

History, Emotions and Hetero-Referential Representations in Inter-Group Conflict: The Example of Hindu-Muslim Relations in India*

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Drawing on interviews with Hindu and Muslim respondents on the symbols involved in Hindu-revivalism in India, the paper exemplifies how the politics of *Hindutva* impacts on the thinking of common man. *Hindutva* ideology is based on historical events that are given particular interpretations in the interest of power politics. It is shown how the popular representations of history are being reframed and interrelated to convey justification and to endow them with the emotional force for mass-action to serve as tools in populist ideologues' claims. The findings are analysed and discussed in terms of social representation theory. It is argued that representations of historical events form a narrative network that fuels cognition, emotions, and actions of followers. The frameworks existing in each of the two groups is shown to be highly interdependent in their mutual reference to the Other.

* Thanks are due to our interviewees who were courageous enough to tell us about their perceptions, experiences and fears. Respect is due to those who refused an interview on the grounds of fearing harm to themselves or to their families in an atmosphere of threat and communal unrest.

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Introduction

Historical backdrop

On August 15, 1947, the day India gained independence from imperial rule, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, summing up the feeling of a free nation, said:

“At the stroke of midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom. A moment comes which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, then an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance”. (Nehru, New Delhi, Aug 15, 1947)

In Nehru's stirring speech on the nation's *'tryst with destiny'*, however, there was no reference to the partition of the country. All over India, millions were affected by Hindu vs. Muslim riots which were incited by religious hatred and uncontrolled fury. This was the foundation and the reality of partition.

Post independence there was an attempt to forget the trauma of the partition. Independent India, following the spirit of secularism tried to introduce a controversial policy, which regarded modern industry as sacred and marginalised the role of religion in national politics. However, from the 1990's to 2004 Hindu ideologues in the pursuit of power politics once again reinstated the significance of religion. The means that were used in this ideological struggle are analysed in this paper and interpreted in terms of social representation theory.

Symbols, representations and normative power

Through the ages symbols have been used in India as elsewhere to express ideological and philosophical preoccupations in the form of myths, stories, religious tales, rituals and legends (cf. Samuel & Thompson, 1990). The topoi of these tropes have strong evocative power due to their iconic form and affective charge (cf. Fernandez, 1991).

In terms of social representation theory these tropes constitute a dynamic system of beliefs, metaphors, images and narratives, which—through discourse—surge in a process of collective symbolic coping with a new and/or threatening phenomenon. In this sense they are generative in providing symbolic solutions to problems (e.g. Schön, 1993). Once elaborated, the representations and their symbolic referent acquire near material reality in the discourse and interaction of the people sharing them. They structure and define the objects populating the local worlds and as such determine the group identity of the people (Moscovici, 2000; Wagner & Hayes, 2005).

Flourishing at the fissures of social life, that is those places where an existing symbolic system of interpretation fails in rendering the novel intelligible, emerging social representations play a role as agents of social change (Moscovici, 1988). The world and life of a group or society changes ever so slightly whenever a new representation takes over its function as an explicatory and epistemic device. In fact, it does not make sense to speak of a new representation if no such social change ensues (cf. Himmelweit, 1990).

The epistemic function of social representations draws its evidence and normative power from the collective weight and the discourses emanating from shared representations. These discourses and associated epistemics rarely develop in symmetric relationships between actors. Symmetric interaction that is not biased by power relationships is rare in tranquil democracies and even rarer under conditions of tension and political unrest. In most cases we must assume that the elaboration of meaning systems is heavily biased by asymmetric power

relationships and unequal access to mass media and other resources (Duveen, 2001; Jovchelovitch, 2001).

Politics is a case in point: wherever politicians struggle for control and political parties compete for access to the parliament and positions in administration the struggle is primarily about control of the symbolic field of the society. On one hand such representational politics (Mehan, 1996) can be in the service of emancipation and equality (Gustavsson, 2000; Philogene, 2001) but, more often than not, it is used in the service of ego and ethnocentric goals and is a fundamental characteristic of populism. Indeed, this latter case is the topic of our research.

Emotions and representations of history

Myths of origin justify and endow social and moral rules with “antiquity, reality and sanctity” (Malinowski, 1926) as do the charters and constitutions of modern nations play by these rules, albeit supposedly based on more rational grounds such as “human rights” (cf. Doise, 2001). Myths attribute sense to the historical events that led to the present way of existence of a group (Laszlo, 2003). Hence, the past always “weighs on the present” (Liu & Hilton, forthcoming) and the interpretation of the present would not work without drawing on representations of the past. This is widely acknowledged and has been shown in the transformations taking place in Central and Eastern European countries after 1989 (e.g. Laszlo & Farkas, 1997; Markovà et al., 1998), transformations related to European unification (Hilton, Erb, McDermott, & Molian, 1996), as well as after the second World War in the case of the Jews and the holocaust (e.g. Erös, 2003; Young, 1988) to name but two examples (see also Liu, 1999; Liu & Hilton, forthcoming).

In a series of studies Liu, Huang and Sibley (2004)¹ demonstrate how historical events and people, who are widely regarded as important in accounts of the past, constitute a “symbolic reserve” for political activity. In contemporary political discourse this resource is used to anchor and make events intelligible. If used tactically such symbolically enriched discourse helps politicians in forwarding their cause. Such anchoring processes and their entailments are at the core of social representations.

More often than not social representations are related to thinking in terms of images, icons and metaphors instead of being propositional (Wagner & Hayes, 2005). Accordingly, new representations tend to anchor to like images, icons and metaphors as their source domain. Sources in the domain of history can be any representation of a historical event that is shared by a significant number of people. In the course of mapping by anchoring the contents of the source play a role in creating intelligibility of the novel, but at the same time also non-structural features are mapped onto the novel as an entailment of the anchoring process just as metaphorical mapping entails the projection of side aspects (Lakoff, 1987).

In the case of history the entailments of anchoring transport the affect and emotion associated with the source event. The fears and hopes related to the event in the real or mythical past will then become associated with the new representational image and involve the bearer of the representation more than a merely cognitive understanding would have done. Emotions “are embodied thoughts, thoughts seeped with the apprehension that ‘I am involved.’” Hence, “Emotions are about the ways in which the social world is one in which *we* [emphasis by the author] are involved ... They are structured by our ways of

¹ Liu, Huang and Sibley’s paper has been presented at the same conference and simultaneously to the present paper. Both were written independently but converge on the idea behind “anchoring” and “source domains”.

understanding.” (Rosaldo, 1984, p. 143) The *sharedness* of historical representations ensures that the *distributed* and individual motivational power emanated by social emotions easily converges towards mass action. There is little doubt that for political agitation historical representations will be the prime source domain for funneling those distributed emotions in the service of political mobilisation.

Representational anchoring is always a many-sided and concatenated process in the course of which a network of mapping relationships is established. Being networks about historical events, which nearly always involve at least two opposing groups, any group’s representational network draws heavily on events that have been enacted by its adversary. In the case where events perpetrated by the adversary group are used as a resource for representational work and accounting for one’s own acts, the resulting relationship emphasises dissimilarity and at the same time carries the mark of negative affect. The structure of such adverse representational systems should be highly dependent upon the other’s. They may be called “hetero-referential” representations.

It must be noted that social scientific knowledge about inter-group conflict, inclusion, exclusion, identity, communalism, dehumanisation, nationalism related to the Hindu Muslim conflict in India (Basu et al., 1993; Butalia, 2000; Das, 1990; Jaffrelot, C., 1993; Kakar, 1996; Lal, 2003; McGuire, Reeves & Brasted, 1996; Nandy, 1995; Pandey, 2001) also, applies to the processes described in this paper. However, at present, our research focus is not on these aspects, but on the use of history and symbolic resources within a social representational framework.

Research objectives

In the light of the afore-presented theoretical understanding, the study

(a) explores the dynamics of historical accounting in politicking and mass-mobilisation taking BJP’s political agenda as an example,

(b) analyses common perceptions and reactions to symbolic representations of recent historical events used to bolster divisive politics and Hindu supremacy² and

(c) in this context the study illustrates processes of historical anchoring and accounting for action resulting in affectively laden hetero-referential representations.

Method

Interviewee sample

Twenty interviews, ten each, were carried out amongst Hindu and Muslim, semi literate, married males, aged 25 to 35 years residing in *Dharavi*, Asia’s largest slum, and a communally sensitive area located in the centre of Mumbai which is often referred to as India’s Financial Capital. In *Dharavi* religion has a significant presence as testified by the fact that it has twenty eight temples and thirty five ‘faith schools’ (*madradas*) and mosques (Justice Srikrishna, 2000; Sharma, 2000). The living quarters of both communities, Hindus and Muslims, are closely intertwined. The respondents represent a group which is most

² At the time of the study the results from the Thirteenth *Lok Sabha* (House of the People) Elections in 1999-2000 were: Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) 34%, Indian National Congress (INC) 21% parliamentary seats, Communist party of India, Marxist (CPIM) 6%; out of a total of seven nation-wide parties. BJP governed from 1999 through 2004.

targeted for communal rhetoric and are generally the major players in a riot situation. The reactions recorded may be, hence, indicative of extreme communal tensions.

Table 1
Socio-demographic profile of the respondents

Religion Muslims (M)			Religion Hindus (H)		
Interview #	Age (years)	Education level	Interview #	Age (years)	Education level
1.	25	Grade 5	11.	34	Grade 7
2.	28	Grade 7	12.	30	Grade 3
3.	26	Grade 3	13.	32	Grade 5
4.	32	Grade 8	14.	26	Grade 5
5.	26	Grade 5	15.	26	Grade 5
6.	35	Grade 5	16.	28	Grade 5
7.	34	Grade 3	17.	33	Grade 3
8.	25	Grade 5	18.	25	Grade 8
9.	30	Grade 3	19.	27	Grade 5
10.	29	Grade 5	20.	32	Grade 5

Note: The serial number shown in the first column is the respondent's reference number. M and H in parenthesis refer to the religion of the respondent. In the following, the quotes from interviewees' statements are numbered according to the respondent numbers in table 1 and marked with 'M' for Muslim and 'H' for Hindu.

Material and procedure

The interviews focussed on different aspects of symbols and representations being used to bolster communal politics. In order to gauge the effectiveness of such charged symbols use was made of visual stimuli, interspersed with associated questions.

- a) What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you see this?
- b) What do you associate it with?
- c) How would *people* react if the following picture [insert picture] was plastered all over/ used at rallies?

Besides the images of, *Jaggannath Yatra* (Figure 1), *Babri Masjid* (Figure 2), Muslims offering prayers (*namaaz*) under police protection (Figure 3), a calendar art depiction of Ram and Sita (Figure 4), the burning train (Figure 5), *Jihad* (Figure 6), *Hindutva* warlords (Figure 7), cadre members of fundamentalist *Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh* (extreme group amidst the BJP) (Figure 8) and riot victims pleading for mercy (Figure 10) inserted in the text, photographs of the, *Akshardham* Temple, *Gaurav Yatra* (Pride March), a dead riot victim, armed protection of a sacred place, a group carrying a flag in front of the Taj Mahal, and a flag with the Hindu Swastika were also used as stimuli.

In order to establish a social network, help was taken of contact persons, i.e. people familiar with the milieu, social class and religion (cf. De Araujo Günther, 1998). Given the highly sensitive nature of the research, all the interviews were conducted by the first author who is based in Mumbai. The interviews were conducted in Hindi/Hindustani (a mix of Hindi and Urdu) and lasted between 60-75 minutes. Sometimes an interview had to be abandoned because the respondent exhibited fear of the underworld or communal politics and did not want his views to be recorded. In order to ease the flow of inter-action the interviews were conducted in different local areas such as construction sites, under a tree in a playground, in the respondent's shanty, local *chai* (tea) shop etc. However since the interviewer was a Hindu woman, initially the respondents in particular the Muslims, were reticent but once a rapport had been established they became very emotionally involved.

The fieldwork was conducted in the summer of 2003. At that time the BJP was firmly entrenched, the general belief was that it would win the parliamentary elections to be held in

2004 with a thumping majority, the USA had invaded Iraq and for the first time in independent India political clout was used in Gujarat in 2002 to inflame communal riots. The situation was further given a communal charge since one of the main Muslim festivals, *Muharram* and *Holi* (a Hindu festival) were going to be celebrated on consecutive days and this had created a rather tense situation since the Muslim festival is about mourning and *Holi* is about revelry. The results are hence context specific. The sample size is undoubtedly small and a gender comparison would have enriched the understanding of the situation.

However the present research topic stands out among usual social psychological research because it was extremely topical and highly politically charged. The analysis is based on multi source information. Although primarily dependent on interviewee responses (presented in double quotes) at times to highlight a few salient points, e.g. section 3.1, alongwith personal observations and surmises, reference has been made to other documents whose source is mentioned in the text.

Interpretation of the interviews in their historical context

The resurgence of *Hindutva* and its symbolic roots

In 1990 the resurgence of *Hindutva* (in context of this paper it is defined as Hindu revivalism) started with a kaleidoscopic event symbolically represented as the Chariot March (*Rath Yatra*), which made use of source domains and symbols, derived from both mythology as well as historical events. We conjecture that this choice of symbol is certainly no coincidence. Firstly the *Somnath* temple which, since several centuries had been symbolic of the ravages by Muslim intruders on pacifist Hindus was astutely chosen as the starting point. It was plundered eight times by Muslim invaders but till today maintains a place in the *sanctum sanctorum* of Hindu identity. This we assume provoked the sense of Hindu humiliation. Secondly the *yatra* drew on the emotive strength crystallised in the *Jaggannath yatra* (Figure1).



Figure 1

The Jaggannath Yatra at Puri

The tradition comes originally from worshipping Lord *Krishna* under the name of *Jaggannath*, in the city of Puri, Orissa. There, his “image is placed in a wagon so heavy that the efforts of hundreds of devotees are required to move it, and it is dragged through deep sand to the country house of the god. The journey takes several days, and thousands of pilgrims participate” (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2002, DVD edition). It is interesting to note

that the English word juggernaut, with its connotation of a force crushing whatever is in its path, is derived from this ritual, which symbolised vanquishing and by default Hindu victory. Given its emotive roots the Chariot March, it appears, became a particularly forceful symbol pointing at the out-group, when used in the political context of *Hindutva*.

This twin play of humiliation and triumph we believe catalysed the Hindus. The BJP thereby revoked popular representations of history and mythology, interrelated them and effectively endowed the Chariot March with the emotional force for mass-action. Here metaphorical mapping was used to transport the collective affect associated with the source events. Humiliation and pride related to the events in the real (*Somnath* temple) or mythical past (*Jaggannath* yatra) were successfully associated with the new representational image – the Chariot March.

The 'yatra' was stopped en route. As events prove this added further emotional surcharge to an already evocative symbol. Hindu ideologues became martyrs and on that fateful day, based on the events which followed, we surmise, that the Chariot March assumed a religious significance; it became a symbolic representation of resurgence of *Hindutva*. The Chariot March became a tool in the repertoire of ideologues' attempt at provoking Hindu pride. This is one situation where the past was adroitly used to weigh upon the present.

Further, during the 1990's, in order to consolidate its position, the BJP along with other members of the Hindu right wing political spectrum created yet another symbolic representation, *Babri Masjid*, a symbol which had been at the centre of divisive politics being practised all through the last decade.

Symbols of violence

The controversial issue of the birthplace of Lord *Ram*, on the spot where *Babri Masjid* is located, has a long past. It started in 1855. However it assumed symbolic significance in December 1992 when following a clarion call, millions of volunteers assembled in *Ayodhya* and demolished the *Babri Masjid*. Shortly after the demolition massive riots took place all over India. Later the BJP entered the fray and made political capital of the situation. Since then there was an escalation in communal politics in contemporary India (Punyani, 2003; Varshney, 2002; Zakaria, 2002) during the course of which constitutional and high politics of secularism was temporarily suspended (Figure 2).

Following Hindu ideologues, our interviewees claimed that the Moguls destroyed thousands of Hindu temples. Therefore, when Hindus want to demolish the *Babri Masjid* to build a temple on the spot where, it is asserted, *Ram* was born, then the Hindus' doing should not be questioned. They argued that the act is justified since the Hindus are merely replacing a symbol of oppression (*Babri Masjid*) with a symbol of India's religious and cultural heritage (the *Ram* temple). The riots which took place after the demolition show that this argument was accepted by large numbers who, inflamed by rhetoric, tried to balance history through violent means if they were required.



Figure 2

Photograph of the destruction of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya by militant Hindus

Events, which have been witnessed throughout the last decade until the present, along with the respondents' views establish that *Babri Masjid*—which in reality was a dilapidated structure—is a core image around which the entire edifice of *Hindutva* was being created. Other events and documents, such as the picture of the burning train of *Godhra* (see following section), attained their status as a symbol, their meaning and their charge from their relation with *Babri Masjid*, which went far beyond their original historical significance. This emotional charge permitted the organisation of riots and communal hatred as a consequence. The core image of *Babri Masjid*—or figurative core (Moscovici, 1976)—determined each element of right wing fundamentalism, its presence, its value and its function. Connecting an event in political discourse with *Babri Masjid*, it seems, was a guarantee to attach symbolic meaning to it; and vice versa, mentioning the event, in turn appeared to objectify the symbol of *Babri Masjid* in the national identity.

The *Babri Masjid*, according to the respondents had become a symbol of collective grief amidst the Muslims and collective triumph amidst the Hindus. It retained the power to stoke divisive politics. Muslim respondents see its symbolic side and its implications clearly. They perceive it as a stimulus for their shame and anger that has, if used accordingly, the power to mobilize the members of their group into an uprising. The *Babri Masjid* theme focuses their individual feelings and emotions into a collective state of mind; “I am involved and we are involved” (Rosaldo, 1984):

“This kind of poster (of *Babri Masjid*) is put by the Muslim community on 6th December (the day the demolition took place) to evoke collective grief, sadness and anger. It will evoke high emotions, it is a spark (*chingari*)”. (6M)

“If people from the Muslim community see this *Babri Masjid* poster they will rise up, get excited, provoked... for instance see my hand, the hair is standing. I just look at this and get filled with anger. It's a shock (*dhakka*) and my heart has missed several beats”. (9M)

In political discourse *Babri Masjid* dictated terms and controlled the emotional reins. It was a ‘canonic thema’ (Abric, 1996) which was shrouded by suppressed fury.

Hindu respondents openly criticised the practice of Muslim's conducting *namaaz* (prayers) on Friday afternoons, on roads and public areas adjacent to mosques (Figure 3). The emotional baggage was anchored on various peripherals, which rested on cliches:

“Muslims have scant regard for the law of the land, they do what they want, block roads, stop traffic ... ambulances can't go, traffic jams are created but nobody stops them ... why should we let this happen?” (18H)



Figure 3

Muslims offering prayers (*namaaz*) under police protection

The Hindu respondents felt that in the name of religion Muslims were constantly crossing the line of civil society and the only way to restrict them was to be retaliatory. On further probing it became evident that at the core was the felt discrimination that Hindus were not allowed such religious leeway. There was a sense of indignant helplessness and frustration.

“When our own people let us down and do not let us fight for what is ours then what can we do? These Muslims get away with everything because they are a vote bank and we are left high and dry ... who cares for us? These people (Muslims) need to be taught a lesson ... but we are cheated in our own country” (17H)

In this *hetero referential* (discussed in detail in section 4.3) situation, Muslim respondents felt that any behavioural change brought in response to Hindu demands was a signal that they were willing to surrender their rights and accept Hindu dominance. As a result diametrically opposite reactions were observed regarding police protection being given during *namaaz* in riot sensitive areas. Muslim respondents perceived police surveillance as an infringement of religious space and this constant reminder of Hindu retaliation helped in reinforcing the symbolic significance of *Babri Masjid*, the memory of which evoked high emotions and a desire to take on a defiant stance. It was hence commonly referred to as a spark (*chingari*). In contrast the Hindu respondents regarded this as pampering of Muslims. This also kept the *Babri* symbol alive and consolidated *Hindutva*. These religion inspired perceptions thus cast their shadows on everyday situations and were mapped on to the symbol, the *masjid*, as metaphorical entailment (Lakoff, 1987).



Figure 4

A calendar art depiction of Ram and Sita.

The centrality of religion in the guise of the *Babri Masjid* controversy also came to the fore with reference to *Ram* the main godly protagonist of *Hindutva*. For instance, respondents immediately associated an icon of *Ram* and *Sita*, basically reminiscent of popular calendar art (Figure 4), at several levels with the on-going *Babri Masjid* controversy. Both, Hindu and Muslim respondents, concatenated the Hindu creation myth of Lord *Ram*'s birth with the demolition of *Babri Masjid*, though with a slightly different reference and feeling of timescale. On one hand, Hindu respondents claimed the place by its significance for a mythical past:

“*Ram*'s birth place (*janambhoomi*) cannot be claimed by the Muslims ... they have thousands of mosques, can't they give up just one, where Lord *Ram* was born? ”. (12H)

Muslims, on the other hand, resented the image of *Ram* as *symbolizing* the destruction of their mosque and the mythical past as an unfit justification:

“If a poster showing *Ram* and *Sita* (Figure 4) is put in today's environment a person's mind will go directly to *Babri Masjid*, *Ayodhya* ... and this in turn will create tension”. (9M)

Many Muslim respondents felt that discourse on *Ram* heightened communal discord. *Ram* was instantaneously associated with *Ayodhya* and was considered the root cause of the demolition. The greater sanctity given to *Ram* in comparison to *Allah* incorporated in their mosque evoked feelings of humiliation and this was considered unacceptable although such sentiments were never openly articulated. The fury was restrained but highly palpable. Thus *Ram* and *Allah* both, became hostages of communal forces.

The Muslim respondents were also puzzled by the change in character of *Ram*, whose mythical attributes were invoked to construct a contradiction between Hindu religion and the Hindu aggressors' justification for the destruction:

“*Ram* is known for being a morally right king (*Maryada Purshottam*) since when did he become the symbol of a warrior? This is very strange ... why should this happen? ”. (3M)

At times, Muslim respondents, felt threatened by this change and were apprehensive that catalysed by communal rhetoric this new representation of *Ram* may help provoke Hindu militancy which may in the long run translate into anti Muslim violence.

In contrast, for Hindu respondents the same icon triggered pride and with reference to *Ram* the immediate reaction was twofold: Muslims were terribly cursed and secularists used double standards when taking a stand on religious issues. Consequently most of the Hindu respondents disdainfully labelled the latter “psuedo secularists” which in itself is an emerging representation—yet fuzzy:

“These people (secularists) are *airy-fairy* (head in the clouds), pretentious, English (westernised), brown sahibs/memsahibs and are not at all in touch with the real India”.(11H)

“These secularists are useless people and use double standards. They side with the minorities ... Muslims, Christians but will never stand up for the justified demands of the Hindus. They are spineless eunuchs who are always trying to lick the feet of western people”. (20H)

Although the responses suggest that there was resentment towards this parliamentary group a chip on the shoulder was also visible. Some of the Hindu respondents claimed that the secularists were “glamorous”. This was resented and their arrogance irked. Conversely, Muslim respondents were unanimous in support of the secularists. A large number felt that subjugation under the British *Raj* was more acceptable than living in a Hindu dominated India. Accepting dominance of the Hindus, after having ruled them, was considered *infra dig* and symbolic of total loss of self-esteem:

“These people (secularists) give us hope otherwise we think it would have been better to live under the British than be bullied by these *Hindutva* inspired people. We ruled over them for hundreds of years. Why should we let these goons dominate and insult us?”. (10M)

Thereby *Hindutva* created a social turmoil and impacted the thinking of common man. This complex amalgam of feelings, as reflected in the interviewees’ responses, led to a situation where even a decade after the demolition, the representation of *Babri Masjid- Ram Janambhoomi* (birthplace of *Ram*) controversy, retained the potential to create communal disharmony due to its structural weight in the symbolic network of both communities.

Events that became symbols

The *Godhra* incident took place in 2002. The compartment of a train, in which voluntary workers were travelling from *Ayodhya* after laying the foundation of the *Ram* temple, was set alight by what Hindu interviewees called Muslim terrorists. Who was the perpetrator of this violence is a moot issue but what is of significance is that once again an event was converted to a powerful symbolic representation to nourish the dormant embers of *Hindutva*. The “train filled with brutalised dead bodies”, “surfeit with death” - became another evocative symbol that Hindu respondents associated with yet another source domain, the partition of India (1947) when such trains would arrive from Pakistan (Singh, 1988). It immediately brought to their mind the horrors of the partition and the brutality of the Muslims (Figure 5). Thus memories related with the event in the past, (partition of India) became associated with the new representational image (*Godhra*) and fuelled cognition and affect as reflected in the respondents’ reactions.

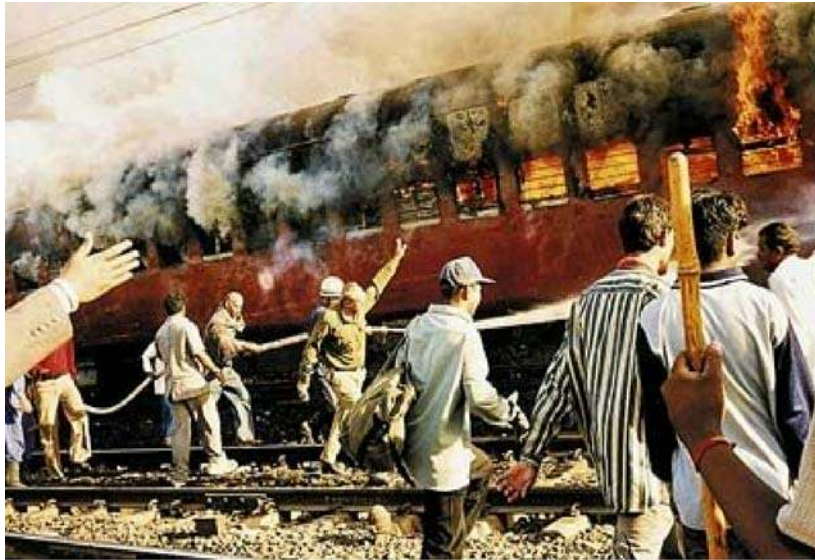


Figure 5

Photograph of the Godhra incidence where militant Muslims supposedly incinerated a train and killed many Hindu volunteers returning from construction work at the Ram temple replacing the Babri Mosque.

The representation of this train and killing event had occupied centre stage in 2002-2003. It appears that it had all the elements of powerful imagery associated with it to evoke strong reactions. The responses suggest that through *Godhra* the *Babri Masjid* controversy was stoked, killing of Hindus reminiscent of partition of India was brought upfront and deep anger aroused within the Hindu respondents; in other words, the respondents took another step towards concatenating historical and recent events:

“Trains filled with dead bodies of Hindus ... this only happened during the time of the Partition. We were not born then but have seen it in films and television. These Muslims are ruthless”. (19H)

“This will have a very strong effect. It will bring back forgotten memories and create tension...”. (17H)

After the *Godhra* incident, over two hundred thousand Muslims had been made homeless by the riots. It is, hence not surprising that the recurrent theme, which emerged in the discourse of Muslim respondents, revolved around “fear” (*khauf, dar*) and “trauma” (*dehshat, khaufzada*). According to our interviewees as a consequence the Muslim community, pushed into a corner, had begun to feel at once threatened and ready for vengeance; a confrontation had been created. Muslim respondents expressed the cross-group interdependence of representations and emotions by noting that they, the Hindus, are involved and will be affected by the events, thus creating emotions:

“Godhra is a Hindu spark (*chingari*) like Babri Masjid is for Muslims ... it will create tension”. (5M)

Sentiments such as, “will take vengeance”, “do or die”, “for how long will we tolerate?” indicate the existence of violent feelings of distrust and retaliation, which had anchored in the psyche of respondents from both communities. These were the emotionally over loaded whispers, which were gaining momentum, giving rise to xenophobia amidst the Hindu

interviewees and retaliatory behaviour amidst both group of respondents albeit for different reasons.

The afore mentioned reactions and ensuing acts, both as enacted and visualised as future behavioural patterns, establish that *Godhra* was closely linked with *Babri Masjid*. This new representation had the power to vitiate institutional politics

The, for the Hindus, victorious event at *Babri Masjid* thus remained the primary symbolic representation of *Hindutva*. Periodically, diverse elements got linked to this core and thereby helped sustain the representational aspect of the symbol. Out of this cooking pot of symbols emerged riots and violence.

Emotional and action implications of the representations

The reaction to the two primary symbols of *Hindutva*, *Babri Masjid* and *Godhra*, was highly emotive amidst the respondents of both communities as witnessed in the interview excerpts. The responses testify that the emotional appeal associated with *Babri Masjid* had survived through a decade and had also helped in the creation of a prototype of Hindu militancy in what was seen as unjustified religious rights of Muslims:

“We have to build a temple here ... Give us sticks and stones and let us resolve the issue once and for all”. (18H)

“They come to our land, break the temple and build a mosque. And now they say: listen to the Court verdict... was there a court when the temple was destroyed ... did anyone tell *Babur* (first Mogul emperor of India) to seek the advice of the courts? ... If we are not allowed to make a temple in Hindustan then should we build one in Pakistan, China?” (14H)

Undoubtedly the sense of frustration was high and all respondents felt that if provoked it would create riots and hate. Further the Hindu respondents felt that if they were not able to build a *Ram* temple then they were neutered. Male arrogance and aggression came to the fore and this found its echo when articulated in remarks such as:

“If the temple is not made ... then Hindus are not worthy enough to stay in this country ... wear bangles, wear saris, live like a woman and ask their Hindu women to marry Muslim men”. (17H)

It is interesting to see how the image of the group of Hindus as a whole was perceived as being at stake if the outgroup was not going to be held at bay. The above is the ultimate insult that Hindus can hurl on a member of their own community. A Hindu woman marrying a Muslim man is still symbolic of absolute humiliation and unacceptable even in liberal homes. This clearly shows that a high emotional pitch was attached to the politics of *Babri Masjid* and it had assumed gargantuan proportions. Such affects and emotions added the required charge to newly emerging representational images.

In such changed circumstances the Hindu respondents perceived Muslims as intruders and questioned their patriotic credentials. They felt it was time that *Hindutva* become strident and took on an offensive role.

“They (Muslims) should show us that they are for Mother India. Not support Pakistan during wars or cricket and if they find this intolerable they should just go to Pakistan ... their pure land which their community (*kaum*) created”. (11H)

In direct contrast to the upbeat mood amongst the Hindus, the Muslim respondents' space had become crowded with emotions of collective grief, humiliation and insecurity. The

Muslim interviewees pointed out that the physical humiliation experienced by Muslim men during the riots had been extremely traumatising. Their religious branding was flaunted and many times they were punished for the corporeal sign, circumcision, of their religion. Consequently their self-esteem appeared shattered.

“What does one say, we were asked to take off our trousers ... people were being killed and we had to wait our turn ... we feel scared”. (1M)

To make matters worse, in the *Godhra* riots women too were not left unscathed and through this rape Hindu male ego was brought into play (Sarkar, 2002):

“They did not even leave the women and children. Took away our homes and the police and government (*sarkar*) was with them. Where could we go? We feel trapped and scared”. (10M)

The Muslim respondents felt that in the recent past they had been subjected to extreme humiliation and such collective experiences had embittered them.

“You inflict so many atrocities and then say forget it, that's not possible. Why didn't you think then? You can't return my yesterday, my dead people”. (2M)

The highly different collective space defined by the two communities, Hindus and Muslims, testify Halbwachs' (1992) assertion that collective memory is always selective and various groups of people have different, though interdependent, collective memories that in turn give rise to different modes of behaviour. *Inter alia*, it establishes that collective memory is continually re-interpreted and not a constant.

Promotion of violence

Another symbol, which came into prominence, was the re-presentation of Muslims as religious warriors (*jihadi*) (Figure 6).



Figure 6

Poster showing a *Jihadi*

To counter the *jihadis*, a new representation of militant Hinduism was being propagated but most Hindu respondents had not heard of the term *jihad*. An image of warriors with beards (commonly associated with Muslims) and swords (Figure 6) was often perceived as a “fight sequel in a film,” “religious film where Gods are shown fighting” or “picture of the

British time”. The reactions show that the image of Muslims as *jihadis* had as yet not been collectively objectified. However those respondents who did identify it as *jihad*, were vitriolic:

“It’s a picture of olden times and a Muslim army is cutting Hindus into pieces ... this poster will have a great effect, will wake up the Hindus ... Hindus have been cut before and its happening now ... how long will this continue ... when will we finish it?”. (13H)

Amidst the Muslim interviewees the situation was unambiguous. Brought up in the spirit of religion as ideology they spontaneously associated the visual with *jihad* and perceived it as a symbol of communal passion (*kaumi jazba*) which most of them believed was justified:

“To fight for one’s religion (*mazhab*) is our duty. There is nothing wrong in doing this”. (1M)

“There is a war going on between Hindus and Muslims ... it’s a symbol of invasion and Muslims are winning”. (4M)

What is significant to note is that the Muslim victory factor, as perceived in the visual, was mentioned with apprehension accompanied with pride. Pride because it re-instated their shattered self-esteem and apprehension because the display of such emotions may provoke and create social tensions. The rise in militancy amongst the Hindus was fleetingly referred to and was then instantaneously set aside and at times ridiculed by some respondents:

“These people (Hindus) who live on vegetables and are puny how can they become warriors? We have the strength and passion to fight”. (5M)

It was felt that Islam and Muslims were being threatened and amidst the Muslim respondents the desire not to cognise this was quite palpable. It is assumed that Muslim militant arrogance, as reflected in our respondent’s articulations, was not ready to accept this change in the Hindu mind set and it was felt, though not stated by the respondents, that male pride was a significant factor in this. Attributing greater militancy to the Hindus was perceived as emasculation and was not acceptable. Thereby representational politics was brought into play to serve ethnocentric ego and goals.



Figure 7

Photograph of a BJP rally which is lead by Hindutva inspired “warlords”

According to respondents from both communities escalation in Hindu militancy had been given a clear mandate and respective representations were playing a significant role in this reconstruction of history and culture.

On the basis of the analysis it becomes evident that an attempt was being made to re-write history, reinstate Hindu pride whose ancient lineage was time and again revoked and skew the victory factor towards the Hindus. Both Hindu and Muslim respondents felt that there was a drama (*natak*) of high emotion taking place in which real life characters were totally involved. It appears that the evocative strength of these representations, jihad, Godhra and partition of India, Babri Masjid and associated dominance of Hindus helped to anchor *Hindutva*, which symbolically represented itself as the supreme saviour of the threatened Hindu *dharma* (religion).

Evidence, representations and violent action

Sharedness and evidence in discourse

One of the surprising facts in the functioning of past and present politics is the truth-value that is attributed to ideologies, myths and representations. It seems that once a representation has been adopted by a significant portion of the members of a group that evidence is recursively established in and through the very dynamics of the unfolding discourse. In a study on the dynamics of witch-hunt in Arthur Millers play 'The Crucible', the authors show how both, belief and disbelief contribute to the existence of the social fact of witchcraft, its institutionalisation in court and finally to the execution of several villagers (Wagner & Mecha, 2003).

Very similar processes seem to be at work in making *Babri Masjid* and other representations a powerful tool in the mobilisation of *Hindutva* followers. In a streak of rare openness and probably unintended insight, a document (the *Rashtriya Swayam Sewak's* newsletter)—arguing the brief for the Hindu ideologues and highlighting the significance of myth as history—states:

“The belief of millions in such matters is enough to bestow upon them the sanctity more than History can. ... The very fact that Ram is worshiped from Far East to Arabian Sea, from Himalayas to Kanyakumari, and tradition passing from father to son believes him to be a living person of a prehistoric era is proof enough that a person of that name existed and was born in a city called Ayodhya”.

This discursive evidence does not depend on verifiable historical facts. Representations are true by virtue of their being shared in a group and so are the ensuing actions and interactions objectifying it. Objectification makes the controversy familiar, imparts credibility to the entire narrative and, in a recursive move, draws additional evidence from the effects that emerge from collective action such as the defensive reactions of the victims. In the case of Hindu-Muslim conflict and rise in xenophobia, the Muslim communities resorting to fundamentalism for maybe, security in a threatening ambience, recursively justified anti feelings towards them. This is one situation which clearly shows the role of myths in the formation of identity and justificatory system of peoples.

The tendency of people to accept popular myths in lieu of historical scientific evidence or accept a mixed baggage of facts and fiction is crucial to the understanding of social change. The power of popular/popularised myths is immense and is a sign that everyday reality, thinking and discourse is a phenomenon in its own right and will exist, if not challenged by other representations. Also there is no reason for people to accept hard evidence and scientific

methodology. In situations which are emotionally charged the demarcation between myths and evidence become blurred and in their place a new representation which is socially shared and hence has inherent normative power begins to emerge. *Ram's janambhoomi* thereby became firmly established/demarcated and was ascribed a truth value the infringement of which created havoc; its defense took on the guise of a charter which needed to be adhered to despite all odds.

Just as witchcraft's working is invisible so is history's truth hidden in the past and subject to interpretation in the vaults of scientific research that is virtually inaccessible—both physically and cognitively—to the lay-person. Thus history riding on the back of new symbols and myths often becomes a handy tool in the repertoire of power politics.

Representations, stories and emotions

Once the truth of a mythical event has been discursively established, it is a handy resource for new events, akin to metaphorical mapping. In serving as anchor, the representational system has an epistemic function for the interpretation of the topical and novel (Duveen, 2002; Wagner & Hayes, 2005). The present research shows that by epistemic function we do not only understand the creation of cognitive knowledge but also the attachment of feelings and affect to symbols, memories and representations (cf. Banachs, 1996; Jodelet, 1998).

Events and their representational images, such as *Ayodha* and *Godhra* complex as well as the complex's roots in myth, be it *Ram's* creation or *Allah's* honour encapsulated in a mosque, have threefold aspects relevant to the present study: First, they are a good story to listen to for Muslims and Hindus alike, but each from a different perspective. Second, they provide a powerful framework for fostering stronger group ties and ethnic identity. Third, by linking the events to behaviours of the other group they allow to define the status of the other in mutual attempts at altercasting. The latter aspect is being dealt with in the next section.

Stories have a serial structure of events that define a beginning, a climax and an end. In the present case and for the Hindus, the beginning lies in the mythical past with *Ram's* birth and the place is being desecrated by Muslim invaders. As a climax its sacred character is being reestablished by the events in *Ayodha*, and the whole story ends in temporary defeat in *Godhra*. The emotional tone of defeat of the *Godhra* incidence is further enhanced by reference to trains "surfeit with death" taken from the history of India's partition 1947. For the Muslims the story line is near identical, with a shift in the weight of the climax: It begins in a symbolic conquest of "pagan" Hindu religion by the Moguls building a mosque in *Ayodha*, its destruction is the climax and an act of revenge as the end. Whether the image of *Jihad* as a symbol of resistance counts as the continuation of the Muslims' story is not entirely clear. It is evident that the two story lines are parallel and at the same time squarely contradictory: What is a triumphal climax for one group is a defeat for the other and the end is a humiliation for one and an ambivalent victory for the other (Figure 8).

This structure makes the series of events a useful tool in discourse where people can easily follow the logic of aggression, response and their justification. This is one of the reasons why stories and the narrative format are so frequent in human communication (Laszlo, 1997). Stories make a case for facts that are hard to refute. The justification for a single action that is not embedded in a coherent story line is much easier to oppose by argument than a series of concatenated actions that are logically following from each other. In the latter case, any potential critique is challenged in contesting many events as well as the justificatory logic underlying them (e.g. Guerin, 2003).

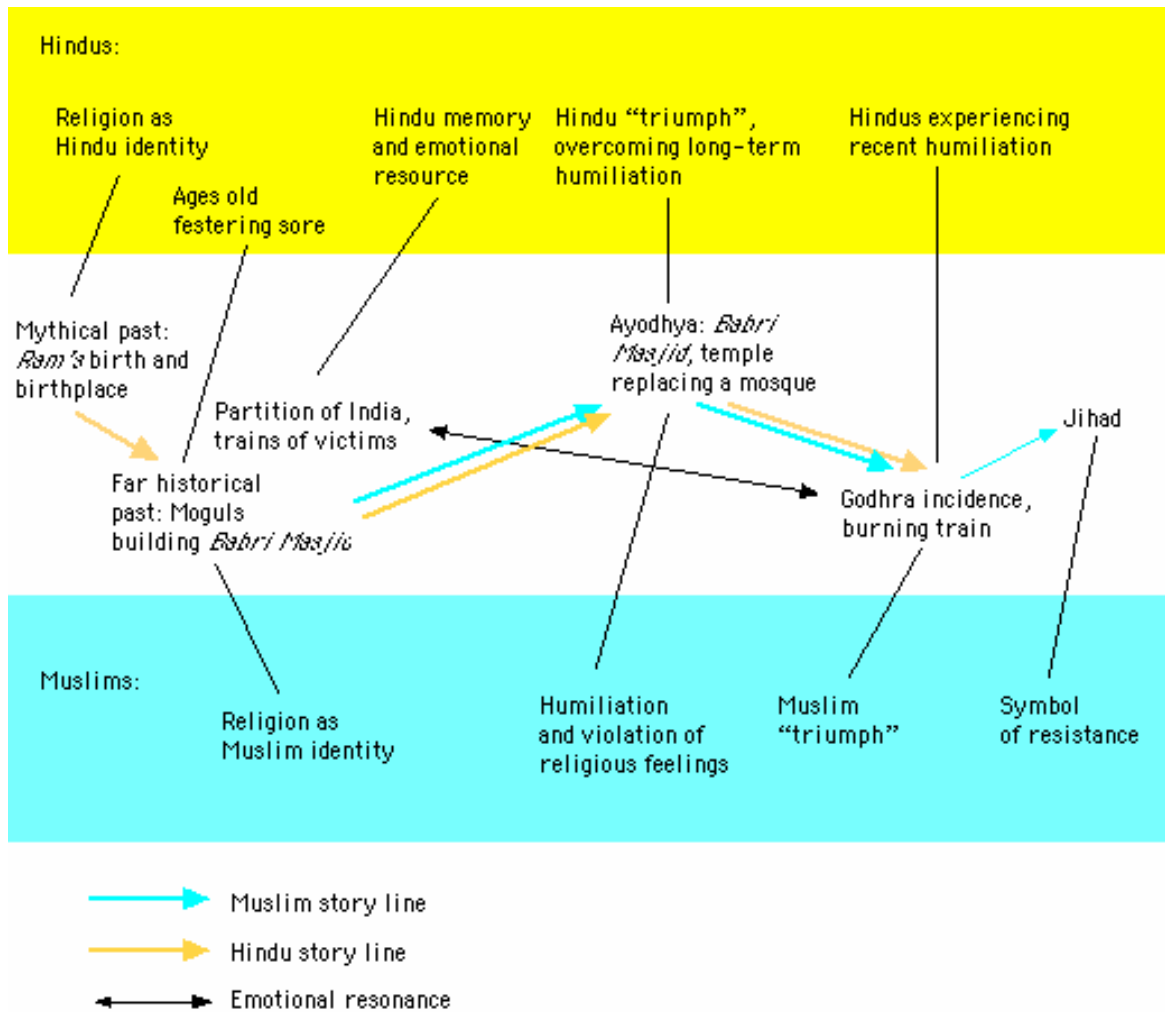


Figure 8
 Story lines and hetero-referential relationship between representations of events and associated type of involvement

Thinking and telling the stories with their respective emotional implications implies a clear juxtaposition of the involved groups. If the stories were not about another group conflicting with one's own, it would certainly be much harder to establish the feeling of involvement (Rosaldo, 1984) and the implied emotion of contempt. Stronger still than shared cognitions and representations, shared involvement in events and shared emotions weld people together and are the stuff group identities are made of. Emotions are immediate states and not reasoned about and thus escape refutation. A challenge that might put a cognitive belief in doubt will most certainly strengthen an existing emotion instead of weakening it.

Being aware of that election campaigners of BJP in 2002 played the sound of approaching trains to mobilise their electorate. Using sound in this way is a particularly efficient way of transporting the complex of emotional and cognitive content of representations (cf. Bauer, 2000). This stimulus immediately evoked the memory of the partition of India in 1947 and of the trains bringing back the victims of Muslim atrocities at this time (Singh, 1988). Another source of group specific emotional involvement.

At the same time group identities also are about claims for resources as became clear in the present interviews, even if they are such simple resources as the Hindus' street traffic

unimpeded by Muslims praying or the more serious resource of an ethnic group's women as alluded to by Hindu respondents.

In the context of populist politics, the interrelationships within the network of historical social representations are not the result of representational work and elaboration in a symmetric discourse of equals in a consensual group. Instead it is the result of representational politics that seeks to produce affective connotations and symbolic meanings by intention; and so far most effectively.

Hetero-referentiality and structural facilitation

Finally and logically implied by the foregoing analysis, story structures involving two groups define and foster one's own identity and in doing so also set up boundaries within which the other group is symbolically located and which role it is assigned in the story plot (Pratkanis, 2000; Weinstein & Deutschberger, 1963). This altercasting of the collective other is the final keystone in the architecture of *hetero-referential* representational systems.

We wish to call two systems of representations "hetero-referential" if two groups refer to the same series of events and if the shared events are represented in a "180 degree" antagonistic fashion and in the manner of a zero-sum game by each group. Each group's enjoyable experience entails the other group's loss and each group's painful experience entails the other's joy. This situation is a characteristic of historically related ethnic groups, states or nations, whose proximity and antagonistic interests inextricably links their fate inversely to the other's fate.

Usually such antagonism is fuelled by simultaneous claims for a geographic area, for resources or for ideological and religious claims of supremacy. The representational and ideological system that develops in the long historical development of such conflicts provides the collective mental harness of justification that is further elaborated by the ideologues' attempts at estranging and de-humanising the Other. In the present study the *Hindutva* politicians were just starting to include the idea of *Jihad* in the branding of the Muslim community, a clear case of altercasting. The collective representational harness is the structural precondition for atrocities to be taken as normal and their perpetrators being praised as heroes.

Hetero-referential representations are a borderline case of polemic representations (Moscovici, 1988, p. 221) and of holomorphic representations (Wagner & Hayes, 2005, p. 277f). They are polemic because they imply antagonism in interaction and access to resources. They are holomorphic because each of the two groups is not only aware of its own course of action and justification thereof, but also has some general knowledge of patterns of perception, feelings and judgement and the course of action of the other group. Without a certain degree of mutual—or, if you want, empathic—background knowledge of the others' way of story telling and symbolic resources in order to properly reconstruct and perpetuate the conflict over time (cf. Raudsepp, 2005).

Systems of widely shared justificatory representations imply the structural and behavioural logic investigated in the Stanford Prison Experiment (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973). This research showed that it is not the personality or some ingrained evilness that makes people perpetrate against the Other, but the ideological and/or physical structure of the situation. It does not take a prison structure with well-defined participants being prisoners or guards, but only the outspoken or silent encouragement of an authority or the actual or projected consensus of other in-group members to prepare the perpetrators (Figure 9).



Figure 9

Preparation of Hindu militancy, cadre members of fundamentalist *Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh* (extreme group amidst the BJP), whose member Nathuram Godse, assassinated Mahatma Gandhi for following a soft Muslim line.

In the case of groups confronting each other the representational systems of each do not only comprise cognitive and affective components, but also behavioural implications. In other words it can be said that social representations are enacted in discourse as well as in overt behaviour. In the present interviews there was hardly any statement to a stimulus picture that did not imply some violent action against the Others or that did not express fear of the Others' potential doings at least in the sub-text. The violence implied for one and feared from the other group ranged from the asymmetric threat of the Hindu majority demanding Muslims "to live according to Hindu rules", "simple" bodily harm to sexual abuse and degradation of women and men. As much as shared systems of historical representations unite the members of the in-group and create their unique identity, to the same extent shared representations exclude the members of the out-group from being seen as human beings with a right to their own way of life.

Conclusion

In this study the Indian situation served as a model for representational politics and xenophobic re-interpretations of history and contemporary events in the service of populist politics. There is a host of similar party politicians around the world whose politics, if need be, can serve the same purpose.

Moving beyond the political aspects prevalent in the Hindu-Muslim conflict in India the study allowed to highlight issues that are difficult to assess in social representation research about more general topics (Guerin, 2001). These are the affective burden of representations once they are inserted in everyday life-worlds and social conflict, the question of power and domination in the symbolic and physical realm (Jovchelovitch, 1997) that lurks in all utterances of the interviewees' responses, and the symbolic interdependence between conflicting groups. Social representation theory provides little help for analysing emotion and power issues despite the fact that these issues are at the core of all political and ideological struggles that pervade the life of all groups and nations. For added explanatory power for acts of social and ethnic exclusion as well as power relationships, the theory would need "a clearer grasp of ideology" (Voelklein & Howarth, 2005, p. 446). This is still in short supply in this field.

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