Chapter 6
Violence and the Other in Hinduism and Islam: 1809 Lat Bhairon Riots of Banaras

Sunthar Visuvalingam and Elizabeth Chalier-Visuvalingam

6.1 Divide, Rule and Unify: Self–Other Dialectics of Violence

Violence has been and remains the fundamental problem of all organized societies for it is rooted in the animal's survival instinct, the vital competition for food, living space and reproductive mates.[1] With the cerebral crossing of the human threshold, blind instinct becomes floating mimetic desire such that the now uncertain choice of object is increasingly determined by significant others, who risk

Dedicated to all who have undergone, willingly or unwillingly, in Banaras or elsewhere, the salvific punishment of Bhairava.

[1]"Aggression and human violence have marked the progress of the human race and appear, indeed, to have grown so during its course that they have become a central problem of the present. Analyses that attempt to locate the roots of the evil often set out with short-sighted assumptions, as though the failure of our upbringing or the faulty development of a particular national tradition or economic system were to blame. More can be said for the thesis that all orders and forms of authority in human society are founded on institutionalized violence. This at least corresponds to the fundamental role played in biology by intraspecific aggression, as described by Konrad Lorenz. Those, however, who turn to religion for salvation from this 'so-called evil' are confronted with murder at the very core of Christianity—the death of God's innocent son; still earlier, the Old Testament covenant could come about only after Abraham had decided to sacrifice his child. Thus, blood and violence lurk fascinatingly at the very heart of religion" (Burkert

S. Visuvalingam (✉) · E. Chalier-Visuvalingam
Chicago, USA
e-mail: suntharv@yahoo.com

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becoming competitors for its possession.[2] Exacerbated through such mediation, the "will to injure" (*himsa*) of "killing man" (*homo necans*) is directed against both rival individuals within the same collectivity, and by the latter against other groups defined by conflicting ethnicity, gender, class, nation, caste, ideology, gang membership and so on.[3] Violence in its primordiality, however, is not simply directed against (pre-constituted) others but is (also) constitutive of the Other.[4] Human desire, because of its indirection through a privileged other, readily metamorphoses from emulation into envy, spite, competition and even the vengeful destruction of its original object of love or worship. [5] The dualistic "tribal" organi-

Footnote 1 (continued)

1986). *Homo Necans*, which begins with a dramatic description of sacrificial killing and consumption in the Greek polis, appeared in English the same year as René Girard's *Violence and the Sacred* (1986). For Burkert, the constant menace of intraspecific violence among early humans was projected outwards onto the productive hunt for food resulting in the equation of the animal quarry to its pursuing killer. The prolonged survival of the associated guilt into subsequent agricultural and urban societies was expressed through collective sacrificial murder. In Hindu mythology, the ritualized hunt was seen through the optic of the initiatic death of the sacrificer expressed through his fatally wounded prey. An epic example would be the *diksha* scenario of the golden deer (Maricha) in its final throes mimicking the pleading voice of its royal hunter Rama. Conversely, the exposed foot of the meditating Krishna is pierced by a fatal arrow discharged by an unwitting hunter, who had mistaken it for a camouflaged deer. Indeed, this would have been karmic retribution for having unjustly slain from behind, in his previous Rama incarnation, the monkey chieftain Valin during the latter's fratricidal confrontation with Sugriva, a 'dualistic' duel charged with sacrificial notations.

[2]Mimetic rivalry has been intuitively exploited in the cinematic theme of the identical but "evil" twin—unable to achieve a meaningful existence except through identification with the alter ego—who returns to compete, often deceitfully under a protective stance, for the envied object of desire. Whereas such mechanisms are normally and unrecognizably projected onto the world at large, they become obsessively apparent within the dysfunctional family. I know firsthand of a case, who kept falling for the successive object choices of his brother, a compulsive pattern that makes sense only in terms of infantile rivalry for the (unrequited) love of the mother.

[3]Just as the development of the cerebral function and the relative autonomy of the emotions has also resulted among humans in sexual preferences and even perversions no longer being determined entirely by the imperative of species reproduction, so too violence has taken on an "aesthetic" life of its own as sadism, masochism, and suicidal killing sprees that are becoming increasingly frequent and no longer serve the needs of self-survival.

[4]This is the ultimate significance of the interminable warfare between Big and Little Endians over at which end to crack hardboiled eggs in Jonathan Swift's satire, *Gulliver's Travels*. Perhaps if we learned to recognize that all conflicts—even and especially those over "life-and-death" issues—were being fought, in the final analysis, between such arbitrarily opposed factions, the focus would shift instead to our inner propensity to violence.

[5]René Girard has shown, through "anthropological" analysis of world literary masterpieces, the underlying mimetism of desire: objects become desirable because they are prized by admired others and we are willing to harm the latter for their possession. The scheming villain of the *Mricchakatika* (Visuvalingam 2014) desires the heroine less for her own beauty than her reciprocated love for his unwitting rival, the hero, and succeeds in (almost) destroying both when thwarted. Not only does the semiotics of the play identify villain and hero within a sacrificial logic, it suggests that this murderous rivalry began in the libidinous (temple-) womb of the Mother.

zation that arbitrarily pitted its two halves (moieties) against each other in festive (potlatch) cycles of obligatory clashes was a ritual mechanism to contain a contagious "aggressivity" otherwise liable to crystallize along other more permanent lines of social fracture and hence capable of dissolving the whole.[6]

The rising and felling of Bhairava's *linga*-pole during the Bisket festival is accompanied by a ritual battle between the upper and lower halves of the city of Bhaktapur in Nepal. Cheered on by the riotous population, the hair-raising tug-of-war to drag the chariot of Bhairava from the centre into their respective halves of the city becomes violent at the least pretext. On the night of April 1985, the Nepali army was stationed in a state of preparedness around the Taumadhi square and—as we watched from the loft of the Nyatapole inn facing the Akash Bhairab temple—the festival degenerated into a veritable riot with stone-throwing and casualties on both sides while the Gorkha soldiers looked on impassively. A similar north–south conflict during the festival of Siti Nakha in Katmandu involved deaths on both sides and the regular sacrifice of captured prisoners to the goddess Kali. It was the model for similar battles in villages elsewhere in the Newar kingdom, which must have corresponded to an earlier dualistic tribal organization. The founding legend makes no bones about the Malla king Gunakamadeva, the reputed founder and culture hero of Katmandu, having instituted this custom at the behest of Skanda, the god of war, in order to destroy his enemies and to prevent his subjects from revolting (Chalier-Visuvalingam and Visuvalingam 2004:124–126). The dangerous game was abolished only around 1870 by Jung Bahadur Rana, at least in the capital, when a non-participating onlooker, British Resident Colvin, was struck by a flying stone. Similarly, the regular clashes between rival Hindu sects like the Shaiva Nagas and the Vaishnava Bairagis over the least pretext, such as precedence in taking their sacred bath in the Ganga during festivals like the Kumbha Mela, reflect an underlying ritual paradigm that valorizes death as liberation (see note 6).

Iranian cities and villages, including the successive Safavid capitals, had likewise been divided into opposing sets of quarters dominated by rival sects (for example, the Hanafites and the Shafi'ites, both of Sunni persuasion), which regularly engaged in violent conflict with the connivance and even encouragement of the rulers, both foreign (for example, the Mongols) and indigenous (particularly Shah Abbas). The opposing ascetic orders of the Sunni Ni'mati and the Shia Haydari, who were doctrinally close to the transgressive Mala'amatiya (Way of Blame), were founded in the late fourteenth century in eastern (Kerman) and

[6]The potlatch celebrated by opposing moieties of North American tribes, especially along the northwest coast (Haida, Tlingit, etc.), consisted of agonistic self-destruction of wealth to humiliate the rival other. Solidarity was maintained above all through obligatory exchange of women as conjugal partners between the moieties. The fratricidal Mahabharata war, a gigantic self-consuming "potlatch" between cousins, corresponds to the founding dualism of the mythical "Churning of the Ocean" (*samudra-manthana*). This cooperative tug-of-war rivalry between gods and demons, which delivers the goods of life including the nectar of immortality, is also the model and justification for the Kumbha Mela, the world's largest festival, which was likewise the scene of bloody clashes.

western (Tabriz) ends, respectively, of Iran. Even after the advent of the Safavid dynasty in 1502 when the Ni'mati gradually converted to Shiism, they continued to fight the Haydari. All social antagonisms—right through the Qajar period and down to our own times—would inevitably polarize, even if only in symbolic form, under their opposing "sectarian" banners and reach a violent climax during the (tenth of) Muharram. However, the tomb of Sultan Mir Haydar at Tabriz was venerated not only by Shias and Sufis from as far as Ottoman Turkey but even by the Sunni Muslims; and it was Shah Abbas, the (Shia) Safavid ruler (1587–1629), who had the "heretical" shrine demolished no doubt out of fears for his own political security in the face of popular dissent. His active divide-and-rule policy against his own subjects resulted in the spread of the Ni'mati-Haydari polarization from the urban proletariat to the court and the countryside, so much so that Safavid Iran was hopelessly disunited in the face of the Afghan invaders. Thus even the Sunni-Shia divide, notwithstanding the doctrinal differences of their respective theologians, has a marked ritualized character that feeds on and further inflames communal grievances stoked by other social factors (cf. Mirjafari 1979). Under normal conditions in Banaras the celebration of Muharram and Barawafat, which have been consistently growing over the recent decades, is characterized rather by intense but sportive competition organized by the various clubs (*anjuman*) between the neighbouring Muslim wards (*muhallas*) themselves (Kumar 1989, pp. 158–163).

This binary pattern within (Persian) Islam, which corresponds in many details to (Hindu) Nepal, may well derive from archaic (pre-) Aryan institutions, but it conforms all the same to the immanent logic of human violence. The centrality of (Pachali) Bhairava's symbolic role as royal scapegoat (in Katmandu) suggests that succeeding rulers had (merely) exploited (generally within certain self-imposed limits) a pre-existing socio-ritual mechanism meant rather to regulate and provide a safety valve for the constant and pervasive menace of self-consuming violence otherwise capable of undoing the entire (Hindu-Buddhist) community (Girard 1977). This dualistic structure was easily extended and adapted to accommodate the more basic religious opposition between Hindus and Muslims. Due to the coincidence of the festivals of Dashahara and Muharram occurring on the same day in 1821, for example, many were killed at Cuddapah in the Deccan when neither party was willing to give way. Nevertheless, many Hindus participated fully in Muharram, consumed only meat that had been sacrificed according to Islamic rites, and even disguised themselves as Muslim ascetics. If any fighting and bloodshed took place between the two communities, the Hindus who had temporarily become *fakirs* took the part of the Muslims and fought against their own co-religionists (Shurreef 1863, p. 122; cf. Pandey 1990, p. 131, fn. 34). Even today in the Balinese village of Lingsar, the entire Hindu and Muslim communities—including women and children—congregate en masse to attack each other with blessed rice cakes at a unique sacred complex that juxtaposes temple and mosque and is recognized by the Indonesian government as a cultural heritage site. The participants attribute the peace, harmony and unity that have prevailed across successive generations to their celebration of these mock battles in "good faith" (Nugraha 2013).

The stubborn persistence of the dualistic mechanism into our own times—whether contained within integrative (royal) festivals, manipulated to further partisan political agendas, distorted by systematic economic exploitation, exacerbated by modern racism often internalized by its victims, generalized in our age of enlightenment into intense individual competition for climbing the ladder of "success" or perverted into fissiparous outbursts of crime pure and simple—only proves that the ideology of pacifism urgently needs to be supplemented by adequate techniques for recognizing, confronting, neutralizing and transmuting the innate violence that nourishes even the most-refined disguises assumed by the acquisitive urges of the self-conflicted soul.[7]

6.2 Mimesis and War by Terror: Deconstructing the Scapegoat

The channelling of volatile conflict through an arbitrary dualism stops short of actually revealing the hidden psychological dynamics behind such othering of the opposed party. The universal mechanism of the scapegoat, whether institutionalized by tradition or occurring spontaneously within a contingent gathering, focuses the repressed violence upon which society is founded onto a convenient individual, who is sacrificed, expelled or simply made the butt of aggressive jokes that bond through shared laughter. The ritual prescriptions and symbolic notations surrounding the scapegoat define, through careful often step-by-step re-enactment, the processes of identification and exclusion that split the embodied consciousness into a subjective self and externalized other. By simultaneously identifying with both executioner and victim, even "mere" spectators are obliged to participate in and thereby confront this innate mechanism of violent othering. This is especially obvious when the victim is believed and even explicitly declared to take on the accumulated sins of the entire community. During the prototypical Jewish "Day of Atonement" (Yom Kippur), this equation was demonstrated by doubling the otherwise single goat: the victim was chosen arbitrarily by lot, whereas the spared other was decked with the insignia of the high priest, who thus conducted what amounts to a murderous self-sacrifice.

The royal consecration (*diksha*) of the imperial horse sacrifice (*ashvamedha*) concluded with the Vedic king shedding his sins (i.e. war crimes) onto a deformed brahmin standing mouth-deep in a pool. The entire community followed suit

[7]The extreme "senseless" cases of the depressive running amok, compulsive serial killer, shooting sprees in crowded places that seem completely "out-of-character" to those closest to the perpetrator, etc., confirm that the propensity to violence preexists the contingent conflicts that serve to channelize and rationalize its outward expression, the counterproof being concerted nonviolent resistance to oppression even under extreme provocation. Freud likewise relied on the abnormal to psychoanalyse the hidden dynamics of "normal" sexuality.

bathing in that purifying water, before the human scapegoat was expelled or perhaps drowned. The corresponding deformity prescribed for the "great brahmin" (*maha-brahmana*) clown (*vidushaka*) ensured the conservation of this now disguised ritual role even within the secularized aesthetic context of the classical Indian theatre. But whereas the bisociated cognition that underlies our incessant laughter relies on at least partially othering the bungling clown, we completely identify with his *alter ego*, the poor brahmin hero, when the latter is explicitly compared to the sacrificial goat being led in procession, mourned by the entire heartbroken city, to be executed at the stake for the (ontological) crime (that he did not commit). Conversely, the "evil" dictatorial king eventually slain in his stead is not only named "Protector" (Palaka), he is struck down in the midst of the sacrifice just as he is about to immolate the (brahmin) goat. The *Mricchakatika* thus played the same unifying cathartic role for the segmented Indian caste society as *Oedipus Rex* did for the democratic polis, for both Greek tragedy and comedy are derived, through their very names, from the pre-existing ritual of the scapegoat. Having for its chief connoisseur the high priest of Dionysus, theatre underpinned the great Athenian experiment in democracy, which included the regular ostracizing and even exiling—through collective voting on anonymous potsherds (*ostrakon*)—of statesmen deemed too powerful, even if like Pericles they had sacrificed their all for the mother city.

The crucified "Lamb of God" that took on the original sin of all mankind—or at least of those capable of believing in and thereby identifying with the Saviour—was intended, instead, to found a new universal community that would transcend the opposition between Jew and Gentile. While abolishing the actual practice of animal sacrifice, Christ's passion elevated the aborted immolation of Isaac or Ishmael to centre stage of the Abrahamic eschatology not only inviting identification with the (innocent) victim but hopefully deconstructing the scapegoat mechanisms beneath the obligatory sacrifice (Girard 1987).[8] The Son of Man was inevitably recycled into the inescapable dynamics of the self–other dualism, which now pitted Christians against both Jews and Pagans, and eventually among themselves in prolonged bloody warfare between Catholics and Protestants. Was the victimized Jesus resurrected as the triumphant Christ to convert the world through the force of arms, with the Cross blazing upon the European shield, or is the

[8]For Girard there are two opposed understandings of the Crucifixion: the preceding sacrificial one that still holds sway in other traditions and, vehicled by this misreading while gradually subverting it, the denunciation of the foundational scapegoat mechanism through its now deconstructive re-enactment: "get thee behind me, Satan!" That the orthodox brahmins, who scrupulously conserved their sacrificial practices, otherwise abhorred the shedding of blood shows that they clearly recognized its criminal if yet necessary character. Conversely pacific Buddhism began by denouncing the brahmanical sacrifice only to end up formulating esoteric rituals whereby the Tibetan tantric adept identifies himself with a Bhairava-like divinity to achieve individual enlightenment through such (visualizations of) (Chalier-Visuvalingam and Visuvalingam 2004, p. 155). Each religious tradition has approached dreaded yet foundational violence in its own unique manner. This essay is dedicated to our longtime benefactors Félix and Aurora Ilarraz, who embody the ideal marriage of the Hindu-Christian ethos.

Gospel narrative intended to deconstruct the indeed universal mechanism of the archaic scapegoat that has returned, to run amok, with an unimaginably devilish vengeance?[9]

In providing the transcendental foundation and organizing principles for perpetuating a specific collectivity, each religious tradition has been obliged to repress, regulate and channel this primordial violence in a manner that conforms to its own original project.[10] Its overall experience and expression varies, for the process of othering reflects and reinforces the self-image unique to that tradition. Because the universal peace promised by Islam was predicated upon the entire world submitting to the egalitarian reign of its religious law (*sharia*), collective violence (*jihad*) was legitimately projected against unbelievers (*kafir*). The once expanding boundary that separated the triumphant Muslim fraternity (*umma*) from unredeemed territories now readily translates, especially in India, into eruptions of hostility against infidel Hindu neighbours. Whereas the unique Caliph harnessed state violence in principle for the promotion of the universalizing faith, self-aggrandizing Hindu kings were deliberately pitted against each other as rival champions of a shared hierarchical religious order (*dharma*) in much the same way that Vedic chieftains had performed competing sacrifices (*yajna*) to win the favour of Indra. For the brahmanical economy of violence excludes its recourse from the civic interreligious domain and relegates it instead to the pursuit (*purushartha*) of wealth–security–power (*artha*) that Indian aesthetic theory equates to the underlying emotional disposition of aggression (*krodha*). Committed to non-injury (*ahimsa*) in deed, word, and thought, the otherwise vegetarian orthodox brahmin had to partake in obligatory killing and consume meat only within the carefully circumscribed performance of *yajna*.

The complex interplay of the above dynamics is revealed within the microcosm of the 1809 "Lat Bhairo riots" of Banaras, which have become crucial to understanding and interpreting the communal violence that has not yet abated in contemporary India. This historiography is all the more compelling for the conflict erupted modestly within an otherwise syncretic Hindu-Muslim cult around an ancient pillar sacred to the (Hindu) "God of Terror" (Bhairava) and quickly engulfed the entire holy city. Beginning with the lowest castes on the periphery, the ensuing conflagration soon took over the upper classes and—dividing the

[9]The Devil in the Western imaginary has been typically depicted with the head and hoofs of a goat, perhaps the most prevalent—affordable yet substantive—sacrificial beast that now appropriately demands those very human victims, for whom the helpless animal had originally served as the domesticated substitute. The annual pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca comprises an obligatory ritual where the Devil himself is stoned as a scapegoat, pelted at least 49 times over the course of three days. Because he attempted to dissuade patriarch Abraham and wife Hagar from sacrificing their beloved son Ishmael and the latter from acquiescing voluntarily to Allah's command. Hundreds of unwary pilgrims have died over the years during uncontrollable stampedes at this ritual, most recently in September 2015.

[10]For Abhinavagupta (10–11th C.), religious tradition (*agama*) is constituted at its transcendental core of a seminal idea—embodied by the founder (e.g. impermanence by the Buddha) and conditioned by when, where, why, how, and other contingent factors—that takes on a perennial life of its own. This would translate for us, now able to retrospect on its millennial evolution through diverse adaptations, into a tentacular collective project.

ineffective police force along sectarian lines—set aflame even the Aurangzeb mosque at the centre. As the self-consuming violence was abating over the course of the year, it metamorphosed into a shooting feud between police and military, where Hindus and Muslims were ranged together indiscriminately on either side. With this bracketing aside of the original religious underpinnings, shared grievances channelled the collective agitation into a nonviolent city-wide protest (*dharna*) against the recently imposed colonial British administration, even without the charismatic leadership of a long-suffering Mahatma. By inscribing the Muslim toppling of the "world-pillar" into a pre-existing Vedic cosmogony exemplified by the raising and felling of the Indra pole, the Hindu memorial reflects a sacrificial understanding of otherwise disruptive and contagious communal violence. The Brahmanas define man as the animal that, unlike other victims, is also capable of performing the sacrifice.

While projecting and cultivating the reign of Reason that sets us above our evolutionary ancestors, post-Enlightenment Man has become all the more adept at devising and rationalizing modes of self-aggrandizement and gratuitous cruelty far beyond the capacity of the most hungry predator.[11] Scientific research into the deep durable effects of the calculated infliction of pain and the identity-tinkering possibilities of torture and brainwashing that was pioneered by the Nazis is being applied in extraterritorial concentration camps on behalf of the "Land of the Free" with the active institutional collusion of medical doctors, psychologists and anthropologists.[12] Shortly after World War II, Anglo-American intelligence implemented Operation Gladio to deploy a "strategy of tension" across "Free Europe" that employed law enforcement, far right, and criminal elements to carry out false flag terror attacks that were deliberately blamed on (Soviet-instigated) "communists" leaving the frightened populations little recourse but to turn to the State for

[11]The *Life of Pi* allegorizes the confrontation with our innate constitutive violence by leaving us, especially "enlightened" (Pi) Indian viewers, stranded in mid-ocean with a ferocious Bengal tiger aptly named Richard Parker after a European hunter. The book highlights in turn the unique virtues of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. The narrative is also a prolonged meditation on the food chain that reduces even idyllic vegetarianism to disguised (Eucharistic?) cannibalism. For author Yann Martel, who graphically depicts imaginative tortures that otherwise "decent" human visitors inflict as amusing pastimes on the caged animals, "freedom" from the well-managed zoo of Indian (caste-) society readily translates into the predator's license to prey unrestrained on lesser creatures. The cornered tiger jumps out of the 3D-screen at us, and it is symbolically significant that "Nirbhaya" was brutally raped to death by three men stalking the streets of Delhi while returning home after enjoying it at the cinema.

[12]Abdel Hakim Belhaj "the Libyan" was kidnapped from Malaysia in March 2004 by MI6 and delivered to Colonel Gadhafi's torturers. Even while pursuing reparations from Britain, this warlord who helped topple the regime has been at the forefront in delivering jihadist "freedom-fighters" to swell the rebel ranks in the Syrian "civil war" that is mostly foreign funded and equipped, with large contingents from marginalized European Sunnis. Now accused of (massive) "human rights violations," Bashar al-Assad was likewise entrusted with illegally kidnapped Canadian dual citizen Maher Arar. Why else are such innocent Muslims still detained at Guantánamo?

protection.[13] The spectacular violence and abiding trauma orchestrated on 9/11, the media-hyped image of the falling twin towers upon which the previous world order rested, has been seared so deeply into the collective consciousness as to obscure the pre-existing agenda of global domination it served to justify. Supposedly reclaiming the human dignity and individual liberties of the civilizing West from oppressive traditions, for the moment incarnated by the menace of *jihad*-imposed *sharia*, the "War on Terror" is being waged against a conveniently protean Other.[14] "Humanitarian" interventions, legitimized and facilitated by ethnic cleansings, delegate these very self-sacrificing jihadist auxiliaries to the frontlines across resource-rich regions as the most efficient and cost-effective proxies for bringing down non-compliant regimes. Autocratic dispensations that had nevertheless managed to hold together pluralist societies based on precarious civic equilibriums have thereby disintegrated beneath the interethnic and inter-confessional violence, by unleashing a proliferation of "liberated" others. By pitting and arming Sunnis and Shias against each other, the long simmering inner conflict of Islam has been exploited to devastating, increasingly self-propelled, divide-and-rule effect to further imperial geostrategies.[15] 9/11 has also served to justify a

[13]Among the many atrocities committed were the 1978 kidnapping and murder of Italian Prime Minister Aldo Moro and the 1980 Bologna railway station massacre, all typically blamed on the Red Brigades or other radical left factions. They were often timed when electoral politics and/or foreign policy in the nation were shifting significantly towards socialism. Despite various inquiries and condemnations at national levels and by the European Parliament there is no conclusive evidence that these clandestine structures were ever completely dismantled. All indications are that the lethal use of sarin gas recently in Syria that was to serve as the humanitarian pretext for a "shock and awe" US attack was actually perpetrated by the rebels provisioned by Saudi and Turkish proxies.

[14]Whereas the perpetrators of 9/11 were allegedly Saudi nationals motivated by religious fanaticism, blame was quickly laid—with all the fanfare provided by the unrepentant corporate media—on the secular Iraqi state accused of stockpiling weapons of mass destruction. Though long since shown to have been fabricated, similar charges have been pressed against the Syrian regime, drawing the ire of both Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches against the West. So fundamental is scapegoating to mass psychology that similar tactics have been effectively employed against a recalcitrant Iran that has been reprieved, for now, to focus instead on the Yellow Peril that threatens American dominance in the Far East. For Girard, the scapegoat (e.g. Oedipus) is typically branded as a (e.g. parricide and incestuous) transgressor to legitimize the recourse to violence. Though the converse is equally if not more true—the brahmanicide Bhairava and the *vidushaka* as laughing stock are primarily figures of transgression—the geopolitical applications of the preceding insight have been amply demonstrated, as by the international media campaign demonizing President Vladimir Putin as the resurrected Russian Bear.

[15]By installing and propping up an otherwise marginal Wahhabi dispensation in dynastic Saudi Arabia, the United States has created a reservoir of mercenaries to serve its "secular" geostrategic aims, starting with bringing down the Soviet Union using the Afghan mujahideen as eager proxies. If 9/11 was mere blowback from this global "database" (*al-qaeda*) of (potential) conscripts, why have these unseemly bedfellows been used to topple the Libyan and now the Syrian regimes? Just how bogus Western Enlightenment's "War by Terror" has become—and has been from the very beginning—is amply demonstrated by its cynical cooption of the most bloodthirsty (liver-eating) jihadists in pursuance of its (now largely de-Christianized) "human rights" project of global emancipation.

global surveillance apparatus that supersedes national sovereignties to spy on the entire globe through social networking infrastructure and with the collusion of telecom multinationals and Internet service and search engine providers. More dangerous than the loss of privacy are the unlimited creative possibilities, already attested, for targeted blackmail and hence control of public leaders by permanently recording and mining their all too human frailties. Whereas the raison d'être of the archaic sacrifice, also through its theatrical disguises, was to confront the undiminished violence of our animal nature, targeted drone killings presided over at congenial weekly rituals by a Nobel Peace laureate serve instead to reduce self-exposure and sanitize the slaughter into the "collateral damage" of a video game.[16] Who is ultimately inflicting this metastasizing violence against which others? Have we all become scapegoats?

6.3 Marriage of Lat Bhairon and Ghazi Miyan: Sacrificial Syncretism

If a religious tradition, its self-image and economy of violence is best defined by its rejected Other, then the privileged key to unravelling—through the backdoor—this sprawling multistoried edifice known to us as "Hinduism" has been vouchsafed to its "god of terror" Bhairava.[17] Not only has this impetuous Indian Dionysus been the symbolic crucible for the assimilation and fusion of countless bloodthirsty deities of tribal origin across the subcontinent, the central defining deed of this impure Outsider is brahmanicide, the most heinous crime imaginable in the brahmanical law books. His origin myth, found in the authoritative Puranas,

[16]Whereas President Obama, hailed still in living memory as the "Black" American Messiah, has been overheard bragging to administration aides that "I'm really good at killing people," several drone operators at the "(killing) field" level have nevertheless quit, confessing to the media their growing unease at playing executioners.

[17]This article is indebted to my wife and lifelong collaborator Elizabeth Chalier-Visuvalingam's field work on Bhairava in Benares and Kathmandu between 1984 and 1989, and related (often joint-) publications. It was originally presented as a talk to the interdisciplinary forum "Issues and Ideas" of the Indiana State University at Terre Haute (26th March 1991) and to the Dept. of South Asian Languages and Civilization/ Committee on South Asia of the University of Chicago (2nd April 1991). Maria Green, Patrice Brodeur, Father Gregory Schissel, Profs. Houchang E. Chehabi, Ali Asani, and William A. Graham of Harvard University, Prof. C.M. Naim of the University of Chicago, Prof. Gyanendra Pandey of Delhi University, and Prof. Sir Christopher Bailey of Cambridge University contributed comments and/or indicated valuable source materials on the Islamic side of the equation. The original version of this paper, submitted under the title "Sex and Death in Hinduism and Islam," was published in *Islam and the Modern Age* instead as "Between Mecca and Banaras: Towards an Acculturation Model of Hindu-Muslim Relations" (1993). Subsequent spinoff publications elaborating other aspects simply summarized here are referenced at the appropriate text locations.

attests to the intimate and indissoluble link between the holy city of Varanasi (Banaras) and such transgressive sacrality.[18] After having emerged from the pillar of fiery light (*jyotir-linga*) to violently cut off the head of Brahma, the "skull-bearing" (Kapalika) Bhairava had to wander about for twelve years in order to expiate. Finally, he reached Varanasi where the skull of Brahma, and with it the sin of brahmanicide, fell into a tank appropriately named the "liberation of the skull" (*kapalamochana*). Yet even after his absolution, the "Black" (Kala) Bhairava remained at Kapalamochana as "sin-eater" (*papa-bhakshana*) to devour the impurities of pilgrims to this city of final liberation (*moksha*). Paradoxically, Bhairava, the (ex-) criminal, reigns as policing magistrate (*Kotwal*) in Banaras, entrusted with the duty of preserving its sanctity not only by barring its access to the wicked but also by punishing those who indulge in sins even within the confines of the holy city. Inflicted on everyone at the moment of death, the "punishment of Bhairava" (*bhairavi-yatana*) burns their accumulated sins in this "great cremation-ground" (*mahashmashana*). This momentary but excruciating torture was administered at an ancient pillar (*lat* = Sanskrit *stambha*) the stump of which, now called "Lat Bhairon," still stands beside the present Kapalamochana tank where it is worshipped as the phallic representation (*linga*) of Shiva-Bhairava (Chalier-Visuvalingam 1986, 1989, pp. 183–191).[19] Here the impure god of transgression remains as (sacrificial) executioner, (scapegoat-) victim and pillar of the world, also known as Kula-Stambha.[20] For radical underground currents of Shaiva tantricism, exemplified by the Kaula (derived from *kula*) traditions, this Untouchable represents the supreme non-dual metaphysical principle, and was (secretly) worshipped as such by many among the mainstream Brahmin elites. Abhinavagupta, Hinduism's greatest philosopher-mystic and its ultimate authority on aesthetics, defies fearsome Death by affirming his identity as the terrifying

[18]This origin myth is systematically analysed and reinterpreted in Chalier-Visuvalingam (1989), p. 160ff; the "punishment of Bhairava" in Chalier-Visuvalingam (1986); and the marriage of Lat Bhairon in Chalier-Visuvalingam (2006); all from the Hindu perspective of transgressive sacrality first formulated by Visuvalingam (1985).

[19]Since Bhairava functioned as sin-eater at both the *Mahashmashana-Stambha* where, as *Kotwal*, he executed the ultimate punishment, and also at *Kapalamochana* where, as *Kapalin*, he was freed of the ultimate crime of brahmanicide, it is perfectly logical that, in the wake of the Muslim occupation of Omkareshvar, the heart of Hindu Kashi, Kapalamochana had come to be (re-) identified with Lat Bhairo. These representations are components of the symbolic web (Ganga, cremation, Vishwanath temple, etc.) central to the meaning and status of Varanasi as the sacred centre of Hinduism. Pilgrimage, death, and cremation in this "City of Light" are modelled on and transpose the (principles underlying the) Vedic sacrifice.

[20]See John Irwin (1983). The cosmogonic significance of the cult of pillars and poles in South Asia and elsewhere first came to our attention with Irwin's visit to Banaras in 1979 to complete his research on the Lat. We are grateful for his constant encouragement of our work and for his comments on the present paper. A clear résumé [partly by the editor] of the contents of his various papers may be found in Irwin (1990). Limitations of space have prevented the detailed treatment of not only the successive post-Islamic relocations of Hindu sites in the sacred geography of Banaras but also the properly Buddhist aspects of the pillar.

power of Bhairava. What distinguishes Hinduism above all is this deliberate, even if often publicly disguised, elevation of the other from (beyond) the periphery to the core of its self-representation, including through the spatial visualizations of sacred geography. For Bhairava is also the internal "a priori" other, the individual and collective subconscious, through the deliberate exploitation of which one's limited psychosocial identity is transcended to realize the true Self. Upon undergoing his ritual consecration (*diksha*), the pre-classical Vedic sacrificer inwardly regressed to a prenatal state laden with impurity, evil, death and especially violence, both inflicted and undergone through a substitute animal (*pashu*) victim bound to a wooden stake (*yupa*). The phallic *yupa*, from which is derived the Shiva *linga*, stands on the edge of the vaginal altar (*vedi*), such that the embryonic regression is assimilated to a procreative sexual union, from which the "dead" initiate (*dikshita*) is "reborn" to a renewed lease of life, rejuvenated. The cosmogonic marriage of Lat Bhairon to the adjacent maternal well (*bharat kup janani*)[21] is celebrated annually by bringing the "head" (in the form of the silver mask) of Kala Bhairava from his more centrally located temple to "crown" the top of the pillar, in what is clearly a dramatization of the death-and-rebirth scenario of the Hindu king identified with the "Lord of the Universe" (Kashi Vishvanatha) himself.

After its early classical reform, under the growing pressure of the civilizational ideal of nonviolence (*ahimsa*)—popularized by spiritual currents advocating self-restraint and respect for all life such as Jainism and Buddhism—the Vedic sacrifice, which continued to serve as model for all subsequent domains of Hindu life (temple worship, public festivals, pilgrimage circuits, theatre, life cycle rituals, etc.) was purified of its (overt) sexual and violent components (that were retained, if at all, only as symbolic vestiges). Whereas the substituted animal was earlier decapitated at the *yupa*, which the Rig Veda alludes to as stained with blood, it was now (euphemistically) "pacified" (*shanta*) by being discreetly strangled in an isolated shed. Like the world renouncer (*sannyasin*), the inviolable public image of the orthodox brahmin was reduced to non-injury in deed, word and thought. The cultivation of disgust (*jugupsa*) for one's own body, more specifically the (biological needs of the) "lower body stratum" (Bakhtin), was held conducive to spiritual detachment such that, the orthodox schema correlated the goal of *moksha* to its corresponding aesthetic sentiment (*bibhatsa*). Two categories of disgust were distinguished based on the psychological effect of the impurity: whereas faeces and putrefaction exemplify revulsion (*udvega*), spilt blood causes anxious agitation (*kshoba*), which seems intimately linked to the dread of contagion, i.e. the

[21]This alternative name of "Bharata's well" (*bharat kup*) is in accordance with the phenomenon of local sites becoming known for the particular function for which they are used in the local *Ramlila*. The waters consecrating the Hindu king—whether the epic Bharata or the royal Bhairava—are always drawn by regressing to the womb.

spilling of even more blood.[22] As the embodiment of *ahimsa*, the brahmin became the ideal for the rest of society to respect, cherish and emulate.[23] The minutest applications of the pure/impure opposition were codified by the brahmanical law books that assimilated (even involuntary) infractions to (symbolic) "brahmanicide" such as to become inscribed into the attitudes, behaviours and very body of the (caste-) society. [24] This is how Hindu civilization had come to be viewed, both within and without, as "innately" nonviolent, the natural home of Mahatma Gandhi.

The now obscured yet core experience of violence was conserved instead by projecting and semiotically reworking its ritual mechanisms onto external others, whether "heretical" ascetics (Kapalikas), savage "non-Aryan" deities, or even the foreign invader whose propensity to kill readily assimilated him to the Vedic butcher. Ghazi Miyan was born into "history" as Salar Masud, the nephew of Mahmud of Ghazni, at Ajmer in 1014. As his desire for martyrdom was as intense as his proselytizing zeal, he headed the Muslim warriors in their numerous incursions into the Gangetic plain, until he was felled in battle in 1033 at the tender age of 19 by the Hindus at Bahraich. When Muslim domination over North India was permanently established towards the end of the twelfth century, his tomb was rediscovered. It became such an important pilgrimage site that, already by the thirteenth century, the poet Amir Khusru could speak of the whole of Hindustan being embalmed by the fragrance from the perfumed tomb. The ballads (*sohila*), which are sung by low-caste Muslim musicians (*dafali*) belonging to a fraternity devoted to his cult, make Bahraich itself his birthplace. Most significant of all is the repeated identification by the *sohila* of the city of Ghazi Miyan's tomb with Mecca and Medina (Gaboriau 1975, pp. 300, 306). Such were the material difficulties that in Akbar's reign, the doctors of religion (*ulema*) even declared that the pilgrimage (*hajj*) to Mecca was no longer obligatory for Indian Muslims. Ghazi Miyan

[22]Adopting a radically "Marxist" and materialist approach, Laura Makarius, in her seminal work on *The Sacred and the Violation of Interdictions* (1974), reduces all primitive prohibitions to (ramifications of) the blood taboo, because archaic societies were ever susceptible to and in constant dread of contagious violence. Though ignorant of Indian parallels (brahmin, *vidushaka*, etc.), she also examines the indispensable role of inviolable figures, in whose presence blood must not be spilt, as institutionalized mediators in resolving violent disputes.

[23]As Girard now acknowledges, mimesis operates just as well in a deliberate, increasingly self-conscious, manner that distances us from the automatism of the survival instinct. Desires are not mimetic to the same degree, and cultivating their renunciation ensures that what remains is relatively authentic and self-willed. In India, such emulation has been aptly described as the (benevolent) "tyranny of the sages" (Vivekananda). The caste dispensation that had preserved India's live-and-let-live diversity has long since become counterproductive.

[24]Contrary to prevalent propaganda by his Dalit followers against immemorial "brahmanical oppression," Dr. Ambedkar astutely attributed the consolidation of the caste hierarchy to such emulation by other groups. The exclusion of "untouchables" was the logical corollary to the brahmin's repression of his own natural urges and disgust towards his (lower) bodily functions. For Girard, a hierarchical dispensation embracing diverse values and orientations is less prone to violence than an egalitarian society where everyone competes for the same goods.

became the emblem for the Islamic conquest, both physical and spiritual, of pagan India. But what is so striking is that his otherwise Muslim cult is so impregnated with sacrificial symbolism that Hindus could readily identify with and mourn his martyrdom, and typically constituted the majority of the participants at his festivals across North India. The festive mobile poles bearing his decapitated head are clearly phallic symbols that, by uniting heaven and earth, invoke plentiful rain and bountiful harvests. The "Untouchable" Doms, in charge of the Hindu cremation rituals beside the Ganga at Manikarnika Ghat in Banaras, remain fervent devotees of Ghazi Miyan and regularly make the pilgrimage to Bahraich, earlier the epicentre of the popular pre-Islamic solar worship of Lat Bhairon (Briggs 1953).[25]

Ghazi Miyan was cursed even before his birth to be martyred on his wedding day. He annihilates the aggressors and it is only while returning that he is killed by the arrow of a survivor. He had to exchange his red nuptial garments for armour, or is even still wearing them. The festive music turned martial as he rode out to battle to consummate his marriage in death. Conversely in the pre-Islamic *Mricchakatika*, the brahmin hero's procession to the execution stake culminates in an "unexpected" reunion with his lost beloved. In both cases, the funerary drums are equated to those of a wedding. Similarly today, the "Muslim" observances that prepare Lashkar-i-Taiba candidates for martyrdom, recruited primarily among the Urdu-speaking Muhajir community that emigrated during the Partition from India, find little sanction in Islam as practiced across its Arabian heartland and resemble the practices of the very Hindus targeted by the suicide attacks of these terrorists. The martyr's death is systematically assimilated to a sacred marriage where the revered mother and her consent to the self-sacrifice play a central symbolic role.

While heading for Bahraich in 1034–35, Salar Masud had dispatched a portion of his army and its retinue under Malik Afzal Alavi towards Varanasi (Sukul 1974, pp. 152–155; 1977, pp. 24–26). The invading contingent was thoroughly defeated on the northern outskirts beyond the boundary wall of the city at the site where the Masjid Ganj-i-Shahidan ("treasure of martyrs" mosque) now stands near the Kashi Railway station. The Muslim civilians, with their women and children, were permitted to settle down in that area as townsmen and over the following century peacefully served the Hindu kings even as soldiers. After Quṭb-ud-din Aibak had devastated the city in 1194, destroying nearly one thousand temples, the Muslim locality was renamed "Salarpur" or "Alavipur/Alaipura" (which today includes the two wards of Adampura and Jaitpura). During the reign of Feroz Shah Tughluq, the famous Arahi-Kangra mosque, the Chaukhamba and Gola Ghat mosques, many others in Alavipur, and almost the entire building scheme around the Bakaria Kuṇḍ were constructed, generally on the site of and with the

[25]Lat Bhairon was originally crowned by a discus (*chakra*) probably representing the sun, as attested in "world pillars" (*axis mundi*), uniting heaven and earth, still standing elsewhere across the Indian subcontinent.

materials obtained from demolished Hindu temples. The Tughluq dynasty patronized the by now already famous cult of Ghazi Miyan and Feroz Shah made the pilgrimage to Bahraich where he had his hair cut. When the Muslim occupation of Varanasi eventually destroyed the architectural complex at Kapalamochana and transformed it into a magnificent mosque, it left the aniconic pillar intact in the middle of a prayer ground (*idgah*) to stand between the kneeling worshipper towards the back and the niche (*qibla*) on the wall in front pointing in the direction of Mecca. Thereby, the continuing worship of the now non-anthropomorphic pillar by Hindus and recent converts to the iconoclastic faith was (re-) inscribed into the much wider topography of Islam. So complete has been the transfer of symbolic notations from the largely denuded Lat Bhairon that, when questioned about the rationale behind the pillar's annual marriage with the adjoining well, the Hindu devotees invariably "digress" into describing Ghazi Miyan's wedding celebrated by their Muslim neighbours.

The variants on his legend retold by the Muslims around the area of the Lat (Searle-Chatterjee 1993) seem to have grafted onto the martyred warrior many significant fragments of this archaic Hindu mythico-ritual universe of sacrificial death. A bridegroom discovered that he had been chosen to be the next victim, on the very day his marriage was to be celebrated, at the problematic temple of Somnath near the confluence of the Varana with the Ganga at Rajghat, where human sacrifices were once regularly offered to the divinity. Responding to the hysterical condition of the victim's mother, Ghazi Miyan bathed in the Ganga and took his place, but the image started sinking as soon as he placed one foot across the threshold. The Muslim hero nevertheless managed to seize the head by its tuft and kick it, before dispersing the hair which grew as a type of grass wherever it fell. In a common variant, Ghazi Miyan removed his own head to avoid seeing and being seduced by the hundreds of naked women sent by the king's astrologer in order to destroy the power of his purity and thereby render him an easy sacrificial victim. Nowadays, it is the Lat which is popularly held to be sinking into the ground, and Kala Bhairava was decapitated at the Bhaktapur cosmogony when he had almost completely disappeared into the earth on his underground escape route back to Benares. Through that resilience and adaptability so characteristic of Hindu genius, Kala Bhairava still makes his annual "pilgrimage" as the royal bridegroom from his present-day temple to re-enact, in the middle of the Muslim prayer ground (*idgah*), his fateful marriage by "crowning" the Lat with his own head. The popular wisdom of colloquial (Hindi) language still refers to the cremation (-ground) as the "place of the bride" (*dulhan ka sthan*) and as the "last marriage" (*akhiri shadi*). If the Newars can be so confident that the head of Kala Bhairava at Kashi is not his "real" head, this is probably because he had already been regularly surrendering it to the Mahashmashana-Stambha even before offering it to Bhadrakali at Bhaktapur. Though the initial hostility towards the infidel other is now legitimized as a concerted effort to extirpate human sacrifice, Ghazi Miyan, whether cast as executioner or as victim, has served to (re-) inscribe his

Muslim devotees, the majority of whom were indigenous converts, into what remains a syncretic version of the pre-existing Hindu cult: hence the joint celebration of Lat Bhairon's wedding.[26]

6.4 Ghazi Miyan and Muharram: Sunni-Shia Reconciliation in India

Notwithstanding the foundational attempt of the *umma* to project violence outwards onto the non-believers (*kafir*), Islam has been polarized from the beginning by an unresolved feud over historical succession that has acquired eschatological implications. The millenarian promise of the "kingdom of heaven upon earth" that led to the Abrahamic split between the still awaited political triumph of the Jewish Messiah ben David and his alter ego, the spiritualized Christian (Jesus) ben Joseph, was thereby replicated within the immediately victorious Islam around the martyrdom of Husain (and the Prophet's immediate family) in 680 CE at Karbala (Iraq) at the imperial hands of the Umayyad dynasty. This "inner conflict" of Islam—which reflects the inevitable tension between its revolutionary "mystical" thrust from below and the "secularized" power structure of its status quo consolidated into the Caliphate—has been kept alive through the Shia commemoration of the martyrdom during Muharram. Though the cult of Husain, who by virtue of his death became "the bond of reconciliation with God on the Day of Judgment," subsequently spread to the Sunnites, the Muharram processions outside of India are generally observed only by the Shiites. The celebration in Shia Iran takes the form of passion plays:

> Not infrequently fights with Sunnites or other adversaries will develop, resulting in casualties and even deaths…. National animosity against the Arabs expresses itself on occasion, but the true villains are Caliph Yazid, who gives the order to kill Husain, and Shammar, or Shimr, who is believed to have struck the fatal blow. The excitement of the audience reaches such a pitch that the spectators not infrequently try to lynch the actors representing the murderers of Husain. Anti-Sunnite feeling is said to be such that no Sunni would be knowingly tolerated among the spectators. The final scenes usually depict the progress of the martyr's severed head to the Court of the Caliph. (Grunebaum 1951, pp. 87, 90)

In India, the Shiite community allowed Christians and even Hindus to enter the ceremonial booths (*tabut khanas*) and participate in the Muharram festivities; only the Sunni Muslims were denied and, under the English rule, prevented

[26]For Sandria Freitag (1989b), such syncretism and reciprocal "civic" participation in city-wide festivities (like the Ramlila) demonstrates that the Hindu-Muslim distinction did not exist in the early 19th century and that the Lat Bhairo riots could not therefore have been caused by religious differences. The original version of this paper, focused exclusively on the 1809 riots, was rejected from inclusion in *Living Banaras* (Hertel and Humes 1993) because of her scathing peer review regarding its "inflammatory" content. Our rebuttal (already in Visuvalingam and Chalier-Visuvalingam 2006, to which Freitag also contributed) is that such revisionist history betrays a woefully inadequate understanding of the dynamics of religious identity.

admission. When the *tabuts* are finally carried to the Muslim cemeteries, "and Sunnis and Shias meet face to face before the open graves of Hasan and Husain, the feuds between them, which have been pent up all the year, are often fought out to a bloody end" (Pelly, 1879, pp. xxii–iv). There were frequent clashes especially in Uttar Pradesh, generally occasioned by public Shia cursing versus Sunni praise of the first three Caliphs, leading to the ban on pubic processions in 1909, which however did not prevent inter-communal violence from resurfacing in 1935–36 and in 1939. Among the still sensitive spots in Banaras (Jaitpura) are the Doshipura *mohalla*, especially during the festival of Barawafat celebrated by the Shias, who are the majority in this locality, and the Kazi-Sadullapura *mohalla* during the Muharram (Kumar 1988, p. 69). Indeed, the opposing attitudes to Muharram seem to have been read back onto the Prophet himself, for Sunnis rejoice while Shias grieve during the innovative Barawafat, which paradoxically marks both the birth and the death of Muhammad (Kumar 1989, 159–163). The Sunni-Shia divide has remained so strong that "when the issue of separation of India and Pakistan came to the fore in the 1940s the Shia were at first reluctant to entrust themselves to a Sunni dominated state of Pakistan and so, in the main, opposed separation and supported the National Congress Party politically" (Momen 1985, 276–277). Nevertheless,

> … the total number of Shi'a in India and Pakistan is difficult to estimate since they do not exist as a separate identifiable community as in most parts of the Middle East but are intermingled with Sunnis and many practise *taqiyya* [dissimulation or religious "hypocrisy"] of their beliefs in the presence of the Sunni majority. There are moreover some difficulties of definition in that there appear to be large numbers who participate in the Muharram ceremonies, for example, and who venerate Imam Husayn, but who are otherwise not identifiable as Shi'is. British censuses that attempted to differentiate Shi'is from Sunnis in the early 20th century are thought to have grossly underestimated the number of Shi'a on account of the practice of *taqiyya*. (Momen 1985, p. 277)

There are separate Sunni and Shia shrines for the Prophet's family in the vicinity of the Lat and the self-depiction of the vast majority of the Banarasi Muslims, particularly the entire weaver community, as "Sunni" (Kumar 1989, pp. 147, 163) should be replaced in this context of dissimulation and a certain fluidity, even vacillation, of religious identity (cf. Freitag 1989b, pp. 252–253). In India, both Sunnis and Shi'as observe the festival, not in the form of theatre but as processions called *marsiyah* after the elegies composed and recited specifically in honour of Hasan and Husain. Jaffur Shurreef concludes his narration of Karbala and prefaces his detailed description of Muharram as celebrated around Hyderabad in South India with the quasi-Shi'a observation that since Husain's martyrdom "the rejoicings at the *eed* (or festival), have been abolished, and mournings and lamentations established in lieu thereof" (1863, p. 112). Though he does indicate, for example (p. 114), that the Sunnis consider unlawful the practice of violently beating the breast in grief which is regularly practiced by Shi'a women, and though he approvingly mentions certain groups of *fakirs* praising the "four virtuous friends"—the Caliphs Abu Bakar, Omar, Othman and Ali—this Sunni compiler studiously avoids mentioning any Sunni-Shi'a conflicts. While the Shias have

extra processions like the wedding and maintain a certain distance, all the Sunnis of Banaras except the Wahhabis celebrate Muharram (Kumar 1988, pp. 212–222).

The dynamics of reintegration under the banner of Islam is reflected in the syncretic version of the Ghazi Miyan ballad which attributes the slaying of Hasan and Husain to the idolatrous Hindus. This is a perfectly logical development because the Iranian "hagiography" already presupposes that the Sunni victors, particularly Shimr, must necessarily be "infidels" in order to slay the near family of the Prophet (Grunebaum 1951, p. 91). The ambivalent complicity of Hindu orthodoxy in propagating this Muslim cult throughout the subcontinent may be judged by its treatment in the *Parashurama-carita*, a history of the brahmin Peshawar dynasty composed in 1771 by a brahmin chronicler: Hasan and Husain, the demoniac sons of Muhammad himself, are slain on the 7th and 10th of Muharram, respectively, by the Hindus only to receive worship ultimately from the idolaters even as far south as the Karnataka and Dravidian lands. In the *Mahikavatici Bakhar*, an early seventeenth century historical biography, they even become the slain sons of Alauddin Khilji, who in revenge killed the king of the Yadavas of Devagiri, Ramdevrav, and thus heralded in 1296 the fall of Maharashtra to Muslim domination. The rise of the (Moghul) "barbarians" (*mleccha*) to political supremacy in India is attributed precisely to the ubiquitous Hindu celebration of the *urs* (Wagle 1989, pp. 51–54, 64). Though the festival (*urs*) continued to be the occasion of Shia-Sunni conflict in India, the transposition of their martyrdom onto the Ghazi Miyan cycle served, in part, to facilitate and legitimize a common front against the infidel Hindu majority (Schwerin 1981, pp. 157–160). The Indianized martyr also provides the mythicized model for the tradition of warrior Sufis who, as religious auxiliaries legitimizing the Muslim imperial expansion into the western Deccan, constituted the first wave of Islamization that resulted in the mediaeval Sultanate of Bijapur (Eaton 1978, pp. 19–44). The popularity of Muharram among both Shias and Sunnis has indeed been expanding throughout the last century in Banaras, but since the 1931 Hindu-Muslim riots the Hindus of the sacred city have stopped participating in it (Kumar 1988, pp. 215–216).

In the vicinity of Lat Bhairon are now separate Shia and Sunni complexes comprising the "tombs" (*rauza*) of the Imams Hasan and Husain along with that of their mother Fatima. One syncretic version of the Ghazi Miyan ballad serves instead as an Indianized founding legend for this ten day festival of Muharram: it is Hasan and Husain, the grandsons of the Prophet, who are themselves born at Bahraich of their mother Fatima al-Zahra, only to be killed there on the day of their marriage with Johara Bibi. The wedding theme was already intrinsic and central to the Iranian Muharram and not simply borrowed from Lat Bhairon via Ghazi Miyan. Like Banaras for the Hindus,

> … the rebuilt grave [at Karbala] has remained to this day the devotional center for pilgrims from all over the Shi'a world. Those that are buried by the sanctuary will surely enter Paradise. Many aged Shi'i settle in Karbala or ask in their will to have their bodies transported to the holy city. For centuries endless caravans of the dead have been coming to Karbala from Persia and India, transforming the town into one vast burial-ground. (Grunebaum 1951, pp. 87, 90)

In our Indian version, Husain's death on the 10th of Muharram is no longer due to the Sunni butchery at Karbala in 680, but rather to the attack on Bahraich by Sahal Deo Bhar, the infidel Hindu king. It is most significant that Johara (Zohra or even Zahra), the Indian name of the common wife of Hasan and Husain—whom they thus share with Ghazi Miyan—is just a variant of the epithet "the Radiant or the Resplendent" that permanently characterizes their mother Fatima (al-Zahra), the daughter of the Prophet himself. Ghazi Miyan provided a role model for the Indian Muslim, even quite independently of the politico-religious notations that pit him against the infidels. This is confirmed by the all-night narration of his legend—against the backdrop of painted representations of his battles and martyrdom—during a normal marriage ceremony (Shurreef 1863, p. 66). Whether Shia or Sunni, the bridegroom is assimilated to the fallen warrior, even as Ghazi's martyrdom has been transformed into his wedding day.[27] In their 1809 attempt to demolish the Vishweshvar temple, the ragged "army" of Sunni weavers—who attribute the conversion of their ancestors to Ghazi Miyan—could thus invoke the names of Hasan and Husain in their Muharram-like procession to the nerve centre of the sacred city.

The warlike Muslim martyr embodies not so much an uncompromising opposition to Hindu piety but Islam's implantation of its globalizing egalitarian project into the very heart of the hierarchical *dharma* of Brahmanism. Conversely, the Hindus were able to embrace both festivals as their very own, especially at the popular level, by carnivalizing them on the riotous Holi paradigm. For the Shia, "Ashura is a day of darkness and disorder in the universe. On it, darkness, the symbol of evil and chaos, was created" (Ayoub 1978, pp. 151–152). Before its gradual reform, the Muharram used to be celebrated as a great saturnalia where socio-religious norms were parodied amidst shared laughter even by the Sunnis themselves (Shurreef 1863, pp. 123–141). The solemn ritual of the Hajj would be caricatured while sermons were proffered on the virtues of drunkenness, gambling, adultery and usury. In a typical Konkani village, Hindus and Sunnis would join each other in celebrating with alcohol generously supplied by the women (Saiyid 1981, pp. 124–125). The village idiot was dressed up as a long-tailed monkey to take the prime initiative in violating norms of sexual segregation and creating an atmosphere of general promiscuity (Saiyid 1981, pp. 132, 137). The Drunkard, who was even depicted wearing a brahmanical sacred thread made of leather, recalls the "great brahmin" clown of the Sanskrit drama, who reveals a fondness for wine and is constantly assimilated to a wanton monkey. The marriage of Ghazi Miyan was likewise characterized by the suspension of not only caste barriers, between brahmin and untouchable, but also the religious barrier between Muslims and Hindus, who constituted the majority of participants. The (inverted)

[27]See Visuvalingam and Chalier-Visuvalingam (1993:41–44), where a greater wealth of ethnographic detail is analysed to demonstrate how the syncretic Indo-Muslim Ghazi Miyan is a meaningful fusion of the cults of (Lat) Bhairon and Muharram that already shared common themes deriving from an esoteric equation of sex and death (Chalier-Visuvalingam 1994).

values invested in the secret Kaula worship of Bhairava—the god par excellence of transgressive sacrality, who still lurks behind the Islamic proselytizer—have been exteriorized and generalized onto popular religion well beyond Hinduism. The receptive Indian soil had carnivalized, here and now, the eschatological promise of Muharram and of the Abrahamic tradition as a whole.

Deep-rooted sectarian conflict was not eliminated but aestheticized into mock combat, circumscribed within space and time, thereby minimizing the ever-present risk of reverting to type, of historical grievances spilling over into ordinary civic life: "theater without footlights" (Bakhtin) but where the actors are also part spectators mirroring their counterparts.[28] Where there are no Shias in the locality with whom to re-enact the battle at Karbala, Sunnis in India even celebrated Muharram by fighting among themselves. In the predominantly Hindu rural town of Bishnupur in West Bengal, for example, the entirely Sunni Muslim minority is divided into thirteen neighbourhoods that jointly celebrated Muharram as an occasion of both gaiety and mourning. This reaffirmation of religious unity was nevertheless characterized by inter-locality competition for the Hindu Maharaja's prize for the best *tazia*: not so much divide-and-rule as uniting the already divided. These exclusively Sunni actors re-enacted Karbala with real swords and sticks resulting in injury and bleeding. A newspaper report of July 1895 could observe that "Muharram passed off without a disturbance. Firstly, there was never any fear of fighting and disturbance in Banaras; secondly, when it is Hindus who mostly celebrate this festival, what fear can there be?" (cited in Kumar 1988, p. 216). Hence, beneath the triangular politics of shifting alliances between Hindus, Sunnis and Shias in India are recognizable the tensions and interplay of the respective principles of hierarchy, egalitarianism and transgression, which continue to operate even beyond, and independently, of these traditional but once fluid religious identities. The return of the Mahdi, accompanied by the resurrection of Husain and Jesus, will be heralded by the outward manifestations of extreme promiscuity and violations of sacred norms, precisely what used to happen within a religious context in the Indian festivals of Ghazi Miyan and Muharram, for the Mahdi "will demolish whatever precedes him just as the Prophet demolished the structure of the Time of Ignorance (al-Jahiliyya—the period before Islam)" (Momen 1985, pp. 169). While, on the one hand, the conservative streak of Wahhabi iconoclasm already inherent in Islam would reduce the Kaaba stone to a mere unifying symbol, the radical Shiism of the Carmathians, on the other hand, had already sought in 930 C.E. to eliminate the symbol altogether and thereby render the Meccan pilgrimage itself wholly superfluous (Jambet 1990, pp. 18–23).

[28]Among Hindus during the "Shudra festival" of Holi, pent up aggressivity by the marginalized against those in authority and power, including by women who ganged up against their menfolk, was endured by tradition. Generalizing the (mock) violence of all-against-all served to diffuse its hold and impact and to minimize group conflict along inherited dichotomies. This is the atmosphere in which ritualized Shia-Sunni conflict took place.

6.5 From I-Thou to We-They: Modernity Aggravates the Religious Divide

> The kotwal, in particular, functioned as a hinge figure in the political order. Responsible to the Mughal Emperor for maintaining order and providing important information on the urban development of Banaras, he also had to command the confidence of all communities resident in the city in order to prevail on them to pledge "reciprocal assistance and [bind] them to a common participation of weal and woe." Evidence suggests, however, that in Banaras by the turn of the nineteenth century the preexisting relationship between kotwal (as representative of the state) and communities had begun to erode…. In the developments of the riot of 1809, too, we see evidence that the kotwal had lost the confidence of Banarsis. His inability to effect compromise and consensus was viewed by all (including himself) as a measure of the erosion of his power and position. (Freitag 1989b, pp. 36–37)[29]

Islam and Hinduism are fundamentally incompatible, even diametrically opposed, at the socio-religious level: Allah's transcendent uniqueness versus polytheistic pantheon, uncompromising iconoclasm versus anthropomorphic images, ritually encoded egalitarianism versus sanctified caste hierarchy, beef-eating versus the holy cow, orientation to Mecca versus the sacred geography of Mother India, triumphant history of the universalizing brotherhood (*umma*) versus the timeless mythology of the eternal return. The recognition of separate destinies has since resulted in Partition with the antagonistic nation of Pakistan midwifed by the otherwise secular Jinnah. Modernity, which has made it possible to bracket aside religious identities to interact amicably and productively in the secularized public sphere, has at the same time short circuited the gradual process of religious acculturation. Pre-colonial Hindu-Muslim interactions were defined by an "I-Thou" relationship that could range from a harmony of minds, through dialogue with a disconcerting challenger, to a heated altercation resulting in (much worse than) blows against a hostile adversary. But (the evolution of) self-perceptions (and self-construction) were still mediated by the reflected image of Self in the eyes of the rival Other: the face-to-face reciprocity that had shaped the religious syncretism that constituted the cults of Ghazi Miyan, Muharram and Lat Bhairon. When the colonial power and its secular administration usurped the place of the insistent interlocutor ("Thou") for both Muslims and Hindus, each was relegated to "They" in the eyes of the other, someone no longer worthy of talking to but only about—the "brokering" between the two faiths increasingly became the prerogative of an alien (-nated) intelligence, with its own agenda, that did not share their traditional

[29]As divinized policeman-judge for the Hindu king, Bhairava encapsulated a sacrificial understanding and application of law and order, transgressive violence, and human salvation, a sanctified role that his towering statue at Darbar Square continued to play in Nepal until quite recently. Even after his mundane functions were usurped, first by the Muslim kotwal and then by the British district magistrate, the underlying dynamics of the scapegoat seem to have determined not only these 1809 riots but the tragic history of communal violence in India.

self-perceptions. Increasing Hindu-Muslim polarization is largely the product of a modern mentality that drags the deadweight of both traditions into its reductionist wake.

Self-standing cosmogonic pillars and temple flag posts were appropriated by encroaching Islam and transformed into de-sacralized victory monuments. So extensive and systematic was this appropriation that Muslims often no longer recognized their Hindu provenance. Not only did Islamic iconoclasm in the form of "Aurangzeb" leave the aniconic "Ashokan" pillar standing before the *idgah* when it tore down the surrounding pantheon of Hindu idols. The Muslims' own post-riot memorial which was "signed by 724 persons, 105 of whom were accounted individuals of note" went further to claim that this pillar of the world was in fact

> … the structure of Feroze Shah, like the pillar [Lat] at Allahabad, Delhi and other places, and which the [Hindus] state to have been erected by their own forefathers. But, be that as it may, it was not an object of their worship entitled to any great veneration like the temples of [Vishveshwar] and [Bhairon Nath]; for no account of this pillar is to be found in any of their orthodox books. The style of worship of the Hindus is this, wherever they find set up (a pillar) they call it, at the incitement of their priests, a place of their worship, and after sometime has elapsed they consider it as a place of worship of the highest sanctity. (Robinson 1877, p. 119)[30]

The same source notes that "for some years the lower classes of [Hindus] and [Muslims] have annually celebrated the marriage of the [Lat], and have divided the offerings between them" (Robinson 1877, pp. 113–114). The latter fact was still reluctantly admitted by the legal custodians of the *idgah* when we interviewed them in 1979 with John Irwin. The low-caste Muslims were primarily from the illiterate weaver (*Julaha*) community still living in Alaipura (which includes Adampura and Jaitpura wards) and who generally congregate at this *idgah* instead of at the Gyanvapi mosque unlike their caste fellows living in Madanpura. Such syncretizing popular cults still reflected an I–Thou relationship, where latent animosity deriving from incompatible religious ideologies did not entirely inhibit direct social intercourse around shared even if barely understood esoteric themes.

The "Lat Bhairon riots" of 1809 have played a crucial role in colonial historiography not only because of their gravity and magnitude comparable, we are told, only to the Kanpur outbreak of 1931 but also because they are among the first to be recorded in the colonial period (Pandey 1990, p. 29). Though the history of Hindu-Muslim riots goes back into the pre-colonial period (seventeenth century Gujarat, for example), and may be legitimately understood as the continuing legacy of the Islamic conquest of North India, it is noteworthy that there had been no significant outbreak of communal violence during the previous 100 years in Banaras, which has always remained the Mecca of Hindu orthodoxy (Pandey

[30]All citations in this article from the conflicting Muslim and Hindu "memorials" and from Mr. Bird's personal record of the riots are from Robinson (1877), a photocopy of which from the India Office archives was received from John Irwin upon our first meeting in 1979 in Banaras when he arrived to study the Lat.

1990, p. 26, fn. 6). Banaras had been a "Mughalizing" city in the early eighteenth century and reflected cultural patterns that continued to be fostered by the Nawab's court at Awadh. Hence the strong ties established early in the career of the present Bhumihar dynasty—a landlord family, which had served as tax officials for the Nawab but had become virtually independent by 1750—with Muslim lower caste groups like the weavers. The triumvirate of power holders—royal clan, merchant bankers and Gosains—patronized an innovated and grandiose form of the Ram Lila, centred on the symbolic identification of the Maharaja with Lord Rama, which claimed the wholehearted participation of rival landowning and commercial groups like the Rajputs and the Marathas. Even the Muslims joined in celebrating it more as a civic festivity around the unifying figure of the king offered as an aesthetic spectacle in the public arena at Ramnagar and Nati Imli.

The British however had replaced Awadh as the national level authority in 1775 and the Resident's power at Banaras steadily increased until they finally took direct control of the city in 1784. The Bhumihars too had enriched themselves and come to power in the Banaras region precisely through British land reforms that had displaced the earlier supremacy of the Rajputs and Marathas. By 1809 the then Maharaja had suffered loss of power and face through his unsuccessful decade-long agitation to free himself from the control of the East India Company.[31] The Muslim kotwal too had lost the confidence of the Banarasis by 1803 when he acquiesced to highhanded British attempts to impose a tax for recruiting patrols of watchmen. Unlike the ostentatious participation of the Maharaja in the public arena, the British administration held aloof from community life and exercised its authority through local intermediaries, but intruding ever more profoundly into the interrelations, inherited structures, and autonomous functioning of the pre-existing communities. Though the social tensions and lines of fissure generated by these far-reaching politico-economic changes are difficult to determine precisely, the rationalizing mentality introduced by the British state had no doubt begun to have an insidious effect on the Banarasi "civic" culture that had for so long united the high and the low, both Hindus and Muslims. While praising the colonial administration, sometimes in obsequious tones, for having provided relatively impartial law and order and the overall conditions for economic prosperity for all of Banaras till now, both post-riot memorials appeal for British adjudication against "them" as others.

[31]Unlike Pandey (1990), intent on restoring agency primarily to the lowest "subaltern" castes, Freitag (1989a, b) insists on the constructive mediating role of the stripped down Maharajah between the legitimate needs of his subjects as a whole and the demands imposed from above by the colonial administration. This sometimes impossible royal dilemma is well portrayed in the grassroots cross-caste resistance against the "austerities" imposed by exorbitant colonial taxation in Ashutosh Gowarikar's fictional movie *Lagaan* (2001). The ruling political dispensations across not only the Sunni world but also the Europe Union seem more responsive these days to the writ of the American superpower, beholden to global banking, than to the worsening plight of their own citizenry.

The joint participation of Hindus and Muslims in each other's cults and festivals should moreover not obscure the intense ideological struggle, even where peaceful and mutually accommodating, between the rival religions on the symbolic level for the heart, mind and soul of India. The Hindus could not remain oblivious to the living visual testimonies of the razing of the religious architecture of their sacred city (c. 1660s) by Aurangzeb who had sought to impose an Islamic city called "Muhammadabad" upon their socio-religious centre (Freitag 1989a, b, pp. 19–52). Having now lost their political supremacy, the Muslims, on the other hand, had been willing to submit to Hindu acculturation but certainly not to the extent of surrendering the divergent world view embedded into their own ritual orthodoxy. The Muslim memorial begins by observing that for 3 years Muharram coincided with the Hindu Dashahara and for 3 years with Holi; and that trouble had been averted each time by the British authorities restraining the Hindus from celebrating Dashahara till the Muharram was over and from dancing, etc., during Holi (Robinson 1877, pp. 112–213). The licentious Hindu festival of Holi formerly involved much indiscriminate violence on the ghats and elsewhere and it is therefore not surprising that Sherring (1868, pp. 191–195; cf. Pandey 1990, pp. 34–36, 80, 129; and Freitag 1989b, p. 51) simply attributed the cause of the Lat Bhairon riots to an unfortunate coincidence of religious calendars, which brought a mob of Holi revellers into headlong collision with a mourning procession of Muharram. In this climate of accelerated social change and disequilibrium brought about by British rule, all that was needed for the resurgence of the dualistic pattern of violence along redrawn Hindu-Muslim lines was an appropriate symbol to condense within itself the axial issue that separated Islam from Hinduism.

Though the weaver community in North India reverenced the flag of Ghazi Miyan to whom they ascribed the comparatively recent conversion of their ancestors, by the early nineteenth century they were already beginning to abandon such syncretic, "un-Islamic" practices under the growing pressure of Wahhabi reformism emanating from the Arabian Peninsula. For the downtrodden castes, the stricter observation of the Islamic law and personal code (*sharia*) provided the means of reasserting their social status in the face of politico-economic domination by the upper classes, both Hindu and Muslim (*ashraf*). A parallel process of purification was also occurring among the Hindu untouchables like the Chamars who were giving up liquor, meat, (blood-) red vegetables, etc., and demanding the abolition of caste and an end to idol worship. Despite its undisputed age-old sanctity, the now "brahmanized" Lat Bhairo or Mahashmashana-Stambha ("Pillar of the Great Creation Ground") was largely neglected by the Hindu scriptures no doubt because of the stigma of death and impurity associated with it. The growing religious polarization was further reinforced by the attempts of the colonial administration to systematically classify and publicly record everything, thus leaving the Muslim weavers little choice but to shed their Hindu names and customs in order to gain an equal standing within the fraternity of Islam (Pandey 1990, pp. 83–90). Partly a reaction to the derogatory connotations of their appellation as "Julaha" by others, the weavers now call themselves "Ansari" meaning "Helpers" (of the Prophet at Medina), thus crowning the tendency of South Asian Muslims to

see themselves as immigrants with a separate "biological" ethnicity rather than as native converts (Kumar 1988, pp. 49–57; 1989. p. 153; cf. Roy 1983, pp. 19–57, 249–253). Though such developments may be understood as already internal to the growth of an "Islamic consciousness" and not necessarily the product of politico-economic rivalry with non-Muslims (Mines 1981), it is nonetheless true that they set the social preconditions for religious conflict, especially when they are reflected in a shifting attitude to shared sacred spaces and symbols. The mock "tribal" conflict that seems to have been enacted by the tug-of-war between "Kols" and "Bhils" at the fair held there on the day before the new moon of Ashwin, fourteen days after Lat Bhairon's marriage, has long since disappeared. Perhaps it was rendered quite unnecessary by the even greater sacrifice of battle for the world pillar celebrated jointly by Hindus and Muslims under the divide-and-rule British impartiality of the latest district magistrate.

6.6 Lat Bhairon, Scapegoat of Lord of the Universe: The 1809 Banaras Riots

> The reconstruction of the Banaras riots in colonialist discourse, in its successive recensions spread over a 100 years or so, amounts to the making of a narrative form of strategic importance for the analysis of Indian politics. This is a form of representation of communal riots which assumes, over time, the importance of a master narrative and acts as a sort of model for all descriptions, and hence evaluations, of communal riots in official (and, I might add, nationalist) prose. In the colonial case, this communal riot narrative […] is simultaneously and necessarily a statement on the Indian 'past'. (Pandey 1990, p. 32)

> Notice that scarcely a word is altered in the text: and yet the change of context completely transforms the statement. What applied to a particular city, the experience of "convulsions" in the past and the "religious antagonism" of the local Hindus and Muslims now applies to the country as a whole. Banaras becomes the essence of India, the history of Banaras the history of India. (Pandey 1990, p. 28)[32]

Robinson (1877) has given a very detailed report using the memorials written by the Hindus, Muslims and the British shortly after the Lat Bhairon riots, so-called because the pillar was the destructive focus of the three-day carnage between Hindus and Muslims.[33] In 1809, the conflagration was sparked off by a

[33]The only objection posed by Gyan Pandey, who attended my original talk at University of Chicago on which this paper is based, was to doubt the numbers involved and killed during these riots that he suspected were British attempts to sensationalize the Hindu-Muslim conflict. It turned out subsequently that he was unaware of Robinson's article at the India Office archives in London that John Irwin had passed on to us. I provided Pandey a photocopy of the same when he visited us shortly thereafter in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[32]Whereas Pandey's irony indicts colonial and nationalist historians for essentializing and thus perpetuating this repetitive narrative of Hindu-Muslim conflict, our account aims instead to reveal that the underlying violence that erupts so spectacularly and cumulatively—now between Sunnis and Shias across the Middle East or between Hindu castes and ethnicities—has a logic of its own that contemporary (Western-derived) "humanism" is incapable of recognizing, let alone resolving. In this regard, these 1809 Lat Bhairo riots are indeed paradigmatic.

trivial incident: in fulfilment of a vow upon his recovery from illness, a Hindu of the Nagar caste would have tried to replace the mud dwelling of Hanuman on the contested ground between the *idgah* and the pillar with a stone enclosure. At first the Muslim weavers were content to appeal to the law officer (*qadi*) and agreed to let the Hindus to continue with the Bharat Milap before referring the dispute to the court immediately after the Dashahara holidays. When they were over on 20th October, they instead held a mammoth protest meeting, in the excitement of which they polluted the Lat and its surroundings by overturning Hanuman's pedestal, uprooting the adjacent *tulsi* tree and beating the pillar itself with shoes. The conjuncture of events around the Lat so faithfully reflects the overlapping disposition of Hindu-Muslim sacred space between the Vishwanath temple and the Aurangzeb mosque, that Robinson's account mistakenly locates the Muslim demonstration around this mosque within the old Vishweshwar enclosure and shifts imperceptibly to the defilement of the pillar, which is in fact quite a long way from the religious centre of the modern city (cf. Pandey 1990, pp. 37–39). By daybreak the whole Hindu community had heard of the sacrilege and a crowd began to assemble at the Lat, so much so that the acting British magistrate had to deploy two companies of sepoys (Indian soldiers in the service of the colonial administration) to protect the Muslim places of worship. Anticipating retaliation by the Hindus, the outnumbered Muslim weavers, who were at the forefront of all these manifestations, decided then to sack the temple of the king of the gods, Vishwanath himself. Had the attempt succeeded, it would have certainly resulted in the utter annihilation of the Muslim community in Benares. The Hindus led by the Rajputs, whose attempts to assemble at the Lat had been thwarted by the district magistrate and the army, fell back and regrouped to bar the route of the Muslims who were advancing with raised standards and crying "Hasan, Husain." Outnumbered and beaten back by the better armed Hindus at Gai Ghat, the seven or eight thousand weavers retreated leaving about eighty of their dead.[34] To revenge their defeat, the Muslims slaughtered a cow on one of the holiest ghats and mingled its blood with the sacred waters of the Ganga and, according to Heber (1828, pp. 429, 431), the sacred well itself was subjected to the same sacrilege.

> The attack on the [Vishweshwar] had now been made and foiled, and the [Muslim] army, returning as it happened by another route to that taken by the crowds rushing to [Vishweshwar] arrived at the Lat and found it defenceless. They at once proceeded to mischief. A cow was dragged out from a neighbouring house and killed at the foot of the

[34]Pandey (1990, p. 32) underlines, here as elsewhere, the mutual contradictions of the British reports: whereas the earlier records put the number killed at 28–29 (or 20) Muslims with 70 wounded, the *Gazetteer* (1907) claims several hundred killed; only 2 or 3 (and not 80!) Julahas were killed at Gai Ghat (p. 34). Given the "law-and-order" situation, there could have been just as much reason for British authorities to minimize as to exaggerate the extent of destruction and casualties. The Hindu and Muslim memorials are even more emphatic regarding the gravity and unprecedented nature of the 1809 riots (Freitag 1989a, pp. 210–211) than the highly impartial reports of magistrate Bird. Likewise, subsequent confusions in the British reports as to the (immediate) cause of the dispute and the site of the original Muslim demonstration make much sense in the light of the Hindu-Muslim representations as revealed in the subsequent memorials.

> pillar. Its blood was taken into every corner, till all the sacred place was splashed with it, and then the carcass was flung, with shouts of exultation, into the holy tank of Bhairo. Firewood was heaped round the Lat and lighted to destroy no doubt the metal appendages of the pillar; and finally amidst cries of triumph, the Lat itself was overthrown, shattering in its fall into many pieces! (Robinson 1877, pp. 98–99)

Having triggered off this irreversible *quid pro quo* and now exulting over their short-lived triumph, the weavers simply went into hiding in their quarters. Such was the horror of the sacrilege that the Hindus, even upon receiving the news, would not visit the defiled spot and kept milling around the area of the Vishweshwar temple. The Rajputs, who had already been incensed by the report of a Muslim butcher having killed a cow on October 9th when the Hindus were still making offerings to the manes at Kapiladhara, counterattacked only on the following day.

> But about noon…there was sudden call to arms, and as if from the earth a vast throng of armed Rajputs, some thousands strong, poured out and led by Rattan Singh and Mannear Singh, took their way to the Lat. Behind and mixed up with them were hundreds of Gosains, screaming invocations to the god, and by their cries and gestures excited the armed crowd to a frenzy of fanatical rage. At headlong speed the avengers traversed the intervening streets and soon arrived at the outraged Lat now lying in fragments and splashed with cow's blood. The mosque of [Aurangzeb] was soon in flames. Every [Muslim] found lurking within its precincts was put to the sword, and his body thrown into the blazing pile. A hog was brought in, killed at the pulpit, and its blood sprinkled over the corpses and ashes. Meanwhile the passage of the Rajputs and Gosains through the streets had filled the city with fanatical excitement, and from end to end Benares was given up to pillage and slaughter. (Robinson 1877, pp. 100)

The Rajputs had even begun to demolish the tombs around the Durgah of Fatima, the mother of the Imam Husain, and would have proceeded to do the same to the tomb of Prince Jewan Bukht, held in the highest veneration by the Muslims, had not Mr. Bird checked them in the nick of time. On re-entering the city, the latter saw that

> multitudes of armed Hindus were assembled in every quarter directing their rage chiefly against the lives and properties of the weavers and butchers. The Gosains were busy dilapidating the [Gyanvapi Mosque] and had set fire to it. Several bazaars were in flames, and the whole quarter of the Julahars was a scene of plunder and violence. (Robinson 1877, pp. 100)

However due to the "diplomacy and firmness" of the district magistrate, the rioters were eventually broken up and the city was completely in the power of the large military force by the next day, but not before some fifty mosques had been destroyed. The subsequent Muslim memorial argued:

> If in support of their religion they sought vengeance the destruction of the Imambarrah, which they had already accomplished, was complete; if their object was the effusion of blood, they would have directed their havoc and slaughter against those who had destroyed the [Lat] and not have plundered and robbed the whole body of the [Muslims] in the city who had no connection whatever in the licentiousness of the persons who aimed at its destruction. They murdered the innocent, though the [weavers] and other [Muslims], after witnessing the injury to the Imambarrah, with the exception of the

> destruction of the [Lat] (which was in fact not an object of Hindu worship, and at all events be it what it might it was common to both parties[35]) did not extend the hand of rapine to their impure property. The murderous excesses therefore which were committed by the Hindus can be attributed only to a lust for robbery and plunder: some of the Hindus also took that opportunity of gratifying their private resentment and killed and wounded each other.[36] (Robinson 1877, p. 117)

The available details on the evolution of the riots rather suggest a cathartic eruption of self-consuming violence that exploited every possible fissure in the social fabric before falling back to more normal modes of self-regulation. It was perhaps inevitable that the Lat of the "sin-eating" Bhairava, who had always been the scapegoat of Vishwanath, was defiled and dismembered by the Muslims in the name of their own Lord of the Universe. And the irony of divine justice demanded that the Hindus should proceed to desecrate and destroy the royal Jama Masjid that had once housed their own Vishweshwar. After all, the Lord of the Universe was ultimately identical with the scapegoat Bhairava on whom he displaced his own ritual impurity, so necessary to the sacrificial process of death and rebirth.

> The [Muslims] concerned were of the lowest order, butchers and weavers. Among the Hindus were many of rank and influence. The Rajputs to a man, great and small, mixed eagerly in the mêlée and were prominent in it…. On neither side were there men of the very highest position; the Raja of Benares and the family of Mirza Jewan Bukht were alike thanked by Government for withholding their countenance to the rioters. As regards the religious classes, it is noteworthy that the higher Brahmins took no part in the riot. They expressed throughout a dignified and seemly grief and listened to reason when the magistrate asked their assistance to quell the excitement. It was a Brahmin who saved from death the [already severely wounded] child of the murdered Mutwali of the mosque [by voluntarily interposing his own inviolable body before the Gosain aggressor, a fact acknowledged by the Muslims and for which he was rewarded by the British].[37] The lower religious classes of the Gosains, however, behaved throughout with obstinate fanaticism, headed the mob in their atrocities, murdered, robbed and burned with their own hands, and opposed from first to last the restoration of order. (Robinson 1877, p. 93)

Much later in the 1920s and 30s, Hindu and Muslim landlords (*zamindar*) could still make common cause, for primarily socio-economic reasons, against lower castes like the Ahirs who were trying to improve their caste status by campaigning

[35]The strongly caste-conscious weavers, who could venerate Lat Bhairon due to the shared symbolic paradigm that also encompassed Ghazi Miyan, were also emulating their still Hindu neighbours. They would rather destroy the sacred pillar, whose annual marriage they had been jointly celebrating, rather than allow the infidels to appropriate it completely (see note 5 on Girard's mimetic rivalry).

[36]Regardless of their ritualized dualism, the obligatory conflict during the Bhairava festivals in Nepal allowed for such violent settling of private intra-party grievances with no recourse to subsequent redress. We see here again that violence once unleashed, by whatever cause and between whichever parties, has a mind of its own.

[37]See notes 23 and 22 on the brahmin as role model and mediator, the full significance of which becomes more apparent in the 1811 nonviolent city-wide anti-House Tax protest against the colonial administration.

for cow protection and claiming the right to wear the sacred thread (Pandey 1990, pp. 155–157). The Hindu-Muslim conflict over the Lat thus seems to reflect, at least in part, the social tension between the low castes of Muslim weavers and butchers, who initiated the agitation, and the higher Hindu castes grouped around the "aristocratic" Rajputs. The "10 sects of Gosains" became involved only at the second stage, whereas the relatively "secular" Rajputs, who had once been the real mainstay of the Moghul army and provided some of its best generals, opposed the weavers' action from the start. With the advent of British administration, the Rajputs, who had been the main landed group from the 16th to the 18th centuries, had lost their traditional dominance in the region to the triumvirate constituted by the Bhumihar dynasty, the merchant bankers and the Gosains (Cohn 1987, pp. 320–342; also Cohn 1964). The District Magistrate, Mr. Bird, notes that

> On the 21st of October, the Gosains in general took no active part in the disputes at [Kapalamochana] between the Julahars and the [Rajputs]. The [Vishweshwar] was threatened with attack, the Lat Bhairo was absolutely destroyed, without a single effort on their part to prevent it; on that day the [Rajputs] presented the only obstacle to the excesses of the Julahars, but on Sunday, the 22nd, when a scheme had been concerted to retaliate on the [Muslims] at large, for the injuries done to the religion of the Hindus the Gosains were foremost in the work of vengeance. (Cited by Robinson 1877, p. 102)

Under these appalling conditions, it was only natural that Islam, particularly the Shia martyrs and the Indianized Ghazi Miyan, should provide the revolutionary banner for revolting against an enveloping Hindu order, which had acquiesced to the powers of the repressive state. The communal violence of 1849 at Shahabad, for example, was ignited when, precisely during the ritual procession (of *tazias*) on the tenth of Muharram, impoverished Pathan debtors stopped before the house of their moneylender, "the most respectable Hindu merchant in the district," in order to plunder his property and to build from the loosened bricks a miniature mosque on his very threshold (Pandey 1990, pp. 69–82).

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, however, witnessed a sharp increase in the demand for the weavers' goods and skills and those of Banaras, in particular, were perhaps less affected by the subsequent socio-economic upheavals (Pandey 1990, pp. 72, 75). More important than the loss of income for the fiercely independent Julahas was the preservation of an occupational lifestyle where weaving and worship, workshop and mosque, were wholly and deliberately identified. The period (of transition?) immediately preceding the riots may have rather seen the reformist (Wahhabi) wave of Islamic self-consciousness temporarily coincide with a heightened self-confidence and assertiveness conferred by recent economic prosperity (cf. Pandey 1990, pp. 96–107). Their very readiness to resist the encroachment of Hindu idolatry upon their *idgah* by defiling the Lat suggests that in the first place their own pillar never had for them the same sanctity that it had for the Hindus. Whatever be the nature and composition of the hidden tensions which led to the initial desecration of the Lat, it was sparked off by a religious dispute and the resulting conflagration engulfed the whole city and polarized the population along the Hindu-Muslim divide. Hinduism and Islam, after all, embody

and consecrate wholly incompatible social ideologies, the one hierarchic and the other egalitarian. The Hindu "memorial" of grievances presented to the British authorities after the riots was in the name of

> … we, all the Brahmins, [Kshatriyas 'aristocrats'], and persons of [Vaishya 'merchant/peasant'] and [Shudra 'laboring'] castes…. We, every sect of the Hindu persuasion, have emigrated from all parts of the country to this place, for our religion tells us that [Kashi-ji] (Benares) is a spot eminent beyond all others for its religious purity and a place of worship and adoration. It is here that according to the [Vedas, Puranas,] and Shastras, the gods have always fixed their residence. (Robinson 1877, p. 106)

It was believed by the Hindus and Muslims alike that the Lat was and still is slowly sinking into the ground so that, when its top became level with the ground, not only would the Hindu caste hierarchy collapse but "all nations would be of one caste. The throwing down, therefore, of this pillar was regarded as most ominous and dangerous to Hinduism." Rev. Buyers also recorded a conversation between two brahmin soldiers guarding the prostrate pillar at the height of the riots:

> "Ah," said one, "we have seen what *we* never thought to see: Siva's Lat has its head level with the ground. We shall all be of one caste shortly. What will be our religion then?" "I suppose the Christian," answered the other; "for, after all that has passed, I am sure we shall never become [Muslims]". (Sherring 1868, pp. 192–193; cf. Heber 1828, pp. 430–431)

By the law, as then existing, the sentences passed on the offenders should have depended on the *fatwa* of the Muslim law officers, who would however have been obliged to release the Hindu prisoners in order to avoid meting the same punishment to the Muslim detainees. The acting British magistrate, Mr. Bird, hence protested,

> although common sense and natural justice must view the excesses of both parties as equal offences against the public peace, the authority of Government and the welfare of the society, still the fundamental principles of the [Muslim] law are diametrically at variance with such a sentiment. That law resting on the assumption of the excessive sanctity of the [Muslim] religion and the heresy of all other modes of belief, will consider the slightest insult offered by a Hindu to a place of [Muslim] worship as heinous sacrilege and profanation, while in the greatest outrages committed against any object of Hindu superstition, it will see nothing but a laudable attempt at the extirpation of idolatry. (Robinson 1877, p. 104)

That the Government eventually dispensed with the *fatwa* to have the trials conducted by a special court only serves to underline the impossibility of any fundamental reconciliation so long as polytheistic Hinduism continues to define itself in terms of a caste hierarchy which must necessarily exclude or demote the impure Muslim, and so long as monotheistic Islam continues to define itself in terms of an uncompromising iconoclasm which it must necessarily impose on all infidels. The Muslim memorial ends with an appeal:

> the spots within the precincts of [mosques] which the [Hindus], contrary to fact pretend to call their places of worship, such as…the [Lat] ([Kal Bhairon Kula-Stambha] of [Feroz] Shah; and, which from the avarice of the ignorant [Mutwali] of the faithful they have for some time frequented for the purpose of [worship], be prohibited to them, in order that a

> stop may be put to the dissensions which must constantly arise from participation of the [Hindus]. (Robinson 1877, p. 119)

The Hindu memorial makes counterclaims on the sacred sites of the city and remonstrates that

> if the [Muslims] enjoy strength and power for war and combat, let them look to the [Kaaba] and [Karbala] the true places of their worship. It is but lately, as all the world knows, that a sect of their own, the [Wahhabis] attacked the [Kaaba], made a general massacre of their holy city, rooted up the tombs and monuments of their prophets and their imams, and plundering property by crores, carried it off as spoil…. Let them go there and wage war with the destroyer of their race, let them seek retribution for the blood of their own tribe, and in support of their faith kill the enemies and murderers of their brethren and be killed themselves. The fame of their attachment to their faith will thus spread throughout the world, and they may restore their dilapidated tombs and Imambarrahs. By their constant dissensions with us poor creatures, they vainly injure their own hopes in the next world, and only harass us. (Robinson 1877, p. 111)

The Hindu memorial adds for good measure that "the violence sustained at the hands of these short-sighted [Muslims] was not once practised under the administration of the [Muslim] Emperor. It has occurred under the Government of the English Company renowned for its active goodness" (Robinson 1877, p. 111). The *idgah* here had no particular sanctity but was esteemed by the Muslims only because it marked the former ascendancy of Islam over the religion of the Hindus, whereas the Kapalamochana tank and (what was left of) the Lat was of the highest sanctity to the Hindus. The district magistrate (now Mr. Watson) hence proposed to hand over the whole site to the Hindus as part of an overall policy of separating the two communities to prevent future clashes even at the price of totally excluding one or the other at disputed sites like Vishweshwar. However, Mr. Bird opined that both Hindus and Muslims had suffered so severely that neither would molest the other.

> Government adopted his counsels and no alteration whatever was made to the original position of the parties. Permission was given to both alike to repair damages, and according to their respective religious customs each purified their violated altars. The Hindus held high ceremonies, and with prayers and Ganges' water the fragments of the Lat were restored to their original sanctity and reverently buried (Robinson 1877, p. 106). But it was not until June 1810, when the Hindus reconsecrated their outraged shrines and the veneration paid to the original pillar was transferred to the mutilated relic, that the first riot can be said to have actually concluded. (Robinson 1877, p. 102)

Human violence has its own logic and even the intervention of the Gosains, which signalled the disastrous "sacralization" of the conflict, was perhaps not a complete derailment of the archaic dualistic pattern around the raising and the felling of the Bisket *linga*. The brahmins and higher castes had been fasting on the ghats since the evening of the 20th to mourn and protest the sacrileges at the shrines particularly the Lat and the Ganga, which meant that liberation was no longer possible in the desecrated city. When they were finally persuaded by the district magistrate to disperse on the 23rd, the Gosains and other rioters, who had been too busy slaughtering and pillaging to participate in the fast, now took their

place on the ghats on the 24th morning. Bird observed that "they collected not like the Brahmins on the 23rd from religious principle, but for the purpose of obtaining concessions" which they could now extort through "the danger to be apprehended from their influence and example" at a time when the public authority naturally looked to the community leaders for support (Robinson 1877, p. 103). Having run its quasi-apocalyptic course along the Hindu-Muslim communal divide, the indiscriminate violence thus began to cut across religious barriers and assume political overtones increasingly directed against socio-economic injustices. The police had earlier

> divided themselves into two parties, Hindu and [Muslim], and wherever they were stationed sided with their co-religionists against each other instead of combining to preserve the peace against all comers…. The Kotwal himself was a [Muslim], and for his supposed complicity with his co-religionists went in danger of his life till he resigned his post. The soldiers [perhaps half of whom were brahmins; Heber 1828, p. 429], however, maintained throughout the utmost discipline, and, whether Hindu or [Muslim], remained true to their trust of guarding the places of worship of either denomination, acting as effectively against their co-religionists as against other disturbers of the peace. (Robinson 1877, p. 103)

But even as "the original disturbances marked only by shocking religious outrages had subsided in June 1810," a singular feud erupted between the military, the chief indigenous instrument of British domination and aggrandizement, and the agents of law enforcement, namely the police: "The sepoys carried on a guerilla warfare in the streets of the city against the police, and in either body Hindus and [Muslims] were indiscriminately mingled" (Robinson 1877, p. 103). The sepoys had not only persistently defied a magisterial order against the carrying of arms in Banaras but also ridiculed the police for their earlier role, which thus lead to a long succession of affrays in August and September 1810 (Pandey 1990, p. 40). Already during the Lat Bhairo riots, for about 20 days in October and November 1809, the sepoys were not allowed time off to bathe, dress, or prepare their food, so as "to *prevent them* as much as possible *from communicating with the people.* For this purpose they were provided with [local sweetmeats] that they might be at all times within the control and observation of their officers" (Pandey 1990, pp. 48–49). When a reinforcement of British troops arrived on November 21, the authorities withdrew a good many sepoys from the city but still retained, for the same reason, the entire contingent of European officers. The British civil and military officials were concerned that, like the Hindu and Muslim police, the Indian sepoys could also become infected by the contagious popular violence, which could have easily sought a fresh and perhaps more legitimate target, namely their own intrusive alterations of the existing socio-religious order. What transpired in 1811, in almost seamless continuity, was a well-coordinated uprising by the whole city—comprising both Hindus and Muslims—against the colonial administration but now in a resolutely nonviolent "Gandhian" mode.

6.7 Felling of the World Pillar: Islamic Fulfilment of Vedic Cosmogony?

> These are the laws and the rules which you must carefully observe in the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, is giving to you to possess, as long as you live on earth. You must destroy all the sites at which the nations you are to dispossess worshipped their gods, whether on lofty mountains and on hills or under any luxuriant tree. Tear down their altars, smash their pillars, put their sacred posts to the fire, and cut down the image of their gods, obliterating their name from that site. (Deuteronomy 12, pp. 1–3)[38]

The violent conversion of Hindu temples into mosques was simply an extension of the original strategy of transforming (the idolatrous Arab pilgrimage cult around) the pagan Kaaba into the unifying sacrificial symbol of a triumphant and uncompromising monotheism (Peters 1990a, p. 233; 1990c, pp. 64–67). When the pre-Islamic tribes of the Quraysh were forming alliances for battle simply over the privilege of lifting the black stone into place in order to complete their joint renovation of the Kaaba, it was the (future) Prophet who ordained that all the tribes should equally participate by taking hold of the ends of a cloak to lift it into position so that he could establish it with his own hands (ibid, p. 191). Even then some of the first Muslims, as exemplified by Umar, refused to worship the Kaaba and did so only on the Prophet's insistence and example, and with full knowledge that they were kissing a mere stone (op. cit., vol. 3, p. 120). Because the polytheistic pantheon of Egypt had served to consecrate a socio-economic hierarchy with the oppressive god-king (pharaoh) at its exalted centre, the egalitarian ideal imposed upon the freed slaves was encoded into the Mosaic prohibition on idolatry. What distinguishes uncompromising Islamic iconoclasm from that of the (prior) "chosen people" was its triumphant plebian expansion across diverse ethnicities already long exposed to Jewish and Christian monotheism.[39]

Arabic inscriptions on the new entrance porch (Alai Darwaza) built by Alauddin Khilji to the mosque of the Qutb Minar at Delhi liken the latter to a second Kaaba (Baitu'l mamur).[40] Another Hindu *nagari* inscription on the right hand jamb of the main entrance door calls the Minar by the Hindu term for "pillar" (*stambha*). Qutb-ud-din Aibak laid the foundation of this "pillar of light" (from

[38]Peters (1990c, p. 50ff). Such biblical passages are currently used to legitimize a narrow territorial understanding of "Greater Israel" and the forcible Zionist (re-) settling and (dis-) possession of Palestine.

[39]Graham (1983) focuses on the fundamental opposition between pervasive ritualism and "reformationist" iconoclasm in Islamic orthopraxy without attempting to resolve this apparent contradiction in terms of an inherent "project" presiding over the "final" revelation. I have outlined a dialectical understanding of the thin vacillating line separating (commemorative or decorative) symbolism from idolatry in the Abrahamic tradition rather in terms of the unifying egalitarian ideal encoded into the monotheistic iconoclasm.

[40]The following observations are culled from John Irwin's various papers on Islam and the Cosmic Pillar.

qutb and *manara*) in 1192 "both as tower of victory to celebrate the defeat of the Rajputs in battle, and as a minaret for the priest's call-to-prayer at the adjoining Victory Mosque (*Quwwatu-l-Islam*), built on the site of a Hindu temple dedicated to Vishnu" (Irwin 1987, p. 136). Though the mosque was dedicated in 1199 A.D., the Qutb was completed only after his death in 1211 A.D. by his successor Iltutmish. Alauddin Khilji (1296–1316) had started building a second and even larger Minar at the mosque but it was never completed beyond the basement storey. Before the Islamic Qutb, stands the equally famous fourth century Iron Pillar, which had stood on a mound facing a Vishnu temple. Fifteen years after Feroz Shah Tughluq ascended the throne in 1351 A.D., the Qutb was severely damaged by lightning and the Sultan repaired it by increasing its height and adding a new cupola, which also fell to the ground after the earthquake of 1803. By the end of his reign in 1388, he had pillar shafts brought to Delhi from Topra in the Ambala district of present-day Haryana and from Mirath in Uttar Pradesh; a third pillar bearing Ashokan inscriptions had been re-erected within the compound of his mosque at Hissar, 150 miles to the west of Delhi. The Topra pillar was erected immediately before his royal Jami Masjid in the fort at his capital, corresponding to the location of the "flag-pole" (*dhvaja stambha*) in the compound of the Hindu temple.

Feroz Shah was a patron of the cult of Ghazi Miyan and had made the pilgrimage in 1378 to Bahraich where he had his hair cut (Schwerin 1981, pp. 148–49). His Hindu mother and his awareness of the cosmogonic significance of the Indian pillar-cult notwithstanding, the iconoclastic Sultan would have had sound Islamic justification for (re-) erecting an even Ashokan pillar at the *idgah* at Banaras, so long as the monument was not treated as a divinity in itself. Akbar himself was keenly interested in the Allahabad (pre-) Ashokan pillar, which he enclosed within his own fort, and unsuccessfully attempted to transport an ancient pillar to his capital at Fatehpur Sikri before he eventually had his pillar throne (*diwani-khas*) constructed there in stone (Irwin 1986). In some of the Shiite traditions, moreover, "the link between God and the Imams is visualized as being a pillar of light descending from heaven upon the Imam," which only serves to identify his station even further with the "axis mundi" or "pole" (*qutb*), the Perfect Man (*al-Insan al-Kamil*) of (Sunnite) Sufism (Momen 1985, pp. 208–209). The inevitability of the socio-religious confrontation hence did not preclude—from the very beginning—a certain complicity between Hinduism and Islam in the symbolic interpretation of the violence to which the Lat had been subjected.

After all, the Muslim lower castes had connived at the Hindu worship of the world pillar, participated in celebrating its marriage, and even claimed it as their own, so much so that the Banaras myths of Ghazi Miyan reflect as profound an understanding of its function as the Hindu theologem of the "punishment of Bhairava" (*bhairavi-yatana*). For the Hindu mythico-history, on the other hand, the levelling of the Lat was as inevitable as the Kali Yuga, which would be redeemed only by a "barbarian" (*mleccha*) messiah (Kalki), a role readily fulfilled for certain Indian (especially Bengali and Gujarati) Muslim innovators by the Prophet Muhammad. More than just the tendency of Sunnis and Shias to close

ranks within a single community (*umma*), the Indian cult of Ghazi Miyan represents the symbolic implantation of this egalitarian Islamic ideal within the heart of (not only popular) Hinduism.

When following the example of Sikandar Lodi and Aurangzeb, the Wahhabi theologian Sayyid Mahmud Hasan proscribed the customary practice of prostration after taking control of the shrine at Bahraich in 1942, he was successfully challenged in court by the leading *ulema* of the time, including Baba Khalil Das of Banaras. Litigation was pending in 1989 for restoration of a more representative committee but the shrine continued to be managed by reformist administrators appointed by the UP Waqf Board, which was however denied any authority to interfere with the *dargah* practices (Mahmood 1989, pp. 39–40). In the months prior to the Hindu-Muslim riots of 1931, the same Vedic scholar cum devotee of Ghazi Miyan, Khalil Das Chaturvedi, had been leading the Tanzim movement in a vigorous campaign for social and religious reform among the Muslims of Banaras (Freitag 1989a, b, pp. 226–227). Though interrupting this process of syncretic assimilation at the folk level, even the spread of the iconoclastic Wahhabi ethos, which cannot be judged in terms of the mere numbers of its adherents (cf. Kumar 1989, pp. 162–163 for Banaras) nor be reduced to its Arabian trappings, thus tends in its own way to transform the Indianized symbol into a universal social reality (cf. Roy 1983, pp. 249–253).

The chaotic birth pangs of a new order based on the abolition of the caste segregation were already being jointly rehearsed by both Hindus and Muslims during the festivals of Ghazi Miyan and Muharram all over India, and by the Hindus themselves in their own festivals both before and after the arrival of the Muslims. The carnivalesque spring festival of Holi could easily be (re-) interpreted as an exteriorization of the (temporary but) necessary abolition of caste distinctions within closed Tantric circles, as in the esoteric Kaula cults of Bhairava, whose leading theoreticians were all brahmins like Abhinavagupta.[41] From the Hindu perspective, the Muslims were merely guilty of "hastening or forcing the end." Faced with the *fait accompli* however, the Hindu memorial simply translated the event into a re-enactment of a sacrificial embryogony:

> it has been ascertained that the Lat notwithstanding all these attempts, did not fall till they sprinkled it with the blood of a cow and her young, which they got from a [garden] and dragged, tied by the neck to the spot. On this outrage the [capital] on the [Bhairon Lat] spun round and tumbled and the Lat burst and fell to the ground. They cast the cow which they had slaughtered into the tank of [Kapalamochana] which is near the Lat and completely defiled it. (Robinson, p. 109)

[41]My keynote address on 19 July 2013, complemented by Chalier-Visuvalingam's plenary talk on Rabelais and the Medieval carnival, at the "Bakhtin in India" international conference (Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar) was precisely on this topic, taking the (ritual) clown (*vidushaka*) of the classical Sanskrit theatre as mediator between the hidden ideology of transgressive sacrality and inversions of the popular carnival.

And like the fallen pole of the Indra festival, the Lat itself is said to have been thrown into the Ganga about half a mile away, whereas the physical probability is that the sandstone largely crumbled under the heat of the fire (Sherring 1868, pp. 191, 306).

The *Mricchakatika* successively assimilates the (innocent) brahmin being led to his execution to the Indra pole being carried to the cremation ground, to the sacrificial goat being led to the Vedic *yupa*, to the delivery of a calf (*gosava*), and his death to the birth of a son. Not only is this "chief person" of the sacred city (of Ujjain), whose body is imprinted all over with the extended hand in blood-red sandal paste, (falsely) accused of having murdered his beloved courtesan for her gold, but his own wife with whom she is symbolically identified prepares to throw herself into the fire just as he is being executed. However, the execution instead culminates in the (un-) expected reunion with his courtesan-wife at the stake, experienced as a rebirth from the throes of death. The untouchable Tamil folk hero Kattavarayan eagerly consummates his fatal wedding with the inviolably pure Aryan daughter of the Vedic brahmins likewise at the stake (Visuvalingam 1989, pp. 438–445). The calf "unexpectedly" found within the "barren" cow, which was "to be bound or immolated after" (*anubandhya*) the sacrifice as an offering to Mitra-Varuna,[42] was identified with the immortal Vedic sacrificer himself. The (premature) extraction of the embryo (of sometimes indeterminate sex) was assimilated to a normal delivery and it was decapitated only to be ritually (re-) united (by means of the *brahman*) with the golden womb of the dead mother so as to form a single sacrificial entity. "Thus that which is superfluous (*atirikta*) becomes not superfluous," declares the *Shatapatha Brahmana*.[43] By adding the detail of the calf, the Hindu memorial has simply translated the Muslim "sacrilege" into a brahmanicide "decapitation" of Lat Bhairon himself, into the death and "matricidal" (re-) birth of the sacrificer from the womb within. The present stalemate in India between the outward socio-religious manifestations of the "primordial" and the "final" revelations is best symbolized by the stubborn stump of Lat Bhairon remaining in the middle of the level prayer ground (*idgah*). The toll on the living will however continue, at least until Muslims and Hindus willingly join hands in completely levelling not the innocent pillar but the remaining socio-economic inequalities in what may perhaps be called an Islamic fulfilment of Vedic cosmogony.

[42]The Vedic Mitra ("friend") was the beneficent face of the awe-inspiring Varuna, who ruled over the cosmic law and equilibrium (*rta*) punishing transgressors with his dreaded noose. Chalier-Visuvalingam and Visuvalingam (2004) has shown, through a sacrificial analysis of the Hindu pantheon, that the kotwal Bhairava has inherited his "underworld" role from Varuna. Likewise, the scapegoat aspect of the classical clown (*vidushaka*) is derived from the "evil-form" of Varuna as incarnated by a deformed brahmin standing mouth-deep in his native element of water.

[43]Cf. Visuvalingam (1989), pp. 435–436, 452-453. See *Shatapatha Brahmana* (4.5.2.1-18) for details on the *anubandhya* cow (Eggeling 1978). My unpublished but systematic scene-by-scene sacrificial analysis of the *Mricchakatika* is available at http://www.svabhinava.org/abhinava/SuntharMrcchakatika/index.php.

6.8 Sacrificial Violence in Abrahamic Tradition: Vedic Brain in Islamic Body?

> Whether we call it Vedantism or any-ism, the truth is that Advaitism [Non-Dualism] is the last word of religion and thought and the only position from which one can look upon all religions and sects with love. I believe it is the religion of the future enlightened humanity. The Hindus may get the credit of arriving at it earlier than other races, they being an older race than either the Hebrew or the Arab; yet practical Advaitism, which looks upon and behaves to all mankind as one's own soul, was never developed among the Hindus universally.
>
> On the other hand, my experience is that if ever any religion approached to this equality in an appreciable manner, it is Islam and Islam alone.
>
> Therefore I am firmly persuaded that without the help of practical Islam, theories of Vedantism, however fine and wonderful they may be, are entirely valueless to the vast mass of mankind. We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran. Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose that path that suits him best.
>
> For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam—Vedanta brain and Islam body—is the only hope.
>
> I see in my mind's eye the future perfect India rising out of this chaos and strife, glorious and invincible, with Vedanta brain and Islam body. […]

Swami Vivekananda, letter written 10th June, 1898 to Mohammed Sarfaraz Husain of Naini Tal.[44]

The Vedic sacrificial embryogony deliberately read into the sacrilegious felling of the cosmogonic world pillar could just as well have been (re-) written by an Islamic scholar conversant with its esoteric parallels going back to the roots of his Abrahamic faith. Ibn Ishaq's *Life of the Apostle of God* already speaks of some of the treasure of the Kaaba being stolen from a well in the middle of it. It was on the stone of the Kaaba, created at the same time as heaven and earth, that Abraham would have united with Hagar to conceive Ishmael and it was there that he would have subsequently tethered his camel when he sought to immolate him for Allah (Peters 1990a, pp. 190–191, 244–245). The Kaaba stone, which is repeatedly referred to as a "pillar" in the context of the Prophet's farewell pilgrimage in the year of his death (Peters 1990c, p. 116), is also the Muslim counterpart of the

[44]Standing at the fountainhead of Hindu revival, Indian nationalism, and interfaith dialogue, Swami Vivekananda's legacy has become the object of contestation between Hindu nationalists, Indian secularists, and globalizing Vedantists, as became so apparent during his 150th Birth Anniversary Celebrations in 2013 in Chicago. Whereas Vivekananda is here recommending the adoption by enlightened (Indian) Muslims of a non-dual (*advaita*) spiritual perspective (that is also found in Abhinavagupta and ibn Arabi), this section argues that the (scapegoat mechanisms underlying the) Vedic sacrifice could very well complement this by clarifying the problem of violence.

stone that Jacob had earlier set up as a pillar in the Hebrew "House of God" (Beth-El), to mark the site where he had seen the ladder to heaven (Peters 1990a, pp. 34–35). The Prophet was transported on the Night of Destiny from the sacred Mosque at Mecca to the "distant" (*al-aqsa*) mosque where he ascended the ladder to "which the dying man looks when death approaches" so as to receive the first revelations of the Koran (Peters 1990a, pp. 208–210, 1990b, pp. 43–45). Even otherwise, the first intimation of the Koran on Mount Hira by Archangel Gabriel to the sleeping Prophet was already likened to an experience of death (Peters 1990a, pp. 193–194). The site of the ascension (*me'raj*), which seems to be a simplified version of the ascent through the seven palaces of the Jewish Heikhalot mysticism, was subsequently identified with (the al-Aqsa mosque standing before the Dome of the Rock built over) the Stone of the Foundation on the Temple Mount of Jerusalem (ibid, pp. 208–209).[45] On this rock, where Abraham had sought to sacrifice Isaac, had once stood the Jewish Holy of the Holies, a place of symbolic sexual union as represented by the twin cherubim, which were also equated with the palm tree. The episode where Jacob is maimed by an unnamed assailant who then blesses him with the name "Israel," is itself a symbolic enactment of the animal being immolated at the altar of the Temple so as to be borne to heaven by the "ladder" of the sacrifice (Peters 1990b, p. 84). Muhammad originally chose Jerusalem as the direction of prayer and is even reported, on the authority of (the future second Caliph) Umar, as worshipping before the Kaaba such that it stood between him and Jerusalem (Peters 1990a, pp. 207, 218–219).

The originally white stone, which had become completely black due to constant fingering by menstruating women, is interpreted by the great Ibn Arabi as (the evil in) the dark luminosity of the heart. The words of Al Hallaj as reported by al-Ghazali:

> People make the pilgrimage; I am going on a (spiritual) pilgrimage to my Host; While they offer animals in sacrifice, I offer my heart and blood. Some of them walk in procession around the Temple, without their bodies, For they walk in procession in God, and He has exempted them from the Haram.

[45]A photograph of handprints stained with blood at the al-Aqsa mosque appeared in *Time Magazine* (October 29, 1990), p. 51, in the aftermath of the Temple Mount incident between the Israeli police and the Palestinians. "The Supreme Muslim Council expressly forbids anyone other than Muslims to pray on the Temple Mount. When right-wing Knesset members tested this restriction by praying outside the Dome of the Rock in January 1987, Muslim riots rocked East Jerusalem. Arab nations have voted to wage a jihad against Israel if the mosques are destroyed. This actually pleases the craziest of Christian fundamentalists and ultra-Orthodox, since they believe an all-out war, the Armageddon, must come along with the Messiah. If such a conflagration breaks out in the Middle East, it may explode over this big, unattractive, and intensely disputed rock on top of Mount Moriah" (Tierney 1989, p. 370). For the messianic expectations and the wave of prophecy sweeping through America in the wake of successive Middle East crises, see among others Steven Stark, "Apocalyptic fervor" in the *Boston Globe*, Monday, November 19, 1990, p. 13 cols. 1–2.

Hallaj's limbs were amputated before he was hoisted on the cross and finally beheaded not only for proclaiming his identity with Allah but particularly because of his affirmation that the Temple of the Kaaba itself had to be destroyed (within) as the last remaining "idol" separating the mystic from its Founder (Peters 1990c, pp. 112–122, 244–249). This axial "pillar" of the Muslim pilgrimage probably corresponds not only to the black spot that was removed from the heart of the Prophet when, as a mere child, his body was cut open and cleansed with white snow (Peters 1990a, p. 184), but also to the black kid sacrificed to the pole at the culmination of the Nepali festival of Ghazi Miyan. A syncretizing Bengali version of the prophetic genealogy assimilates this quasi-shamanistic ordeal to a purificatory punishment imposed by Allah on his exemplary Messenger for having struck an intransigent goat in anger (Roy 1983, p. 101). The camels slaughtered during the Hajj in commemoration of Abraham's sacrifice of Ishmael, the progenitor of the Arabs, are but substitutes for the pious pilgrims themselves.

For the (Twelver) Shiites, the Hidden Imam (Mahdi), who bears the same name Muhammad (ibn al-Hasan al-Askari) as the Prophet himself, disappeared in 874 A.D. into the Well of the Occultation (*Bi'ral al-Ghabya*), while imprisoned with his mother, in the cave-cellar of his house-mosque at Samarra (Momen 1985, pp. 161–171). His messianic reappearance at the end of time will happen more specifically on the anniversary of Husain's martyrdom on the tenth (Ashura) of Muharram (Peters 1990a, pp. 382–385), the first month of the Arab calendar, whose choice as a Muslim festival was originally modelled on the Yom Kippur, which likewise fell on the tenth day of the first month (Tishri) of the Jewish calendar (Peters 1990c, pp. 109–110; Schissel (1990). Now, the ritual of the scapegoat on Yom Kippur, which symbolically identified the High Priest as both executioner and victim, also explains the splitting of the Jewish Messiah into a martyred (Jesus) ben Joseph and a triumphant ben David. The *Zohar* (Peters 1990c, 100b) moreover assimilates these 10 days of Awe to the stages of a divine wedding consummated on Yom Kippur. The Jewish sacrifice of the Red Heifer (Numbers 19:1–10), whose ashes rendered the pure impure and vice versa, was identified by Saint Paul and even more systematically by Thomas Aquinas with (the feminized) Christ on the Cross (Peters 1990b, pp. 230–232; 1990c, p. 47).[46] The transgressive Sabbataian Jews subsequently identified her with the Kabbalistic secret of the Messiah, who had abrogated the law of the Torah. The Koran scrupulously retains this "ridiculous" Mosaic prescription in its second Surah—that of the Cow (2.67–73)—to the effect that, in order to allay mutual accusations of murder, an unyoked and unharnessed cow must be sacrificed and its pieces used to hit the corpse of the

[46]The late Hyam Maccoby, Talmudic scholar, who published a work on human sacrifice in ancient Judaism and introduced me to Patrick Tierney's work on the same in Andean religion, thought (our conversation of 28 July 1989) that its redness is particularly associated with menstrual blood. French Kabbalah scholar Charles Mopsik informed me of an esoteric Jewish tradition that would make the Red Cow the mother of the Golden Calf, whose idolatry prompted Moses to break (the original tables of) the Law.

victim. In the Jewish prototype, an untraced murder is expiated through breaking the neck of a heifer, enjoined by the judges upon the elders of the nearest Jewish city, who thereupon washed their hands over the corpse declaring "Our hands have not shed this blood, neither have our eyes seen it. Forgive, O Lord, Thy people Israel, whom Thou hast redeemed, and suffer not innocent blood to remain in the midst of Thy people Israel" (Deuteronomy 21.1–9). Even in mishnaic times the cow was symbolically assimilated to a man and, according to one source, the consent of a Bet Din of seventy-one members is necessary for the killing, which would amount to "re-inscribing" a purely criminal act into the properly sacrificial paradigm of the Red Heifer (contrast Patai 1983).

But what is the relevance of this transgressive embryogony to the larger contemporary question of human violence in an increasingly "secularized" world? The abolition of caste within the radical Tantric fraternities devoted to the cult of Bhairava was not so much the expression of an egalitarian political ideal, it was rather the direct consequence of the transgression of the otherwise binding rules of ritual purity which were also the foundation of the social hierarchy. Whereas the (triumphant) Sunni Caliph was the defender and propagator of the Islamic polity *vis-à-vis* the infidels, the (martyred) Shia Imam became the sacrificial focus of an ever-belied messianic expectation of the imminent abrogation of the religious law (*sharia*) that (provisionally) held this community (*umma*) together (Jambet 1990). The messianic liberty that inspires the Shia movement is however not so much a glorification of license—the carnivalized Indian Muharram that enjoyed massive Hindu participation—but a perfect interiorization of the maternal figure of the Imam who will simply render (the outward observance of) the law wholly superfluous. All the Imams are said to be not only martyrs on the model of Husain, but were born circumcised, with their umbilical cords already severed and even spoke from within their mother's womb (Momen 1985, p. 22)! In the final analysis, the Mahdi, who "will come with a new Cause just as Muhammad, at the beginning of Islam, summoned the people to a new Cause and with a new book and a new religious law (*sharia*), which will be a severe test for the Arabs" (Momen 1985, p. 169),[47] is no more than the "historical" hypostatization and religio-political institutionalization of the death and rebirth of the Muslim initiates from the inner womb of a Fatimid gnosis.

As the Mother-Creator figure, Fatima is "not very different from the image of Mary in Roman Catholicism, she is even referred to as 'virgin' (*batul*)" (Momen 1985, p. 236). Such "virginity" is no doubt also the primary significance of the "barrenness" of the *anubandhya* cow and the requirement that the Mosaic heifer must have never been yoked. Fatima represents the Sophia of the Shiite gnosis and would functionally correspond, in the Suhrawardian transposition, to the Avestan Spenta Armaiti (Corbin 1977, pp. 63–68). The Imams thus share the "maternal"

[47]Interestingly, one of the Shia prophecies also predicts that "death and fear will afflict the people of Baghdad and Iraq. A fire will appear in the sky and a redness will cover them" (Momen, loc. cit.).

role of the brahmin (=cow): "the Imams are the 'brides' of the Prophet. And furthermore, since Initiation is nothing but the spiritual birth of the adepts, in speaking of the 'mother of the believers' in the true sense, we should understand that the real and esoteric meaning of this word 'mother' refers to the Imams. Indeed, this spiritual birth is effected through them…." (ibid., p. 67).

Bhairava himself was absolved of his brahmanicide only when he re-emerged from the Ganga at Kapalamochana during that precise conjunction when Banaras itself, the Great Cremation Ground engulfed an all sides by the maternal Ganges, assumed its full significance as the womb of Hinduism (Chalier-Visuvalingam 1989, pp. 178–180 on the *matsyodari-yoga*). The inner violence of this traumatic rebirth—outwardly expressed through the punishment of Bhairava, the martyrdom of Husain, and even the crucifixion of Christ—implied not just a positive valorization of (initiatic) death as liberation. It would suggest that the only way of completely uprooting the innate human propensity to violence is perhaps through an intense struggle (the "greater *jihad*") culminating in a conscious inner re-enactment of the marriage of Lat Bhairava and Ghazi Miyan, a perfect interiorization that would render wholly unnecessary this endless sacrificial cycle of raising, felling and resurrecting the pillar of all humanity.

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