The Rise of Hindu Nationalism in India: The Case Study of Ahmedabad in the 1980s

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The massacre of Muslims in Ahmedabad and throughout Gujarat in February 2002 demonstrated the challenge of Hindu nationalism to India's democracy and secularism. There is increasing evidence to suggest that government officials openly aided the killings of the Muslim minority by members of militant Hindu organisations.[1] The Gujarat government's intervention did little to stop the carnage. The communalism that was witnessed in 2002 had its roots in the mid-1980s. Since then, militant Hindu nationalism and recurring communal violence arose in Ahmedabad and throughout Gujarat.[2] This study aims to shed light on the rise and nature of communalism since the mid-1980s.

The rise of communalism in Gujarat was unexpected. Before the mid-1980s there was little evidence of enduring or even newly developing Hindu–Muslim strife in the politics of Gujarat. Although there had been major communal riots in Ahmedabad in 1969, Hindu–Muslim tension in the 1970s and early 1980s had been insignificant. The ethnic conflicts of the 1980s had primarily been about reservations policy and the status of the backward castes. The large-scale riots that occurred in Ahmedabad in 1985 began as caste riots over

[1] See Siddharth Varadarajan (ed.), *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy* (Penguin Books, New Delhi, 2002); Aakar Patel, Dileep Padgaonkar, B. G. Verghese, *Rights and Wrongs. Ordeal by Fire in the Killing Fields of Gujarat* (Editors Guild Fact Finding Mission Report, New Delhi, May 2002); John Dayal (ed.), *Gujarat 2002. Untold and Retold Stories of the Hindutva Lab* (Media House, Delhi, 2002); Chaitanya Krishna (ed.), *Fascism in India. Faces, Fangs and Facts* (Manak, Delhi 2003); Report by People's Union for Democratic Rights, *'Maaro! Kaapo! Baalo!' State, Society, and Communalism in Gujarat* (PUDR, Delhi, 2002).

[2] Major communal conflagrations occurred in Ahmedabad in 1985, 1986, 1990 and 1992. During the 1990s sporadic communal riots transpired in the city and in other parts of Gujarat.

reservations but turned into communal violence. These riots marked the beginnings of the shift from several decades of Congress dominance to the triumph of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Gujarat as well as in Indian national politics.[3] The rise of Hindu nationalism since the 1980s has commonly been understood as a sectarian conflict between Hindus and Muslims, driven by religious and cultural differences, or determined by class conflicts or instrumental manipulations of the masses by political elites.[4] This analysis of the Ahmedabad riots of 1985 indicates that the growth of Hindu nationalism since the 1980s can be more readily understood by realising that its spur does not lie in Hindu–Muslim antagonism. What appears as a religious conflict between Hindus and Muslims is, in fact, an expression of growing tensions among Hindus. It was largely driven by the way in which diverse groups of Hindus experienced caste and changes in the caste regime. The processes underlying the Ahmedabad riots of 1985 throw light on the origins of the communalization of the state and the society. The conduct of the state during the riots of 1985, as well as the views expressed in its inquiry of the events, reveals the dynamics by which the state's communalized practices developed and consolidated.

The Ahmedabad riots of 1985 erupted over the decision of the Gujarat state government to increase the reserved quota for Socially and Educationally Backward Castes/Classes (SEBC) candidates in educational and governmental institutions from 10% to 28%. However, very soon, conflict between forward and backward caste Hindus over social and economic reforms for the benefit of the lower and

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[3] In 1987 the BJP won the elections for Ahmedabad Municipality. In the 1990 Assembly elections the party increased its seats in Gujarat from 11 in 1985 to 67, and by 1995 it swept the assembly elections in the state, securing 122 seats out of 182. In both the 1998 and 1999 elections the BJP retained its dominant position. See *TOI*, 11/1/98-31/3/98. Priyavadan Patel, 'Sectarian Mobilisation, Factionalism and Voting in Gujarat, *Economic and Political Weekly*, August 21–28, 1999, pp. 2423–33. For some scholars, Gujarat appeared even to 'set the pace' in the decline of the Congress and the growth of Hindu nationalism. See David Ludden, 'Introduction', in David Ludden (ed.), *Making India Hindu* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996), p. 19. Also see John R. Wood, 'On the Periphery but in the Thick of It: Some Current Indian Political Crises Viewed From Gujarat', Paper presented in: *International Seminar on Gujarat Society: Development and Deprivation*, 6–9 December 1994, Centre for Social Studies, Surat.

[4] For a detailed discussion of that mapping of the literature see Ornit Shani, 'The Resurgence of *EthnoHinduism* – a Theoretical Perspective', in Shlomo Ben-Ami, Yoav Peled and Alberto Spektrovski (eds), *Ethnic Challenges to the Modern Nation State* (Macmillan, London, 2000), pp. 268–76.

backward castes transmogrified into communal violence between Hindus and Muslims. This occurred despite the fact that there was no prior religious dispute between the two communities and religion was not a category qualifying a person for reservation of places in educational and governmental institutions. The local Muslim community had no part in the reservation dispute, but an all-Hindu consolidation against Muslims emerged from a conflict among Hindus, and Muslims became its main victims.

The coincidence of the eruption of communal violence with the caste-reservation conflict seems paradoxical. While militant Hinduism assumes and tries to promote the principle of a unitary Hindu identity, caste conflicts demonstrate deep divisions among Hindus.[5] Moreover, the castes that propelled the communal violence were also the primary generative forces behind the caste agitation. It is therefore important to investigate the dynamic processes by which caste reservation conflicts, which were exclusive to Hindus, translated into tensions between Hindus and Muslims. The many commentaries on communalism have either neglected the relations between caste conflicts and communalism or have perceived caste conflicts as a barrier for the further growth of Hindu nationalism.[6] This study argues that both caste and communal conflicts, despite the potential contradiction between them, stem from similar social processes, and that caste is a critical factor in the rise of Hindu nationalism since the 1980s. It was precisely these caste conflicts that fostered communalism in the 1980s and 1990s

Preferential policies for backward castes in the 1980s, like reservations, had served to complicate and antagonize caste relations, especially as they appeared to offer lower and backward castes greater opportunities for social mobility. As some segments of the lower and backward castes appeared to improve their economic situation, forward caste Hindus feared that their own opportunities were being restricted and their dominance challenged. They were now suddenly forced to compete with the lower castes, of lesser status, on terms,

[5] It is important to note here that a contradiction between caste conflict and communalism arises precisely because of the presupposition about the existence of coherent Hindu and Muslim communities. Otherwise, as phenomena in themselves, caste conflicts and Hindu–Muslim conflicts are not necessarily contradictory. By simple reasoning a group (or an individual) can be in a conflict with another group, but on another occasion unite against a third group.

[6] See, for example, Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflicts and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2002), pp. 85, 161.

which they perceived to be disadvantageous. The intensification of communal antagonism since the 1980s reflected the resulting and growing uncertainties within the Hindu moral order. The growth of Hindu militancy and the formation of a 'Hindu identity' were informed by the complex interrelationship between caste and class. At the same time, the dynamic of these interrelations, as well as the ascent of communal antagonism, was largely energised and reproduced by the state's policies and political discourses. The intervention of the state, especially in its reservations policy, appeared to bestow favours on minorities, which Muslims were taken to be part of. State policies addressed issues of equality as if they were synonymous with the rights of religious minorities. In doing so, it enabled caste conflicts to develop and deepen communal rivalries. The construction of a disposition of all-Hindus facing Muslims formed as some segments of forward caste Hindus found the cause of their own 'limited' mobility in these government's preferential treatment of minorities.

This study of the Ahmedabad riots of 1985 investigates some of the dynamic processes between caste and class among Hindus and their effect in order to understand the growth of communalism since the 1980s. The study aims to show how the communal antagonism was an expression of a growing crisis within the Hindu moral order. It therefore examines the conflict by emphasizing the interdependence of political rivalries and economic pressures on the one hand, and social context and identity on the other. Following a summary of the course of events, the study presents two views of the riots. The first account recaptures the official views of the riots as they were seen by the various agencies of the state and represented in their documents. The state was the initial target of the violence. This view is based on the formal documentation of the Dave Commission of Inquiry into the incidents.[7] To the official views, these events were to be explained either by a culture of violence, or by manipulations of communal politicians. The official accounts correspond to the conventional narrative explanation of communal violence. This explanation is limited, leaving inadequately answered the question of the shift in the riots from caste reservation agitation into communal violence between Hindus and Muslims. The second account uses other sources in order to provide a broader dimension for the understanding of the 'communal turn'

[7] Justice V. S. Dave, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry: Into the Incidents of Violence and Disturbances which took Place at Various Places in the State of Gujarat since February, 1985 to 18th July, 1985* (henceforth *COI*), (Government of Gujarat, Ahmedabad, April 1990).

in the riots. It is based on oral testimonies of survivors and witnesses, documents collected by various groups and other reports and materials from the time of the riots. These form the 'living text' of the second account. The oral testimonies are based on repeated long interviews with twelve extended families from the Dariapur area in the walled city of Ahmedabad, where the anti-reservation agitation 'transformed' into communal riots. The interviews were conducted twelve years after the riots, while most of the families, or part of them, were still living in the locality.[8] The second account examines the moments of crisis of 1985 without secluding them from people's own historical circumstances. The history of the small stories neither makes, nor reconstructs a grand narrative of the riots. Yet it finds an interpretation of the events from basic human experience—what the events meant and still mean for those who participated in them. This account offers an understanding of the interplay between caste and class. Around Ahmedabad's urban setting, political, social and economic context, the second account of the riots attempts to provide an understanding of how the idea of a 'Hindu identity' and a communal predicament formed. The analysis of the riots aims to show how communalism was driven by a growing crisis among Hindus. From the local perspective of the long period of sustained violence that Ahmedabad experienced in 1985, the study indicates the underlying processes that would, in the coming decades, become a feature of the rise of Hindu nationalism. It also draws some inferences from the relations between communalism and caste for the understanding of caste.

Outlining the Riots—the Plot[9]

The death of a bus passenger who was burnt alive as a group of protesting students set fire to a State Transport bus, along with the injury of eight policemen during a violent demonstration, marked

[8] The interviews were conducted and the material collected during a year of fieldwork in 1997–1998.

[9] The plot of the riots is based on the *COI*; reports in the *Times of India* (*TOI*), January–August 1985; *The Hindu*, January–August 1985; *India Today*, January–August 1985; newspaper cuttings from the *Indian Express, Hindustan Times* and *Patriot*, February–July 1985; and *The Shattering of Gujarat*, a background paper For Private Circulation, Series 1985, No. 2, BUILD Documantation Centre, Bombay, 1985 (the diary of the events in this source was compiled from the *TOI, Indian Express, Hindustan Times, Tribune, Telegraph, Free Press, Journal, Hindu, Newstimes* and *Sunday Observer*).

the beginning of seven months of ferocious large-scale riots in the city of Ahmedabad in February 1985. The agitation, between forward and backward caste Hindus, erupted over the decision of the Gujarat State government to increase the reserved quotas for backward caste Hindus in educational institutions and government jobs. But startlingly, within a month, this caste riot turned into communal violence between Hindus and Muslims. People armed with stones, acid bulbs, petrol bombs and burning rags clashed as a communal uproar spread throughout the city. The army was called in, but the waves of outrage endured. The police force also became embroiled in the agitations. The spree of violence continued with unprecedented stabbing, looting and burning of houses and shops of, mainly, Muslims. Bomb blasts hit the city. The newly elected Chief Minister resigned because the government did not control the situation. Moreover, the state was paralysed by a massive government employee strike. Finally, after seven months of anti-reservation agitation and catastrophic communal violence the situation gradually normalised.

The government of Gujarat, headed by the Congress party, introduced reservation policies for backward castes in 1972. That year it appointed the Baxi Commission to identify socially and educationally backward communities that would qualify for preferential treatment similar to that being granted to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.[10] These groups had been granted reservation rights by the Indian constitution of 14% and 7% respectively.[11] The Commission submitted its report in 1976, when the Congress party was in power, identifying 82 castes and groups as backward. Two years later, the Janata Government accepted the Baxi Commission recommendation and implemented reservations of 10% for these communities. Nevertheless, in 1982, a second Commission, Rane, was set up to look into the case of groups, which had not been listed as backward by the Baxi Commission. The Rane Commission submitted its report in October 1983. It suggested adding 18% reservation for the SEBC. In contrast to the Baxi Commission, it based its recommendation on occupation and income as the criteria for

[10] In the absence of acceptable criteria for defining backwardness at the national level it was open to different state governments to initiate their own policy.

[11] The reservation for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes was granted in proportion to their share in the total population. In Gujarat therefore scheduled castes and scheduled tribes are entitled to 7% and 14% respectively.

backwardness rather than using caste.[12] However, when the Gujarat
state government finally declared its intention to implement the
report, after it had been ignored for 14 months and shortly before
the forthcoming Assembly elections were announced, it reversed
the Commission's recommendations. The government insisted that
caste and not class should be the criterion for the identification of
backwardness.[13]

When the new reservation policy to increase the quotas for the
backward castes was announced by the Gujarat government in January
1985 there was no overt reaction from the upper castes. An anti-
reservation rebuttal took shape only by mid-February. Initially, the
confrontation was concentrated around the universities and schools.
The principal protagonists were the students and the agitation was
limited to the western side of the city. The riots began with protest
rallies and school boycotts, but soon took a violent turn in the form
of stoning and arson, causing widespread damage to government
and municipal property (mainly buses). During the first week of
March, when the State Assembly elections were held, there was a
lull. The following week, after the election results were announced
(the Congress party, headed by Solanki, won the election with a large
majority), the students revived the agitation and a parent organization
for their support was formed. No communal incidents were reported
during this period.

On 18 March, with the ending of the Gujarat bandh day (shutting
down of businesses, shops and offices), communal riots erupted,
starting in the Dariapur area in the walled city of Ahmedabad near
the Hindu locality of Vadigam and the Muslim locality Naginapol. On
that evening, with the sound of the bandh's 'death knell',[14] a stone
hit a Muslim boy on the head while he was playing carrom. He was

[12] The Rane Commission suggested 63 occupations and an annual income ceiling
of Rs 10,000 as criterion for being listed as SEBC. According to the Commission,
discarding caste as a basis for reservations would help remove bitterness and hostility
between the different castes. For a broader discussion see I. P. Desai, 'Should "caste"
be the Basis for Recognising Backwardness?' *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 14,
1984, pp. 1106–16. Desai was one of the members of the Rane Commission.

[13] The intention of Chief Minister Madhavsinh Solanki was that the total
reservation would reach 49%: the existing 7% for scheduled castes, 14% for scheduled
tribes, 10% for Other Backward Castes (OBCs), or SEBC, and the intended increase
of 18% to the latter communities.

[14] This programme was known as 'Mruyughant', to be observed at 8 pm when the
people would go to the roofs of their houses and ring bells or make other sounds (with
their thali dishes), heralding the death of reservation.

rushed to a hospital.[15] From that moment, 'the signal was on' and communal violence began.[16] The whole night of 18 March through the morning of 19 March marked the beginning of communal riots followed by killings, arson, looting and burning in the walled city. During the next five days the city witnessed a rise in communal and anti-reservation incidents. The army was called in, and the walled city was placed under curfew. The rest of the month was relatively quiet, and by 2 April the army was withdrawn and the curfew was lifted. Yet, the fight against the new reservation policy continued with the persistent boycotting of schools, colleges and examinations. Various professional associations supported the struggle and went on a sympathy strike. The government arrested numerous student leaders under the National Security Act. The student bodies extended their mandate, calling for the abolition of the roster reservation system of promotion.[17] This sparked a counter, pro-reservation reaction. A few open clashes between the pro-reservationists and anti-reservationists (Hindus) took place.

During the following wave of upsurge, in April, much of the protest centred on police atrocities against agitating students and citizens. In mid-April, the situation intensified as confrontations between the police and residents occurred at various localities. Cases of police shooting and killings increased, and clashes between Hindus and Muslims repeatedly took place. As a consequence, the army was called in again. The situation deteriorated when, on 22 April, the police revolted after the killing of Head Constable Laxman Desai. The same day, the police attacked and set fire to the building of the *Gujarat Samachar Press*. At the same time, mass-scale communal riots erupted in the eastern labour dominated area, especially in Bapunagar. The main allegation of the Muslim population in the area, who were the main victims, was that, 'Hindus had done all the damages to Muslims' life and property with the aid, assistance and connivance of the police'.[18] As a result of this turmoil more than a thousand people, mostly Muslims, were forced to find shelter in a relief camp and a few

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[15] *COI*, Vol. I, p. 226. Also see G.W-12, p. 93, S-144, p. 149, 205, 214.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 226.

[17] The roster reservation system was introduced in Gujarat in 1976. Under the roster system, workers belonging to the scheduled castes and tribes get preferential treatment in promotion and seniority. According to the system, unfilled reserved quotas for promotion are carried over to future years until suitable candidates from the reserved categories of caste and tribes are found.

[18] *COI*, Vol. I, p. 251.

hundred houses were burnt down. Although there was a decline in the number of incidents during the next fortnight, various organizations and associations continued protesting against police atrocities, held rallies and strikes, and demanded that the government appoint a commission of inquiry into these incidents. By this time calls for the dismissal of Solanki's government intensified. Moreover, the state employees launched a new anti-reservation front. They went on strike, demanding the abolition of the caste-based roster reservation system of promotion in government jobs.

The following period, from 8–15 May, again witnessed a rise in the agitation. Communal clashes resumed and heightened after the murder of Police Sub Inspector Mahendrasingh Rana in the Kalupur area of the walled city. Within the next few days 33 people died and many more were injured in police and private shooting. But most strikingly, the walled city was engulfed by incidents of stabbing.

The next spell of violence erupted on 5 June, on the occasion of the Gujarat Chamber of Commerce's five-day bandh. The chamber initiated the bandh as a protest against the government's inability to maintain law and order. During this phase, bursts of violence were frequent in the city. Two climatic events marked this period. First, eight members of a Hindu family were burnt alive in Dabgarward locality (Kalupur) in the walled city. Second, the situation intensified on the day of festivities of a Hindu religious procession, the Rath Yatra, and the Muslim Id-Ul-Fitr that fell on the same day that year. The Yatra, which was taken in defiance of an agreement between the temple organizers and the authorities, turned into a communal combat. Surprisingly, although at that time Solanki agreed to accept the anti-reservationists' demands, they decided to continue their struggle and raised new claims. Bomb blasts and stabbings, which occurred in the city until the end of July, further aggravated the situation and raised the death toll. Even the long awaited dismissal of Solanki failed to quell the disturbances, which later took the shape of a massive state government employee strike.

The last burst of violence occurred between 16 and 18 July, after an accord was reached on the reservation issue and the army withdrew from the city. Communal clashes persisted in the walled city and its eastern area. Curfew was lifted in the beginning of August. In mid-August the government reached a settlement with its employees, the strike was called off and the agitation finally died away.

It is difficult to estimate the exact number of deaths and casualties, as neither the Commission's Report, nor the newspapers, or other

sources presented a complete calculation of these figures. However, from the different sources it seems that about 220 people lost their lives. Property worth $1.75 billion was damaged or ruined. From February to July 1985, the police in Ahmedabad city recorded 662 incidents and offences regarding the anti-reservation agitation and 743 communal ones.[19] According to the evidence and records brought to the Commission, Muslims were the main victims of the riots. 2,500 houses of Muslims were damaged, 1,500 shops were burnt or looted, approximately 100 Muslims were murdered, and 400 were stabbed. Furthermore, 12,000 Muslims were rendered homeless and 900 Muslims were arrested. The description of the events, both in the newspapers and in the Report of the Commission of Inquiry, portrayed a vision of wholesale anger, destruction and the collapse of the rule of law and social order particularly in Ahmedabad, but also in other parts of the state.[20] The waves of violence verged on swells of anarchy. The various groups had to face long periods of curfew, and, at least apparently, a paralysis of everyday life.

The Ahmedabad riots of 1985 erupted around the question of compensatory policies for backward caste Hindus. The reservation conflict turned into communal violence between Hindus and Muslims despite the fact that religious issues were ephemeral at the start and throughout the course of the riots. This makes it difficult to see religion as the sole source of the conflict. Moreover, range of conflicts evolved within the riots. Upper castes confronted the government in the streets over the issue of reservations. Then communal riots erupted. Upper castes also aligned with the backward castes against the scheduled castes, for the struggle to abolish the roster reservation system. The police agitated. There was a struggle to dismiss the government, which had just won a clear majority in the elections. Through the riots of 1985 social alliances were rapidly shifting. This revealed that caste and communal identities were elastic and constantly changing. Diverse groups of people participated in the riots. Collective violence in these riots, therefore, could not be seen as actions specific to a single group, class or religious community.

[19] *Ibid.*, Vol. III, Annextures XXXVII and XXXVIII, pp. 439–40.

[20] It is noteworthy that the riots that erupted in Ahmedabad affected the rest of Gujarat, and incidents of violence also took place in other districts, mainly in Baroda (Vadodra) and Surat. See *ibid.*, Vol. I, pp. 158–91. An examination of the events in other areas in Gujarat is beyond the scope of this study.

The Official Views

In the Commission's official view, as it was expressed by the
Police Commissioner and subsequently adopted by the Commission,
Ahmedabad city and its dwellers were prone to violence: 'The entire
walled-city is, thus, even now a volcanic crater ready to erupt a mass
of communal lava. It is highly volatile pocket where aggression by one
community over the other is a cult developed . . . '.[21] The Commission
explained that,

by the end of 19th century, Ahmedabad came to be known as Manchester
of India and several textile mills had come up. Hence the labour from far
and near migrated to Ahmedabad and it started assuming a cosmopolitan
character and ever since then *the people of Ahmedabad became agitational minded'.*[22]

The Commission reinforced this view and reasoning by suggesting
that the city had an old legacy of communal trouble ever since 1714,
when riots erupted during the Holi festival. It added that the Court's
decision to open the Babri Masjid in October 1984 widened the gulf
between Hindus and Muslims in Ayodhya, but also affected Gujarat.[23]
So, the Commission suggested that Ahmedabad city and its people
were culturally violent.[24]

Historical records, however, provide no evidence for a history of
animosity between Hindus and Muslims in Ahmedabad.[25] The most
rigorous study of the city argues that, 'the communal problem has
fortunately played only a small role in the history of Ahmedabad'.[26]
Even the Justice Reddy Commission of Inquiry into Ahmedabad
Communal Disturbances of 1969 argued that after partition

The people of Gujarat in general and those of Ahmedabad, in particular,
were not prone to communal passions or excitement—both the Hindu and

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[21] *Ibid.*, p. 70.
[22] *Ibid.*, p. 72 (emphasis added). Moreover, the Commission found 'it essential
to mention that they [people of Ahmedabad] are also masterminded in spreading
rumours'. *Ibid.*, p. 73.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 226.
[24] *Ibid.*, pp. 225–6. These views were often repeated in the testimonies of state
officials in the Commission's report.
[25] See *Ahmedabad District Gazetteer*, Government of Gujarat, Ahmedabad, 1984,
pp. 107–8 (generally, pp. 70–141).
[26] Kenneth L. Gillion, *Ahmedabad: A Study in Indian Urban History* (University of
California Press, Berkely and Los Angeles, 1968), p. 165.

the Muslim community lived by and large in amity except in a few places here
and there which had their own special reasons for communal disturbances.[27]

Paradoxically, the Commission's attempt to introduce an historic
perspective stands in contrast with its own reasoning about how
'the people of Ahmedabad became agitational minded'. It seems
implausible to delineate *the* character, or *the* nature, of Ahmedabad
dwellers precisely because of the expansion and growth of the city
since 1860s, the waves of migration of various populations, and thus,
the changes in its social composition. Moreover, until the 1950s–
1960s most of the labour came to the city from Ahmedabad district
and the surrounding area. These processes heralded social conflicts
and indeed had important and consequential effects on the city's
social dynamics. But they actually contradict the Commission's own
argument. The Commission presented an elaborated account of the
cultural proneness of Ahmedabad's people to violence, but did not
consider the social and economic circumstances of the events of 1985.
In any case, the viewpoint about an inclination towards communal
violence cannot stand as the sole explanation for the complexity of the
events that occurred in Ahmedabad.

The immediate cause of the eruption of the riots was the decision
of the government to raise the quota of reservation for the backward
castes. However, the Commission considered the reservation issue,
and the generation and continuation of violence as a device, or
a strategy for accomplishing political goals. It commented on the
opportunistic time the government chose for the announcement of
the new policy.[28] The Commission insinuated that Solanki wanted
to expand and consolidate his support base, and thus to obtain
electoral benefits in the forthcoming elections. Solanki contested
the elections on the basis of the KHAM strategy. This was a
caste alliance that the Congress party designated with the idea of
promoting itself as the saviour of the oppressed groups. KHAM was
the acronym for Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims. The
KHAM communities formed about 60% of the population. A majority
of the caste groups in this alliance was either entitled to or being
considered for reservation.[29] This point is substantiated by the way

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[27] Judge J. Reddy, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry: Ahmedabad Communal Disturbances
(1969)*, (Government of Gujarat, 1970), Chapter XVIII, p. 212.

[28] *COI*, Vol. II, p. 8, Vol. I, p. 223.

[29] 'He [Solanki] took the opportunity of implementing Rane Commission and
thereby concentrating on 70% of the votes . . .'. *COI*, Vol. II, p. 9.

the Rane report, which formed the basis for the Gujarat government's decision, was disregarded for 14 months. The government decided to implement it just prior to the elections. Moreover, Solanki reversed the Report's recommendation, insisting that caste and not occupation and income should be the criterion for reservation. Furthermore, the Education Department was not consulted before the decision to implement the Rane recommendation. This raises doubts about the sincerity of the government's policies on social justice and reservation in universities.[30] The Commission claimed that the government was opportunistic over reservations also because the issue was left unresolved for so long. After each commission on reservation submitted a report its recommendations were either partly concealed, or shelved, but never fully implemented. Then, a new commission was invariably nominated. Moreover, according to the Report, even the existing reserved seats for the SEBC were not being fully utilized.[31]

The main allegations about political manipulation as a motor force behind the riots were levelled at the opposition. According to the state counsel and the police, from the very early stages, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP), a student wing of the BJP, had taken command of the agitation. The police argued that 'they were master-minded in planning and its execution and, therefore, they simultaneously started damaging public property throughout the length and width of Gujarat'.[32] In the Commission's concluding opinion:

Motives of the agitation...was opposing the reservation policy but courses of events show that once the planning came in the hands of ABVP supported by BJP and VHP, further joined by Congress dissidents, and some other persons,...the motive for continuance of the agitation and spreading the communal disturbances became the ouster of Shri Madhavsinh Solanki.[33]

The political dimension of the riots became more visible when, before polling day in Gujarat and after assurances from Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi that the state's reservation policy would be reviewed after the Assembly Elections, the student organization decided to call off the

[30] According to the Secretary of Department of Education, the office was not consulted or informed in advance. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, G.W.-2, p. 86.
[31] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 7–8.
[32] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 269. Also see p. 209.
[33] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 11. It is noteworthy that scholars suggested similar explanations. See, for example, Atul Kohli, *Democracy and Discontent* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990), p. 263; Sujata Patel, 'Debacle of Populist Politics', *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 20, 1985, p. 682.

protest. After the election the protest acquired a political tone, when it was alleged that Congressmen who were denied tickets and members of parties who found themselves in the opposition after the election lent their support to the upheaval.[34] In effect, the anti-reservation agitation could have come to an end by 18 March, when Solanki had agreed to accept the students' demands. Yet, the ABVP called for a bandh on that day, 'which resulted in out breaking (sic) [of] communal violence'.[35] Paradoxically, exactly the same accord ended the riots four months later.

The question of the communal 'twist' given to the agitation from 18 March remained unclear. Indeed, communal clashes erupted on the day of the bandh that was organized mainly by the ABVP. But, at that point groups, which originally had no part in the student reservation dispute, began to engage in the violence.[36] The opposition parties, mainly the BJP, claimed that the government itself had been responsible for the eruption of communal riots in order to divert attention from the reservation issue.[37] Rajiv Gandhi and the Gujarat government entirely blamed the opposition for the communal stir in Ahmedabad. Gandhi referred to 'those who lost at the polls and have taken to the streets to strengthen themselves'.[38] Moreover, according to a Police Inspector from Dariapur, where communal riots first erupted, most of the Hindus in the area were followers of the BJP and were members of the RSS.[39] These parties, as well as dissatisfied persons from Congress(I), 'played an important part to turn the anti-reservation agitation to communal riots'.[40] The involvement of right wing Hindu organizations was often repeated in the evidences submitted to the Commission. The Commission's account for the

[34] This claim is repeated in various testimonies submitted to the Commission of Inquiry by police and government workers. See, for example, COI, Vol. I, pp. 53, 60, 95, 101.

[35] Ibid., Vol II, p. 9.

[36] The second account of the riots reveals that many of those who began to take part in the violence were not even fully aware of the reservation issue.

[37] In the case they presented before the Commission, the BJP maintained that not only the Congress party and Solanki's KHAM policy resulted in social disintegration and communal and caste conflicts, but that the Chief Minister was assisted by anti-social elements in order to assume and retain power. COI, Vol. I, pp. 60–2.

[38] The Hindu, March 30, 1985. The same allegation was made by the then Chief Minister, Madhavsinh Solanki. Interview with Madhavsinh Solanki, 18 March, 1998, Delhi.

[39] COI, Vol. I, p. 228.

[40] Ibid., G.W.-12, p. 95. Also see the statement by the then Commissioner of Police, B. K. Jha. Ibid., p. 232.

transition in the riots simply observed that 'the anti-reservation movement took a sudden communal turn'.[41] It emphasized the political factors and, despite the communal turn, argued that the conflict was not over religion, and that 'communalism is not caused by religious difference [but] religion became a means to have the power'.[42]

The Commission tried to address the shift between the caste agitations to the communal riots, but it did not consider a meaningful link between the two. Despite the considerations of various political aspects of the riots, the Commission's account for the transition in the riots from anti-reservation stir to communal one yielded to its own prior assumptions. Reviewing the large numbers of mosques and temples in the city the Commission suggested that 'one feel persuaded that people of the town had and has a religious bent of mind'.[43] In addition to adopting an instrumental view about the link between religion and politics, the Commission also contended that 'religious people are prone to drift to be communalised'.[44]

It is significant that the Commission and state's apparatus dealt separately with the anti-reservation caste riots and the communal ones.[45] The dynamic of events was analysed as a zero-sum-game: 'whenever there was an increase in the communal riots the incidents of crime due to anti-reservation agitation would come down'.[46] The police classified and registered separately incidents and offences regarding anti-reservation agitation and those regarding communal riots. In their statements, policemen also divided the events into two: 'the first period was about anti-reservation agitation while the second time there were communal riots'.[47] Close reading of the course of events does not conform to such a division. Remarkably, during the escalation in communal violence, since mid-April, which by that time was prevalent throughout the city, the anti-reservation melee, in the form of a caste war, was kept alive.

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[41] *Ibid.*, p. 214. Also see G.W.-41, p. 129, 27. Although all the sources and the Commission were struck by the 'sudden' communal turn, the police recorded an incident 'in connection with communal disturbances [by] a mob of Hindus' as early as 15 March. *Ibid.*, Vol. III, Annexture XXXVI, p. 292.

[42] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 13.

[43] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 52.

[44] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 14.

[45] Notably, most of the analyses of the riots in the newspapers and scholarship distinguished between the reservation and the communal issues.

[46] *COI*, Vol. II, p. 10.

[47] *Ibid.*, Vol. I, G.W.-19, p. 100–1.

The Commission made only one reference in the report to the caste factor in the caste–communal riots. It identified connections between the right wing Hindu groups, their involvement in the anti-reservation and communal stir and their aspiration to undermine the Solanki ministry with a specific social group: the 'patels of Khaira district and north Gujarat'.[48] The Commission suggested that the Patel caste lost political power with the rise of the KHAM alliance in the Congress party. The victory of this coalition in the state election escalated their frustration.

The official view of the riots provided the political context of the events. It also disclosed some of the presuppositions, which parts of the state apparatus held towards various groups in the society. For example, that some groups, like religious people, are prone to violence. The communal shift in the riots was to be explained on the basis of an a-priori Hindu–Muslim divide. Drawing on these assumptions, the official view appears to be offering a coherent narrative explanation. Yet, its explanations for the main puzzle of the riots were not satisfactorily evident. Why did the anti-reservation dispute turn into a communal one? Nevertheless, the official account makes it clear that it is rather unavailing to understand the riots as if their impetus lay simply in a Hindu Muslim conflict. The second account of the riots attempts to address the unresolved question from a different perspective. It examines more closely the tensions among Hindus in order to understand the communal turn in the riots. Its value lies in providing a deeper understanding of various social categories, their interaction, meaning and effects. The alternative account pivots mainly on the recollections of a handful of people out of the many who lived through the riots.

An Alternative Account—The 'Living Text'

By reading the events through the experiences of survivors it became clear that there couldn't be *an* account, or a coherent vernacular explanation of the Ahmedabad riots. These riots occurred between 'three cities of Ahmedabad'. Once Ahmedabad was only the walled city. The growth of the city in population, migration and territory heralded processes of social mobility and changes in its socio-economic

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[48] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 9.

landscape.[49] These transformations constituted grounds for newly forming social interrelations among Hindus. Ahmedabad gradually evolved into three cities in substance and meaning. This process worked to unsettle the location of various groups within the 'Hindu order' and promoted tensions among Hindus. The new demographic realities reflected this social interplay and its resulting social tensions. The region on the western side of the Sabarmati river is the city of the 'savarna' and the economically well off.[50] On the eastern bank, the walled city with its old residential and commercial areas is known as 'Ahmedabad proper' in the city's language. The river marks almost naturally the dividing line between the two. The third Ahmedabad is situated in the eastern industrial belt of the city, beyond the railways. The 'have-nots' reside in both the Ahmedabads on the eastern bank of the river. The bridges over the Sabarmati river and the railway draw informal borders and map Ahmedabad as three different cities. The city's residents expressed, in their usage, such a distinction. Each of the Ahmedabads has its own history and was established and developed over different periods. They differ in their architecture, social composition, life style, political inclinations and the economic activities that dominate them. The western city is mainly a residential domain of the upper caste/classes. It has modern commercial areas, and businesses of white-collar professionals. Ahmedabad proper, within the walls, is a bazaar, a huge market intermixed with the old dilapidated residential neighbourhoods of the pols. These are mazes of narrow lanes with the houses in a very compact arrangement. The eastern belt, the predominant industrial labour area, is the city of chimneys of the textile mills. The social conflicts that emerged in 1985 were inscribed on this urban scenery. These tensions exacerbated in the face of the emerging economic circumstances of the 1980s.

The events of 1985 took place in the midst of a collapse of the city's industry. For more than a century the backbone of Ahmedabad's economy and the key to its expansion was the growing composite textile mill industry. This industry, with its related vocations and commerce, became the principal means of living for most of the

[49] Ahmedabad's population immediately after the formation of Gujarat in 1961 was 1,149,918 and reached 2,387,938 by 1985. *Statistical Outline of Ahmedabad City 1984–85*, Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, Ahmedabad, 1986, Table 3.6. Between 1872 and 1981 the city's area grew seventeen fold (from 5.72 sq. km to 98.15 sq. km respectively). 'Growth of the City (1857–1986)' [map], Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, Ahmedabad.

[50] *Savarna* means upper caste Hindus.

city dwellers, and for many new migrants. This growth turned in
the beginning of the 1980s, when an intensifying crisis in the
industry resulted in the closure of mills. At the time, the textile
mills were estimated to give direct employment to about 150,000
workers and indirect employment to another 100,000—a total of 37%
of Ahmedabad's working population. By 1985 as many as 50,000
labourers lost their jobs in the mills.[51] In spite of the downsizing,
increased productivity through newer technologies meant that output
and consumption did not decrease much. This was a result of a
shift from textile production in composite mills to small powerloom
factories. This change severely affected the working class in the
city. It brought a significant fall in their income and high rates of
unemployment.[52] Moreover, since protective labour laws did not bind
a factory that employed a small number of workers, labourers were far
more exploited. The impact of these developments on social relations
among Hindus was consequential to the growth of communalism at
that time.

    The Dariapur area, where the communal turn in the riots occurred,
is a socially mixed locality within the old city of Ahmedabad, where
the communities of upper caste Hindus, Dalits and Muslims resided
apart. Vadigam, is an upper caste locality of Patels and Brahmins
within Dariapur. It borders with the Muslim vicinity Naginapol.
Some of its houses share a wall with the adjacent Muslim houses.
Opposite its entrance gate reside the Dalits. The residential and
architectural structure of Vadigam is typical of Ahmedabad's old city.
The three-story houses of the locality form a complex surrounding
of fortifications, and the massive wooden gate at the entrance,
especially if it was closed, enclosed Vadigam as a fort. Its inner part
consists of a labyrinth of pols. Protected by their own gates, these

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[51] Renana Jhabvala, *Closing Doors. A Study on the Decline in Women Workers in the
Textile Mills of Ahmedabad*, SETU, Ahmedabad, 1985, p. 5. Also see Ghanshyam Shah,
'Caste Sentiments, Class Formation and Dominance in Gujarat', in Francine R.
Frankel and M.S.A. Rao (eds.), *Dominance and State Power in Modern India*, Vol. II,
(Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1990), p. 95; Girish Patel, in *Is Ahmedabad Dying*
Seminar and Publication co-ordinated by Jayendra N. Bhatt, CEPT Ahmedabad and
Gujarat Institute of Civil Engineering and Architects, Ahmedabad, 1987, p. xvi; Sujata
Patel, *Contract Labour in Textile Industry of Ahmedabad*, SEWA, Ahmedabad, 1984, p. 7;
'Nationalisation, TLA and Textile Workers', *Economic and Political Weekly,* December
7, 1985, pp. 2154–5; *Request for Assistance from the National Renewal Funds for Ahmedabad
Textile Mills*, Textile Labour Association (TLA), Ahmedabad, 1993, p. 3.
    [52] Many lost their jobs because the technological advance of powerloom over manual
spinning and weaving. The same productivity would be attained with less labour force.

micro-neighbourhoods made Vadigam a miniature city within the Dariapur area.

The upper-caste dwellers of Vadigam saw themselves as indigenously Ahmedabadies and defined themselves, in 1985, as middle and lower-middle class families. The Patels among them, Shudras by their Hindu caste status, gradually attained upper caste status since the nineteenth century and became an economically and politically dominant group in Gujarat.[53] Within the Patel caste hierarchy in Ahmedabad, the Patels of Vadigam were considered lower in status.[54] Most people in the locality attested that they were well settled economically at that time.[55] The majority of them used to work in the nearby textile mills, mainly in clerical jobs or as supervisors in the weaving and spinning departments. Interestingly, although most of them used to work in the textile mills they did not see themselves as labourers, but as middle class. At the same time, they referred to their mill mates from the eastern side of the city as labour. The collapse of the composite textile mills from the early 1980s and the shifting of industrial activity to the eastern periphery of Ahmedabad severely affected them and the overall economy of the walled city. Many of them were able to secure a job in the emerging powerloom factories with the closure of the mills. But their income fell drastically and they had to work more hours to sustain their livelihood. Some became rickshaw drivers and others started small businesses and *paan* shops.[56] By 1985, the most significant change for them was the downward mobility in their social and economic position. Several residents attested that 'during that difficult time we had income problems, but social institutions like the RSS and Vadigam Seva Sangh provided relief to the people of the locality. They also gathered Hindu youths and gave them lessons. The VHP helped to find new jobs'.[57]

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[53] See Achyut Yagnik, 'Hindutva as a Savarna *Purana*', in Ashish Nandy *et al.*, *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997), p. 100–23; David Pocok, *Kanbi and Patidar: A Study of the Patidar Community of Gujarat* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1972).

[54] Inter-caste division exists among the Patels. The two main groups are Leva Patels and Kadva Patels. The former are higher in status hierarchy. The Patels of Vadigam were considered lower in status in comparison to the Patels from the Khadia area in the walled city, which originated from Kheda district and mainly the Charotar.

[55] Their ancestors came to the locality at the turn of the century, mainly from the surroundings of Ahmedabad to work in the developing textile mills.

[56] *Interview* with L., Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 26/3/98. As a result of the crisis women started small industries in the house, like embroidery and stitching.

[57] *Interviews* with S., Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 21/3/98; 22/3/98.

The personal accounts of the communal turn in the riots in the locality suggested that,

On 18 March there was a programme of sounding of Mryutghant [death knell] against reservation. At 8 PM everybody went on the roofs to 'play' their thali dishes. The noise was very loud. At that time police was not in the area, and in its absence the fighting started. It began with stone throwing and then missile, kakda.[58]

The riots started from a mischief between boys, and then it became a snowball. We [people of the pol] functioned as a military, co-operated as an army regiment. At a certain point we have started to dismantle bricks and stones from the road for weapon. The women helped to lift them up to the roofs. The kerosene for the burning rags and cloths was available as many of us were by then rickshaw drivers.[59]

On the 18th morning, bajap [BJP] and Vishwa Hindu Parishad [VHP] people came and organised that roof programme. They announced it with a loudspeaker, and wrote a notice in every pol's blackboard and on the main one. Bajap people said, that the Muslims are organizing themselves against us. They give shelter to foreign elements to fight us. Don't be afraid of them, protect yourself, be prepared.[60]

Then the fights started police gave us support. They came on our terraces and helped us because we were Hindus.[61] The local police not only joined, but later they started their own agitation. If police wanted, they could stop it, but they did not because of their personal selfishness, because they were not getting their *hapta* (bribe). It is a result of deterioration of politics.[62]

The description of the events of 18 March by the Muslim dwellers of the neighboring Naginapol was not different from the narration of their next-door aggressors. Here, the traces of the 1985 riots were still apparent after twelve years. Walking along the winding main lane one passes walls and roofs that were burnt out. The place and the people carried the scars. The voices along a visit in the pol told that 'this

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[58] *Interview* with L., Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 26/3/98. The same account of the 18 March events was reiterated by J., Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 31/3/98; M., Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 26/3/98; V. Vyas, Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 26/3/98. Only one person claimed that 'when the bells were ringing, the people from Naginapol started to throw stones because they thought it was against them. *Interview* with S., Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 21/3/98, 22/3/98.

[59] *Interview* with J., Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 31/3/98. Also, *interview* with M., Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 26/3/98.

[60] *Interview* with L., Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 26/3/98. This was reiterated, almost in the same words in an *Interview* with J., Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 31/3/98.

[61] *Interview* with S., Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 21/3/98.

[62] *Interview* with V., Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 26/3/98.

house was burnt, this one six times [over the years], this woman lost
her son ... '.

On 18 March morning Muslim's shops remained open in the area, but it did
not cause any problem. At 7 PM, the people of Vadigam started to play their
utensils (thali dishes), on their roofs. With the growing sounds, slogans were
shouted: 'Muslim should go'; 'this is a Hindu raj come out and bow down'.
Then, stones and burning cloths were thrown from the roofs of Vadigam on
the houses of Naginapol. Some of them were set on fire. The escalation took
place when a boy playing carrom was hit by a stone near the pol's gate. He
ran outside bleeding. To his sight and the blaring crying, Muslims from the
bordering Kalupur area began to flow into the pol. By then, the police was
already on the roofs of Vadigam—shooting at us.[63]

The houses on one side of the Muslim locality of Naginapol share
walls with Vadigam. Naginapol's one-storey houses look like small
hutches leaning on Vadigam's bastion. Some of them are semi-pucca.
From Naginapol's lane, Vadigam's terraces look like spires. This
topographical structure clarified part of the dynamics of the events.
Like Vadigam's people, according to the inhabitants of Naginapol, by
1985 the majority of the people in the locality were unemployed mill
workers and faced severe economic difficulties. In the mills they used to
work in the spinning and weaving departments. Many of them became
rickshaw wallas, or started petty trading. The women and children
were working at home in order to sustain the families. Generally,
Muslims in Ahmedabad were relatively economically backward and
only the three business communities of the Memons, Bohras and Kojas
were better off.[64] The community was segregated along occupational,
sectarian and regional groupings.[65]

The Dalit residential area (*Dalit vas*) in Dariapur, opposite Vadigam,
seems like an open neighbourhood. In Ambedkar Street, for example,
there is no gate or fort-like structure, but adjoining two, three-story

[63] *Interview* with A., Naginapol, Ahmedabad, 30/12/97.

[64] Mushirul Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation: India's Muslims Since Independence*
(Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997), p. 288; Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Muslim
Communities of Gujarat* (Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1989). Reports of the Collector of
Ahmedabad, 1854, suggest that Muslims had generally experienced economic decline
since the imposition of British rule. Quoted in Siddhartha Raychaudhuri, *Indian Elites,
Urban Space and the Restructuring of Ahmedabad City 1890–1947*, Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge
University, 1997, p. 48. Muslims form 14.5% of Ahmedabad's population (*Statistical
Outline of Ahmedabad City 1984–85*, Table 3.24, data for 1981).

[65] Hasan, *Legacy of a Divided Nation*, pp. 7–8. Also see *Gazetteer of the Bombay Presidency*,
1879, p. 40. Among the social divisions within Muslims are the Sayads, Shaikhas,
Pathans Mughals, Memons, Bohras and Khojas.

houses. For the unfamiliar visitor, these Dalit houses would appear to be, from the inside and outside, in better condition than those of the upper-caste Hindus in Vadigam. In spite of their advances, the Dalits were not spared economic hardships: 'we had to borrow money from relatives. There was a dhud (milk) crisis. Milk and fresh vegetables were rare commodities'.[66]

Testimonies of people in this locality revealed that the communal riots that erupted in the city were not really spontaneous. About ten days before the Vadigam–Naginapol incidents, rumours were spreading that riots might start, and people even stored food in advance.[67] Many noted that while the police harassed them as usual, in contrast to previous riots, in these riots Dalits were seldom attacked by the upper-caste Hindus. The first anti-reservation agitation erupted in Ahmedabad in 1981. It was a caste conflict, primarily between Dalits and Patels, and Dalits were its main victims. During the riots of 1981 Muslims helped Dalits. Moreover, already then 'the RSS and other Hindu communal elements did try their best to turn the anti-Dalit war into a Hindu–Muslim riot. But best of their efforts failed because all the oppressed and persecuted communities stood like one man'.[68] During the riots of 1985 'the BJP and VHP provided relief, money, food and legal aid'.[69] Residents of the locality testified that some BJP MLAs who had persecuted them during the riots of 1981, provided aid in the riots of 1985. 'They [Dalits] were happy as the BJP protected them from the police'.[70] In Bapunagar, in the eastern city of Ahmedabad, 'Harijans were gathered by a few Bajap politicians in public meetings. They were given money and food; they brainwashed them against Muslims and even gave them weapons—lathis'.[71] Therefore, many Dalits explained, during the 1985 riots a 'Hindu opinion' began to develop among the Dalits of Ahmedabad.[72]

[66] *Interview* with V., Ambedkar Street, Ahmedabad, 28/11/97. Many interviewees mentioned the economic hardship they experienced at the time.

[67] *Interview* with S., Kalupur, Ahmedabad, 25/2/98. Other residents also recalled such rumours.

[68] V.T. Rajshekar Shetty, File 220.9/4, SETU Archive Papers Files, 1981, p. 2.

[69] *Interview* with S., Ahmedabad, 25/2/98.

[70] *Ibid.*

[71] *Interview* with M., Dabgarwad, Ahmedabad, 4/1/98. She witnessed one of these meetings. Similar description was given by Ramesh Chandraparmar, President of Dalit Panthers Ahmedabad, Gomtipur, Ahmedabad, 6/1/98.

[72] *Interviews* with R., Ambedkar Street, Dariapur, 22/2/98, 11/3/98; A. S., Navrangpura, Ahmedabad, 14/11/97; V., Ambedkar Street, Dariapur, 29/11/97; A. Yagnik, Navrangpura, Ahmedabad, 3/3/98.

At the same time, at least in some areas, genial social interactions between Hindus and Muslims endured or emerged during the time of the riots:

Once a ten year old Muslim girl came to Ambedkar Street to sell eggs. Hindu youth were surrounding and harassing her. But some women from our locality approached her, helped her to sell the eggs, and to leave the locality safely.[73]

So, even as the riots occurred, people from various groups tried to overcome the rupture of social life and to restore some elements of normality, even in their relations with 'antagonistic' groups. A resident of the Muslim Sajjan Jamadar's Mohalla in Dariapur attributed the relative harmony in his locality to the good relationships between Muslims and Dalits from the nearby Ambedkar Street.[74]

The dwellers of the walled city suffered an economic crisis. The initial dispute over the new reservation policy was not significant for the upper-caste of Vadigam. In general, the residents of the locality did not initially even remember the anti-reservation agitation. They recalled only the communal riots. Most interviewees even suggested at first instance that the riots erupted as a result of the Rath Yatra religious procession, which took place four months after the agitation started. When they were reminded of the reservation issue, they identified it as either the 'roti' (bread) riots or as the upheaval against Gujarat's government. They claimed that the reservation issue had no effect on them, as many of the families could not even afford to educate all their children.[75] Significantly, although the residents of Vadigam saw themselves as agitators against their neighbouring Muslims they did not identify any concrete tension with them. Most residents even stated that people from Naginapol and Vadigam used to work together in the mills and had good relations. In spite of this communal riots erupted in the locality.

The residents in the area explained that it was not the people themselves who created these riots, but policemen, bootleggers and persons who were politically involved, incited the people for the sake of their own 'wars'. An occasion which heightened violence in the Dariapur area occurred on 8 May, after Police Sub-Inspector

[73] *Interview* with S., Ahmedabad, 25/2/98. S. Solanki resided in Ambedkar Street in 1985.
[74] *Interview* with R., Sajjan Jamadar's Mohalla, Dariapur, Ahmedabad, 29/11/97; 30/12/97.
[75] *Interview* with J., Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 31/3/98; S., Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 31/3/98.

Mahendrasingh Rana was shot dead in Bhanderipole. Police testi-
monies to the Commission of Inquiry suggested that he was a victim
of communal clashes between Hindus and Muslims.[76] Local residents
claimed that 'the local bootleggers were pressed by the local police
to increase their baksheesh payments. So, in order to thwart
police's demand, both Hindu and Muslim bootleggers created riots
and initiated stabbing incidents'.[77] The background for political
manipulation was very local. For example, before 1985 Dariapur-
Kalupur formed one electoral ward. At that time the Member of
Legislative Assembly (MLA) Bupendra Kathri, a Hindu resident of
Vadigam, was not able to win the financial support of the local
bootleggers. In particular, he was unable to collect money from Latif,
an underworld don, who aided the Muslim Congress MLA, Muhammad
Hussin Barejya.[78] Under certain circumstances, such a local story
about political competition could easily feed into the narrative,
which suggested that 'Muslims are organizing themselves against
us'.

The Muslim residents in the area said there was no reason for the
attack. They saw themselves as victims of a situation they had no
part in. 'The reservation agitation was a Hindu business and Muslims
had nothing to do with that. They neither supported nor opposed the
anti-reservation campaign'.[79] 'The Dabgars were OBCs on the list
for the increase in reservation, but this made no difference to their
neighbouring Muslims'.[80] 'The Muslim minority remained neutral
during this time, but was watching with worry. When the agitators
felt that the anti-reservation movement would not be successful and
as the state's government failed to control law and order, they blamed
the Muslims.[81] Similarly, some Muslims explained that 'the communal
twist was a planned move by upper caste Hindus because they began
to fear, as they were equally beaten by lower castes'.[82] Interestingly,

[76] *COI.* Vol. I, G.W.-28, pp. 117–18.
[77] *Interview* with J., Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 31/3/98. This account was reiterated
in *interviews* with R., Sajjan Jamadar's Mohalla, Dariapur, Ahmedabad, 29/12/97; A.,
Naginapol, Ahmedabad, 30/12/97.
[78] *Interview* with A., Naginapole, Dariapur, 30/12/97; *Interview* with R., Sajjan
Jamadar's Mohalla, Dariapur, Ahmedabad, 28/11/97.
[79] *Interview* with R., Sajjan Jamadar's Mohalla, Dariapur, Ahmedabad, 30/12/97.
[80] *Interview* with M., Dabgarward, Dariapur, 4/1/98.
[81] Mujahid (anonymous), *An Inquiry Report on 1985 Communal Riots in Ahmedabad
City, 18th March and After: Real Facts*, Unpublished Monograph, SETU Archive Files,
p. 1 (translated from Gujarati P. D. Thankey).
[82] *Interview* with R., Sajjan Jamadar's Mohalla, Dariapur, Ahmedabad, 30/12/97.

it appeared that Muslims slowly developed a stance against the policy of reservation, from which they were excluded. Several suggested that 'whenever we hear the call to abolish reservation, we realise that communal riots are about to erupt'.[83]

In spite of an inter-Hindu caste reservation conflict and prevailing class tensions among them, an all-Hindu consolidation against Muslims emerged. The Muslim minority had no part in the reservation dispute. Their general impoverishment made it difficult to explain why and how the rhetoric about their peril to the Hindu majority became persuasive. Moreover, upper caste groups led the anti-reservation struggle and the communal instigation. They sought to affirm their own dominance, particularly in the context of their loss in the elections. Thereupon, they started gaining support from some groups among the Dalits who did not obviously benefit from their agenda. The rising communal antagonism was the effect of changing caste relations and growing caste and class tensions among Hindus.

From Caste and Class to Communalism

Once Ahmedabad was only the walled city, where the pol provided the material lived world of the people. The growth of the city, its expansion and development resulted in changes in the interrelations between caste and class among Hindus. Caste segmentation assumed inter-caste and class fissures. The upper caste Patels from Vadigam, who were regarded as relatively lower in status within the Patel caste hierarchy in the city, lived adjacent to Dalit and Muslim localities. In the 1950s and 1960s they were considered to be the middle class. They did not use the language of class but behaved as such. They adopted social traits that were considered to be of a middle class quality.[84] Although the majority of them worked in the textile mills, they perceived themselves neither in terms of majdoor (labour), nor in terms of class categories. They used the language of caste to identify themselves.[85] Their caste status and position as indigenously

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[83] *Interview* with R., Dariapur, Ahmedabad, 22/2/98. The idea was also restated by R., Sajjan Jamadar's Mohalla, Dariapur, Ahmedabad, 30/12/97; S., Shahapur, Ahmedabad, 11/3/98.

[84] For example, women, in contrast to families of labour class, did not seek employment.

[85] The people residing on the eastern side beyond the railways characterised themselves as labour.

Ahmedabadies were the basis of their disposition as middle class. Until the 1950s, for example, the Brahmin and Patel children of the primary schools in the walled city queued separately in the dining area and there were different glasses, labelled by caste. These casteist practices slowly disappeared after independence. Moreover, since the beginning of the 1980s Vadigam's upper castes experienced a downward mobility.[86]

As a result of the city's expansion and rising economic opportunities, class fissures appeared within the various caste groups. Those who were able to do so, mainly professionals, had 'crossed the river' to the western developing area of the city already before 1985. The options for those who remained were extremely limited behind the city walls. They suffered the impact of the closure of the textile mills. The demographic and residential changes across the river and behind the walls contributed to the development of new class based dispositions among Hindus. The upper caste Patels and Brahmins who remained in Vadigam gradually found themselves living in very similar, or even worse, conditions than some of their neighbouring Dalits. By the 1980s, it became more visible and recognised that the prejudiced caste differences and distance were, in fact, greater than the actual living circumstances. Instead of looking at the class fissures that occurred among them, and at their own predicament as labour, their gaze was directed outward. The social anger that manifested was, partly, an expression of deep-rooted prejudices that were then being challenged. The Patels of Vadigam, and upper castes in general in the walled city, felt threatened by the mobilization of Dalits.

Since independence, caste practices in Ahmedabad have relaxed. However, as the importance of caste in daily life diminished, it gradually assumed a growing political relevance and attained a new lease of life. Some groups among the Dalits were able to improve their economic situation. The jobs in the mills gave them security. By the 1980s some Dalits were able to renovate their houses and to provide their children with opportunities for better education. Processes of mobilization among the Dalits in Gujarat began in the 1960s.[87] In the early 1980s many Dalits had already graduated from colleges. The level of literacy among them was on par with the average

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[86] All Vadigam's residents who were interviewed attested this.

[87] During 1977–78 the percentage of post-matric scholarship awards to scheduled castes students in Gujarat was higher than the percentage of their population in

literacy rate in Gujarat.[88] Through reservations their numbers in governmental jobs and educational institutions increased.[89] Indeed, the reservation quotas had not even been achieved. But the number of scheduled castes and scheduled tribe employees, especially in the lower ranked positions, grew. 'At least one person from either of these communities is found in most government departments'.[90] Moreover, Dalits' growing participation in politics served to accelerate their mobilization. The emergence of the Congress's KHAM strategy since the end-1970s fostered their politicization on the basis of their caste status. Gradually, some groups among the Dalits and the backward castes in general, began to consolidate themselves as politically relevant social actors.[91]

Within these political, social and economic processes, inter-caste and class segmentation also began to appear among the Dalits. These class fissures overlapped with inter-caste divisions. Status hierarchy persisted among the Dalits.[92] The socially and politically key groups of Dalits in Ahmedabad were the Vankars and the Chamars. The Vankars, traditionally weavers, were considered to be higher in status. They came to Ahmedabad at the turn of the twentieth century in search of jobs in the developing textile industry. The Chamars arrived later. The Vankars established themselves first within the industry and the labour union. By and large, this group was able to rise in economic status. Another Dalit community that succeeded in mobilising itself, mainly through the avenue of education and governmental jobs, was

the state. *Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes And Scheduled Tribes 1978–79*, Government of India, New Delhi (Through the Minister of Home Affairs), p. 7–8.

[88] Ghanshyam Shah, 'Polarised Communities', *Seminar*, 470, October 1998, p. 32; D. L. Sheth, 'Reservation Policy Revisited', in Gurpreet Mahajan (ed.), *Democracy, Difference and Social Justice* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2000), p. 494.

[89] For the general improvement in the representation of scheduled castes in governmental posts see: *Report of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes April 1984–March 1985*, Government of India, New Delhi, pp. 5,7; *Report of the Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes April 1985–March 1986*, Government of India, New Delhi, p. 10.

[90] Ghanshyam Shah, 'Middle Class Politics: A Case of Anti-Reservation Agitation in Gujarat', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Annual Number, May 1987, p. AN-163.

[91] Dalits' political awareness and assertiveness increased since 1975 also through the growing activities of the Dalit Panther movement in the city.

[92] In Gujarat the distinct groups among the Dalits constitute a hierarchical *varna* order. The main groups are the Vankars, traditionally weavers, the Chamars, leather workers, Bhangis, sweepers, and Garodas the priests. Generally, members of the various groups do not intermarry. See Achyut Yagnik and Anil Bhatt, 'The Anti-Dalit Agitation in Gujarat', *South Asia Bulletin*, IV, 1, Spring 1984, p. 48.

the Mulgami Dalits. They were considered to be original Ahmedabadis
and higher in status. The emancipation of Dalits, partly through
reservations, had created a group of 'neo-Brahmin Dalit, as a politically
opportunistic strata of middle class emerged among the Dalits in the
city'.[93]

    The frustration of upper castes in the old city evolved in the light of
the class fissures that occurred within both forward and backward
castes and the narrowing avenues for mobilization, which by now
were shared by more groups in the society. Although the reservation
issue did not affect them directly, it amplified the sense of their own
restricted opportunities. Reservations signalled the greater prospect
for social mobility for the Dalits and the backward castes. The state
granted these preferential rights to these communities. In the view of
Vadigam's upper castes, the former middle classes, the government
favoured the lower and backward castes in order to gain the bulk of
their political support. After all, the government announced its new
reservation policy two months before the elections. The consolidation
of the Congress's KHAM strategy further antagonized them. The
way in which an upper caste resident of Vadigam reasoned his arrest
under the National Security Act during the riots expressed sentiments
of estrangement by the state: 'I was arrested because I represented the
savarna'.[94] Upper caste Hindus began to feel uncertain politically. In
that context, they also perceived Muslims, who were members of the
KHAM alliance, as a threat to their political dominance. Residents of
Vadigam argued that,

Congress supported Muslims, so BJP supported Hindus. A few days after
communal riots erupted in Dariapur Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, visited
the area. Firstly he went to Naginapol, because Solanki supported the
Muslims. So, the people of Vadigam closed the gate and did not let him in.[95]
In fact, bajap people instigated the people not to see him.[96] Later, Congress
people suggested to arrest Vadigam's people.[97]

The notion of government favours to lower and backward caste Hindus
through reservations policy and electoral politics easily shifted to its
favouritism of Muslims.

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[93] *Interview* with R., Kalupur, Ahmedabad, 25/2/98.
[94] *Interview* with S., Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 21/3/98.
[95] *Ibid.*
[96] *Interview* with L., Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 26/3/98.
[97] *Interview* with M., Vadigam, Ahmedabad, 26/3/98.

Moreover, with the closure of the textile mills, many of the unemployed workers in the Dariapur area became rickshaw drivers, or started small businesses. As unskilled labour for the new developing industries, Vadigam's upper castes suddenly found themselves competing with their neighbouring unemployed Muslims and Dalit textile workers in a very limited job market, and on very similar terms. Although at that time this upper caste group shared similar objective circumstances to those of the Dalits and Muslims in the area, their actions were responsive to their caste dispositions. This local economic tension adds another layer for understanding the communal 'twist' in the Ahmedabad riots of 1985 in this particular area.

The transformations in caste–class relations among Hindus began to reflect in the modes of political mobilization. The old city's upper castes were in search of their mooring. Numerous testimonies from Vadigam described the help provided by various Hindu organizations during that time of economic hardship. Particularly in the light of the KHAM politics, upper castes lent support to Hindu political forces. The local economic tensions at the time also worked to antagonize groups within the KHAM coalition.

The construction of a 'Hindu opinion' among the Dalits was not the sole outcome of the riots, but part of an ongoing process, which took its clear turn during the 1985 riots. Overall, with the exception of the eastern industrial area, Dalits were not attacked during the riots. Hindu organizations started to mobilize Dalits through relief work. They gave their youth leadership and a sense of participation. Their endeavour was achieved by means of the informal welfare system of the VHP and other Hindu organizations. Consequently, since the 1985 riots, the BJP gradually started to win the sympathy of the Dalits living in the inter-mixed localities.[98] Through the agency of the riots and violence, Hindu political forces mobilized support. This marked the beginning of the political transition in Gujarat from Congress to the BJP and the dissolution of the idea of KHAM politics. The economic circumstances and changes in social mobility antagonized lower and backward Hindus and Muslims, which the KHAM politics aimed to unite.

The incorporation of some Dalits in the old city into a Hindu fold was also, symbolically, associated with the Hindu religious rite of the Rath Yatra. The incidents that occurred during the Rath Yatra day were

[98] *Interviews* with R., Dariapur, Ahmedabad, 22/2/98, 11/3/98; A. S., Navrangpura, Ahmedabad, 14/11/97; V., Ambedkar street, Dariapur, 29/11/97.

deeply embedded in peoples' memories. The event was widely recalled as a cause for the eruption of the riots although chronologically the Yatra took place only towards the end of the disturbances. Dalits were allowed to fully participate in the Rath Yatra service. Usually, they were excluded from taking part in religious rituals. This was very meaningful for them. Nares, a Dalit who participated in that Rath Yatra recalled that 'at that time we felt part of the Hindu community'.[99] This was a psychological triumph for the Dalits. Thus, Hindu organizations captured and fulfilled both the need for a politics of redistribution and the need for pride and acceptance.

The middle and lower middle classes-castes—the Vadigam Patels and the rising groups among the Dalits—gradually formed the social foundation of the BJP in the city. Their motive and motif was to move forward. Some were able to gain economic mobility by the 1980s, but were, particularly in Gujarat, gradually excluded from the political processes. Others, despite their mobility, were able to attain neither status nor social acceptance. Interestingly, even though these groups were not experiencing the same frustrations, the Hindu nationalist movement was relatively successful in addressing the varying claims of distinct groups. The movement transformed economic contradictions among castes, between castes and among classes into communal ones.

Similar processes, different in content but alike in their underlying pattern, occurred in the other cities of Ahmedabad. In the eastern industrial belt severe communal violence and large-scale evictions of slums occurred, especially in Bapunagar. The social group that was particularly active in the riots was Kedva Patels from Saurashtra. This group was very close to the BJP.[100] The then Chief Minister, Madhavsinh Solanki, claimed that 'in Bapunagar and the suburban areas, Patels from Saurashtra financed the events. They attacked scheduled castes and Muslims' houses. They were inherently against reservation'.[101] This group began migrating to Bapunagar from Saurashtra since the 1970s. They were considered lower than the Patels of central Gujarat in their status. Members of this group did well. They started the diamond cutting industry, which by the mid-1980s dominated this part of the city. By 1985 one of the main barriers

[99] *Interview* with Nares, Kalupur, Ahmedabad, 23/2/98.
[100] *Interviews* with Ashok Bhatt (BJP MLA), Khadia, Ahmedabad, 15/12/97; Gardhunbhai Jhadaphia (BJP, MLA), Bapunagar, Ahmedabad, 16/12/97; Anisha Mizra, Council, AMC, 16/12/97.
[101] *Interview* with Madhavsinh Solanki, Delhi, 16/3/98.

for their advance was the rising cost of land and rent.[102] Over time, with the growth of the city and the migration of labour, many plots in the area, which initially belonged to the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, were occupied by slum dwellers. About 83% of the slums' population were lower and backward Hindu communities and 15% were Muslims.[103] With the growing demand for land and the price-rise there was an increasing interest in these plots. Slum dwellers that paid rent for a long period of time acquired legal rights over the land, and the slumlords were restricted from removing the residents. Riots were one means of vacating the slum lands. Nevertheless, the Patels in the eastern city of Ahmedabad also felt politically bypassed with the apparent success of the KHAM politics. In their view, the large numbers of the members in the alliance made its communities politically more important and attractive.

The residents in the western city of Ahmedabad, where the agitation over the reservations policy first started, were not seriously affected during the riots. Reservation was a burning issue for the upper caste dwellers of that area. But it was puzzling that the policy became such an acute problem, since the reserved quotas were never fully filled.[104] It was unclear to what extent reservation was a real threat to their dominance, or a notional one. It appeared that the notion of reservation attacked the self-validity of upper castes. Reservations broke down the justification of their position within the Hindu social order: if a Dalit could be a professor, so the whole idea of the 'caste system' lost its meaning. The threat upon which upper castes acted concerned their status anxieties. This might explain why after every concession towards the anti-reservationist students they refused to stop the agitation. However, for some social groups in the city, who did not own land or a business, educational courses or government jobs were their only path for economic advancement. But, it was now also the avenue for the Dalits and the backward castes. The reservation policy would directly affect these groups.

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[102] The national highway that passed by made the area attractive for the new developing industries and the demand for land increased.

[103] About 21% of the slum population were members of the scheduled castes. See *Census of Slums*, p. 16.

[104] *COI*, Vol. II, pp. 7–8; Vol. I, G.W.-2, p. 86. Also see *Report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes And Scheduled Tribes 1978–79*, pp. 13–14; *Report of the Commission for Scheduled Castes And Scheduled Tribes April 1984–March 1985*, p. 5; *Report of the Commission for Scheduled Castes And Scheduled Tribes April 1985–March 1986*, p. 10.

The growing anxiety among upper castes over reservations was fostered and reproduced by the state. The state's 'ever changing reservation policy created a sense of insecurity' among those who were not to get the benefit, about their future.[105] Governments' habit of repeatedly appointing commissions of inquiry for identifying backward caste groups, first ignoring and then partly implementing their recommendations and then appointing another, resulted in perpetuating a sense of uncertainty among upper caste groups. Moreover, for the purpose of reservations, the scheduled castes were defined as 'those groups who because of their low ritual status in the traditional Hindu hierarchy and their spatial and cultural isolation were subjected to imposition of disabilities and lack of opportunity'.[106] The Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order of 1950 provided that 'no person professing a religion different from Hinduism shall be deemed a member of a Scheduled Caste'.[107] The judiciary enforced this designation on the grounds that 'acceptance of a non-Hindu religion operates as loss of caste'.[108] The state's designation of reservations conceived caste as a constituent of Hinduism. Religion, therefore, had inextricably made a criterion for compensatory policies for weaker sections of the society. In that sense, the state addressed issues of equality as if they were synonymous with the rights of religious minorities. Consequently, reservations have sometimes been perceived to be a compensatory act for minority groups in the society on the basis of their religion. In the case of reservations for the backward castes there was no clear or acceptable criterion for defining backwardness at the national level, and it was open to the states to determine their policy. In some cases backward caste lists 'included converts from SC [scheduled castes] to non-Hindu religions and several states used this category to provide some concessions to

[105] COI, Vol. II, p. 7. The Commission made this contention while it reviewed the chronology and history of state committees for the designation of reservations.

[106] Marc Galanter, Competing Equalities: Law and the Backward Classes in India (University of California Press, Berkley, 1984), p. 122.

[107] Ibid., p. 144; Durga Das Basu, Commentary on the Constitution of India, Fourth Edition (S. C. Sarkar and Sons, Calcutta, 1964), p. 158. An exception was made in 1956 to include four Sikh untouchable groups.

[108] Galanter, Competing Equalities, p. 315. The judiciary made this reasoning in some cases of scheduled castes that converted from Hinduism and lost their reservation rights. The court explained that religious discrimination was not exercised in these cases because non-Hindus have no caste. Ibid., pp. 313, 319.

sections of their Muslim population'.[109] The state's designation of reservations conflated issues of social and economic reforms for the benefit of lower and backward Hindu groups on the basis of caste or class with religion. In this way, it enabled caste reservation conflicts to develop and generate communal antagonism.

The reservation dispute became an expression of the social, economic and political dynamics that developed in the city since independence. These processes brought changes in caste–class relations, hierarchies and positions. Since independence, the dominance of the upper castes in the city was further consolidated. The Patel caste emerged as an economic and political force, and was able to attain the *savarna*.[110] Hence, the upper caste as a group became very strong in Gujarat.[111] The state facilitated the processes of their consolidation through, for example, land reforms, the green revolution and the distribution of political goods. Conversely, as the source of their domination turned out to be the state, their dependency upon it, for their well being and legitimacy increased. This, in turn, impaired upper castes' authority over the backward castes. In the past, their domination functioned as a surrogate for a state. They were able to gain command over the rest of the society through various mechanisms of patronage. Yet, as old means of control were changing, with the growing penetration of the state, and traditional modes for mobilization altered, the upper castes began losing that form of domination. The crisis evolved as political parties recognized the electoral importance of backward groups.

From an upper caste viewpoint, segments of the lower and backward castes were mobilising. 'Caste politics', whereby caste alliances were politically instituted in order to obtain majorities, did not necessarily improve the lower groups' economic predicament. But their growing politicisation gradually attained social substance. State reservations policy, for example, enabled backward castes to negotiate political leverage on the basis of their formal low caste status.

Moreover, with the growing class fissures among and between castes it gradually became apparent that the widely perceived harmony between the 'cosmological' Hindu order and everyday reality was cracking. Earlier, the relatively low-in-status upper castes in the walled

[109] Marc Galanter, 'Who Are The Other Backward Classes?', *Economic and Political Weekly*, October 28, 1978, p. 1812, fn. 45.

[110] Yagnik, 'Hindutva as a Savarna *Purana*'.

[111] The Patels formed 12% of Gujarat's population.

city could settle their self-representation as middle class. This was
no longer negotiable in the context of the mid-1980s. Rather than
addressing the 'cultural' clash among Hindus, upper castes transferred
it to a strife with the Muslims. Under the circumstances of the
1980s, the fault-lines in the society were redefined along the lines
of religion. The construction of a disposition of all-Hindus facing
Muslims emerged in the context of political attempts to unite Dalits
and Muslims and intensifying economic pressures, on the one hand,
and growing identity concerns and social frustrations among Hindus,
on the other. Some upper caste groups among Hindus felt that new
opportunities for social mobility over the past two or three decades did
not benefit them sufficiently. At the same time other people of lesser
status were able to exploit these opportunities equally or even more
fully. Upper castes found the cause of their own 'limited' mobility in the
favours government policies appeared to offer minorities, including
Muslims.

   The conjuncture of Ahmedabad in the 1980s throws light on
the relations between caste and communalism. It also offers an
interpretation of caste and its relation to the state. Caste conflicts over
state reservation policies, which evolved around the socio-economic
mobilization of lower and backward caste Hindus, entangled class
issues. The social, economic and political dynamics that occurred in
India since independence generated transformations in caste-class
relations, hierarchies and positions within the Hindu order. Class
fissures occurred within castes, castes faced changes in class, and new
groups emerged. The changes in the social order encompassed both
class and caste categories of social difference. Groups in the society did
not perceive their class and caste position in isolation from each other.
The relational process between caste and class provided grounds for
groups' social action. The critical issue in the interrelations between
caste and class was the formation process of the boundary that defined
the group. The state has largely determined caste groups boundaries
through, for example, its reservation policies in the 1980s for the
benefit of the lower and backward castes. Significantly, 'backward'
caste is a legal and constitutional, rather than a social category. It has
been variably defined in relation to the policies of the state. In the
designation of reservations caste categories were fluid in composition.
For the purpose of political alliances, the rigid distinctions castes
were meant to embody sometimes disappeared. Caste identities were
defined, redefined and attained meaning in politics, in the context of
struggles for the control of political, material and social resources.

Caste properties, then, were contingent rather than essential. In the 1970s and 1980s, the determination of caste boundaries for reservation policies was the subject of growing conflicts among Hindus. The state's designation of reservations intricately conflated questions of caste and class with religion and religious minority rights and therefore facilitated the rise of communal antagonism.

The pattern of events of the Ahmedabad riots of 1985 revealed the dynamics of the relational processes between caste and class, which underlay the growth of Hindu nationalism since the 1980s. The 1985 riots erupted over social and economic reservation benefits for the backward castes, but transformed into communal violence between Hindus and Muslims. In August 1990, large-scale anti-reservation riots erupted throughout India over the V. P. Singh government's decision to implement the Mandal Commission recommendations on reservation for the Other Backward Castes (OBCs) at the national level. By September 1990, the BJP, which at that time backed Singh's National Front coalition, withdrew its support from the government and announced the demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya as its major priority. The then party leader, L. K. Advani, launched his Rath Yatra religious procession from Sommnath to Ayodhya with the intention to liberate God Ram's birthplace.[112] The decision to inaugurate a Yatra to Ayodhya at this juncture 'rapidly changed the political discourse from reservation to Hindu nationalism and Hindu unity'.[113] Even *Aaj* declared that 'Due to the aura of Ram, the demon of Reservation ran away'.[114] From that moment the BJP took on Hindu religious nationalism as its manifesto, and began to attain political success. By the time of the destruction of the mosque in Ayodhya in December 1992 no association at all was made between the communal

[112] See Sunita Parikh, 'Religion, Reservations and Riots: The Politics of Ethnic Violence in India', in Amrita Basu and Atul Kohli (eds), *Community Conflicts and the State in India* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1998), pp. 43–8. Also see Ghanshyam Shah, 'The BJP's Riddle in Gujarat: Caste, Factionalism and Hindutva', in Thomas Blom Hansen and Christophe Jaffrelot (eds), *The BJP and the Compulsions of Politics in India* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1998), pp. 243–9. Ashish Nandy *et al.*, *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and the Fear of the Self* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997), pp. 72–3.

[113] Zoya Hasan, 'Community and Caste in Post-Congress Politics in Uttar Pradesh', in Basu and Kohli (eds), *Community Conflict*, p. 104.

[114] *Aaj* (newspaper published in Banares), 9 December 1990. Quoted in Arvind Rajagopal, *Politics after Television: Hindu Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Public in India* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2001), p. 167. I thank William Gould for bringing this quote to my attention.

fury and the question of caste reservation. But, in fact, the reservation issue occupied the public agenda in the weeks that preceded the events when the Supreme Court upheld the Mandal Commission Report for reservations for the backward castes at the national level constitutionally.[115] During the Ahmedabad riots of 1985 the same dynamics of conflict took place, but the religious issues that gained prominence in the late 1980s were still absent.

An understanding of the communal 'twist' that occurred in the 1985 anti-reservation riots cannot be limited to the narrow facts of the riots themselves. It needs to be examined within the wider processes of transformations in caste and class among Hindus. The growth of communalism and militant Hinduism after 1985 had its seeds in these concrete social transformations and was driven by their effect.

[115] The Supreme Court endorsed the basic recommendations of the Mandal Commisssion Report in November 1992, including its principle that caste and not class should be the criterion for identifying backwardness. But the Court added several qualifications. First, it ruled that neither the advanced sections among the backward castes nor the poor among the forward castes should receive reservation benefits. Second, the Court resolved that the list of the backward communities should be divided into a 'Backward' and 'more Backward' category. See Wood, 'On the Periphery but in the Thick of It: Some Current Indian Political Crises Viewed From Gujarat', p. 14. Also see *NewsTrack December 1992* (Videotape), 24/12/92.