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# India

The Role of Civil Society and the State  
in a Nation Fragmented by  
Ethnicity and Religion

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# Abstract

The Indian society is made up of a complex web of relations deeply rooted in caste, religion and ethnic belonging. Violence and turmoil is common and the entrance of BJP (the nationalistic party that in many ways have dominated the political scene since the late 1980:s) has greatly increased polarization.

This essay is a case study of the destruction of the Babri Masjid and its consequences. The empirical research suggests a clear connection between activities undertaken on the civil arena and the ideology and actions of the state. The correlation to a degree extends both ways. Civil society does function as negotiator/agitator of decisions and practices of the political elite of the state. However, both the empirical and analytical content of this paper indicates that the overall direction of a societal development is mainly dependant on state action and ideology – be it in the shape of national or, particularly in the case of India, regional and communal politics.

*Key words:* India, civil society, state, fragmentation, democracy, violence

*Characters:* 55116

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# 1 Introduction

On December 6th 1992, astounded citizens of India watched as the 464 year old Babri Masjid in Ayodhya was brought down by a 300.000 strong angry mob. The feat was accomplished by using axes, bamboo sticks, crowbars and shovels and in a mere 5 hours the building was destroyed. The Babri Masjid had been a major controversy in Indian politics many years prior to its final annihilation. Bewildered viewers all over India expected the government to step in and stop the destruction, but government forces remained silent until 40 hours later when the police intervened and took hold of the situation in a mere 40 minutes. At this point the mosque had not only been transformed into rubble, but a provisory Hindu temple had been built in its place. As the news of the destruction of the mosque spread across India it sparked riots and turmoil in its wake (Parikh, p. 673-674).

The consequences of Ayodhya were significant. The ensuing riots stretched nation wide and claimed the lives of thousands of people leaving several thousands wounded. The main victims of the newly sparked violence were Muslims and it rapidly became clear that the authorities had not managed to provide adequate protection for them. Thus, the riots also further alienated the Muslims from the system. Even though the main consequences were to be found on the domestic political arena, the effects of the incident reached much further. In the aftermath of the demolition, aggravated mobs in Pakistan and Bangladesh burned and destroyed Hindu temples and relics avenging the destruction of the Babri Masjid. India's reputation also suffered a severe blow internationally. International publicity regarding the event was followed by international disdain and also concern regarding the effect on foreign investment and the future of India's economic liberalization (Ibid. p. 675).

This study focuses on the societal and political implications of the destruction of the Babri Masjid and the spiraling violence that followed in its wake.

## 1.1 Statement of Purpose and Thesis

The Indian nation has a long history of democratic institutions, but the democratic road has been fraught with fragmentation and violence. In a context as diversified as the Indian, choosing the democratic roadmap was not done without repercussions and consequences. We are dealing with a nation that was and still is deeply severed by religious, ethnic and caste separation. This is why the Indian decision is so interesting. It is a great feat in itself that the nation choose democracy. A different ideological starting point would perhaps have been the more logical. To attempt to create and uphold democratic institutions in the face

of poverty and ignorance is nothing short of bravery. As we all know Pakistan, stemming from the same colonial circumstances as India, chose quite a different path.

When attempting to analyze a theme which encompasses a number of variables, it is of importance to use theoretic tools that serve to expose prevalent conditions as well as the mechanisms that created them. Naturally the choice of focus for an widened analysis of a political/social phenomenon is not made with ease. It is difficult to single out a few factors in something as complex as a democratic process. However, in order to accomplish a wide interpretation a few key areas must be chosen. Thus, I will focus on two main aspects of the Indian context: Civil society and the state. I view these two components as a necessity in order to sustain a stable democracy and I hope to present compelling evidence to prove my theory. I wish to also outline the threat that civil society can pose to a societal context –civil society is after all not a risk free endeavor to embark on. On the contrary, if not supported by a stable state –it will be the breaker rather than the maker of stable democracy.

The destruction of the Babri Masjid and its aftermath will serve as the case study that I will base the theoretic outline around. My thesis question is: What is the role of civil society and the state in a nation fragmented by ethnicity and religion? I will also attempt to present an answer as to why the destruction of the Babri Masjid occurred in the first place.

Neither the focus on civil society nor the state is an easy approach. These are concepts that are difficult to define and particularly civil society is a somewhat fuzzy instrument to use. Thus great emphasis will be placed on theoretic tools.

## 1.2 Theory and Research Perspective

I will base my analysis on the theoretic framework of Jean Grugel. Most current theories focus on either actor or structure centric aspects of a political/social phenomenon. Grugel's theories, presented in, *Democratization – a Critical Introduction*, attempts to apply a more holistic outlook in which the two focuses are combined (Grugel, p. 67). Grugel will thus be the departure point around which the paper will be structured and organized. Any further theoretical framework will support this outlook --particularly Varshney will be used, but also Berman, Turam and a variety of other researchers. The paper will thus be a theory consuming study. As stated previously, the focus of this analysis will be:

- Civil Society
- The State

I hope, by combining an actor and a structure centric approach, to be able to present a more all encompassing view of the Indian context. Naturally this choice may be questioned. Is the choice even valid? My view is that conflicting two polar opposites may actually benefit the analysis in terms of width and height. It is true that the in-depth perspective may suffer on behalf of the width, since is more

difficult to obtain depth when combining fundamentally conflicting approaches, however, usage of these diverse tools of analysis may render the finished produced less colored. After all, two different settings will produce two different images with two different shadings. When combined they will mingle, not stand in solitary rigidity. I am not stating that usage of Grugel's approach will render the analysis more objective, but perhaps a little more holistic.

One could also argue that Grugel's holistic approach may not present the sharpest analyzing tool. Combining an actor and a structure focus is in fact conflicting two theoretical polar opposites and it can be argued that it may lead to a washed-out and shallow interpretation and thus, in the end, also conclusion. Possible critique regarding the combined approach is valid. Yes, a combination of polar opposites will affect the outcome of the research. However, this is the case whatever theoretic tools we choose to use. As opposed to research within the hard sciences, the social sciences are deemed to have an element of subjectivity. Our work will be colored by choice of theoretic framework and to an extent, also by consisting norms and ideals of the society in which it was composed.

### 1.3 Methodology

Before I go on to outline the thesis in more detail, I would like to take some time to argue why I have chosen the approach I have. Whenever one is attempting to explain the effects of political/social phenomenon, the author is presented with a choice concerning which type of material to seek explanatory factors in. I have chosen to rely on secondary sources. Naturally first hand sources would possibly represent a validity that would be useful in my circumstances, but they are, for logistical reasons, difficult to attain. My belief is that this paper will loose some and gain some from using secondary sources. It is possible that some of the actuality of the topic may be hard to pinpoint, but on the other hand, the secondary sources will supply a multifaceted and wide criteria of information. A combined approach might have presented a more current image, however, for practical reasons the research will be limited to secondary sources.

### 1.4 Previous Research

A considerable amount of research has been presented regarding civil society and the state. The Indian civil context specifically has been thoroughly explored by Ashutosh Varshney in the article *Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society: India and Beyond*. His focal point regarding civil society is on intrareligious verses interreligious organizations. Since he is somewhat of an authority on Indian circumstances, his work will also be a main focus of this thesis. Nancy Berman's article, *Civil Society and Political Institutionalization* examines the relationship between the state and civil society. Berman concludes that focus needs to be shifted. Instead of centering on how a social context influences the activities of political institutions, the significance of political institutionalization and its impact

on civil society and on political development must be examined. Furthermore, Steven Wilkinson, in his book *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India*, has analyzed the importance of politics and the state in relation to ethnic violence within civil society in India.

## 2 Discussion Regarding Definitions

All of the key concepts used in this paper are problematic since how they are defined is greatly dependant on perspective. In order for the reader to understand the relevance of my points a thorough discussion regarding definition of these complex concepts is necessary.

### 2.1 Concept: Democracy

Democracy is one of the domination concepts and research areas within political science. Despite this, or perhaps due to this, there is no consensus within the research community as to what democracy actually is. Instead it is a concept with a number of diverse meanings and a notion that is widely disputed. This paper does not intend to present an entity on the idea of democracy. However, in this section I would like to discuss democracy in regards to this paper –how it is used and its meaning in this particular case.

Let us look more closely on two definitions of democracy. Liberal democracy had its breakthrough post the second World War. In the words of Lipset: *“democracy is defined as institutional arrangements in order to reach political decisions in which individuals gain political power trough a competition for votes.”* (Eickelman, p. 14). As visible, this definition focuses mainly on the democratic institutions. The assumption is further: the more democracy, the more human rights. Freedom of speech and other rights are not a goal but a means to guarantee juste elections. It is a question of either –or. Democracy exists or it simply does not (Mousseau p. 303).

The second definition of democracy has gained increased influence during the last ten years. Representatives of this definition argue that a definition of democracy that excludes a number of factors, might miss important processes that occur below the surface, for example the role of civil society in a democracy. Also, regimes with an unstable relationship to human rights may still be defined as a democracy, despite serious flaws. Due to this, many researchers wish to include ”substantive rights”, as for example human rights and freedom of speech and press, to the formal rules and institutions. Grugel’s view for example, is that a democracy exist where and when the people support it. It includes extensive participation, a demand for responsibility and that rights, tolerance and pluralism exist and are upheld (Grugel, p. 7). In this paper I will use the broad definition of democracy. I will thus include formal institutions, for example elections, but also human rights and freedom of speech and press.



## 2.2 Concept: The State

Max Weber's influential definition will be used in order to define the state: "*the state is a political institution, whose administrative staff within a given geographical territory, successfully claim the right to monopoly on legitimized physical force in order to maintain a certain social order.*" (Månson, p. 78). These are the basic demands on a state. Other key elements of Weberian administration are that prevailing rules should be obeyed and upheld and that citizens must be able to claim liability from employees within the administration. Furthermore, the state must provide the citizens with service and it should not use unnecessary violence against its citizens (Blomkvist, p. 216).

So, does the Weberian standpoint have validity in regards to particularistic states? If we look at the near 200 countries around the globe the Weberian state is, after all, more an exception than a rule (Blomkvist, p. 235.) On the other hand, the Weberian state is, according to a substantial amount of both research and experience, the system that has the most capacity to implement decisions. It must also be regarded as the most juste societal system. (Blomkvist, p. 235).

## 2.3 Concept: Civil Society

Given the role that many civil groups have in the development of public policy and the extensive connections between state and civil institutions, it has become increasingly difficult to identify the boundaries separating the state and civil society. Often the nature of autonomous civil organizations is unclear, generating debate among political scientists on whether they are part of the state or civil society.

Civil society is thus an abstract and elusive concept. Definition remains widely dependant perspective. This makes definition of the concept more difficult, but all the more crucial to the finished product. I have decided to use a combination of theorist in order to accomplish a valid definition for this paper. I find Nancy Bermeo's definition of civil society to be a good starting point. She views civil society as: *networks of formal and informal associations that mediate between individual actors and the state. These networks may function for good or for evil.*" (Bermeo, p. 7). One may conceive Bermeo's theory as rather vague in nature. It does not present us with concrete evidence of what civil society actually entails. Thus, I have decided to add Varshney's thoughts on the matter, since his outlook conveys a more precise and solid image.

Varshney differentiates between two different spheres in the civil structure: *associational forms of engagement* and *everyday forms of engagement*. He associates the first theme with: business associations, professional organizations, reading clubs, film clubs, sports clubs, NGO:s and trade unions. Everyday forms engagement consists of matters like: interactions in daily life, festivals, celebrations and children (of ethnic, religious and caste diversity) playing in the neighborhood (Varshney p. 363). To further clarify: When I use the term civil

society, civil sphere or civil arena, my outlook represents a combination of *associational* and *everyday forms of engagement*.

In regards to Varshney's thoughts, differentiating between associational forms of engagement and everyday forms of engagement is not always done with ease. The nature of the relationship is that the boundaries are fluid. The same needs to be stated in regards to the interaction between civil society and the state. On the other hand, few concepts within the political and social sciences are solid.

Tocqueville stated that civil society: "*should be regarded, not as the best, but as the only means of preserving freedom*". (Bermeo, p. 8). Our reality remains unpredictable, just like our definitions of it. The human context is not black or white but comes in different shades. Thus, in this paper, I will attempt to present one outlook, not one truth.

### 2.3.1 Intrareligious Verses Interreligious Associations

In the face of conflict, the roles of Interreligious contra intrareligious organizations are quite different. The members of an association that is based intrareligiously i.e. through bonding within their own respective group, enhances the danger of violence within civil society. Interreligious organizations on the other hand, bring together members of different ethnic, religious and class origin and thus has a greater chance of managing to counteract tensions in times of crisis (Varshney, p. 363). The creation of interreligious organizations is particularly important in an urban context. The urban scene presents a more fragmented and anonymous venue and thus the linkages between people beyond their own respective group are fewer. Therefore the urban scene requires a more organized activity in order to bring people together than does its rural counterpart (Varshney, p. 380).

## 3 Limitations

One could argue that my decision to exclude concepts such as for example globalization and economy might lead to finite and limited conclusions. An inclusion of these concepts would indeed have broadened any analysis regarding a society. Globalization, even though it does not necessarily lead to a good and just society and to a more converged and homogenous world, is a very potent presence within our contemporary world. The economic foundation of a nation is for logical reasons also a relevant focus. Globalization and economy are to an extent touched upon in this paper. The reasons why these were not dealt with more in-depth is, apart from limited space issues, that I found the concepts of the state and civil society to be the most compelling factors. A society without a functioning civil society has little hope to broaden and strengthen democracy. Fragmentation and polarization may rise out of an economic, or even a globalized context and may serve to hinder the democratic development. However, democracy is not dependant on these fixtures being friction free in order to sustain.

Naturally this is a relative truth. Economy and globalization can and do play a part in the development of a society. I feel however, that they do not replace or challenge the importance of the state and civil society. Contemporary India is the proof that validates this thought. The Indian economic history shows that a country with limited economic means can maintain and support democratic development. In regards to globalization, the first steps towards democracy was taken by the imperial British rulers and was thus a product of colonization. It might be argued that globalization is but a different version of the western hegemony that took place during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, this is a debate that I will leave for others to partake in. India's introduction to democracy was made by the imperial power in place, however, post independence the democratic process was further developed and finally consolidated. This development I do not attribute to British influence, but to the courage and strength of the Indian politicians.

In conclusion. No democracy can exist without the presence of a state nor a civil society. The state is for obvious reasons necessary and I will deal no further with the concept at this time. Civil society is the oxygen of democracy. Problems within other areas, such as globalization and economy can be solved, but development within civil society has great negative or positive impact on any democracy as a whole.

## 4 Irregular Patterns of Violence

There is an empirical irregularity in research regarding violence in India. Some places, despite being greatly divided along ethnic and religious lines, are still peaceful, while others tend to have a violent nature (Varshney, p. 370). Varshney views the Hindu-Muslim violence in India primarily as an urban phenomena and states that in rural areas the rate of violence is remarkably small. This is of particular interest because most of the Indian population still is rurally based. The violence also seems to be mainly locally concentrated. Nearly 46 percent of all deaths, in combination with Muslim-Hindu violence, is accounted for in eight cities. Between 1950 and 1995 only 3.6 percent of Muslim-Hindu violence related deaths were accounted for in rural India (Ibid. p. 371).

The population of the eight most violence prone cities make up 18 percent of the urban population and this means that 82 percent of the urban population have not been riot prone. Varshney argues that national and state level politics provide the context for the city specific violence (Ibid. p. 373). He also views the preexisting local networks in the civil arena as an important explanation for the violent contra peaceful situation that may evolve. Where ties across ethnic and religious lines are solid, tension is managed within the civil sphere and thus the situation remains nonviolent. If Hindus and Muslims live in segregated situations, where these bonds are difficult to establish or uphold, it is likely that violence will erupt. Simply put: if communication across group identities is common, then this communication will continue even in times of crisis (Ibid. p. 374-375).

Another fact to keep in mind is that only a small percentage of the urban adult population has been born and raised in urban areas. Instead a great number are immigrants that stem from rural areas. The link to the home area (where their respective families often reside) generally tend to be reinforced in the urban scene. When an individual is placed outside his/her own context, ethnic and religious attachment becomes an all the more prominent feature of his/her identity. Therefore cities are generally a scene where ethnic and religious formations dominate civil society. (Igwara, p. 2001:89f).

Some further thoughts regarding the rural/urban relationship: urban settings present a rather anonymous sphere. Most cities are also heavily separated along ethnic, religious and caste lines. A rural village may not be a harmonious, conflict free zone, but dense family networks might in themselves be a restricting factor. Add to the mix: celebrations, festivals, dinner parties, marriages between neighboring children, in short: work and play, side by side. These types of activities might not be enough to reduce conflict, but probably sufficient enough in order to avoid violence and rioting.

The rural/urban relationship is an important circumstance to consider when attempting to understand irregularities in patterns of violence within civil society. Another crucial component is the ideology and influence of politics and the state. In the forthcoming chapter these conditions will be explored.

## 5 The BJP, Hindutva and General Background on the Ram Temple Drama

When a party that rests on a nationalistic agenda comes to power, violence is more likely to occur. (Beer, p. 1015). Regarding India, Human rights watch 2001 noted in its world report: *“attacks against Christians...increased significantly since the BJP came into power in March 1998.”* (Ibid. p. 1003)

Since the 1980:s there has been a rise in Hindu nationalism in India. The process of secularization of the state has been disturbed by notions of religion in politics. India has, during this time, become economically more liberal but politically more conservative (Assayag, p. 353). Proof of this theory is the success of the BJP, a nationalist party that gained central power in 1998 and remained in power until 2004 (Assayag, p. 328). The party’s chief goal is to create a national identity that is built on Hindutva or Hinduness (Misra, p. 149). Bose explains Hinduness as: *“The majority myth of Hinduatva...with its millenarian vision of an India which has resolved all its problem, political conflicts and social contradictions through an affirmation of the organic unity of a common `Hindu identity.”* (Heller, p. 495).

Thus, the essence of Hindutva is to unite the Indian population under one identity based in Hinduism. A logical outcome of such an approach is that the religious minorities of the population will be subjected to the status of merely insignificant others (Guru, p. 758). The current threat towards stabilizing the situation in India is the notion of Hindutva or Hinduness (Metha, p. 118). The creation of an “us” logically also leads to the creation of “the other” and in India “the other” comes in the shape of minority groups such as Muslims, Sikhs and Christians. The current Indian discourse is largely driven by these cemented, collective identities (Ibid. p. 119).

On paper, the background of the destruction of the Babri Masjid was greatly dependant the notion of Hindutva. However, the controversy was only religious in form --its content was overall political. The annihilation of the mosque was both chaperoned and aggravated by the political elite. Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) was the active leader and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), actively supported and participated in the event. It was a joint action to acquire extended political power. In 1991, the agenda of the BJP and its front organizations, collectively called Sangh Parivar, was the Hindu demand for the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya. The focus was rewarding to the BJP. Through the incident the party managed to win 118 sets in the parliament, leaving BJP the main opposition to the ruling Congress Party. BJP also gained full power in four northern Indian states: Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal

Pradesh- Rajasthan and registered its presence in almost all other Indian states. Despite efforts, the BJP had previously lacked favor with the electorate. In the election preceding 1991 the party had managed to win only 2 seats in parliament. The destruction of the Babri Masjid led to an expansion in BJP's electoral base – and the change was rather sudden (Panikkar, p. 64).

Thakur points to the fact that the success of the BJP's did rest on both organizational and leadership skills, but states that the party's triumphs were built mainly around two factors: An identity based on nationalism and patriotism and the exploitation of Hindu sentiments such as the Babri Masjid (Thakur, p. 654). As the BJP was exploiting Hindus notions of religion, Abdullah Bukhari, the Shahi Imam of Delhi's Jama Masjid, was doing the same with the Muslims population. In 1980 few Muslims even knew of the existence of the Babri Masjid. In a mere decade this had changed and the mosque had been elevated into a symbol of Muslim identity. Political rhetoric had forced the issue on to the national political agenda and soon it had become the boiling point of Muslim/Hindu relations (Ibid. p. 655).

The controversy concerning the Babri Masjid had been dormant for about 40 years when it was brought to the surface by the BJP making it a national issue. General attention on the mosque was rather quickly heightened as its cultural and political importance was aggravated by the BJP. All the organization of the Sangh Parivar had a major importance in the outcome. Religion was viewed as a powerful mobilizing factor and the constant usage of religious and symbolic rhetoric speed up the process (Panikkar, p. 65).

The destruction of the Babri Masjid was thus mainly created and instigated by the political elite. The BJP politicians had managed to mobilize the actors within civil society who were in actuality the ones performing the destruction. The aftermath of the demolition saw far-reaching violence and turmoil. I find the answer as to why the consequences were so dire to be located within the organization of political power in India. I will explore and concretize this hypotheses in the following chapter.

## 6 An Analysis of the Chosen Specifics

The events in Ayodhya in 1992 created a wave of violence across the nation. In order to comprehend the activities that followed in the aftermath of the destruction of the Babri Masjid the power structures in India and foremost in Ayodhya must be presented and analyzed. This chapter will thus deal with how politics in India are organized on the national and local arena. The problems connected to India's specific organization of political power will then be further concretized in the following analysis of Calicut verses Aligarh.

### 6.1 The Role of the Police in Ayodhya and the Organization of Political Power in India

India's federal governmental structure places much power in the hands of state level politicians. Kohli states: "*Given India's federal structure, moreover, state-level governments often are significant political forces in their own right.*" (Beer, p. 997.) Decision making in Indian politics takes place on a state level rather than a national level. The local police as well as the paramilitary forces are also mainly controlled from this level. The political repercussions of riots and tensions on a local level are thus highly dependent on the actions and ideas of state level politicians. The Indian constitution clarifies that central forces are only allowed to intervene in a local emergency if state level or governmental level officials find it necessary (Wilkinson, p. 20). India's 28 elected state governments are responsible for upholding law and order in their respective state. The politicians in turn pass down orders through their police and civil service hierarchies. At the end of the chain we find the key district-level officials who are in charge of law enforcement (Ibid. p. 65). Beyond law and order, under the constitution, the Indian states are granted a high level of further exclusive authority. These areas include: welfare, education, healthcare, local government, industry, agriculture and land revenue (Sharma. p. 68).

Over the past decade, the autonomy of police officers to enforce the law independently has declined. Wilkinson states that this has been exemplified by a wide variety of sources: press reports, independent inquiries, retired and currently serving officers and by books written by politicians. These sources all clarify that politicians frequently intervene with local decisions regarding law and order such as prosecutions and arrests (Wilkinson. p. 73). The destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya took place in the presence of 19 companies of the Uttar Pradesh Armed Constabulary. This immediately poses the question as to why nothing was done by the forces to prevent the destruction. One policeman at the



scene stated that: “We had no instructions”. However, the answer is more complex than his words entail. In the aftermath of the demolition of the Babri Masjid information suggested that the armed forces in fact had strict instructions by the state government not to interfere with the activities that took place (Ibid. p. 95-96).

In this context, I also want to mention the increased criminalization of the state. Corruption and violence have infected the body of politics in India. Sharma points to the fact that a large numbers of elected legislators in Bihar and in Uttar Pradesh (India’s most populous state) have criminal records or have criminal investigations pending against them. A direct example of the depth of the problem is that former prime minister P.V. Narasimha Rao was found guilty of illegal financial transactions on September 29<sup>th</sup> of 2000 (Sharma, p. 64).

Thakur brings to mind that commentators of Indian politics have pointed at a nexus between politicians, criminals, and the police. There appears to be a steady criminalization of politics. Politicians are generally held as corrupt and unpredictable by the public. However, they are also greatly feared for their ability to wield state power. The view of the police force is that it is arrogant, when handling citizens and meek and timid when dealing with political superiors. In Ayodhya, the police were caught between reality and theory. The police have a legal role of protector, particularly in chaotic, violent times, such as the destruction of the Babri Masjid, however the political reality was that state level politicians in many ways were as committed to the demolition as the angry Hindu mob. The general police official might not have sympathized with the demolition, but needed to protect his/her own position. Endangering the destruction of the Babri Masjid might damage or risk future and present career opportunities. For every senior police official there is a contrasting relationship between the role as a guardian of the citizens and the will and wish of the state. Thus, opposing the will of the state is reluctantly done and if so, not a riskfree endeavor (Thakur, p. 658-659).

One of the serious consequences of the destruction of the Babri Masjid included doubts as to whether the system could handle severe crisis’s. The controversy plunged India into the worst outbreak of communal violence since partition. Savage communal riots occurred in Calcutta and Bombay that sent shock waves through the country. International relations also suffered. Startled and threatened by the development in India, foreign investors found it difficult to trust the government’s commitment to reforms and economic liberalization (Ibid. p. 645).

Extended communal violence and tension followed in the wake of Babri Masjid. However, the end result differed greatly between various communes. Aligarh and Calicut were two cities that experienced greatly contrasting outcomes.

## 6.2 Aligarh Verses Calicut – Tension in the Wake of the Babri Masjid

Varshney presents the developments in the two cities in order to exemplify how different political approaches will lead to significantly differing end results.

Aligarh is a riot prone city in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. Calicut is a peaceful city in the South Indian state of Kerala. Both cities have a Muslim population that is roughly 36-38 percent. Between 1989 and 1992, particularly severely in the aftermath of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, all of India experienced violence and turmoil. Aligarh and Calicut were no exceptions. Tension and small clashes occurred in both cities, but the final outcome of the two cities was very different. The local administrators in Calicut were able to keep the peace and maintain law and order. Rumors of insults and the tension that followed did not, as in so many other cities at this time, lead to riots. Circulating rumors of insults were extinguished through clarification by the local peace committees and the press.

The city-level peace committees proved invaluable to the peaceful development in Calicut. They provided a link between the state administration and civil society and also functioned as a forum where the citizens could vent their insecurities and anger. Since the peace committees in Calicut were linked interreligiously all the way down to the neighborhood level, they provided a heightened sense of participation to the citizens. The peacekeeping organizations also managed to draw in a vast mass of the population regardless of caste, class, ethnic or religious belonging. The organizational structure within the peace committees in Aligarh was quite different. Organizations were mainly arranged within their respective religious orientations and functioned more as protectors of its particular community and fellow religious communities. Being structured inrareligiously, they provided joint association against, rather than cooperation with, other organizations. In short, the Aligarh peace committees actively policed their community, forming, in its members, a consciousness based more than anything in lack of trust.

The storm that swept the nation in the aftermath of the demolition of the Babri Masjid left Calicut relatively unharmed. Aligarh, on the other hand, faced a different outcome. According to Varshney, this development was greatly influenced by the press, since it did nothing to neutralize rumors in Aligarh. On the contrary, it in many cases instigated and inflamed the unstable situation. Horrendous violence and turmoil followed. Gangs of Hindu criminals went on killing sprees and the press chose to both underreport the number of casualties and silence the causes of death. During a mere few days seventy deaths occurred in Aligarh and many people were injured.

In Calicut the politicians (regardless of party belonging) helped establish the peace. Thus, the polarizing of the community that was occurring in Aligarh was practically non-existent in Calicut. The destruction of the Babri Masjid clearly called attention to the inadequacy of the local politicians in Aligarh. Calicut's situation was greatly improved by the peace committees. Aligarh on the other

hand, had difficulties obtaining and sustaining such, since politicians of differing party orientation were unable to cooperate. Rumors turned into truths that were exploited by political organizations opting to extend their own political power (Varshney, p. 380-382).

I find the examples of Calicut and Aligarh to provide valuable empirical evidence of the importance of both civil society and the state in times of crises. With that in mind I will now return to the departure point of this thesis – the destruction of the Babri Masjid. The first part of the chapter below will explore the relationship between, and the influence of, the state and civil society in the Ram temple drama. The second part will examine the importance of regional crosscutting networks within civil society.

# 7 The Ram Temple Drama –Under the Influence of Civil Society and the State

Civil society is created through norms and rules, but also through state interaction. In order to achieve a stable democracy the two fractions must be linked in a health promoting way. Exactly how this is accomplished is debatable. It is difficult to present a generalized set of standards since each nation has a different historical, social and economic background. There are however, certain criteria that are valuable when attempting to create a stabile and vital relationship between civil society and the state.

## 7.1 Civil Society and the State –a Relationship of Dependence

The Indian discourse is largely driven by the collective identities cemented by Hindutva. (Metha, p. 119). The BJP:s decision to focus on the Babri Masjid as a tool of polarization was rewarding. Not only was the demolition accomplished, but the electoral base was substantially widened. The incident of the Babri Masjid became a powerful mobilizing factor in the Hindu as well as the Muslim communities. The actions at Ayodhya were instigated by the political elite, however, it was performed through civil action.

This stresses that activities within civil society not necessarily have to be positive. On the contrary. Berman argues that depending on the structural conditions of the state, the civil arena may in the end have negative rather than positive consequences. She arguments further that releasing civil factors is always a risk. Civil society is only as capable as the state institutions surrounding it. Religious and ethnic polarization are not possible to deal with sufficiently only on the civil arena. Strong state fixtures are necessary in order to ensure a positive effect. Berman argues that in order to be able to foresee future developments within the civil structure an analysis of state institutions, as well as the civil forum, must be presented. (Berman, p. 567).

Turam too claims that a coexistence between the state and civil society not necessarily must lead to a stability. In regards to the civil forum the state must concentrate on creating organizations and institutions that are able to establish an environment of social compromise instead of polarization. In order to create a good base for tolerance, communication and cooperation between differing ideological standpoints the state must be able to handle social, religious, cultural and ethnic diversities sufficiently. If the state is incapable of this, the civil arena is more likely to harm a democracy than to do it any service. He further explores the

notion that civil organizations, in order to be able to negotiate about civil rights and regulations, and also in order to question the actions of the state, must be relatively independent of the state (Turam, p. 276-78).

I find that Turam's and Berman's arguments are directly applicable on the Babri Masjid controversy. The Indian civil society is vital, but often takes the role of instigator rather than negotiator. Instead of lessening tension – fragmentation has become increasingly visible not only on the micro level, but also a potent factor on the national political arena. The entrance of BJP and other political fractions stressing ethnic and religious belonging have created this causal effect. The micro level is thus not guilty of creating the current polarization, but still subconsciously serves to uphold it. Since the main instigator to the destruction of the Babri Masjid is to be found within the institutional realm, the state also holds the main part of the solution to the violent repercussions. The following text on Calicut and Aligarh – the importance of crosscutting networks, further validates this point.

## 7.2 Calicut and Aligarh –the Importance of Cross Cutting Networks

As previously discussed, India's state level politicians enjoy relatively extended political power. Beer means that this accounts for the great difference in how and why or even if, violence erupts in different communes (Beer, p. 997) The difference in the outcome of Calicut and Aligarh exemplifies the correctness of this argument. The disparity in politics greatly affected the development of respective commune during a severely trying time. Varshney argues that in order for civic engagement to substantially attribute to democracy the communication must cut across ethnic cleavages. He also claims there to be a link between the structure of civil society in multiethnic societies and the presence or absence of ethnic violence. (Varshney, p. 363).

Varshney's argument is crucial in a context of Calicut verses Aligarh. Communication is only meaningful when it cuts across group divisions. The key to managing the situation in Calicut was that the peace committees and politicians regardless of party origin focused on promoting cross-cutting networking. Focus on difference was lessened in political rhetoric -- differences were not ignored -- only did not function as trigger points. In Aligarh on the other hand, polarization of the public was a prominent feature. It was not a new phenomenon and thus, civil society had for a long time been cemented in this context. When the exogenous chock in the shape of the annihilation of the Babri Masjid took place, civil society was defenseless against its effects.

It is common that organizations within civil society are built around the notions of ethnicity, religion, caste or class. According to Berman this enhances the risk of polarization. On the other hand, if a nation is capable of channeling the energy within the civil forum in a constructive way, civil society will serve to stabilize a democracy. If it fails, conflict and violence will erupt and erode the democratic principles (Berman, p. 565, 569).

The previous argument is highly applicable on Aligarh and Calicut. In Aligarh, the actions of the politicians and the press only enhanced the strain and tension. Rather quickly, due to the emergency of the situation, this led to severe violence and rioting. Aligarh's political arena was already highly polarized and thus, in extension, were the local Aligarh neighborhoods. Aligarh did have an active civil society, but it was based inrareligiously as opposed to in Calicut where organizations were mainly of interreligious orientation. Cooperation and communication were thus more difficult to obtain in Aligarh in this time of crisis.

In conclusion: India has a high level of political mobilization. According to Shama however, the country in many cases, lacks a strong and responsive state. Political parties tend to compete along the lines of religion, caste, communal and ethnic belonging and generally these themes remain the significant determinants of the electoral outcome. The vital associational life within Indian civil society generally also reflect the same components and loyalties. A great number of voluntary associations and NGO:s have attempted to build durable institutions that are all inclusive, but due to the intense overall focus on caste, ethnic and religious belonging on a political level, the attempt has been relatively unsuccessful (Sharma, p. 82-83).

Without a stable state that channel the ongoing public debate towards mutual consent and understanding, the activities in the civil sphere will rather danger democracy than support it. The empirical context of this theses validates this statement. However, to an extent the same generalizations are applicable to all societal contexts. Arguments concerning preservation and revitalization of civil society are of importance to all nations. Whether we are dealing with a country with basically no democratic process, one that is struggling with it, or a country where democracy is consolidated.

## 8 Summary and Reflections

The Indian context shows an irregularity in patterns of violence. One of the causes can be found in the rural/urban relationship. The urban scene promotes a more ethnically and religiously centered arena. Frequent immigration from rural to urban areas enhances this focus. In extension, the existing local networks within civil society in cities do not readily invite to intrareligious activity. This makes the efforts and ideology of national and (particularly in the case of India) state level politics invaluable. In order to promote crosscutting organization within civil society a conscious effort must be made to bridge effectively between different civil actors. The urban scene presents a political challenge. It is a fragmented setting that requires more active crosscutting activities.

This brings us to the fact that Indian politics have a local focus. It could be viewed as positive, since it renders local politicians with a certain amount of power and thus freedom in their decision making. However, the negative aspect is that politics are in danger of becoming personal. The present urban/rural context proves this theory. The fact that some cities are prone to violence and others are not, clearly shows the importance of local politics. Appoint the wrong men/women and there is a risk of enhanced violence and conflict.

The destruction of the Babri Masjid amplifies the importance of national and state level politics. Although the actual physical annihilation of the mosque was performed by civil organizations, it was clearly instigated by the rhetoric and ideology of the BJP and its notion of Hindutva. The active participation of the BJP complicated the controversy further, since the police at Ayodhya, although legally bound to intervene in a crisis, found themselves unable to act due to state level commitment to the destruction. 40 hours after the commencement of the annihilation the police were finally allowed to intervene. The destruction of the Babri Masjid led to far-reaching insecurities regarding the system's ability to handle severe crisis's and in its wake massive violence and turmoil followed.

Since state level politicians in India enjoy great political power, the ability of respective communes to deal with tension and violence varies. Two examples of a very different development are the cities of Aligarh and Calicut. In the wake of the destruction of the Babri Masjid the former spun into an uncontrollable wave of violence and turmoil while the latter managed to maintain peaceful relations. Development in each city was to an extent dependant on prevailing interreligious verses intrareligious conditions within respective civil society. In Aligarh the peace committees were built around the notions of religion and ethnicity while Calicut's peace organizations were centered across ethnic, religious and caste boundaries. Civil society was however but a tool in the service of the state. Politicians in Calicut focused on cooperation and informative measures for the

public. In Aligarh the political elite had problems cooperating and ended up taking measures that further polarized the public.

The development in Aligarh and Calicut clearly indicates the importance of politics. I find that Berman's argument, that civil society is only as competent as the state surrounding it, sums up the controversy of Babri Masjid and its aftermath. I would also like to point to the relevance of Turam's and Varshney's arguments that the focal point of the state must be to create an air of tolerance, communication and cooperation within civil society. This view is particularly important in an urban context where it is common that organizations are firmly established around ethnic, religious and caste belonging.

India has a vital civil society, however, since politicians often compete along the lines of religion, caste and ethnicity these themes become potent factors in civil life also. The activities of civil society are firmly linked to the regulations of the state and depending on national, but in particular, state level politics, might enhance polarization rather than the opposite. Civil society is significant when dealing with violence and conflict, the micro level organizations do not however, function independently of macro level institutions. On the contrary, civil development depends on the actions and politics of the state and region.

India's quest for democracy has been a brave and relatively successful endeavor. Yet, the future remains elusive. The nation is facing numerous problems. This thesis does not attempt to present any definitive answers regarding possible outcome, rather solutions for further positive development in certain areas. Heterogeneity has always been a prevalent feature of India. Gandhi viewed the nation as a salad bowl, in which differences mixed in a harmonic state. The idea might seem slightly utopian, but keep in mind that it is not always necessary to get from point A to point B –sometimes it is sufficient to merely reach the middle way between starting point and goal.



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