakistan will fly.[64]

Much the same kind of drive to reconstitute community appears to be at work in the Alwar account. Those who were 'suspect' in the slightest, those who were only nominally Muslim, as well as those Muslims who did not wish to go to Pakistan, had to go. "The Meos were not Muslims," says the Captain : "they were half-Hindu. In their marriages they had both *pheras* and the *nikaah* [respectively Hindu and Muslim rites]. They were not with the Muslim League. They did not

want to go to Pakistan. But we had orders to clear them." Hence : "Not a single Muslim was left in Alwar."[65]

However, the 'reinvention' of community is not so easily accomplished—not even in the Alwar region, where other Hindu inhabitants who took part in the looting and killing of 1947 will, in the presence of Muslim neighbours, often deny that anything happened in their villages, and even assert that the local mosque which lies in a shattered state before the visitor's eyes "came down in a storm."[66] The Gharuan case that I have discussed in detail above is a classic example of this kind of simultaneous loyalty to what we would see as two (or more) different 'communities'. So is Shahid Ahmad's Delhi "which had now become like a witch", but which "still remained a mother."

"Nothing happened in our community." It was 'outsiders', 'criminals', 'politicians', 'madmen', the demented and the temporarily crazed who were responsible for the 'storm'. Two interestingly different resolutions are encountered here. Gharuan changed, but Gharuan lived on (with some of its Muslim inhabitants staying on too). Alternatively, "Delhi still exists : but where is that Delhi now... ? *(Dilli ab bhi baqi hai, lekin ab vah Dilli kahan... ?)*"

What is happening in all the above accounts, I suggest, is a constitution of community, through a discourse of 'violence out there'. Violence occurs—can only occur—at the boundaries of community. It marks those boundaries. Violence and community constitute each other, as it were. It is important to stress, however, in making these observations, the multiple ways in which 'violence', and 'community' go to make up one another; the slippages that occur in the very accounts that signal such a mutual constitution; and, not least, the fragile and always contested character of the communities that are invoked or constructed.

* * *

Let me try now to pull together at least some strands of the argument I have been trying to make about Memory, History and the narration of 'violence'. Although I have argued for

the need to treat History as only another practice of recollection, it is necessary to recognise its exceptional status. Disciplinary history has behind it the force of the state and of 'science'—research, universities, major publishing houses publishing in major international languages. This lends it a very special kind of authority which is not easily challenged, and gives it a crucial place — along with television and other sections of the media — in the construction of a national popular memory. Its fiat is wide-ranging. And the will to truth, and need to forget, that I have spoken of in my discussion of non-disciplinary recollections of the past, are replaced here, perhaps, by a will to power and the need to exclude.

Secondly, History proceeds on the assumption of a fixed subject—community, nation, state—and a broadly pre-determined course of human development or transformation. The violence that accompanies 'progress' and 'civilization', as we have noted, finds little place in the historical narrative. 'Violence' in this genre of writing is usually reserved for extreme, disorderly events of a kind for which there is no ready political name : such as insurrection, uprising, repression, counter-insurgency or war. Yet, this sort of violence is too so overwhelming, and so palpable and obvious, that it practically disappears from the historical account. It is reduced frequently to a set of grand statistics, which point to but one inference : that the violence itself was 'extraordinary', 'aberrational'.

The disadvantage of this approach is not only that it renders the object of enquiry obvious and invisible at one and the same time. Perhaps a more fatal weakness is that it significantly narrows the range and utility of the concepts of agency and contestation. Communities are rendered stable and well-ordered, not to say harmonious, in such a vision—that is, of course, until they are broken up by outside forces; and the ordinary men and women who make up these communities become no more than passive victims of forces they can do little to make or

modify. The violence is, in this reading, unquestionably 'out there'[?]: outside history, and outside the pre-constituted community.

Disciplinary history remains in this respect what it has always been : a discourse of civilization, in the sense of civilizing, with the state as its instrument. Much that happened outside the domain, or initiative, of the state was traditionally excluded from History. And whereas this situation has been altered to some extent by the radical challenge of histories-from-below, of feminist historical writing, and so on, events, activities and tendencies that do not make sense in statist terms continue to occupy a grey area and remain poorly researched and poorly understood.

What are the parameters of Memory, by contrast ? If political incomprehensibility has been the occasion for the emergence of violence as a category of academic, historical and social scientific enquiry, it is (one might argue) the breakdown — or threatened breakdown — of community that leads in 'popular' memory to a consideration of the same kinds of ('violent') incidents. Consider, for example, the many different names for the violence that figures in the non-statist recounting of Partition : *raula, hangama, gadbad* or the Bengali *gondogol* (all terms for disturbance, confusion); *balva, fusaad* (riots); *maar-kaat* (killing); *charhai, hamla,* or *dhar* (organised attacks); *maashal-la* (martial law); *miyan-maari* (the killing of Muslims) in Bihar; and so on.[67] Several of these betoken a crisis of community, an actual or threatened collapse, a loss of meaning, and the need to reconstitute a sense of the collective good.

The 'Partition' that historians have described in careful constitutional detail is characterised in many of the 'sources' that historians use, these non-academic reconstructions of 1947, by happenings that we would commonly classify as 'violence'—turbulence, disorder, dislocation, plunder, even martyrdom. Indeed, as I have noted, no clear-cut distinction is made between 'Partition' and 'violence' in the majority of these

non-disciplinary 'histories'. Indeed, the English term 'partition' (or alternative conceptualisations of the event, such as 'migration') are often used interchangeably with terms like *raula, maar-kaat, maashal-la* and *miyan-maari.* Even the date for Partition in the non-academic account sometimes differs from the official date adhered to by historians, for it is dependent on the time of local disturbances, riots, attacks that threatened or destroyed existing senses of community.[68]

It should be amply clear from the above that the 'communities' at stake in these non-disciplinary accounts are not communities 'as they were' (or are) in some absolute sense—stable, fixed and enumerated—but rather communities 'as they become' through these very narratives. What we have here are notions of community that remain significantly malleable, fuzzy, contextual (might we say, 'historical' ?[69]. This, I want to suggest, is one of the fundamental differences between History—which has since the nineteenth century at least had a fixed, unified, unchanging subject, usually called the nation—and other constructions of the past which I have here labelled Memory.

This too may be an important part of the significance of Memory for our social scientific investigations : that recollections such as these enable us to rethink suppressed histories, and with that, agencies and uncertainties (agential positions and continuing struggles) suppressed by History itself. For too long, the nation-state idea has fixed the subject of history for us, and the admissible lines of enquiry and narration. To take account of other, different kinds of articulations of the past is to open up the area of historical enquiry : to accommodate the malleable, contextual, fuzzy, 'lived' community (and this should now include the 'nation'), and to recognize how the community (the subject of history) is forged in the very construction of the past—in the course, one might say, of a historical discourse.

From all that has been said above about History and Memory, it may be useful to extract two other elements that could contribute to the critique of social scientific and historical enquiry as we know it. It is possible that the 'eternal present' is a better way to think about history than a determinate and unquestionable 'past'—in the sense that history (like memory) is always of the present. Secondly, if indefinability, open-endedness is a mark of Otherness, as Hartog suggests,[70] it is perhaps as Other (rather than as self-same, consistent and constant) that we should seek to represent ourselves. In these respects, at least, History would seem to have more to learn from Memory than the other way around.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

[1] L. Dumont, *Religion/Politics and History in India* (Paris, 1970), p.89.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] N. Z. Davis, 'The Rites of Violence' in her *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, University Press, 1975), p. 153.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 164.

[5] I am grateful to Shahid Amin and more especially Muzaffar Alam for discussions on this point. The Indian historiographical debate on the religious policy of the Mughals and the decline of the Mughal empire underscores this point. As an old student of his informs me, Professor Athar Ali, one of the chief contributors to this debate, regularly declared in his classroom lectures that "Religion was a matter of convenience for Aurangzeb, not a matter of conviction."

[6] I. Habib, *Agrarian System of Mughal India* (Bombay, Asia Publishing House, 1963), p. 333 (emphasis added). The point made here is repeated in Habib's 'Forms of Class Struggle in Mughal India' in his *Essays in Indian History : Towards a Marxist Perception* (Delhi, Tulika, 1995), p. 249. For a parallel critique of the way in which religious sectarian conflict has been dealt with in 'Ancient Indian History', see Kunal Chakravarti, 'Recent Approaches to the History of Religion in Ancient India' in R. Thapar, ed., *Recent Perspectives of Early Indian History* (Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1995).

[7] In regard to Partition, Pakistani and Bangladeshi colleagues have sometimes asked, "Why do you say 'partition'?", "How can you partition something which does not yet exist (as 'India' did not before August 1947)?" While recognizing the force of this objection, I have continued to use 'Partition'—with a capital 'P'—since such a usage is part of our historiographical heritage in the subcontinent, and has quite commonly been employed by Pakistani and Bangladeshi historians too. It is a matter of interest too that local terms for

the violence of the time—*raula, maashal-la* (martial law), *gondogol, miyan-maari,* etc, which I shall refer to again below—are often used interchangeably with *'partition'*, the English word itself being used in the vernacular.

[8] There are perhaps as many seminars and conferences today on the question of 'violence' in history and society, especially in the Third World, as there used to be not so long ago on questions of 'tradition' and 'backwardness'.

[9] Pradeep Jeganathan, 'After a Riot: Anthropological Locations of Violence in an Urban Sri Lankan Community' (Ph. D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1997), pp. 46 and 38.

[10] *Ibid.*,p. 44. Page references for direct quotations are provided in the text in the next paragraph.

[11] Cited in Roger Chartier, *On the Edge of the Cliff: History, Language and Practices* (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), p. 115.

[12] G. W. F. Hegel, *Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, tr. by Robert S. Hartman (Indianopolis, Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1953), pp. 74-5 and *passim*.

[13] *Ibid.*, Hartman's introduction, p. xxxi.

[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 75-7

[15] Abbe J.A. Dubois, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, tr. by H. K. Beauchamp (Oxford, Clarendon Press. 1897; reprinted 1928). pp. 29-30.

[16] cf. B. Russell. *History of Western Philosophy* (London, George Allen and Unwin, 1967); Russell himself holds that "support for the State, as the only alternative to anarchy, is in the main valid", *ibid.*, p. 540.

[17] James Mill (and H.H. Wilson). *The History of British India: From 1805 to 1835*, in Three Volumes, Vol. I (London, James Madden, 1838), p. 336.

[18] *Ibid.*, pp. 338-9. To this Wilson adds the following footnote for good measure: "In 1820 the writer was in the habit of traversing every part of Benares without fear of molestation or insult. The materials for the beautiful map of Benares, executed not long afterwards by...Mr. James Prinsep, were

collected by him in the city, in fearless reliance upon the goodwill of the people, which he invariably experienced"; 339n.

[19] W. W. Hunter, *The Indian Musalmaans* (1871; reprint, Calcutta, 1945), p. 205.

[20] Marx's writings on India fall into this category, although they are perhaps exceptional in their acknowledgement of the violent character of British rule in the subcontinent.

[21] Nirad C. Chaudhuri, *Thy Hand, Great Anarch! India 1921-1952* (London, Chatto & Windus, 1987), p. 843.

[22] *Ibid.*

[23] *Ibid.*, pp. 857-8 (emphasis added). Compare with this the Hindu Mahasabha's call for "violence on the most up-to-date western scientific lines [*sic*]" in its campaign for the 1945-46 elections : "it would be wise if Congress were to take up...to meet the [Muslim League] threat of a Civil War, the Mahasabha slogan of 'Train the Youths in Horse Riding and Rifle Shooting''; cited in Joya Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided: Hindu Communalism and Partition, 1932-1947* (Cambridge, University Press, 1996), p. 238.

[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 859-60.

[25] Jadunath Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire. Volume Four : 1789-1803* (1950; Delhi, Orient Longman, 1992). pp. 289-90, and 292-3 (emphasis added).

[26] 'Violence' occurs in countries like India, in this commonsense view, because of popular passions associated with primordial differences : and because of a supposed "lack of cultural homogeneity and the absence of institutionalized mechanisms for the regulation of differences", as Veena Das points out in her 'Introduction' to V. Das. ed., *Mirrors of Violence : Communities, Riots and Survivors in South Asia* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1990). p. 5.

[27] Compare the work of some 'non-historians' on these themes : Veena Das and Ashish Nandy, 'Violence, victimhood and the language of silence' in Veena Das, ed., *The Word and the World : Fantasy, Symbol and Record* (Delhi, Sage Publications, 1986); see also Veena Das, *Critical Events : An Anthropological Perspective on*

Contemporary India (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1995). ,*Passim*,.

[28] "For many of us in the subcontinent," writes Mushirul Hasan, "still confronted with and troubled by the bitter legacy of Pakistan, the critical and unresolved issue is how Jinnah and the League were able to secure the support of so many Muslims in so short a time"; Hasan, ed, *India's Partition : Process, Strategy and Mobilization* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 42.

[29] However, it is an open question just how 'historical' we would judge these works to be. This is a pseudo-history of 'religious wars', where 'Hindus' and 'Muslims' (and occasionally other religious groups) are represented as having been eternally ranged against one another, the forces on the two sides are undifferentiated, the religions unchanging and the violence inherent. This is, in fact, not a *history* : it is an account of the unchanging past, which for British colonialist writers on the 19th and early 20th centuries and for right-wing Hindu and Muslim propagandists since then too, lives on in the present. For an elaboration of this point, see my *Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (Delhi, Oxford University Press. 1990). ch. 2, and 'The New Hindu History' in *South Asia*, Vol. XVII (1994)

[30] Sumit Sarkar, *A Critique of Colonial India* (Calcutta. Papyrus, 1985), pp. 144 and 139.

[31] *Ibid*., p. 120.

[32] Ayesha Jalal, *The Sole Spokesman : Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Cambridge. University Press, 1985), pp. 262, 216 and *passim*.

[33] Joya Chatterjee, *Bengal Divided*, pp. 230-231 and 253.

[34] Anita Inder Singh, *The Origins of the Partition of India* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1987). p. 182. See also Mushirul Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation : India's Muslims since Independence* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997). p. 116 and *passim*.

[35] Singh, *Origins*, pp. 183-187 and *passim*.

[36] Jalal, *Sole Spokesman*, pp. 215, 216 and 223 (emphasis added).

[37] Sarkar, *Critique of Colonial India*, pp. 119 and 133-4. See also, in this context, I. Talbot, *Freedom's Cry : The Popular Dimension in the Pakistan Movement and Partition Experience in North-West India* (Karachi, Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 50, for a statement along similar lines.

[38] Suranjan Das, *Communal riots in Bengal*, 1905-1947 (Delhi, Oxford University Press 1991), p.162.

[39] *Ibid.*, pp. 184-5 and 187-8. Page references for quotations in the following paragraphs are provided in the main text.

[40] One should note some signs of change, however. Joya Chatterjee writes of the August 1946 violence in Calcutta, for example, that "an analysis of Hindu rioters reveals the extent to which volunteer organisations had been successful in mobilising middle-class Bengali Hindus of Calcutta behind the increasingly virulent communalism that characterised bhadralok politics in the forties"; *Bengal Divided.*, pp. 238-9.

[41] See for example, the numerous publications of the People's Union for Civil Liberties, the People's Union for Democratic Rights, and other 'civil liberties' organizations and investigating committees; also the many writings of scholar activists like Asghar Ali Engineer; Uma Chakravarti and Nandita Haksar, *The Delhi Riots: Three Days In the Life of a Nation* (Delhi, Lancer International, 1987); on communal violence more generally, Veena Das, ed., *Mirrors of Violence*, and Sudhir Kakar, *The Colour of Violence* (New Delhi, Viking, , 1997); and on Partition, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries : Women in India's Partition* (Delhi, Kali for Women, 1998); Urvashi Butalia, *The Other Side of Silence : Voices from the Partition of India* (New Delhi Viking, 1998) ; Veena Das, *Critical Events;* and a few of my essays.

[42] 'Remembering Partition,' a dialogue between Javeed Alam and Suresh Sharma, *Seminar*, no. 461 (January 1998). The following quotations from Javeed Alam are all taken from this source.

[43] See especially the studies by Veena Das; Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin; and Urvashi Butalia cited in n. 41.

[44] The points made in the preceding paragraph also owe a great deal to Jeganathan's argument, as will be clear from my first

lecture ; see Jeganathan, 'After the Riot', *passim.*

[45] The phrase is taken from Paul Magdalino's introduction to Magdalino, ed., *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth-Century Europe* (London, Hambledon Press, 1992), p.xi.

[46] I take the phrase from David Lowenthal's well-known work, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985)

[47] Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Remembered Villages : Representation of Hindu-Bengali Memories in the Aftermath of the Partition', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 10 August 1996, p.2143.

[48] Chakrabarty, 'Remembered Villages'.

[49] On this question of the practical impossibility of speech, see also Urvashi Butalia's remarkable chapter on her uncle, 'Blood' : *The Other Side of Silence*, ch.2

[50] Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, 'Recovery, Rupture, Resistance : Indian State and Abduction of Women during Partition' and Butalia, 'Community, State and Gender' in *Economic and Political Weekly*, 'Review of Women's Studies', 24 April 1993; Das, *Critical Events*, ch.3; G. Pandey, 'The Prose of Otherness' in D. Arnold and D. Hardiman, eds., *Subaltern Studies. Volume VIII* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994).

[51] *Naya Daur* (1948, reprinted in Mumtaz Shireen, ed., *Zulmat-i-Nimroz* (Karachi, Nafeez Academy, 1990). I am grateful to Alok Bhalla for drawing my attention to this important memoir and for kindly providing me with a photocopy of the reprinted version. Page references provided in the text below refer to this reprint.

[52] *Ibid.* (ILO) MSS. Eur. F164/149, D. M. Malik, *The Tragedy of Delhi (through neutral eyes)*, p.19; MSS. Eur.F200/53, minutes of meeting of the Emergency Committee of the Cabinet, 7 October 1947 (cf. MSS. Eur. D621/14, Wilfrid Russell diaries, entry for 1 October 1947); Begum Anees Qidwai, *Azadi ki chhaon mein* (Hindi translation, Nur Nabi Abbasi; New Delhi, National Book Trust, 1990), p.56; and extract from Ralph Russell's interview with Dr. Ebadat Barelvi, published in *Seminar* 420 (August 1994).

[53] (IOL) MSS. Eur. F164/21, Appendix VII, 'A Statement on Delhi Disturbance Made by a Military Officer on 21 September 1947', p.xliii; and ibid., Malik, *Tragedy of Delhi*, pp.21, 25.

[54] Ebadat Barelvi, *Azadi ke Saaye Mein* (Lahore, 1988), p.18.

[55] *Ibid.*, p.13. Since the construction of a new capital city by the British called New Delhi, to the south of the older habitation, the city built up at the time of the Mughals and in the early colonial period has come to be known as Old Delhi.

[56] *Ibid.*, p.18.

[57] The phrase, used in reference to the erosion of Delhi's culture under the impact of colonialism, is Ahmed Ali's; see his *Twilight in Delhi* (1940 ; Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1991), p. viii.

[58] Barelvi, *Azadi*, p.150.

[59] *Ibid.* Page references for the quotations that follow are provided in the text.

[60] The major part of the businessman's account was given in English. The last sentence quoted here was spoken in Hindi.

[61] As he recalls it, he slept right through when the train he and his mother were fleeing in was rained with bullets from a train going in the opposite direction and all other passengers in their coach took cover under the seats; and again when his mother tried to keep him awake, for fear of what marauders might do to them or take from their considerable luggage, when they were stuck for a night at a wayside station full of armed Sikhs, discussing the attacks they had successfully carried out during the day, the numbers they had killed, the goods they had looted, and the tasks that remained for the next day.

[62] Shail Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes: Myth, Memory and the Shaping of a Muslim Identity* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.179-81.

[63] Rahi Masoom Raza, *Aadha Gaon* (Delhi, Rajkamal Prakashan, 1966), p.13 (translation mine).

[64] (IOR) R/3/1/173, translation of intercepted letter from Fateh Khan, Jamadar to "Brother Malik Sher Mohd Khanji", 31 August 1947.

[65] Mayaram, *Resisting Regimes*, p.181.

[66] I cite this particular example from a village of Gurgaon, south of Delhi, that I visited in company with my colleague, Dr. Nayanjot Lahiri.

[67] There is another related term that is frequently encountered—*shaheedi* or martyrdom, but this ought perhaps to be kept separate from the others just mentioned, as referring to what Veena Das and Ashish Nandy (1983) have called a 'consensual' form of violence' and one which does not—in these accounts—appear as violence at all; Das and Nandy, 'Violence, Victimhood and the Language of Silence', *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 19, 1 (1985).

[68] For an elaboration of these propositions, see my forthcoming book on the history and memory of Partition.

[69] For the 'enumerated' and the 'fuzzy' community, see Sudipta Kaviraj, 'The Imaginary Institution of India' in *Subaltern Studies*, Volume VII (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1992); also for 'community' in the rather more abstract sense of the 'collective', which Partha Chatterjee has described as the 'other' of capital, see Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments : Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 230-39. I have also put forward an argument about the always malleable, contextualized notion of the local 'community' in my *Construction of Communalism*, ch. 4.

[70] Francois Hartog, *The Mirror of Herodotus : The Representation of the Other in the Writing of History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California University Press, 1988), p.109.

MEMORY, HISTORY AND THE QUESTION OF VIOLENCE REFLECTIONS ON THE RECONSTRUCTION OF PARTITION

(S.G.Deuskar Lectures on Indian History and Culture, 1995)

GYANENDRA PANDEY

Gyanendra Pandey explores, here, the possibilities of an alternative reconstruction of the history and memory of Partition. The author pointedly juxtaposes the authorised modes of historical scholarship on the event with various non-disciplinary and non-historical modes of narrating, recollecting and recovering a past that has constantly eluded objective documentation. Setting up a dual paradigm of History and Memory, he contests the pervasive presence of the concerns of 'state' and 'nationhood' in the former, and delves into the more open-ended claims and invocations of 'community' in the latter. The first lecture, 'Violence and Civilisation' interrogates the existing historiography of religious communal violence in India, and of the Partition, in particular, showing how the discourses of history, state and nation have repeatedly consigned the issues of 'religion' and 'violence' to the realm of the pathological, or to that of political machinations. The second lecture, 'Community and Violence' turns to a rich and complex body of 'non-disciplinary', 'non-historical' accounts of the partition, addressing the different ways in which these narrate, resolve, and erase the same issues of hatred and violence. The author argues that, in these accounts, the discourse of violence becomes at the same time a discourse of community, and that the borders of community, like the borders of violence, always remain uncertain.

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