

**Coalition Politics, Ethnic Violence and
Citizenship: Muslim Political Agency in
Meerut, India, c. 1950-2004**

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School of Economics for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and contains nothing which is the outcome of work in collaboration.

Abstract

This dissertation examines the responses of the Muslim community in Meerut city, in western Uttar Pradesh, India, to the rise of militant Hindu nationalism and to the anti-Muslim violence that shook Meerut in April-May 1987. I show how Meerut Muslims engaged in adaptive economic and political strategies in the wake of the 1987 violence and how these strategies culminated in a new style of participatory politics. This emerged under the leadership of the hitherto low status Qureshi (butcher) community. I show how Qureshi political activism has worked to create a Muslim political community which can be mobilised in terms both of civic and Muslim identities. I also demonstrate how Muslim political leaders have engaged in an instrumental politics of vote-trading with Hindu low-caste political parties. Both communities are exploiting new possibilities for representation in an era of multi-party coalition politics at state and national levels.

My account of the 'new Muslim politics' in Meerut examines how Islam is understood alongside civic, or even secular, accounts of what it means to be a Muslim in contemporary India. More generally, my discussion of the production of ethnic peace in Meerut since c.1990 allows me to contribute to an ongoing debate on the causes and differential geography of 'communal' violence in India. I do not attempt to adjudicate between the competing accounts of 'votes and violence' offered by Steven Wilkinson, Ashutosh Varshney, Paul Brass and others. Instead, I seek to build on their work by offering a more considered discussion of Muslim political agency in the face of provocative militant Hinduism. Behind concerted campaigns for security and survival, the 'new Muslim politics' mirrors a commitment to the goals of respect and dignity that is also to be found among the region's poorest Hindu communities and the Scheduled Castes (*dalits*).

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Abbreviations of Selected Term

BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BJS	Bharatiya Jana Sangh
BLD	Bharatiya Lok Dal
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
CPI	Communist Party of India
CPM	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
DIG	Deputy Inspector General of Police
DM	District Magistrate
IAS	Indian Administrative Service
INC	Indian National Congress
IPS	Indian Police Service
JD	Janata Dal
JP	Janata Party
LIU	Local Intelligence Unit
ML	Muslim League
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
PAC	Provincial Armed Constabulary
PSP	Praja Socialist Party
RLD	Rashtriya Lok Dal
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SP	Samajwadi Party
SSP	Senior Superintendent of Police/Samyukta Socialist Party
VHP	Vishwa Hindu Parishad

Glossary of Selected Terms

Ansari	weavers
Baqr Id	Islamic annual festival
Bharat	India
Biradari	Occupational guild
Burqa	Black outer garment of Muslim women
Dargah	Saint's tomb
Gaddhi	Cattle raisers and milk suppliers
Gali	Alley
Hindu Rashtra	Hindu nation
Iftaar	The evening meal breaking the fast during the month of Ramadan
Madrasah	Muslim educational institution
Maktab	Muslim elementary school
Malvis	Scholars of Islamic teaching
Maulana	Scholars of Islamic teaching
Mohalla	Locality
Purdah	Female seclusion
Qureshi	Butchers
Ramadan	One of the holy months in Islamic calendar
Saiffie	Blacksmith/carpenters
Shariat	Islamic legal code
Ulama	Priest

Prologue

Overview

One of the most surprising features of the Indian political landscape since 1980 has been the resurgence of Hindu nationalism and the rise to national power of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the late-1990s. After approximately thirty years in the wilderness following Independence and perhaps more so after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, a political grouping which rarely took more than seven percent of the popular vote in the 1950s, '60s and '70s, when it was led by the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, found itself winning close to a quarter of the popular vote in the General Elections of 1998 and 1999.

Since around 1990, a huge body of literature has grown up with the express aim of understanding the ideological and organizational features of *Hindutva* and the Sangh Parivar — the so-called family of Hindu nationalist organizations that is directed in some degree by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). This literature stands in stark contrast to work produced just a few years earlier in which there is barely a mention of militant Hinduism in discussions that otherwise demonstrate an acute grasp of India's political economy (see for example Kohli 1990). Much of this new literature has also confronted the violence that is at the heart of *Hindutva* politics and which is directed overwhelmingly against India's Muslim communities. Such violence ranges from depictions of Indian Muslims as fifth columnists or even agents of Pakistan, all the way through to closely organised attacks on Muslim religious

sites (as at the Babri Masjid in December 1992), property and life. In one of the worst such incidents in the 1980s, an outbreak of so-called Hindu-Muslim violence in Meerut city, western Uttar Pradesh, in 1987 left over 170 people dead. I say so-called, because three-quarters of the dead were Muslims and many of these people died at the hands of the police.

This dissertation, which is focused on the city of Meerut, inevitably takes shape against these fast emerging literatures on the dynamics of Hindu nationalism and the causes and geography of communal violence. I review key parts of these linked literatures in Chapter One. I also make it clear later in the dissertation that I am more sympathetic to the accounts of the timing and geographies of ‘communal violence’ that have been produced recently by Paul Brass (2003) and Steven Wilkinson (2004) — accounts which emphasise the *political* logics that stand behind the creation of what Brass calls ‘institutionalised riot systems’ — than I am to Ashutosh Varshney’s (2002) claim that ‘ethnic’ (religious) conflicts peak in those Indian cities which lack a dense network of associational life bridging between Hindu and Muslim communities.¹ However, it is not my main purpose in this work to adjudicate carefully between these competing arguments, or to set up rigorous empirical tests of their major claims. As I say, I am largely persuaded by Wilkinson’s arguments that electoral calculations and government will stand behind most outbreaks (or non-outbreaks) of communal

¹ This dissertation is mainly concerned with violent conflicts between Muslims and Hindus in urban north India. These conflicts have generally been described as ‘communal’, or conflicts between religious communities. Varshney and Brass both often use this term. Varshney’s preferred term for the violence I discuss here, however, is ‘ethnic’, which is also the preferred terminology of Steven Wilkinson. Unless otherwise stated, I use ‘ethnic’ and ‘communal’ as interchangeable terms; I also generally follow the preferred usage of any author I am referring to.

violence in India. I also accept that minority communities are protected against the violence unleashed behind such 'calculations' to the extent they make their numbers tell in the electoral arena. Muslims in western Uttar Pradesh have been doing this for the past two decades by entering into electoral pacts with parties that began life as vehicles for the advancement of some of the region's poorest Hindu communities and also its Scheduled Castes. I am referring here to the Bahujan Samaj Party and to the Samajwadi Party.

Instead, the major purpose of this PhD thesis is to show precisely how the Muslim community of Meerut city has engaged in a series of adaptive economic and political strategies that have had the effect of making one of India's most dangerous cities rather safer for them. The thrust of my work, then, is micro rather than macro. The principal methods I use are historical/ethnographic rather than quantitative or based on formal political models. My major arguments, to anticipate, are twofold. I seek to show, first, that it is not possible to understand new forms of assertion and tactical political engagement within Meerut's Muslim communities unless we understand that key economic and political powers were transferred in the 1980s and 1990s from hitherto controlling high status groups like the Syeds and Sheikhs toward lower status Qureshis. Second, I show how key Qureshi leaders in Meerut in the 1990s were able to translate new forms of economic and educational wealth into distinctive forms of political capital. The real achievements of men such as Haji Akhlaq and Shahid Akhlaq was to rally the broad Muslim community in Meerut behind an instrumental politics of vote-trading even as they updated appeals to forms of identity rooted in Islam. It is now quite common to talk about the 'modernity of tradition', and this is partly what I write about here. My major contribution,

however, or so I hope, is to show in some detail how an emerging post-c.1987 Muslim politics in Meerut city has welded together in new and productive ways (albeit ways that are also contested) what can be called a secular logic of ‘group citizenship’ to new inflexions within Islamised politics.

Given that the focus of this dissertation is as much on ‘How’ as on Why questions (allowing that these always overlap), the rest of the thesis is organised as follows. Chapter One reviews the growing literature on the re-birth of Hindu nationalism in India and on the mainsprings of communal violence. I suggest that one possible weakness in this literature is its under-theorisation of the politics of resistance to violence, or more specifically of the ways in which minority communities are not simply the victims of political calculations made within or by majority communities. Chapter Two moves from the national stage to the political histories and geographies of Uttar Pradesh, especially western Uttar Pradesh, and of Meerut city more specifically. I accept Steven Wilkinson’s claim that the political geographies of communal violence in India cannot wholly be understood at the city level: for Wilkinson, state-wide political considerations are more important. I nevertheless contend that Muslim political agency is best explored at this spatial scale and with close reference to local historical contexts. To clarify, I am not arguing that Meerut is the only city in western Uttar Pradesh which has become safer for Muslims since the early 1990s. Rather, I am suggesting that if we want to understand *how* Muslims themselves have been active in bringing about a less threatening political landscape, we need to do this deep within a city’s walls, as well as in its immediate environs. Chapter Three concludes Part One of the thesis with a largely descriptive account of the deployment of Hindu and state violence against Muslims in the April-May ‘riots’

of 1987 in Meerut city. These events represented a tragic end-point to an earlier regime of politics in western UP — one which saw Muslims largely dependent on a Congress Party that was now unable or unwilling to protect them against resurgent *Hindutva* forces.

Part Two of the thesis is focused on Muslim responses to organised Hindu violence after 1987. Chapter Four documents important changes in the relative economic and political standing of different social groups within Meerut's Muslim community. In particular, I look at the causes and patterns of social mobility among various low-status Muslim groups, most notably the Qureshis (the butchers). I also examine the ways in which these communities have sought to transfer their new economic wealth both into circuits of cross-community political capital and into forms of Islamisation that continue to demarcate Muslim from Hindu. Chapters Five and Six examine how significant political campaigns were waged in the 1990s and early 2000s by Haji Akhlaq and his son, Shahid Akhlaq. Both men surged to positions of political power at this time, the former in the UP Legislative Assembly and the latter in Lok Sabha. But why, and how? I consider in some detail how these muscular Qureshi leaders were able to appeal to their Muslim 'co-ethnics' without consistently reminding their new allies among Meerut's Backward Castes of the glories of Mughal rule, or worse of Pakistan and Partition. In short, I consider here and in a brief Conclusion (Chapter 7) what it means to be a Muslim now in Meerut. I also reflect on how a more assertive Muslim identity has been produced in the period of coalition politics that India has lived with since the collapse of the Congress Raj in 1989.

Fieldwork and Research Methods

Before I begin, let me also say something here about the fieldwork that lies behind this study and about my own experiences in India and positionality. This dissertation takes the form of an in-depth single case study that is largely based on ethnographic materials and semi-structured interviews. The study also draws on official publications, local historians' writings, family histories, caste (*biradari*) archival records, and newspapers written in English, Hindi or Urdu. Although the main subject of the study falls in the field of political science, my aim has been to examine issues of religious identity and community politics by means of historical, anthropological and sociological research that links events in one locality to others at different spatial scales.

My fieldwork began in mid-January 2001 with a visit to Delhi. After that I visited India several times for three to six months at a time, before basing myself in Meerut city for 16 months from January 2003 until the end of May 2004. In total I spent over two years in India. In 2001 I visited a number of major cities and towns in Uttar Pradesh² in order to choose a city or cities for my study. My leading research question was a deceptively simple one: why were some Indian cities more peaceful than others even though where they had almost identical socio-economic characteristics? I should add that I was formulating this

² The cities I visited were Meerut, Aligarh, Moradabad, Mathura, Agra, Saharanpur, Kanpur, Lucknow, Allahabad and Varanasi. I visited most of them more than twice as the second round of visit always provided a better vision of a city in comparative perspective and a settling effect of my newly acquired knowledge about it.

question a few years before the major works of Brass, Wilkinson and Varshney came out.

In each city I conducted interviews with state as well as district government representatives, and also with political and business leaders, journalists and political activists. My aim was to acquaint myself with Hindu-Muslim relations in the city, with riot histories, and most importantly with local official and unofficial structures and mechanisms for maintaining law and order involving civil society actors. These latter structures and mechanisms included quasi-official Peace Committees at the locality-, ward- and city-levels, all of which involved citizens and which police officials called 'community policing' at the time. My aim was to study how civil society actors were engaged with the state in riot prevention, control and post-riot reconciliation.

Interviews with the District Magistrate (DM), Deputy Inspector General of Police (DIG), Senior Superintendence of Police (SSP), Station Officers, and people of various ranks underneath them, helped me to understand official views of Hindu-Muslim relations and joint efforts to maintain law and order within the context of north Indian society. In each city I interviewed at least ten to fifteen top government representatives and politicians and another dozen non-state actors across different walks of life. Meetings with new people through the networks of the local administration often removed my position of impartiality and appeared to place me in the state camp, which was powerful enough to significantly alter the nature of my later interviews. In these interviews I noticed that my interviewees' words and attitudes appeared to have more constraints attached to them on some occasions.

I finally chose Meerut as my research site because of its distinctive and puzzling record of high frequency Hindu-Muslim violence up to the end of the 1980s, followed by a period of dramatically reduced ethnic violence. I decided to adopt a single case rather than a cross-case study because of the need for ethnographic depth over a controlled period of time. The primary focus of my fieldwork in Meerut, beginning in January 2003, was to explore what had been happening in the Muslim community, particularly among low-status Muslim groups like the Qureshis that became the dominant political force in the city after the early 1990s. I began my fieldwork in Meerut with interviews with local government representatives and local politicians (former MLAs and MPs). Initial contacts with local government representatives, including the DM and DIG, were essential in order for me to obtain official recognition and possibly protection as a researcher who aimed to study Hindu-Muslim relations and violence in the Meerut city. From these initial contacts I gradually established my own networks among ordinary citizens. A snowballing list of respondents was extended to include political activists, business leaders, journalists and academics. These interviewees represented different fields close to or within the power structures of Meerut society. They had detailed knowledge of the functioning not only of their own field but of the entire city (at least from their own perspectives). My interviewees in this general category numbered around 30, and I conducted interviews more than once with some of them. But this list of early respondents includes very few Muslims.

As far as my principal target group was concerned — low-status Muslims in general and the Qureshis in particular — I initially gained access to many members of the more economically advanced and visible Ansari community.

But when it came to the Qureshis it was very difficult to obtain initial contacts. A breakthrough came three months into my stay, when I met *Shahar Kaji* (a religious judge) in his house not far from the *Jama Masjid* in the Old Town; through him I was able to get the first contact with the Qureshi community. *Shahar Kaji* became my central contact through which to approach the key Qureshi political leaders in Meerut, including Yusuf and Yaqoob Qureshi, and the then-Mayor, Shahid Akhlaq. Another important contact was Mr. Abdul Wahaf (Doulla), the head of the Meerut government slaughterhouse, who introduced me to the localities of the Qureshi butcher community. I could find no detailed maps of the Old Town which would give me a good sense of the location of each locality; for this I needed Doulla's help.

The only official map of the city I could find was one produced in 1974 by the military, in which the Old Town is shown in miniscule proportions. In Delhi as well as in Meerut I was told in specialised book shops that there was no better map than this. I therefore collected many hand-drawn maps, mainly from police officers and other people I asked to draw maps for me. I also drew maps myself by walking throughout the Old Town with Doulla or other Muslim respondents. In this way I gradually built up a sense of the location of each locality and the geographic expansion of the area. I also collected data on the socio-demographic composition of the Qureshi community and their surrounding neighbourhoods through interviews with Muslim residents of different communities. While each locality forms an independent space of defined social boundaries containing dense and intimate networks (Kumar 1988; Mann 1992), the south end of the Old Town, and the areas surrounding the Kotwali police station, appear to form an entity woven by common and complex threads of the

history, demography and, most importantly, religious life shared by a larger group of *Ajilaf* or artisan Muslims in Meerut city.

I should say that my fieldwork in the Old Town was based on ‘purposive’ sampling rather than on truly random or more ‘scientific’ stratified sampling method (Mitchell 1967: 31). Fieldwork is often messy and requires the field researcher to be flexible and pragmatic. In order to define the ‘facts’ of the case, I used multiple sources of evidence, comprising semi-structured and open-ended interviews, direct observation of inter-personal interactions, and general observations of physical artefacts of cultural features and other operations of everyday life (Yin 1998: 230-233). The array of my findings from these methods has been backed up by secondary sources including local writings, newspapers and archival records. Among Muslim respondents I conducted about 80 interviews. I also conducted a focused survey to inquire about experiences of the 1987 violence, specifically focusing on Muslim victims in Hashimpura and Maliana village.

The topic of Hindu-Muslim violence in general and the 1987 violence in Meerut in particular was an extremely difficult one to research. Many respondents either refused to talk, fell silent or changed the subject. It needed a large amount of time and effort, as well as patience, to collect interview data on this topic. In this particular survey I managed to collect 15 responses from Hindus and 11 from Muslims. In order to obtain these, my Hindu assistants (pretending that they were Muslim) and I had to contact at least 40 respondents in each community. In a few instances respondents who had finished interviews with us returned a little later on with more substantial information about their

experience of the 1987 violence. At these second interviews we were just quiet listeners to energetic accounts that almost took the form of a confession. Often these respondents said that they wanted to let the world know what happened in 1987. Needless to say, these responses are the ones I cite most in my thesis.

As time went by, many people, both Hindus and Muslims of different walks of life, came to talk to me, especially after a local Hindi newspaper carried my name as a Japanese researcher visiting Meerut. From that time on, about five months after starting my life in Meerut, I almost did not need to introduce myself. Many people that I encountered in the city seemed to recognise me. Sometimes I just sat in a public space such as the office of Municipal government, and local politicians came by and talked to me. They said again that they wanted their story to be known outside India, in Japan or in the UK. This, I thought, was very different from western society where people usually attend this kind of meeting only after making appointments. In these random interviews I acquired information of significant value to my research. It is, therefore, not only that I sought respondents for interviews, but rather that the field was coming towards me, often with important information.

I rented a flat at the top of a house constructed by the owner in a Christian colony in Meerut. I chose this colony because my respondents, both Hindu and Muslim, tended to ask me as their first question 'where I put up?' The Christian colony was the best choice that I could think of as I thought that since it was neither Muslim or Hindu it would help to make my residential identity slightly more ambiguous. The area I lived in was close to Police Line and not far from Bagum Bridge (Bagum Puri); these form boundaries between the main busy

Hindu market streets that go down toward the Old Town and the relatively quiet residential areas of Civil Line and Police Line. The area is almost the beginning of the vast cantonment that stretches towards north-east and west Meerut (see Map 3.1).

The sensibility and consciousness typically shared by Meerut inhabitants, and Indians more generally for that matter, about my ethnic as well as gender background — in a word, my ascriptive location — accompanied me throughout my fieldwork. Although I am a Japanese woman, I dressed in *Salvar-khurta*, the long top and loose trousers, with a *chadar* to cover my head and upper body, the typical everyday dress of ordinary Muslim women. As I moved into the Old Town, it was very important for me to become one of them, at least in appearance. My Hindu assistants also had to pretend that they were Muslim when they accompanied me in the Old Town for interviews; in the Hindu localities outside the Old Town they returned to being Hindus with Hindu names.

My male Hindu assistants were of limited use in some interviews, particularly when I wished to meet my interviewees' family members. They drove away female members of Muslim families because of their gender. When I went on my own, almost all the members of an extended family of three generations came out to see me. I soon found that my respondents' teenage grandchildren could act as able translators, at least where they were attending English medium schools. This was the marker of upward mobility for a family whose elders had no command of English. These occasions also provided me with good opportunities to observe and converse with female members of the family, few of

whom one would come across outside Muslim households. Even if one did encounter them, they seemed to shut off the outside world with their black outer garment, the *burqa*. My gender in this case, therefore, worked to expand the range of my respondents.

I was aware that being an outsider and a female also imposed certain constraints on my respondents' answers and stories. I recognised that if I were an insider the content of my respondents' talks would be different, to varying degrees, and that I might be missing out on certain aspects. However, I was also aware that there were things that my respondents told me *because* I was an outsider with no competitive interests or connections to their society. These were things that they might never have told people from their own society.

Over a period of six months or so I came to hear the same repeated answers to questions. I also started getting a feeling for the society that I was studying. One of the most powerful messages of the Meerut Muslim society was how deeply religion is embedded into the everyday life of ordinary Muslims. It became intriguing for me to explore the role of Islam, the unique and powerful aspects of a religiously-based identity and the relationship between religion, society and politics. I attended many social events both in private and public spaces where women were not allowed. These were among the best events to observe 'the political' as it was performed in the public arena. At wedding ceremonies of Qureshi politicians, for example, I was allowed to present myself in the formal marriage proceedings where there were no other female attendees. In these proceedings, politics inevitably appeared in juxtaposition with religion. Powerful men led by the high-status Muslim priest, usually *ulama*, prayed on

the stage facing Mecca during the ceremony. These men were selected because of their qualifications as 'men of religion' as recognised by the *ulama*, and other men attending in the room observed their public performance of religious rites with respect and admiration. When I attended the wedding of the daughter of Haji Raes, a renowned Qureshi politician, I saw these religious rites performed by the leading Qureshi figures in Meerut, including Yusuf and Yaqoob Qureshi and Haji Raes himself.

This thesis, to recap, aims to tell the story of one low-status Muslim community in Meerut city. The weakness of a single case study in comparison with a large-N study is of course the difficulty in defining to what extent the findings can be generalised to produce a robust theory. I believe, however, that a single N study which is set in the context of a broader theoretical and regional literature remains the most appropriate way for one researcher (as opposed to a team of researchers) to understand the sorts of questions around identity formation, religiosity and politics that are my object here. Many intriguing questions emerge 'along the way' in fieldwork when the very field opens itself up with its own energy and speaks to the researcher, guiding her to knowledge grounded on and generated from itself.

Chapter 1: On the Causes and Geography of Communal Violence in India

[T]he long-term trend toward dispersion and the ‘normalisation’ of the Muslim vote, that is, its distribution over a number of political parties according to social position and ideological inclination was abruptly reversed in the 1989 and 1991 Elections as Muslims in large numbers chose to vote *en bloc* against the BJP or against Congress (Hansen 1999: 152).

1.1 Introduction

The immediate starting point for this thesis is my observation, echoed above in part by Thomas Blom Hansen, that since c.1990 Muslim voters have been moving away from the Congress Party in north India as they have sought to protect themselves against resurgent and often violent forms of militant Hinduism. The fact that Muslims in Meerut have made effective alliances with low-caste Hindu groups and their political representatives can be made to explain, to a large degree, why organised violence against Muslims in Meerut declined sharply in the 1990s and into the 2000s. What I primarily seek to show is how and in which terms and with what precise consequences, different actors within Meerut’s diverse Muslim communities were able to effect these new political transactions.

A less immediate starting point for my work is the observation, popularised recently by Ashutosh Varshney among others, that communal — or what he calls

‘ethnic’ — violence in India has not only ebbed and flowed sharply over time, as Hansen also indicates, but also across space. Most victims of Hindu-Muslim ‘riots’ or violence are killed or injured in cities, and then mainly in a small group of cities (as I discuss in more detail later in this chapter). Some of India’s states have also been more prone to vicious outbursts of communal violence than others. Gujarat comes to mind in recent times, but if we go back to the 1960s (Ranchi) or 1970s (Jamshedpur), the state of Bihar, including that part of it which is now Jharkhand, saw repeated instances of communal rioting in a way that happily has not been mirrored since c.1990.

Before turning, then, to Meerut, or even to Uttar Pradesh (see Chapter 2), it is important that this thesis first addresses itself to more general bodies of work on the changing historical geographies of Hindu-Muslim violence in India. Accordingly, section II of this chapter reviews some key factors in the political development of colonial India that laid the foundations for communalism and Hindu nationalism in more modern times. I consider here not just the well-known story of British ‘divide and rule’ policies, but also the formation of what Nicholas Dirks (Dirks 2001) has called ‘the ethnographic state’, or the sharp delineation of community groups in the Census and other technologies of government. I also review some work on the formation of organised political groupings within what become more sharply defined ‘Hindu’ and ‘Muslim’ communities, including those linked to the Aligarh movement on the one hand and the Sangh Parivar on the other. In section III I then discuss some of the more significant work that has emerged in recent decades on the mainsprings, significance and content of communal violence in independent India, and most especially since 1980. Above all, I focus on work by Ashutosh Varshney, Steven

Wilkinson and Paul Brass, although I also refer to work by Asghar Ali Engineer and Veena Das, among others.

1.2 The Construction of Communalism in Colonial India

India's Muslim population today numbers over 140 million, making it third in size to that of Indonesia and Pakistan.³ Half of this Muslim population lives in north India and West Bengal, particularly across the Indo-Gangetic plain and centring around the Ganges and Jamuna rivers — the traditional seats of lasting Muslim power. The Muslims came to India in three major waves. After the first military invasion in AD 711 in Sind by the Arabs, the Slave Dynasty initiated by Turkish descent marked Islamic power's permanent foothold in India in 1206. This was followed by the Delhi Sultanate, which originated in the Turkish and later Afghan invasions. The Sultanate succeeded in expanding its power over the vast northern Indian plains and also moved southward to most parts of central India during the 13th to 16th centuries (Troll 1986).

The Mughal empire which followed the Delhi Sultanate began with the capture of Kabul by the Turk, Babur, a descendant of Genghis Khan, in 1526. The great Mughal dynasty was largely shaped by Mongol and Turkish military powers. It came to occupy a vast territory under Akbar (1542-1605), running at the time of his death from Afghanistan in the east to Orissa and south to the Deccan plateau. Of course, these long centuries of Mughal rule were often challenged by

³ India's Muslim population as recorded in the 2001 Indian Census report is 138,188,240, or 13.43 percent of the total Indian population.

Hindu insurgencies. Among them, the Marathas became a major threat and permanently weakened the political foundation of the Mughal dynasty in the 18th century. By the 1740s, the Mughals had been reduced to a collection of factions of the nobility who were fighting among each other just as European inroads into South Asia were gathering pace. When the British East Company conquered Bengal and Bihar after the battles of Plassey in 1757 and Buxar in 1764, the fallen empire lost most of its heartland to the British. Awadh (Oudh) was the major state in the area and the home domain of the failing empire. Its ruler, the Nawab of Awadh was defeated by the British East Company in 1764 and was forced to cede to the company a large part of his territory in 1801 (Bayly 2000 (1983): 1). The Company finally annexed its whole territory in 1856. In 1877 the North-Western Provinces and Oudh had emerged by combining the administrative offices of the North-Western Provinces and the region of Oudh, which was renamed as the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh in 1902, and today is Uttar Pradesh.

The fall of the Mughals and the conquest of the British meant the old ruling community (the 'Muslims') and their subordinates (the 'Hindus') became nominally equal subjects under a new political regime. All subjects strove to adapt their way of life, social position and political relations to the new ruler, according to the perceived rules of the new system. A section of progressive Muslim elites started a socio-educational reform programme in the latter half of the 19th century. Muslims were seeking socio-economic survival under the British system, whose presence was firmly established after the Revolt of 1857-8

by the primacy of its military power.⁴ The programme was also a response to intensive economic competition with the Hindus, some of whom had been flexibly and rigorously adjusting themselves to the new education system installed by the government of the East India Company. Muslims were falling behind in this competition, in part because traditional Islamic learning was an obstacle to adjusting quickly to a more secular education system. Many Muslims saw little compatibility between western and Islamic education. English education became another hurdle for them, while elite Hindus demonstrated far more enthusiasm for learning English (Seal 1973: 11-17).

But not all Muslims reacted in this way. Muslim socio-educational reform was initiated by the 'Aligarh Muslims' — those who centred around the circle of Syed Ahmad Khan and who proposed a new interpretation of Islamic faith and law.⁵ The Aligarh Muslims sought to spread and institutionalise higher-level western education among north India's Muslim community. The programme was underpinned by the assumption that Muslims would have more to gain from collaboration with British power than from resistance (Metcalf 1965). The reform programme, later known as the 'Aligarh movement', became a key centre for Muslim politics in the late-19th and early 20th centuries. It sought to

⁴ The Revolt, or insurgency among the Sepoys against the British, started in the cantonment area in Meerut city in 1857. It had a critical impact in initiating and shaping the fundamental modernism and ideological themes of the Aligarh movement. For a concrete and detailed analysis of the impact on individual Muslim elites, see Robinson (1993). The British conceived that the uprising was largely a conspiracy among the Muslims (Metcalf 1965).

⁵ Muslims reacted to the modern western system in a variety of ways, and many were opposed to Syed Ahmed's modernist rationalism. The most extreme reaction came from the traditionalist theologians of the seminary of Deoband, founded in 1867 in Muzaffarnagar. For detailed profiles of other Muslim reactions, see Ahmad and von Grunebaum (1970).

negotiate Muslim interests in exchange for 'unquestioned loyalty' to the colonial power. British patronage and protection greatly enhanced the movement. The Aligarh Muslims established the Anglo-Muhammadan Oriental College (Aligarh Muslim University) in 1875 in Aligarh in western UP, and their own political party, the Muslim League, in 1906.

Syed Ahmed's reform programme also marked a founding moment in what later was most often called Muslim communalism. It represented the first attempt to create a 'Muslim' community out of mere 'collections of different interests', or as a consolidated political force (Robinson 1974: 28). From the beginning, the Aligarh Muslims saw themselves as a separate and distinct political force, distancing themselves from the incipient nationalist movement, as represented by the Indian National Congress. This separatist orientation, however, which was partly forged amid socio-economic and political competition with Hindus, was developed most significantly within the broader structures of imperial rule in India, or in regard to Britain's 'divide and rule' policy. The colonial government conceived India in terms of separate religious groups, as I explain further below. By endorsing the Aligarh movement financially and politically, the British sought to place a system of control over potentially their most dangerous and yet also important political ally (ibid. 126-131). The Indian National Congress (INC), founded in 1885, on the other hand, stood in opposition to the British and sought to represent (and create) a unified Indian identity. A triangular political situation was thus established in which the colonial government generally allied with the Muslims to counter the nationalist aspirations of the Congress and its major sponsors, the Hindus.

1.2.1 Technologies of rule

Various modern institutions of governance and control installed by the colonial government played a critical role in the growth of communalism. Newly representative — if heavily circumscribed — systems of modern government had considerable influence in politicising Indian subjects. Self-government institutions provided Indians with a means to organise themselves in formal politics and to promote their interests at different spatial scales. At the same time, the system of separate (religious) electorates installed by the British from 1909 contributed greatly to the growth of communal identities (Page 1999).

British census operations, which began in 1872 and which sought to enumerate indigenous groups by religion and caste, formed another technology of government that helped to build a sense of separate identity among several of India's major political communities (Kaviraj 1997: 328). David Washbrook points out that the British set up a system of representation based on 'difference', in which the governed could only represent particular, sectional interests, with the colonial state alone being seen to be capable of representing the whole of Indian society (Washbrook 1997: 40).

1.2.2 Hindu revivalism

Against this background of 'communalism born of colonialism' — notwithstanding that the former has earlier roots, as Chris Bayly reminds us (Bayly 1985) — Hindu revivalism and indeed nationalism were forged as yet

another response to the challenges of colonial modernity, including the spread of western education and Christian missionaries. The latter group in particular developed a powerful machinery of polemics against Islam, Hinduism and other indigenous religions. The popularisation of communal identities also owed much to the emergence of Hindu revivalism, which succeeded in attracting widespread popular support through traditional cultural idioms (Andersen and Damle 1987: 16).

Among 'Hindus' (or those in the process of becoming Hindus), the most dynamic reaction to the challenge of western civilisation was the rise of a revivalist Vedic sect known as the Arya Samaj, founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875 in the Punjab. The Samaj preached against several practices of orthodox Hinduism, including untouchability and the subjection of women, and promoted the pure teachings of the Vedas. The proselytisation of the Hindu faith to Muslims was one of the Samaj's most important activities and was widely practised in north India.⁶ The Arya Samaj was the most important Hindu revivalist organisation to lay the foundations of Hindu nationalism in India. The Samaj's Hinduist ideology — based on inherent ethnic pride, stigmatisation of the Other and emulation of the semitic religions — was inherited by forms of Hindu nationalist thought which gathered force in the 1920s and 1930s, as I explain further below (Jaffrelot 1996 (1993): 16-27).

⁶ The Arya Samaj of course provoked reaction from Indian Islam mainly from the Deoband seminary and the *Ahl-I hadith*, the neo-traditionalist Islamic school of thought. The *Ahl-I hadith* was also opposed to the rationalistic modernism of the Aligarh movement (Ahmad and von Grunebaum 1970: 6).

The Arya Samaj spearheaded two of the most prominent revivalist movements of the last decades of the 19th century. One was the cow protection movement, which aimed to stop the sacrificing of cows during the Islamic annual festival of the Baqr Id in north India. The cow protection movement stirred religious zeal among the 'lower strata' of Hindus in small towns across Punjab and the United Provinces (UP). The movement resulted in a number of serious communal clashes and reached an early peak in 1893 with large-scale violence in eastern UP (Pandey 1999 (1990): Chapter 5).

A second movement featured political agitation among Hindus for the replacement of Urdu by Hindi as the administrative language of state. Urdu had been the court language of the Muslims during the Mughal empire. It was the language of the Muslim elites. On the other hand, many Hindus spoke various dialects of Hindi. Although these languages are nearly identical in grammar, they differ in specialised vocabulary with Urdu retaining Persian, Arabic and Turkic influence while Hindi relies heavily on Sanskrit. These languages are also different in script — Urdu is written in the Persian script while Hindi is written in the Devanagari script. Much of the attack on the Persian script came from Hindus who wished to break the firmly-guarded system of patronage of government jobs available only to Urdu-speaking elites. The language controversy ended with the victory of the Hindus when the colonial government issued the Nagri Resolution in 1900, ordering the use of both Urdu and Hindi as official languages.⁷

⁷ The propagation of Hindi invited essentialist and stereotypical images of the Muslims. Muslim depictions by nationalist writers and educators in the press were products of the imagination in

At the turn of the century, another important Hindu leader was deep within the ranks of the Congress Party — Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Tilak was described from early on as an ‘extremist’ in his militancy against the British, as well as against the Muslims. Tilak became aware of the mobilising power of popular religious symbols from the time of the cow protection movement. He organised Hindu folk festivals using religious symbols in the Marathi-speaking part of Bombay Province. One was to worship the Hindu God, Ganesh, and the other, the Maratha king, Shivaji, who fatally weakened the Mughal empire. These festivals did much to contribute to the propagation of an exclusive political identity among Hindus and worsened communal relations in what is today called Maharashtra.

Peter van der Veer has argued that Hindu revivalist movements, particularly the cow protection movement, also laid the foundation for religious (Hindu) nationalism in British India (van der Veer 1996 (1994): 66). Hindu money-lenders and merchants who had acquired wealth and political power were an important medium both for Hindu revivalism and nationalism. They were also the most fervent supporters of the early Congress. These ‘Hindu rich men’ helped to ensure that Congress ideology reflected much of the revivalist view, which also helped the Party to gain political influence (Bayly 1973; 1975: 16, 123).⁸ Religious differences between Hindus and Muslims were increasingly

constructing and inventing separate identities. These images continue to be used by the press and Hindu nationalists in contemporary India (Amin 2005).

⁸ The myth of medieval ‘Muslim tyranny’ and Hindu ‘national’ defence was largely developed and endorsed by Congress nationalists in the late 19th century. At the local level, the Hindu revivalist and later nationalist movement often shared the same cadre in the Congress until the late 1930s when Hindu Mahasabha was formally expelled from Congress (Basu et al. 1993: 4).

brought into play in municipal politics in the context of changing local power structures. As electoral competition intensified the communal divide was sharpened in many UP towns. It was in the trading centres of north India that assertive Hindu revivalism developed most strongly and was brought into national politics by the Hindu Mahasabha from the first decades of the 20th century onwards.

1.2.3 The birth of Hindu nationalism

The 1920s saw a renewed cycle of Hindu-Muslim violence, especially in north India. Among many triggering events during the 1920s, the Khilafat⁹ most powerfully prompted the process of Hindu identity-building. Hindu nationalists began to construct a concept of Hinduism in a more organised and articulate form. A militant Hindu discourse emerged to consolidate Hindu culture and strength in order to cope with the challenges of modernity. The publication in 1923 of *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* by V. P. Savarkar, a Maharashtrian Brahmin, set the ideological foundation of much Hindu nationalism in India. Savarkar constructed ideas of *Hindutva* (Hinduness), based on a perceived sense of Hindu (temporary) 'inferiority' and vulnerability vis-à-vis Muslims. Hindu vulnerability was conceived to be derived from the internal division of the Hindu community by caste and as a result of ideas of non-violence. For their

⁹ Eminent Muslim leaders launched the Khilafat movements to restore the Caliphate, the Sultan of Turkey, and to preserve his religious authority. The Muslims pressured the British, who were taking the leading role in the peace negotiations following the First World War settlement in 1920. The movement ceased after the sudden abolition of the Caliphate by the Turkish National Assembly in 1924.

part, the Muslims exemplified religious strength through extra-territorial loyalties of the kind most powerfully shown during the Khilafat.¹⁰ Savarkar defined India as a Hindu nation and refused to accept the existence of an Other within the eternal socio-cultural territory of India. According to his *Hindutva* ideology Muslims were alien to India, since their religious precepts were developed outside South Asia. Muslims and other minorities could expect to become Indian citizens only through assimilation into Hindu culture and under Hindu tutelage (Jaffrelot 1996 (1993): 16-29).

The RSS was founded in Nagpur by Dr. Keshav Baliram Hedgewar in 1925 as a catalyst for Savarkar's concept of *Hindutva*. It incorporated a tradition of muscular and spiritual training for Hindu youth in order to create the 'new man', a selfless patriot who would play a leadership role in promoting the progressive re-organisation of the Hindu community. The RSS sponsored a wide range of activities, including the organisation of country-wide Hindu networks, the rescue of Hindus in communal strife and reconversion from 'forced conversion' to Islam (Hansen 1999: 93, 248 fn5).

The Partition of India in 1947 increased the pronounced hostility of Right-wing Hindus towards Muslims. The RSS regarded Partition as the result of mistaken soft treatment of Muslims, notably by Gandhi but also by Nehru. The organisation was allegedly involved in the assassination of Gandhi in 1948 and

¹⁰ Ambedkar concedes that Pan-Islamism '... lead[s] every Mussalman in India to say that he is a Muslim first and Indian afterwards. It is this sentiment which explains why the Indian Muslim has taken so small a part in the advancement of India but has spent himself to exhaustion by taking up the cause of Muslim countries'. He asserts that between 1912 and 1922 during the Khilafat 'Muslims did not bother about Indian politics in the least' (Ambedkar 1941: 297).

was banned for a short time in response to this allegation. After the ban was lifted, the RSS began creating semi-autonomous affiliates to develop its image and overcome public criticism. These are referred to as the 'sons' (Sangh Parivar) of the RSS, the 'mother' organisation. The most important branch of the Sangh Parivar was for a while the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) founded in 1964. The VHP continues a mission begun in the 1920s to produce a 'Hindu nation' by consolidating 'Hindu society' and various Hindu organisations and by establishing a global Hindu network. Its activities include reconversion and teaching Sanskrit to the poor. The VHP is a transnational and overtly political organisation, pursuing and embodying an aggressive Hinduism that surpasses even that of the Arya Samaj (ibid. 107). It came to play a critical role in the disputes around the temple/mosque in Ayodhya in the 1980s and 1990s.

1.2.4 Endgames of empire and the partition of India

The Muslim League first appeared in 1906 as an antithesis to the Congress, which sought to represent all Indians as belonging to one nation. Initially, however, the League's political position was not necessarily developed in opposition to Congress, as it sought to advance Muslim interests *within* the framework of a single nation and a multicultural polity. Nevertheless, periods of co-operation between the League and the INC were limited — peaking perhaps in the defence of the Caliphate — and were not much observed after the mid-1920s. The political distance between the two parties grew steadily amid

rising communal tension and as the Hindu Mahasabha gained a stronger position within the Congress Party (Sarkar 2001 (1983): 235-237, 356-357).¹¹

After the overwhelming victory of the INC in the 1937 Provincial elections, the Muslim League, now led by Mohammad Jinnah, constructed itself afresh as an all-India political force against Congress and went on to win an impressive victory in the elections in 1946. The League fought the election on the sole basis of 'Pakistan'. This victory set the electoral basis for the partition of British India in 1947 into the independent states of India and Pakistan. When Jinnah claimed to realise that the Congress Party was not in a strong position to safeguard Muslim interests under a proposed federal scheme that had been taking shape from the mid-1930s, and observed that no settlement regarding power-sharing was possible, the partition of India became inevitable. The 1946 election strikingly revealed the prevalence of intensive communal voting that appeared to go beyond the sole effect of the logic of separate electorates (ibid. 427). The election reflected the depth of communal feelings at a popular level. This soon manifested itself in inflamed levels of communal violence that quickly spread over a wide area, starting with the Great Calcutta Killing in August 1946.

The Partition riots in 1946-1947 probably killed almost a million people on both sides of the divided territories (Butalia 1998: 3). The phenomenal scale of

¹¹ In 1928-1929, for example, the Congress lost its last chance to abolish the Muslim separate electorates, a compromise offered by Jinnah. It made, instead, a number of concessions to the aggressive communal views of the Hindu Mahasabha in drafting the Nehru report (Hasan 1979: 267). In return, Jinnah revived his demand for separate electorates in his famous Fourteen Points. The breakdown of negotiations over the abandonment of the separate electorate was a 'milestone along the way to the partition of India' (Hardy 1972: 213).

communal killing and a mass exodus of people¹² marked the discontinuity of Muslim existence in India and the birth of a new Muslim community in the new independent India. Mere figures are unable to express the depth and extent of the impact of this extraordinary human tragedy on the new nation, its people and society. The horrors of Partition have become part of a submerged collective memory of the Indian nation and 'an unwritten epic' of South Asia (Nandy 2001: 99).

1.2.5 Hindu nationalism and the politics of communalism in post-colonial India

After Independence Indian Muslims faced a substantially different political situation, not to mention living reality, as a national minority grouping. They had lost the great Muslim populations which had formed majorities in West Punjab and East Bengal, and became a much smaller and politically weaker constituency within India. They also lost their privileged minority position in the earlier representative system, marked as it was by a separate electorate and reserved seats. They were now organised into the general electorate for the first time under a universal franchise. The large majority of Muslims were illiterate and underprivileged. The All-India Muslim League, which had led the way to the creation of a new Muslim country, disappeared from the political scene in

¹² One figure says that 12 million people crossed the border in the three months between August and November 1947 (Butalia 1998: 76).

north India.¹³ So did much of the prominent Muslim leadership — its ‘modern’ leaders — in the large-scale exodus to Pakistan. Had they remained in India, laments Mushirul Hasan, leaders of that calibre would have been able to lead the masses in a much better way, and would have encouraged modern education and other necessary social reforms (Hasan 1997: 186-195). The leaders who remained in India were ‘far smaller men’ than those who took the ‘mantle’ of leaders in the Pakistan movement (Noorani 2003: 1). Indian Muslims, in other words, were dramatically reduced to a leaderless and economically and socially fragmented community whose security was constantly threatened by Hindu resentment about the founding of Pakistan. Rather ironically, most Muslims now had to look to the Congress Party for economic advancement and social protection.

The Congress party leadership, especially Jawaharlal Nehru, made great efforts to overcome communalism by promoting a modernising project based on liberal democracy and secularism. The leadership believed that the state and economic development would work to eliminate traditional identities of caste, religion and ethnicity. By the 1970s, however, it was clear that the expected erosion of these identities was not taking place. Instead, religion, ethnicity and caste remained essential to the working of India’s modern political system. John Zavos has shown that the British colonial state was preoccupied with religion, believing it to be the ‘motor force of Indian civilisation and social relations’ (Zavos 2000:

¹³ The former politicians in the Muslim League who remained in India were politically divided among themselves and had no political organisation. The politicians of the Muslim League were discredited by their past associations and had lost motivation after the establishment of Pakistan. Even on issues of Muslim minority rights in India, many of these former political leaders sided with the Congress after Partition (Austin 1966: 9 fn34).

36). As a result, the British elevated religion as the legitimate ground for the representation of political interests of Indian subjects. Zavos' observation on the mobilising power of religion in Indian politics proved to be the case after Independence. The ascribed identities of ethnicity, religion and caste all turned out to be useful tools for mobilising social groups, particularly the underprivileged classes to participate in Indian political life through political parties. 'Identity politics' remains essential in India's modern electoral politics (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967: 24).

Based on the main 'lesson' of Partition — that communalism would 'kill' the new country — India adopted a constitution that defined it in practice as a secular republic. The Constitution of 1950 was a realisation of a nationalist conception of India that embraces all religious, ethnic and linguistic identities under one overarching Indian national identity. The Constitution uniquely underlines the importance of religious faith among the Indian population, as well as the claims of religious minorities, by according all religions equal status and recognition. It seeks to achieve unity amidst many religions by granting all individuals equal citizenship. Based on these premises, every citizen is expected to participate in a plural political democracy based on a secular identity as an Indian.

The Indian Constitution does not advocate secularism in order to separate religion from the state in the strictest of senses. The contradiction in India's concept of secularism lies in the fact that the Constitution guarantees equal citizenship and justice to all individuals, and at the same time grants collective rights to cultural groups in charge of their own personal law (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987: 40). There have been many instances of state involvement in the

affairs of religious establishments since 1950. Most notably, the Hindu Code Bill of 1955 attempted to reform some (allegedly) pre-modern Hindu practices such as polygamy according to religious norms and to 'secularise the public domain of personal law' (Chatterjee 1995: 25). However, this effort at reform was not applied as strongly to other religious groups, including Muslims, prompting Hindu nationalists to lay the charge of government-sponsored 'pseudo-secularism' (or 'pampering' of the Muslim minority).

1.2.6 Hindu nationalism in the 1980s

The issue of a uniform code vs. the Personal Law of religious/cultural communities was revived most aggressively at the time of the Shah Bano affair in 1985. The Supreme Court's historic verdict concerning maintenance payments to a Muslim divorcée suggested that Indian civil law should override Muslim Personal Law, but this ruling was overturned by the government of Rajiv Gandhi as it strove to pass the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill in May 1987. At this time, Rajiv Gandhi was keen to court the Muslim vote. Both verdicts touched the very sensitive area of Muslim cultural rights. The Shah Bano affair provoked an unprecedented scale of protests among Muslims who viewed the Court's judgement as a violation of their cultural rights,¹⁴ while the Women's Bill outraged the Hindu Right wing on the grounds that India's secular policy was weak and only good for communally-biased 'minority appeasement.'

¹⁴ In Bihar, for example, 400,000 people gathered for the protest, while Bombay saw a rally of 300,000 people gathering for the Muslim cause (Engineer 1987c: 36).

Hindutva rhetoric is based on a clever semantic reversal. It has challenged Nehru-style secularism (which in practice *had* come to offer some special protection to Islam and Muslim Indians) by recourse to the same underlying discourses of equality and fair representation, but this time in order to justify its logic of Hindu majoritarianism (Morey and Tickell 2005: xviii). The Shah Bano affair reminded some Muslim scholars of the Khilafat movements in the 1920s, in that it demonstrated the mobilising power of religious symbols (Hasan 1989). For militant Hindus, however, the Shah Bano affair helped the BJP to use communalist ideas in its election campaign, for which they were magnified and sharpened, and were linked particularly to the agitation around the mosque in Ayodhya from 1986 onwards. Muslim politicians and religious leaders responded equally aggressively to the Hindu plan to destroy the Babri mosque, built by the first Mughal ruler, Babur in the 16th century. The politics of religious identity, promoted by Tilak nearly a century before, returned to the political arena now in very aggressive forms.

The RSS, and the broader collective of the Sangh Parivar, which also comprised the BJP, VHP, Bajrang Dal (the VHP youth organisation) and the Hindu Mahasabha, orchestrated a temple agitation campaign. The campaign drew on an earlier round of religious processions which had mobilised one version of Hinduism (or a Hindu imaginary strongly indebted to the iconography of Lord Rama) across the length and breadth of India. It aimed to arouse a renewed sense of Hindu religious unity as the basis of a new/old political community (van der Veer 1987; Jaffrelot 1996 (1993): 360).

State-controlled television broadcast an 18-month-long series on the *Ramayana*, the epic of Lord Rama, which penetrated the everyday life of a mass public. The programme depicted a simplified version of a militant and virtuous Rama avenging India (*Bharat*) against the alien Other (Manuel 1996: 130). Hindu nationalist ideology thus permeated not only Indian politics and religion but also the much broader field of the media and popular culture; it acquired a normality and acceptability that it had not been accorded before (Hansen 1999). The BJP expanded and came of age amid a series of well-organised campaigns that sought to appropriate and reinterpret Rama-related imaginary. After it was born as a reincarnation of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in 1980, the BJP won only two seats in the Lok Sabha in the 1984 elections. However, within seven years it became the second largest political party in India in the 1991 General Elections. This was a dramatic rise considering that in preceding decades no Hindu nationalist party, particularly the Jana Sangh in north India, had been able to become a significant national political force. This was partly because the majority of Hindus did not share the Party's convictions, but also because of what Bruce Graham calls, 'the essential bond' between Hindus and the Congress Party (Graham 1990: 255-256).

During the 1980s communal ideology played increasingly strongly within Indian politics and was associated once again with rising levels of inter-community antagonism and acts of violence. But how do we explain the sudden and dramatic rise of the Hindu Rightist party, the BJP, within such a short period of time? Communal violence does not appear much in the official records of the 1950s and 1960s. Scholars in general credit the ability of the Congress Party, whose secular and centrist stance was said to provide a stabilising effect on the

new democracy. Myron Weiner notes, for example, that the Party was good at incorporating new groups and elites into its organisation, accommodating diverse groups and interests in order to manage political conflict (Weiner 1987: 21).

From the mid-1960s, however, suspicion about Muslims' loyalty to India revived in reaction to a series of events in Kashmir that resulted in the Indo-Pak War in 1965 (Puri 1993; Pandey 1999). Hindu communalism, led by the RSS and its political associate, the Jana Sangh, was resurgent in the susceptible ground of nationalist feelings amid India's war efforts. Communalism began taking a toll of lives and property in various parts of the country. The worst came in the 1969 violence in Ahmedabad, when more than 1,000 people were killed amidst turmoil caused in part by the split in the Congress Party.¹⁵

Death and destruction of property started to increase again after 1969. The 1970s were relatively calm with regard to communal relations, although the authoritarian Emergency regime set up by Indira Gandhi was destabilising enough to shake the basis of the Indian polity, and some serious communal conflict did occur during this period. The sterilisation policy for birth control, the most notorious policy of the regime, alienated most Muslims from the Congress Party. Indeed, the policy helped to decisively alter the historical relationship nurtured between Congress and the Muslims. From the end of the 1970s, the state forces' anti-Muslim partisanship, particularly those of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), became increasingly a prominent

¹⁵ The majority of victims were Muslim (Shah 1991 (1984): 191).

phenomenon, one first seen in communal violence in Varanasi in 1977, in Aligarh and Biharshariff in 1978 and again in Jamshedpur in 1979. These events were followed by the unprecedented scale of the PAC firing upon Muslims in Moradabad in September 1980.¹⁶ A similar scene was repeated twice in Meerut in 1982 and to a much larger extent in 1987 (see Chapter 3).

The 1980s were marked by a dramatic rise in the level of communal strife in north India. The death toll of the decade was quadruple that of the 1970s, rising to more than 7,000 ahead of the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya (Ludden 1996: 16). Varshney points out that after the mid-late 1970s there was a clear rising curve of Hindu-Muslim violence, peaking in 1992 at the all-India level. The temple agitation provoked a much larger number of incidents, both rural and urban, than in previous years (Varshney 2002: 95-96). It is worth recalling that at Independence the Congress leadership sought to build a new nation by embracing its enormous religious and cultural heterogeneity through the promotion of universal citizenship rights, democracy and equality. Indian politics in the 1980s, however, seemed to exemplify the exact opposite, with rising religious and cultural chauvinism and aggressive attacks on religious minorities, as well as growing intolerance among a large section of the Indian middle-class.

¹⁶ The famous 'pig riot' began when a pig wandered around the mosque during the Muslims' Id prayer. An altercation between the attending policemen and Muslims developed into the police firing in the closed mosque. It killed over 50 Muslim worshippers on the spot. The PAC was also accused of participating in looting, burning shops and killing civilians during the incident (Hasan and Saberwal 1991 (1984): 209-227).

Atul Kohli has offered one well-known explanation for the rise of social conflict in the 1980s. Kohli maintains that the political system in India changed in the 1970s and 1980s because of the collapse of a hitherto strong 'Congress system'. The Congress, a mainly centrist and secular party under Jawaharlal Nehru, had for two decades followed inclusive and encompassing policies in order to attract and hold a strong support base made up of diverse social groups from the extremes of the social order. Its main supporters were composed on the one hand of elite, land-controlling castes at the top (often Brahmins and other Forward castes), and on the other hand of impoverished and disadvantaged low caste groups, including the ex-untouchables and Muslims. The Congress system relied on the power of local elites who organised votes for the Party in exchange for patronage. This meant that the Congress Party had to reflect the interests of local elites in state policies, and the Party had limited control over the extent and pace of change in the local power structures. According to Kohli, these pillars of the Congress system worked in the 1950s and early-1960s but had all but collapsed by the 1980s. The Congress Party could no longer accommodate and manage the diverse interests that made up its constituency, especially with the lower castes and classes increasingly asserting themselves amid a successful democratic expansion. The organisation of the Congress Party was further weakened when Indira Gandhi adopted a more personalised form of rule. The authority pattern of the Party changed so much that it lost its capacities for conflict resolution or for responding to the growing discontent of large sections of civil society (Kohli 1990).

Stuart Corbridge and John Harriss suggest that the failure of the Congress system lay at root in the many contradictions of Nehru's modernising project. In

some senses this was a narrow elite project that failed to engage India's masses, and into which resulting vacuum strode the forces of Hindutva (Corbridge and Harriss 2000). The ideological gap between the elite project and the Indian population had steadily widened as Nehru's proposed project of socialist economic planning, development and poverty alleviation ran out of steam after the Third Five Year Plan period (1961-66). The weakness of the Nehruvian model was aggravated rather than strengthened by his successor, Indira Gandhi. The 1971 General Elections, which brought Gandhi an overwhelming victory after the 'liberation' of Bangladesh, not only legitimised her political position in the Congress Party vis-à-vis her rivals, but also encouraged her to continue her populist strategy for responding to competing mass demands amid increasing resource scarcity. Indira Gandhi later sought to remain in power by making empty populist promises rather than by reforming the system of governance or the economy. Congress increasingly relied on the Nehru family reputation. The social discontent generated by unfulfilled expectations meant that Indira Gandhi finally had to resort to the authoritarian Emergency regime to control the crisis from 1975 to 1977. Weak and fragmented opposition parties also accelerated this systemic crisis, which led on from the Emergency to the troubling decade of the 1980s (Brass 1994 (1990): 75).

New forms of communalism in the 1980s arose in the midst of a struggle to reconstruct the Indian polity as new groups joined the competition for power. Thomas Blom Hansen (1999) sees this as a time when majoritarian Hindu activism gave voice to deeply held grievances against the state and the Congress Party among a frustrated Hindu middle class. The ruling Congress Party under Rajiv Gandhi in the 1980s failed to produce a coherent ideology of rule. Rather,

the Party operated in an opportunistic and incoherent manner, exploiting for a while the absence of a strong opposition. The Congress Party under Rajiv Gandhi increasingly abandoned its 'traditionally' secular outlook in favour of the sort of communal idioms that Indira Gandhi had misused during the crisis in Punjab. The Party created a series of historical milestones as it set about politicising religious identity, with its populist techniques oscillating oddly between pro-Hindu and pro-Muslim policies. Among them, the Shah Bano verdict, and the unlocking of the Babri Masjid in 1986 for Hindu worshippers, gave critical impetus to Hindu fundamentalist organisations, including the VHP, and set the political scene for further fragmentation. In place of a weakened Congress Party, the BJP emerged as a solid competitor, courting tens of millions of popular votes and making itself into a powerful social and political movement.

In August 1990, the National Front coalition government led by V.P. Singh decided to act on several key recommendations of the Report of the Second Backward Classes Commission (generally known as the Mandal Report, commissioned in the late-1970s and later ignored by Indira Gandhi's government when it was completed in 1980) by allocating new quotas in government jobs and education for the Other Backward Castes (OBCs). This caused a storm of protest among those urban upper castes whose dominating position now came to be threatened — and whose antipathy to the rise of subaltern castes the Hindu Right sought to exploit by forging a sense of Hindu unity against non-Hindus (especially Muslims).

It was against this background that the VHP and BJP decided to begin a campaign for the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya on 30 October 1990,

and for this purpose they organised another procession to carry bricks to the temple site. From this period until the General Elections in May 1991 the country was almost torn apart by social disorder. Indian politics began to polarise around the *mandir* (temple) versus Mandal issues, and the country was convulsed with both inter-caste (anti-Mandal) and communal (anti-*mandir*) violence. The pilgrimage procession with bricks started in August 1990 with an appeal by BJP President L.K. Advani for Hindu unity and later covered 10,000 kilometres before reaching the proposed construction site in Ayodhya. As a result of numerous communal clashes on its way the pilgrimage largely succeeded in polarising Indian politics on communal rather than caste-class lines (Rudolph and Rudolph 1993).

The destruction of the Babri mosque on 6-7 December 1992 was achieved by VHP *kar sevaks* (volunteers), who were more or less given a free hand by the BJP chief minister of UP, Kalyan Singh, to raze the mosque to the ground. A frenzied Hindu mob also set out to destroy Muslim houses in Ayodhya and damaged 23 mosques and Islamic educational institutions (*madrasahs* and *mazars*) in the town, in the process killing more than a dozen Muslims (Nandy et al. 1995: 197-198). All of these assaults took place in the sight of fully equipped paramilitary forces that were present at every strategic point, including the entrance to the 'disputed structure'. As many as 195 companies had been drawn from different states by the central government at the discretion of the UP state government out of concern for the security of the mosque. However, these companies were not utilised by the state government when the assault began (Government of India 1993: 27). Indeed, the UP Chief Minister prevented central government troops from moving in until the demolition of the

mosque was complete. The Congress government at the centre also delayed responding to the ongoing destruction. The event was a triumphant act of Hindu militancy against both Islam and Indian secularism.

The destruction plunged large parts of India into an orgy of retaliatory ethnic violence. It spread quickly to affect as many as 15 states of the country.¹⁷ More than 2,500 people were killed, 95 percent in urban areas (Mathur 1994: 350). The destruction also had an international impact, affecting neighbouring Pakistan and Bangladesh, Iran, the United Kingdom and Nepal. It resulted in a spate of attacks on Hindu establishments and property and angry demonstrations by the Muslim populations of these countries. Both Hindu and Muslim religious organisations were banned immediately after the event in India, including the VHP, RSS and Bajrang Dal. President's rule was imposed in Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh on 15 December 1992.

1.3 The Causes and Geography of Communal Violence

As we have seen, Partition made Indian Muslims much more vulnerable than they had been in the colonial period. They were deprived of national-level leadership, their political party and strong Muslim majority states. The security of the Muslim minority was now greatly dependent on the Congress Party and its political hegemony. Accordingly, Muslim voters were co-opted under the Congress Party system. This mode of political integration had considerable

¹⁷ By 7th December violence had already spread in UP, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Punjab, Bihar, West Bengal and Delhi (ibid. 33).

implications for the social and political organisation of Muslims at ground level. The political integration promised in the Constitution — based on equal rights under a ‘secular’ identity — turned out to be a far cry from the political reality surrounding many ordinary Indian Muslims. In particular, weak Muslim leaders were not able to voice the grievances of an impoverished community. They were treated as little more than a ‘symbol of minority participation’ in politics in order to prove the Congress Party’s ‘secular impartiality’ (Wright Jr. 1966: 110-131; Shakir 1980; Graff 1987, 1992).

As a result, Muslims were constituted largely as *passive* agents in the process of political contestation. Further, they were discriminated against in educational opportunities, quotas for government jobs, representation in central and state governments and in police and army recruitment systems (Hasan 1988).¹⁸ Muslims have continuously been the victims of ethnic violence since the early 1960s, when a new wave of communal violence began after Independence. Unsurprisingly, there had been growing dissent among Muslims against the Congress Party (Hasan 1988; Puri 1993: 2142-2143). Yet although it was not ideal, Congress hegemony limited the extent of communal violence toward Muslims more in the 1960s and 1970s than it did in the 1980s, when the Party started to decline in stature and standing.

During the time when the Congress Party maintained its one-party dominance, its secular ideology and centrist position were mainly strong enough to contain Hindu nationalist forces such as the Jana Sangh or the Hindu Mahasabha. As

¹⁸ ‘Sachar Committee Report’, *The Hindu*, 8 December 2006 (*The Hindu* (New Delhi)).

Bruce Graham notes in his study of the Jana Sangh in north India, the Congress Party maintained an iron grip on the majority of Hindus, relegating the Jana Sangh to the background of the mainstream political scene (Graham 1999: 225). Violence towards Muslims accelerated, however, with the decline of the Congress Party in the 1980s and 1990s, and with the growth of the BJP, a reincarnation from 1980 of the Jana Sangh. This in turn reminded some Muslims of how the Congress Party had failed to protect many of them (to put it mildly) during the Emergency years.

In the second part of this dissertation I examine how India's Muslim communities, and especially some parts of Meerut's Muslim community, have become active agents in their own political empowerment — and protection — during the eras of coalition and subaltern politics that took fuller shape nationally from circa 1989. Before I turn to this task, however, I need to not only describe the location of Muslim households and political development in Uttar Pradesh and Meerut up to c.1987-91 (my task in Chapters 2 and 3, focusing especially on the anti-Muslim violence that shook Meerut of April-May 1987), but also to put in place a review of an emerging academic literature on the causes and geography of communal violence in post-1980 India. I do this below less in general terms than by means of a close analysis of the work of a small number of key authors in the field of political science — namely, Paul Brass, Steven Wilkinson and Ashutosh Varshney. I focus mainly on these three authors since this dissertation is guided by and built on the questions raised by their work. I also briefly review works of Asghar Ali Engineer and Veena Das as this dissertation is methodologically guided by their approach, based mainly on empirical data and ethnographic explorations. Das' anthropological approaches

are particularly relevant as they are often centred around the effects of violence on victims rather than the causes of violence, which I try to follow in this dissertation.

1.3.1 Political and socio-economic approach

It is important to note the numerous contributions of Asghar Ali Engineer to our understanding of ethnic violence in India, even if this corpus of work tends to have been overshadowed of late by debates between Varshney, Brass and Wilkinson. Engineer has been a prolific and long-term researcher on Hindu-Muslim relations and communal violence in India. His numerous reports on incidents of communal violence are regularly published in the journal *Economic and Political Weekly*, and are based on his own analysis of broader political developments in the country as well as on ethnographic evidence which is placed within specific historical contexts. Engineer's observations are usually based on fieldwork conducted immediately after the relevant incident. His contribution to our understanding of communal violence is derived in part from his considerable knowledge of the social fabric of the 'local', by which I mean the economic/industrial and power structure, intricate networks within and between localities, as well as small incidents that indicate personal animosities among families, castes and communities.

Although Engineer's analysis places emphasis on the role of politicians at local, state and national levels, and the mainly political motives behind incidents of violence, he also points out the importance of socio-economic factors at any

given site of violence (Engineer 1991 (1984): 295).¹⁹ In his analysis of the Bombay-Bhiwandi riots of May 1984, for example, Engineer first places the event in a broader context of political change.²⁰ The Congress Party was then in the process of abandoning minorities as it sought instead to win the support of the middle and backward Hindu castes. The ruling Congress and the state government consequently positioned themselves as being silent spectators in the face of the mounting militancy of Shiv Sena, largely because they had come to believe that they could not afford to alienate the Marathas. But Engineer also draws attention to growing economic prosperity among local Muslim weavers, who were largely migrants from Uttar Pradesh. Many of those weavers had come to own powerloom factories and had become increasingly visible in the town's economic life. In addition, coming from the lower ranks, many Muslim weavers appeared to be religiously conservative. They spent a large proportion of their acquired capital on religious rituals, a fact exploited by Hindu communal organisations like the Shiv Sena to paint Muslim weavers as religiously aggressive and fundamentalist. Powerloom factories owned by UP Muslims were among the main targets of destruction during the violence that Engineer describes (Engineer 1984).

¹⁹ Engineer's main causal variables are tested by Wilkinson in his regression analysis, as discussed below.

²⁰ Bombay-Bhiwandi riots first took place in Bhiwandi, the centre of the powerloom weaving industry in Maharashtra, from 17 to 27 May 1984, and then spread into other environs including Bombay. The incident killed between 258 and 500 people and left more than 50,000 homeless. The gap in the number of casualties came from a number of the people who were missing (Engineer 1984).

Engineer is one of a small number of Muslim academics and writers who have provided powerful insights into the nature of Muslim leadership, Muslim 'communalism', and the acute socio-economic problems shared by large numbers of Muslim households. Emphasising as he does both the economic and political mainsprings of ethnic violence, Engineer's work has partly laid the ground for the more openly theoretical arguments of scholars who have followed in his wake, including Steven Wilkinson and Paul Brass.

1.3.2 Electoral incentives for ethnic violence

Wilkinson's major contribution, like that of Ashutosh Varshney (with whom he shares a large database which he and Varshney constructed together), has arguably been to explain both violence and the absence of violence, in his case with reference to the electoral calculations of the ruling party of a state, or the party that controls the police. Wilkinson (2004) suggests that electoral competition among political parties is the most important variable in explaining ethnic violence both at state and town levels. He notes that '...the fact that peace at the local level is often the norm when larger theories of ethnic conflict might predict violence alerts us to the weakness of many of the general explanations' for ethnic violence (Wilkinson 1995: 27).

Wilkinson contends that scholars commonly tend to think that every socio-economic characteristic shared by riot-affected towns — such as Moradabad, Aligarh, Meerut and Ahmedabad — is equally important in other towns and thus 'causes' ethnic riots (Wilkinson 1995; 2004: 37). Wilkinson's main criticism of

most existing explanations of Hindu-Muslim violence in India is then, firstly, that scholars have tested the importance of socio-economic variables in a single or, at best, a few cases, which he calls 'an unrepresentative sample' (Wilkinson 2004: 37), rather than by means of a sample of all towns. Secondly, he suggests there is a methodological fraud where existing studies lack structured comparisons of both peaceful and violent towns. Towns with the same socio-economic characteristics that have generally been peaceful have too often been ignored (ibid. 37).

For his part, Wilkinson uses a data set composed of monthly observations of violence/non-violence regressed against other variables for the period from 1970 to 1995 for 167 towns and cities in UP with populations of 20,000 or more. The total number of observations in his data-set amounts to around 40,000 (ibid. 37). The socio-economic variables that Wilkinson considers as possible predictors of Hindu-Muslim violence (or riots) include economic competition in the ethnic division of labour between Hindus and Muslims, the demographic balance, the presence of Hindu and Sikh refugees from Pakistan to India, and previous violence in a town.²¹ According to his tests, most of these variables are statistically not significant except for demographic balance and past violence. The electoral competition variables that he tests for, on the other hand, are highly significant. Wilkinson maintains that the likelihood of violence increases sharply as elections approach (ibid. Chapter 2). Town-level electoral competition among political elites and parties aiming to represent the same ethnic group encourages politicians to mobilise target voters by using 'ethnic

²¹ Meerut satisfies all these variables.

wedge issues' to increase the salience of ethnic identity (ibid. 23). Anti-Muslim mobilisations thus might make use of accusations of cow slaughter, with Hindu reactions often leading to violent exchanges between the two communities.

Wilkinson's main argument, however, is that it is the electoral calculations of the state government which most clearly determines whether riots occur. If the state government is dominated by politicians or parties sympathetic to Hindus, violence will most likely be tolerated and riot control action delayed, resulting in grave consequences and large Muslim death tolls. On the other hand, if the overall electoral system in a state is sufficiently competitive that coalitions with minority-supported parties are required there is a high possibility that the state government will intervene to stop or prevent precipitating events.

Since the decline of the Congress Party after c. 1989 there have been increased numbers of political parties in the electoral contests of most north Indian states. Electoral competition intensifies with the growth of the effective number of parties contesting the election. This situation should significantly increase the importance of Muslim minority votes.²² Accordingly the ruling political party

²² Wilkinson lists three reasons why Muslim, and not Hindu, votes become pivotal after the emergence of a multi-party system. Firstly, the rise of the lower and middle-caste parties augmented the salience of the intra-ethnic cleavages among the majority community. These parties are keen to seek minority support, rather than that of their own ethnic group, with which they are in competition for scarce resources. Secondly, Muslims' demands in exchange of their votes focus on security, which is relatively inexpensive for political parties. Wilkinson concedes that Muslims make fewer demands in general on other political issues, such as government employment, than most of the main Hindu majority electorates, partially because of their relative economic and educational backwardness. Thirdly, security is not too costly to provide and does not pose threat to the majority's own sense of physical security, as Muslims are the

must negotiate or form coalitions with minority supported parties, regardless of the party's own ideological preferences. The best hope for minorities wanting to be protected from violence, Wilkinson maintains, is for there to be three or more parties in a state electoral competition where minorities are perceived to be key marginal voters (ibid. 138). Wilkinson's model suggests that a shift from two-party to eight-party elections is associated with a decline in the predicted number of episodes of ethnic violence per month from 0.07 to 0.01 (ibid. 152).²³ On the other hand, a more dangerous situation for minorities is where there is bipolar fractionalisation of parties in a state, in which only fewer than 3.5 effective parties are in real electoral competition. The anti-Muslim violence in 1987 in Meerut seems to offer an example of this. This incident took place when the ruling Congress and the rising BJP were in sharp competition for Hindu swing votes, with both parties striving to establish their credentials as a 'Hindu' party, or at least as a party mainly for Hindus.

Wilkinson also challenges the consociational thesis of Arend Lijphart (1977), who has suggested that a power-sharing mechanism was in place during the years of Congress rule from 1947-1966 which helped to maintain low levels of ethnic violence. Lijphart explains higher levels of ethnic violence after this period, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s mainly with reference to the decline of a Congress governing system that fostered power-sharing with minorities. Wilkinson suggests that Lijphart 'miscoded' the Congress system from 1947 to

demographic minority nearly everywhere with very limited representation in the police, paramilitary forces or army (ibid. 144-145).

²³ As of February 2002, there were only five major states where two parties shared more than 75 percent of the vote (fewer than 3.24 effective parties). In other major states, there are at least three major parties competing for power (ibid. Table 5.1.: 143).

1966, and argues that this system did not in fact work for higher levels of Muslim participation in government jobs and power structures. Wilkinson contends that lower castes and Muslims were largely excluded from political power and government employment during this period. India was in fact more consociational during the colonial period, when consociational principles of minority proportional representation in politics and employment were observed by both central and provincial governments (ibid. 104). Wilkinson also maintains that, after 1967, with the Congress losing its power in many states, there was growing political competition for the votes of India's lower castes and minorities among political parties. These changes have made India's political structure more 'consociational' as the formerly underprivileged communities and classes gained more access to the political sphere and government resources. In short, the more consociational colonial (1919-1947) and post-Nehru (1967-1995) periods appear to have had higher levels of ethnic violence than did the non-consociational period of Nehruvian rule (ibid. 127). Wilkinson maintains that '[s]ome of the states with the lowest levels of Muslim proportionality in the administration and cabinets [eg. West Bengal and Kerala] have done quite well in controlling levels of communal violence [and better than more 'consociational Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh]' (ibid. 128).

Wilkinson's careful discussion of consociational power-sharing theory is insightful in showing that minority proportionality in the police or the state government (as cabinet ministers) does not always lessen — or predict statistically — levels of ethnic violence across India's states. His discussion sensibly indicates that the recruitment of Muslims into the police or the administration is not in itself an appropriate means by which to gauge the

effective level of inclusion of Muslims in India's political life. Wilkinson distinguishes between two conceptions of minority representation: on the one hand, 'the tangible and narrow' representation afforded by increased numbers of Muslim recruits in the police or the government, and on the other, the more significant matter of effective political representation that incorporates 'the concerns and interests of minorities' and which protects them against majoritarian violence (ibid. 134).

Wilkinson accepts that where substantial political representation is achieved by Muslims there might indeed be a connection between levels of minority proportionality in state government and levels of ethnic violence (ibid. 134). His model, however, falls short of explaining precisely *how* the substantial political incorporation of minorities works to reduce levels of ethnic violence and how this agency is made manifest.

Wilkinson's model quite properly seeks to explain an observed diminution in Hindu-Muslim riots in India after the mid-1990s with reference to changes in the electoral strategy of state-level political parties as they sought to attract more Muslim votes in a more competitive political environment. Nevertheless, there is a tendency in his model, as in many such macro-models, to position India's Muslims as passive receivers of the security offered by the majority parties in exchange for their votes. Muslims then 'bid low' in terms of what they demand from those parties. What Wilkinson's model does not explain so well is *how* it is that different political parties now campaign for the Muslim vote. Nor does his model have much to say about the *agency* of different Muslim political groupings in seeking to animate or exploit the changing political landscape that

Wilkinson describes so well. Who consolidates the Muslim votes to be directed to a particular party? And how does this interface work in the light of Muslims' own political organisation and identity?

1.3.3 Institutionalised riot systems

From a similar but perhaps rather wider perspective, Paul Brass argues that communal violence in India is a construction of political elites. Ethnic violence takes place particularly within the context of competitive electoral politics or intense political mobilisation. The persistence of ethnic violence is explained through the functional utility of historical Hindu-Muslim opposition and violence, which have served to fulfil the political aims of both groups, as well as of secular and communal political parties.

Paul Brass's recent work (Brass 1997, 2003, 2006) on ethnic violence in India is a culmination of his long-term scholarship on Indian politics over a period of 40 years. It is based on his longstanding view of communalism and the apparent historical enmity between Hindus and Muslims in north India. Brass has been a principal advocate of a constructivist view in studies on ethnicity, nationalism and conflict. He maintains that ethnicity is socially constructed. Violent conflict that appears to be ethnic in nature is actually the result of manipulation of symbols by elites for their own political or material benefit (Brass 1979, 1991).²⁴

²⁴ For the renowned debate with Francis Robinson, see (Brass 1979) and (Robinson 1979). Brass' 'constructivist' position is challenged by Robinson's 'primordialist' view of the Muslim mobilisation for the separatist movement in 19th century India.

Brass views violence as a production directly involving human agency. The production is mainly planned and organised by what Brass calls an ‘institutionalised riot network’. This is a network of power relations among politicians, the police and criminals, who all benefit from the use of force and violence.²⁵ The network functions to keep Hindu-Muslim sentiment and antagonism alive in everyday life. When the time is right, it transforms a precipitating incident into full-scale ethnic violence by provoking counteraction from the opposing group in order to generate an exchange of aggressive counteractions between antagonists.²⁶ Brass argues that neither a pre-existing history of communal antagonism nor the tension of immediate circumstances provides a satisfactory explanation for the outbreak of large-scale ethnic violence. The decisive factor is the pre-planned and organised actions of the human agency that activates the historical communal enmity. This is where Brass’s work adds significantly to Wilkinson’s similar but more formal thesis, and it is a line of approach that I hope to explore in the second half of this dissertation (albeit with an emphasis on Muslim agency).

Brass’ interest lies in explaining when, how and where enmity can be ‘ignited’ to trigger ethnic violence. Moreover, the dynamic process of the ‘production’ of violence involves political intention, elements of both spontaneity and planning and explanation or interpretation of incidents of violence after their

²⁵ The power relations are shown in his rich ethnographies of four cases of police-public confrontations in UP (see Brass 1997: 58-203).

²⁶ For this, see Brass’ analysis of the case in Kanpur (Brass 1997: 204-259). Through an analysis of a causal sequence of a full-scale rioting, Brass indicates that engineering a reaction from one group and a counter-reaction by another is the key factor in producing large-scale violence (ibid. 12).

occurrence.²⁷ This production mechanism for large-scale Hindu-Muslim violence has been institutionalised in riot-prone cities such as Aligarh and Meerut in western UP. Because of the long-term presence of institutionalised riot systems (IRS), ethnic violence has become endemic and a recurrent feature of life in these cities. Moreover, the presence of the IRS and those involved in it are well-known to the local authorities. It is ultimately a political decision at state level whether to prevent or to let loose the production process that leads to violent conflict, much as Wilkinson maintains. Brass emphasises the important role played by ‘agents’ and ‘specific persons, groups organisations and state agents who actually inaugurate and sustain riotous events’ that are not shown, for example, in Wilkinson’s large-N statistical model (Brass 2004: 8).

Brass explains geographic and temporal variances in violence with reference to the existence or absence of the IRS in specific towns, most notably with reference to Aligarh.²⁸ Brass emphasises that his close and ‘refined’ approach offers a more finely-tuned eye on events than that of classifying an entire city as

²⁷ Brass observes that contested interpretations of an incident appear among the actors involved. In the case of Kanpur, where a precipitating event — the murder of a BJP politician — did not evolve into a large-scale Hindu-Muslim violence, contested interpretations of the murder case appeared among the district authorities and the teams of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CB) and the state government’s Criminal Investigation Department (CID) after the incident. The district authorities under the Mulayam Singh Yadav government firmly denied the possibility that this incident was linked to the communal issue, while the CB and CID maintained otherwise (Brass 1997: 245).

²⁸ In spatial terms, violent incidents are concentrated in only 29 (12 percent) of the city’s 241 *mohallas* (localities) (Brass 2004: 162). In terms of time, there was no violence in Aligarh between November 1980 and 1990 December or in December 1992 after the Ayodhya incident. Also, the local administration successfully contained the precipitating event following large-scale violence in neighbouring Muzaffarnagar in October 1988 (ibid. 104-107).

riot-prone and seeking to compare it with other equally large units (ibid. 38).²⁹ This approach effectively localises the significance of the violence and enables the identification of underlying issues that make violent incidents endemic to a particular locality.³⁰

1.3.4 Inter-communal civic engagement

Ashutosh Varshney (2002) departs from the previous two authors in shifting attention from the state and elite to the role of *non-state* actors and mechanisms in civil society. Civil society, as Varshney defines it, is ‘the part of our life that exists between the state...and families...that allows people to come together for a whole variety of public activities, that [are] relatively independent of the state’. Civil society or ‘civic life’ is not necessarily ‘non-political,’ but it is a ‘non-state’ space of collective activities. Civil society therefore includes trade unions and political parties that are highly political, because their activities may also provide social platforms that bring people together (ibid. 4).

Varshney’s unit of analysis is the town level, notwithstanding that he shares a common dataset with Wilkinson. Like Wilkinson, Varshney notes that ethnic violence in India is generally an urban phenomenon, which is largely

²⁹ In this, Brass criticises Varshney. Varshney’s paired comparison, according to Brass, blurs the gaze of the researcher rather than refining it, with much emphasis on non-violence (ibid. 38).

³⁰ Use of the *mohalla*-level data enabled Brass to conduct an analysis of longevity, concerning the relationship between elections, economic factors and violence in the particular *mohalla* over a period of time.

concentrated, he says, in only eight cities.³¹ Varshney argues for the importance of civic networks and organisations in which Hindus and Muslims can be brought together in daily life and share economic, cultural and social needs with the effect of forging inter-ethnic understanding and solidarity. This integrative civic structure creates a 'bulwark' that can withstand communal shocks from exogenous events, just as it undermines any attempt to promote ethnic polarisation. Varshney maintains that the cadre-based Congress Party and Gandhian popular political mobilisations in the 1920s, constructed and institutionalised such civic patterns in some cities more than in others. The movement converted the pre-existing 'master narrative' of the town into an institutionalised form of politics by introducing large numbers of mass-based civic organisations (ibid. 132). The master narrative comprises the pre-existing social structure, based either on inter-ethnic or inter-caste hierarchy and antagonism. Varshney also argues for the importance of economic practices on the ground, which in turn may (or may not) provide for 'mass-based' civic engagements in the most important industries of a city (ibid. 175-178).

Three sets of paired comparisons of violent and peaceful towns, with similar Hindu-Muslim population ratios and other controlled variables, are at the core of Varshney's study. The first pair of study towns, Aligarh and Calicut, shows the stark contrast in consequences that a different master narrative can make. Having communalism as the dominant political narrative, Aligarh has developed very little integrative civic structure and hence has a fragile local mechanism for

³¹ These cities are Delhi, Mumbai, Calcutta, Aligarh, Meerut, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Baroda. They comprise only 18 percent of the urban population and only 5 percent of the total population of about a billion (Varshney 2002: 91-107).

maintaining or promoting peace.³² On the other hand, in Calicut, lower-caste movements and politics aiming to end caste injustice facilitated a large arena for lower-caste Hindus and Muslims to come together. In Varshney's view, this accounts for the flourishing of inter-ethnic civic organisations in the town, and hence low levels of violence. The second pairing of Lucknow and Hyderabad again offers a neat comparison between the two master narratives. While Lucknow has a Muslim sectarian divide between Sunnis and Shias, Hyderabad has a communal divide as its master narrative. The Lucknow case also shows the importance of inter-ethnic economic interdependence in contributing to creating peace. The Hyderabad case, on the other hand, indicates the limited ability of inter-ethnic elite associations in the face of the larger force of communalism dominating its town politics.

Throughout his case studies, Varshney emphasises the importance of the mass-based organisation as a stronger bulwark than elite associations for communal peace. The last pairing, Ahmedabad and Surat, is examined across time. Situated in Gujarat, both cities were peaceful up to the late-1960s, both being at the centre of an earlier Gandhian movement for Hindu-Muslim unity, and both had flourishing civic organisations, including trade unions and business associations. Yet Ahmedabad experienced a chronic cycle of communal violence after 1969 while Surat only witnessed large-scale communal violence in December 1992, after over 60 years of enduring peace. Varshney explains both cases with reference to the erosion of local Congress Party organisations and the

³² Peace Committees, for example, created by both citizens and the administration are often intra- rather than inter-religious, based on lack of trust (Varshney 2002: 124).

decline or collapse of civic organisations, including most notably strong labour unions.

Varshney's principal contribution is his study of the absence, rather than the presence, of violence — and this is the cue that I try to follow here. Why did so many towns not experience Hindu-Muslim violence after the provocations of December 1992? Why did the state turn out to be effective in preventing potential violence in many towns at the time? If violence and non-violence are studied together, Varshney suggests, a different conclusion will be reached (ibid. 286-289). Although Varshney's explanation stresses the role of non-state actors, inter-ethnic civic engagement works best in 'synergy' with state actors. A biased police force or ineffective administration can work better with the 'right kind of institutional pressures' from below, that is, the kind of civic structure that makes the state more accountable (ibid. 296). When no such support exists, the ablest state officer may fail to exert effective action to stem sources of potential violence that include tension, rumour or provocative action by communal parties and elements (ibid. 123, 289). Further, the political parties' local attitudes, Varshney argues, will vary depending on the structure of local civic life. Communal parties would not dare to challenge local peace if there is a 'thick' civic engagement that makes a strong support base for the local administration.³³ Varshney's explanations for an absence of violence thus stress a combination of state and non-state activities. In this 'synergy' of the state and non-state, however, Varshney emphasises the importance of the latter in forging

³³ In Calicut in 1989-1992, for example, the BJP at such a critical moment of Hindu-Muslim confrontation did not even initiate the polarising process, although this would have been in its political interest, for 'it would not like to be blamed for undermining local peace' (ibid. 126).

inter-ethnic civic engagements that can effectively reduce the largely (or otherwise) negative influence of political actors, including political parties.

Varshney's argument ultimately has a problem of 'endogeneity', in my view; that is to say, it is not clear whether peace leads to enhanced inter-ethnic civic ties and/or whether such ties are the independent variables that lead to peace, as Varshney claims. In establishing his position, Varshney needs to argue that violent incidents did not break inter-ethnic civic organisations, even as the weakening of the latter invited violence. Varshney argues that the erosion of Congress organisations which 'caused' the 1969 violence in Ahmedabad began much earlier than 1969 and for reasons that were nothing to do with ethnic violence. The causal sequence is, therefore, that the deepening fragility of civic organisations led to communal violence, not vice-versa (*ibid.* 266). Varshney's explanation for this causal sequence, however, appears to be insecure, as he provides very little information about the kind of norms and networks the civic associations display or on how they facilitate interaction, negotiation and reconciliation between the two communities. The explanation of how, where and to what extent these engagements create a positive political outcome and contribute to peacemaking, and the workings of democracy more generally seems to be largely missing from these 'social capital'-style arguments (Putzel 1997). Further, Varshney explains very little about the interaction between civic organisations and local state authorities, and how synergy can be created between them.

1.3.5 An anthropological approach to violence

Anthropological approaches to social violence may not offer the kind of 'causal analysis' of violence attempted by Varshney or Wilkinson. Violence is rather analysed in local terms, and a view and understanding of the state from the ground up are introduced through local discourse and narratives. Veena Das (1990, 1996), for example, shows the pattern of violence in the uneven distribution of rioting in the colonies of Sikh concentration in south Delhi during anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984. This distribution may not be satisfactorily explained by general theories. The dynamism of specific, ongoing local issues, including local power relations, must be linked to the national narrative of major confrontation in order for local latent conflict or 'diffused hostilities' to be translated into major violent conflict (Das 1996). Contiguity between local issues and the master narrative is the basis of local understanding or 'public consciousness' of the violent conflict taking place. Thus, 'while the kind of violence encountered by the Sikhs...may be narrated as part of a national or regional history, it may also be simultaneously understood within a different sequence of events that have local relevance' (Das 1990: 13). Local knowledge of violence comprises, therefore, both national- and local-level narratives. An anthropological approach that emphasises the 'local' already implies that an entangled mixture of the 'national' and the 'local' sometimes leads to less or no violent confrontation.

Some recent anthropological literature on violence attempts to reconceptualise it based on the analysis of society *in transition* following an incident of violence, or more precisely during the transition from the moment of active killing to low-

intensity peace. Violence is to be explained not only through past or present narratives of hate or politics but also through the sequence of events, changes and transformations that follow the incident. Fixing their gaze on suffering victims and communities on the ground, anthropologists have explored how these entities try to cope with loss, recover both physically and psychologically and reconstruct a community. Communities have to overcome or find solutions through their own understanding of the meaning of suffering in a wider context. Communities have to reconstruct their lives in ways that make sense in terms of their understanding of the external world.

Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman (2001) call this process the 'project of re-creating "normality"'. In this context, the concept of 'space of time' becomes crucial. Space of time is not our more usual sense of time, but is time closely linked to an event of violence that evolves into a space of transformation. Here, the 'everyday' is not taken for granted, but is rather viewed as the 'social place' where victims struggle to rebuild and restore normal life, and resist oppressive policies and injustice (Das 1998, 2007; Das and Kleinman 2001). The notion of violence is extended to include not only acts of violence, but also the effect of violence on individuals, family life and communities that continues to exist and afflict them long after the act of violence itself has ceased. The transition process also includes the way violence produces 'subjectivity' in people affected by it, and how subjectivity changes through experiencing violence. In studying violence, one cannot 'draw a sharp line between collective and individual experiences of social violence. ...Violence creates, sustains, and transforms their interaction, and thereby it actualises the inner worlds of lived values as well as the outer world of contested meanings. ... Multiple forms and dynamics of social

violence animate local worlds and the individual lives in them' (Das and Kleinman 2000: 5).

The end of a violent event can be the beginning of a new phase of life. By placing themselves at the very site of transition, anthropologists are sometimes in a position to view violence in a wider societal context. They observe a particular interface being created between different 'entities' such as the state and civil society, Hindus and Muslims, administration and victims, and so on — as I shall strive to do here. Each entity is being shaped more clearly in the process of interaction, but at the same time the complexity of creating the process itself paradoxically reveals the ambiguous and unclear positions of each entity in relation to violence. State actors indicate various alignments regarding violence, and Das is sceptical of a model of 'clear binary opposition' between the state and society in understanding violent conflict (Das 2003: 295; 2007: 205-221).

Some of these state actors, however, are part of the violence itself, as much direct perpetrators of brutal violence as an invisible entity affecting the everyday life of the ordinary. Das and others (eg. Spencer 2003) do not see a rupture in the presence of the state between everyday life and the moment of collective violence, but see the continuity of its ubiquitous presence as a powerful social force affecting local life. Local processes of reconstruction of communities especially highlight the presence of the state, with its constantly changing face and role, juxtaposed with local communities (Das 1996: 200).

The study of violence from the perspective of sufferers and victims brings insights into what is needed for reconciliation, recovery and peace. It reveals the

various strategies that survivors use to revive and reconstruct the economy, social life and normality. Victims' coping strategies show how they manage to appropriate and reinvent the traditional and cultural practices and understanding, opening up possibilities for a new and better life (Das et al. 2000; Das and Kleinman 2001; Das 2003). This turns our attention to the transforming power of violence; how violence can become an opportunity to remake local society through new consciousness, renewed identity and new forms of solidarity (cf. Balandier 1986). This aspect of the anthropological approach makes us aware that there are different potential responses to violence. In localities or cities where violence is cyclical, it is almost automatically assumed that vengeance and hatred will produce a response of retaliatory violence. The heterogeneity of the local structure, however, can provide a possibility for non-engagement in violent acts. It may depend on new visions, organisations or imaginary of the 'local' who reconstruct their world after violence.

1.4 Conclusion

There appear to be at least two important points evolving in the recent literature on understandings of ethnic violence in contemporary India. The first is that violence has come to be viewed to a large degree as an engineered operation. That is, ethnic violence is planned or 'produced', rather than arising in spontaneous, sporadic acts of mob violence largely induced by ethnic hatreds and religious passion. Violence is no longer seen as a manifestation of a

communal ideology, which itself is presented either as a disease of civil society (Chandra 1969; Rajgopal 1987) or as a pathology of modernity/colonialism (Pandey 1998). Violence has to be 'organised' by the political elite, and may or may not be prevented by the state government depending on its political orientation or electoral calculation.

The second important advancement in the literature is that Wilkinson, Brass and Varshney have all paid at least some attention to the importance of the question of non-violence. In their pursuit of the causes of violence, these authors explain non-violence as either the absence of cause or as a consequence of a state government decision.

Both Wilkinson and Brass predict a reduced level of ethnic violence in the future, pointing to the rise of backward caste parties as an important variable in altering the mapping of electoral politics. Within this context Wilkinson clearly explains that the new political structure, in which Muslim votes are in demand, is a precondition for lower levels of ethnic violence in India. That Muslim votes have become pivotal in electoral competition, particularly since 1992, is now the reality of high politics in India. The major questions arising from this background are: what the workings or mechanisms of reducing the frequency of ethnic violence are in this new political structure, which is indeed more favourable to Muslims. Both Wilkinson's and Brass' theses seek an answer in terms of the electoral calculations of parties in given political structures. This implies, however, that if the political structure changes again, and Muslim votes are no longer needed, that Muslims might face the same dangerous situation

that existed prior to the 1990s, when Hindu parties did not hesitate to create anti-Muslim mobilisation in order to kill Muslims.

My concern, in short, is that in much of the existing literature Muslims are treated as victims and simple targets of Hindu mobilisations. They are the 'dependent variable', passive and innate. Brass and Wilkinson certainly offer considerable insights when they suggest that north India's Muslims are better placed now than twenty years ago, not least because of the alliances they have made with various subaltern parties (such as the Bahujan Samaj Party in UP). What is missing from these accounts, however, is a different sort of absence than the one identified by Varshney and Wilkinson — the absence of ethnic violence in most of India's towns and cities and from its countryside. This thesis offers an alternative and complementary explanation of the absence of violence within one of India's most riot-prone zones. My focus is much more on Muslim political agency and the means by which new political coalitions have been built, contested and understood by different groups of Muslims and Hindus in Meerut since c.1990.

Before I turn to this task, however, which is mainly the subject matter of the second half of this thesis (Chapters Four to Six), I first discuss the patterns of ethnic violence which shook Meerut, and Meerut's Muslims in particular, up to the early-1990s, including the anti-Muslim violence of 1987.

Chapter 2: Political Geography and Muslim Politics in Uttar Pradesh

For a community to think that its interests are different from that of the country in which it lives, is a great mistake. Assuming that we agreed today to the reservation of seats, I would consider myself to be the greatest enemy of the Muslim community because of the consequences of the step in a secular and democratic State. Assume that you have separate electorates on a communal basis. Will you ever find a place in any of the Ministries in the Provinces or in the Centre? You have a separate interest. Here in a Ministry or a Government, based on joint responsibility, where people who do not trust us, or who do not trust the majority, cannot obviously come into the Government itself. Accordingly, you will have no share in the Government. You will exclude yourselves and remain perpetually in a minority. Then, what advantage will you gain (Sardar Patel quoted in Noorani 2004: 5-6)?

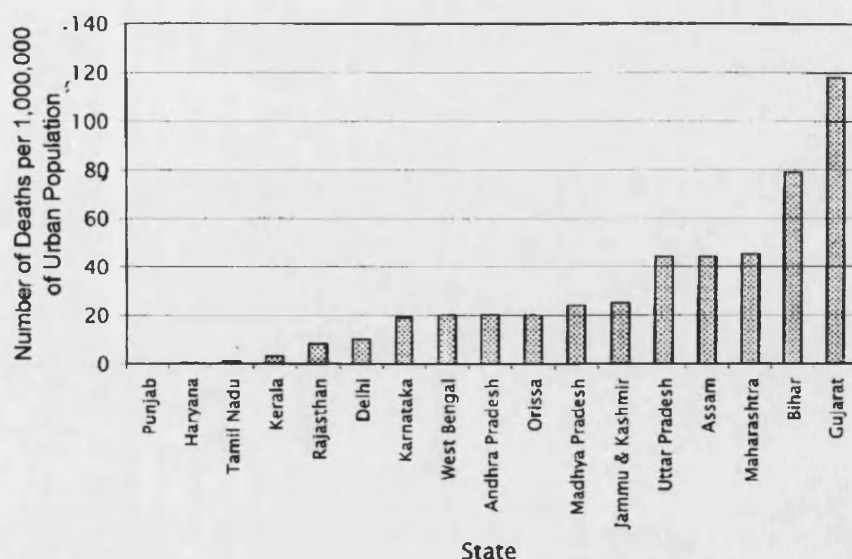
2.1 Introduction

What might be called the new life of Muslims in post-Independence India took shape in a changed political environment that took aim at the very idea of a separate Muslim political identity. Sardar Patel, the first Home Minister in the Government of independent India, had a reputation for being more sympathetic to militant Hinduism than either Gandhi or Nehru, but his remark quoted above, made to the Constituent Assembly (1946-49), was nonetheless broadly the view of the Congress by the time that Independence — and Partition — arrived. Patel was speaking back sharply to the demand of India's remaining Muslim leaders for the continuation of a separate Muslim electorate (and thus a

self-consciously 'Muslim' political leadership). The thinly veiled threat that is also apparent in Patel's remarks speaks to the fact that Congress leaders were still unsure during this turbulent period about how to incorporate Muslims in the political field as the equals of Hindus.

In Chapter One I discussed the broad historical geographies of Hindu–Muslim violence in India up to the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992. In this chapter, I seek to complement this analysis in some degree while turning my attention from the national scale to the life worlds of Muslims, most of all, in the erstwhile United Provinces – later Uttar Pradesh – and most especially in western Uttar Pradesh and the city of Meerut. The state of Uttar Pradesh (UP) has long been one of the most dangerous states in India in terms of Hindu-Muslim communal violence, rivalling states like Gujarat and Maharashtra (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1 Deaths per million in urban riots with one or more deaths, 1950-1995



Source: Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 97 (Varshney 2002).

Within the state of UP, moreover, the western part is home to some of India's most notoriously riot-prone cities, including Aligarh and Meerut (Lambert 1951).³⁴

Given the specific nature of Hindu-Muslim relations and politics in UP, and indeed in selected parts of UP, the rest of the chapter is organised as follows. Section II is focused on the political history of UP as a whole, before and after Independence in 1947. I establish the centrality of the state in politics in India, and note the importance of UP both within Indian National Congress and Muslim League politics. Most of all, I provide important background to the rise of militant Hindu forces in UP after Independence, and to strategies for the incorporation of Muslim political leaders — and a broader Muslim vote bank — into the state Congress Party. Section III then examines some of the same issues at the city scale, providing important information along the way on the living conditions of many Muslims in Meerut ahead of the major Hindu-Muslim violence that rocked the city in 1987. I further suggest that Muslim politics in this period continued to be framed with reference to an occasionally crude assertion of a separate and distinctive Muslim identity. This led to clashes both with the Congress leadership and latterly, more dangerously, with Muslim antagonists within a re-emergent camp of Hindu nationalists.

³⁴ Meerut ranks fourth in the total number of casualties of communal violence that took place from 1950 to 1995, only below the three metropolitan cities of Bombay, Ahmedabad and Hyderabad. Aligarh ranks fifth, following Meerut (Varshney 2001: 372).

2.2 A Brief Political History of Uttar Pradesh

Map 2.1 Indian subcontinent and the state of Uttar Pradesh



The state of Uttar Pradesh emerged in 1950 out of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (see Map 2.1). Notwithstanding the loss of the Uttarakhand region in 2000, UP is still home to India's largest provincial population, standing in 2001 at 166 million people, or about 16 percent of the entire population of the

country.³⁵ The political importance of the state and its significant influence in all-Indian politics are evident in the fact that 80 of the 545 seats in the Lok Sabha, or slightly less than one-sixth of the total number of members, are rooted in UP. Because of this, political changes in UP affect New Delhi with a greater magnitude than those in any other state. UP continues to occupy a central position in the calculations of all of India's national political parties, either acting alone or in terms of alliance-making (Hasan 1996: 58).

The political importance of the state at the all-Indian level also derives from the fact that UP formed the centre of lasting Muslim power in the Indo-Gangetic belt, the legacy of which still affects the development of post-Independence politics in north India. Muslim 'separatist' politics began in UP under British rule, and from here the Muslim League drew a critical part of the electoral support which brought it to all-India importance in the 1930s (Robinson 1974). Muslims in UP still compose 18.5 percent of the total population of the state. Muslim households are especially to be found in the western part of the state, where many large towns were once closely associated with the rise and fall of the Mughal empire. These towns had flourished as former capitals of Islamic rule as well as centres of British government. The concentration of Muslims in present-day UP, therefore, serves in part as a reminder to both Muslims and Hindus of the historical influence of Islamic power in this part of India (ibid. 13).

³⁵ Census of India, 2001 (*Census of India* 2001).

2.2.1 Political geography in UP

Prior to Independence the United Provinces was already a stronghold of the Indian National Congress. After Independence, Congress maintained its extremely strong position in the state from the first General Elections of 1952 to the third General Elections of 1962. Its hegemonic position came from a support base formed largely of Brahmins (and some other high castes), Scheduled Castes and Muslims. Political support from Muslims and the Scheduled Castes was particularly vital because these communities formed the largest minorities in the state (Brass 1985: 195; Rudolph and Rudolph 1987: 182-188).³⁶ The Congress Party maintained its dominant position in UP into the 1980s, but from the time of the 1967 General Elections fell into a period of (punctuated) relative decline that became much more evident in the 1990s, by which time it faced challenges from the BJP and from various 'subaltern' political parties. In the first decades after Independence, UP's Muslims and Scheduled Castes were largely inducted into UP (and Congress) politics as clients of the state's dominant upper-caste communities. The so-called 'Congress system' of this time was based across north India on the domination of government at different spatial scales by traditional landowning castes like the Brahmins and Rajputs (Meyer 1969; Hasan 1996) (see Table 2.1).

³⁶ The Scheduled Castes and the Muslims form 21.1 percent and 18.5 percent respectively of the UP population (*Census of India 2001*).

Table 2.1 Uttar Pradesh Lok Sabha election results, 1952-2004

Party	1952	1957	1962	1967	1971	1977	1980	1984	1989	1991	1996	1998	1999	2004
Turnout (%)	38.40	47.80	51.00	54.50	46.00	56.40	50.00	55.80	51.30	49.24	46.50	55.49	53.53	48.16
INC	53.00	46.30	38.20	33.40	48.60	25.00	35.90	51.03	31.77	18.28	8.14	6.02	14.72	12.04
BJS/BJP	7.30	14.80	17.60	22.20	12.30	--	--	6.42	7.58	32.83	33.44	35.80	27.64	22.17
SP	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	20.84	28.70	24.06	26.74
BSP	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2.18	9.93	8.70	20.61	20.90	22.08	24.67
JD	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	35.30	21.62	4.26	0.47	0.09	0.00
CPI/CPM combined	0.30	1.70	3.60	4.50	3.90	1.20	1.70	1.68	1.81	1.77	1.04	0.41	0.31	0.15
JD (United)													0.59	0.80
Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD)													--	4.49

Sources: The data from 1952 up to 1998 is from Kanchan Chandra, 'Post-Congress Politics in Uttar Pradesh: The ethnification of the party system and its consequences' in Indian Politics and the 1998 Election, edited by Ramashray Roy and Paul Wallace (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1999), p. 24 (Chandra 1999). The data for the elections after 1998 is from the official reports published by the Election Commission of India, <http://eci.nic.in/StatisticalReports/ElectionStatistics.asp> (Election Commission of India Web page).

UP politics formed a pivotal part of this 'Congress system' (Kothari 1964), and upper-caste dominance provided strong motivation for non-upper caste groups to challenge the supremacy of the Congress Party from the late 1960s (Hasan 1996: 60). Over the longer term, the Party's decline can primarily be attributed to the failure of its Brahmin leadership to adapt to a changing political economy in UP, where lower castes and classes were increasingly mobilizing in their own right as their economic status improved in the 1970s and 1980s (as for example through the Green Revolution) (Hasan 1998).

Among the main political forces now in opposition to the Congress in UP, Hindu Rightist organisations have a long history dating back to the late 19th century. The United Provinces was a focus for many cow protection movements during the period from c.1880–1920 and these prompted a number of violent encounters between Hindus and Muslims not only in the western part of the region but across the Provinces more broadly (see Pandey 1999 (1990)). These and other incidents produced fertile ground for the growth of already existing Hindu nationalist forces, such as the Arya Samaj, as well as for the birth of new organisations like the all-India Hindu Mahasabha in c.1915. The Hindu Mahasabha enjoyed its greatest visibility in UP in the late 1930s and 1940s under the presidency of V.D. Savarkar. It failed, however, to build an effective party organisation, and its electoral efforts saw little success either side of 1947.

The RSS leadership reconsidered its role in Indian politics after Independence, and particularly after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. The RSS' main leader, Madhve Sadashiv Golwalkar, was not willing to allow the RSS to enter

directly into politics. His solution was to spin off a new affiliate to the RSS, which was structurally distinct from the organisation but allied to it in terms of orientation. Members of the RSS, led by a young Atal Bihari Vajpayee entered into negotiations with a Bengali politician, S.P. Mookerjee, who had just resigned from Nehru's cabinet, and together they formed the BJP's predecessor, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (the BJS or Jana Sangh) in 1951. Mookerjee aimed to place the Jana Sangh at the centre of organised political opposition to the Congress Party (Graham 1990). The considerable resentment apparent among some Hindus in UP after Independence — as a consequence of the partition of India — fed the Party's quick growth in the 1950s and 1960s. The migration of Hindu Punjabi and Sindhi refugees from Pakistan into many of the larger cities and towns of UP also greatly enhanced the Jana Sangh's electoral support base. UP was one of the states, following Madhya Pradesh — the so-called 'cradle' of electoral Hindu nationalism (Jaffrelot 2005: 238) — in which the Jana Sangh recorded a degree of electoral success, particularly in cities with large Muslim populations (Baxter 1971 (1969): 234).³⁷ The Jana Sangh emerged in the 1962 UP Assembly elections as the largest opposition party to Congress, gaining more than 15 percent of the vote and winning 49 seats in the State Assembly (see Table 2.2).

³⁷ The state of Rajasthan and the then-region of Chhattisgarh in Madhya Pradesh are identified as the emerging areas of electoral strength of the Jana Sangh in the 1960s by Bruce Graham (Graham 1990: 226). Uttar Pradesh was not in general a stronghold of Hindu nationalist parties until the 1990s. But the BJP came to power in the 1991 General Elections and onwards because of the Party's electoral success in UP (Jaffrelot 2005: 238).

Table 2.2 Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly Election Results, 1952-2002

	1952	1957	1962	1967	1969	1974	1977	1980	1985	1989	1991	1993	1996	2002
Turnout (%)	52.7	63.4	51.4	54.6	54	56.9	46.1	44.9	45.7	51.3	--	57.13	55.73	53.8
Congress vote (%)	47.9	42.4	36.3	32.2	33.7	32.3	31.9	37.7	39.3	31.6	17.59	15.11	29.13	8.99
Seats	430	430	430	425	425	424	424	425	425	421	419	422	424	403
INC	390	286	249	199	211	215	47	309	269	94	46	28	33	25
Indian National Congress Urs	--	--	--	--	--	10	--	13	--	--	--	--	--	--
CPI	--	9	14	13	4	16	9	7	6	6	4	3	1	0
CPM	--	--	--	1	1	2	1	--	2	3	1	1	4	2
BJS/BJP	2	17	49	98	61	--	16	11	16	57	221	177	174	88
Janata Dal (JD)	--	--	15	12	5	1	--	--	--	204	92	27	7	
Janata Party (JP)	--	--	--	--	--	--	352	4	20	1	34	1	0	1
Lok Dal-B (LKDB), (LKD until 1985, BKD until 1974)	--	--	--	--	98	106	--	59	84	2	0	--	--	2
Socialist Party	19	--	24	44	13	5	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Praja Socialist Party (PSP)	1	44	38	11	3	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
BSP											12	67	67	98
SP												109	110	143
RLD														14

Sources: The data for all elections up to 1989 is from Zoya Hassan, 'Party Politics and Communal Mobilisation in Uttar Pradesh' in *Quest of a Secular Symbol: Ayodhya and after*, edited by R. Ghose (Bombay: Indian Ocean Centre, 1996), p. 58. The data for all elections after 1991 is from the official reports published by the Election Commission of India, <http://eci.nic.in/StatisticalReports/ElectionStatistics.asp>.

It did even better in 1967. As I explain in more detail later in this chapter, the UP Congress adopted a series of policy measures that had significant implications for local Muslim communities post-1947. Many of these were concerned with the cultural and religious symbolism of the Muslim community, and as such they struck at issues that had been contested in the public realm in north India for over a century. Many of these policy initiatives had the effect of making ethnic and religious cleavages more intense. Muslim leaders and organisations naturally arose in protest against these policies, not least in the 1960s, but this in turn invited a Hindu backlash and gave further mileage to the campaigns of the Jana Sangh. The Party continued to be aggressively involved in anti-Muslim or communal mobilisations, some of which escalated into large-scale Hindu-Muslim violence in north India in the 1960s.³⁸

The Jana Sangh, however, never became a major threat to the ruling Congress Party, even though it had some degree of electoral success in north India between 1951 and 1967. Bruce Graham's study (1990) of the political growth of the Jana Sangh reveals how the Party's communal appeals did not have much success during the first decades following Independence. This is because the ruling Congress Party itself played the role of principle defender of the Hindu cause. The Jana Sangh's limited electoral success throughout the Congress'

³⁸ These included the Aligarh-Meerut-Moradabad riots of October 1961, which resulted in 36 deaths and were considered the worst riotous event after Independence at the time. This incident was followed by others in Jamshedpur in 1964, in Ranchi (Bihar) in 1967 and in Meerut in 1968. Among them, the Ranchi violence was particularly severe with 184 people dead. The incident was closely related to the declaration of Urdu as the second official language of the state of Bihar (Brass 1974: 219-220).

heyday also reflected the electoral strength of the Congress Party with its resources and organisation. The Party's hegemonic strength demonstrated how little mobilising power the Hindu nationalist appeals had for ordinary (non-elite) Hindu voters in the Hindi heartland.

Political forces from the Left, on the other hand, had considerable presence in UP politics before the 1967 General Elections. The principal leftist parties were composed of various socialist parties that had their origins in the Congress Socialist Party, but which had formed separate parties in 1948. Merging and splitting amongst themselves, the Praja Socialist Party (PSP) and the Samyukta Socialist Party (SSP) emerged with some electoral strength in the 1960s. Following the split of the Congress Party in 1969, and Indira Gandhi's renewed advertising of her own socialist credentials, the socialist forces fell into a gradual decline, and to some degree were even replaced by new opposition parties emerging from the farmers' movement that also emanated from western UP.

The peasant-proprietor castes of western UP were among the first to challenge Congress hegemony in the state. The impetus for political mobilisation against upper-caste dominance lay in the significant economic rise of these agrarian middle castes, particularly empowered by *zamindari* abolition in the 1950s and 1960s and then by the Green Revolution, and yet also angered by what they saw as urban bias in India's development policies. The most consolidated challenge came under the strong leadership of a Jat politician, Chaudhury Charan Singh. Singh dominated the Congress District organisation in Meerut from the early 1940s and eventually defected from the Congress Party in 1967 before organising the Bharatiya Kranti Dal (BKD) in 1969 (Brass 1965; Jha 1979; Brass 1983: 301-

334). The BKD represented not only the interests of the agrarian middle castes but also 'rural' interests opposing 'urban' dominance (Brass 1983: *ibid.*). The formation of the BKD marked the first concrete expression of the middle and upper-middle castes' protest against the political dominance of Brahmins (and urban elites more generally) within the Congress Party.

The rise of the BKD was arguably also the beginning of an 'identity politics' based on 'horizontal' forms of mobilisation that differed significantly from the Congress system of 'vertical' mobilisation. Vertical mobilisation is based on the traditional structures of hierarchy in Hindu society in which dominant castes or local elites mobilise political support from their dependants (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967). Under forms of horizontal mobilisation, lower caste groups and communities make political alliances 'sideways' in order to exploit the greater numerical strength of the non-Forward Castes. Political parties and caste associations play a critical role as agents of horizontal mobilisation (*ibid.*). Studies of caste associations have aimed to show how caste groups are transformed into larger ethnic blocs on the basis of (allegedly) common ideologies, identities or interests that range from the ritual to the educational, economic and political (Rao 1979).

Another important social group in terms of its population size, as well as of its structurally similar position in society to that of many low-status Muslims, is the Scheduled Castes (or the former 'untouchable' castes). Their persistent social movements against landlordism have formed a critical stream in the political landscape of UP before and after 1947. Their protest movements developed into a major political movement, 'Ambedkarism', named after Dr. Bhim Rao

Ambedkar, the main leader of India's Depressed Classes from the 1920s to the 1950s. Ambedkarism progressed steadily among educated and socially-aware sections of the Scheduled Castes and started taking shape in terms of political mobilisation and activism. One of its manifestations was the formation of the Republican Party of India (RPI), notably among the Jatavs (Chamars) of Agra, in western UP in 1958 (Lynch 1969: 95-128; Lerche 1999: 187, 206) shortly after Ambedkar's death. Chamars, who were traditionally leather workers, are the most numerous as well as the most politically conscious group among UP's Scheduled Castes. They are also the largest single caste (*jati*) grouping in UP. The RPI aimed to eliminate caste-based inequality and discrimination and to establish the rights of Scheduled Castes as equal citizens within the new republic of India. It succeeded in gaining electoral strength between 1962 and 1967 in western UP, but in the long run, as we shall see, it did not prove to be the main political vehicle for the political mobilisation of the Scheduled Castes in UP or across northern India.

Social movements among the Scheduled Castes can also be seen in terms of the emergence of a class movement, albeit one which is not disassociated from the impact of democratic elections and the adult franchise. The extension of the right to vote to social groups regardless of their socio-economic status or political influence offered them a new political resource (Hardgrave and Kochanek 1986 (1970); Mitra and Singh 1999). India's largely illiterate electorate, which included Muslims, had a high voter turnout rate of 46-48 percent in the first two General Elections. This rose over 60 percent by 1967, reaching a level equal to the average voter turnout in the United States, and it remained consistently above 55 percent in consecutive General Elections

between 1962 and 1998. By 1989, voter turnout was higher in rural than in urban areas. India's most disadvantaged groups, including the Other Backward Classes and the Scheduled Castes, are more likely to vote than are upper-caste Hindus (Yadav 2000).

Democratic elections in India continue to be a major vehicle for social change, in the sense of breaking the traditional social order under the impact of competition prompted by electoral politics. Frankel and Rao (1989, 1990) explain this dynamic process of transformation with reference to the combined effects of economic change, social reform and political mobilisation within a framework of political regionalism. Their rich ethnography shows how the principle of universal adult franchise empowered the relatively powerless at the bottom of the pyramid. The bottom layers quickly learned how to pool their collective voting strength and to use it as a political resource. Their learning process is buttressed by a generalised notion of citizenship, as opposed to the feeling of mere subjecthood, as well as by a growing belief in their entitlement to 'equality' and a higher standard of living (Mitra and Singh 1999: 20-26). The 'language of right' has permeated deep into Indian society, where it is steadily altering the nature of interactions between the rulers and citizens.

Before picking up on this broad subaltern narrative, however, let me now reconsider the position of UP's Muslim communities before Partition and the *de facto* declaration of India from 1950 as a secular state. The United Provinces before Partition was a major area of Muslim demographic and political ascendancy. The Muslim League succeeded in establishing a strong support base among the UP Muslim constituency, mainly by exploiting Muslim

grievances about their status as the Provinces' largest minority (Puri 1993: 2141). However, UP remained with India after 1947 and was not ceded to Pakistan. Thus the Muslims in UP who spearheaded the Pakistan movement were left in a not dissimilar Hindu majority state, but this time as a much weaker minority. The states of UP and Bihar were affected more than most other states by the repercussions of Partition. They suffered not only from the ferocity of the Partition riots but also from the enormous exodus of Muslims to Pakistan, including a considerable 'skimming off' from the professional classes that continued until the early 1960s (Hasan 1990: 51). A large majority of Muslims in Uttar Pradesh therefore were drawn from the lower ranks, and they had to face an increasingly volatile situation in a Hindu-dominated independent India without strong political leadership of their own. Muslims also lost their reserved seats and separate electorates, and needed to be organised for the first time into the general electorate under the principles of universal adult franchise. In this context, Muslims mainly looked to the Indian National Congress of Jawaharlal Nehru as their protector, and supported the Congress Party in exchange for security. The Congress Party thus played one important role in the integration of the Muslim community into the political structure of the new nation. Another — which was linked — was played by the Constitution of India. Muslims' rights to self-regulation were condensed in the community's persistent demand to maintain their Personal Law vis-à-vis a unified civil code. Muslim Personal Law is based on the Islamic legal code, *shariat*, which governs life-cycle events such as marriage, death, divorce and inheritance. The maintenance of Personal Law has comprised the core of many key Muslim political demands in post-Independent India, and in the process has provided a focal point for Hindu nationalist attacks on the Congress government (or Party) for its alleged

‘pseudo-secularism’. As we shall see throughout this thesis, negotiations around Muslim religious and civic identities have been key to the politics of Muslim (and indeed non-Muslim) groups in UP, as elsewhere in India after 1947. What is remarkable about the post-1987 period in Meerut, however, is the changing basis on which this dual identity is constructed and contested (see Chapters 5 and 6).

2.2.2 UP Congress policies concerning Muslims in UP

Notwithstanding official all-India protection of Muslim cultural rights after 1947, it needs to be pointed out that the UP Congress Party — in key respects the Muslims’ main protector in the state — itself took a lead after Partition in circumscribing some key moments (or areas) in the cultural or religious rights (and rites) of UP Muslims. G.B.Pant, the first UP Chief Minister, moved his government in September 1949 to adopt Hindi as the state’s only official language and to drop the option of Urdu as second official language. These decisions culminated in the UP Official Language Act of 1951. UP has the largest Urdu-speaking population in India, and Urdu is the single largest minority language, spoken by over ten percent of the population of the state (Brass 1974: 179-180). This legislation excluded Muslims from key opportunities in government employment or recruitment to the police force. The enactment also meant that Muslim children were deprived of adequate facilities for education through the medium of Urdu.

The UP Congress Party also concerned itself with the prohibition of cow slaughter for religious (Islamic) sacrifice. The cow protection movement has a long history in north India, as we have already seen (Chapter 1), linking back to forms of Hindu revivalism that emerged in the last decades of the 19th century. Prolonged debates between secularists (including Nehru) and Hindu nationalists and traditionalists within the Congress³⁹, notably during the time of the Constituent Assembly, resulted in an ambiguous phrase that recommended the prohibition of cow slaughter in Article 48 of the Constitution, but only at the level of the 'Directive Principles' — in other words, it was offered as guidance to the state governments of the Indian Union (Graham 1990: 147). In July 1949, several district boards in UP decided on an outright ban, with other important districts, including Meerut, following suit by the end of the year. Acts at the district level became UP Acts in 1955.

Another Congress policy concerned the 1951 Amendment Act of the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), an act that aimed to reduce the university's 'minority character' and to secularise its mandate. The 1951 Amendment included the abolition of compulsory religious education, opened the governing body to non-Muslims and the affiliation of the university with predominantly Hindu colleges in Aligarh town, and finally proposed dropping the term 'Muslim' from the university's name (Brass 1974: 223-224). The 1951 Act was followed by a further amendment in 1965, which prompted a long-term counter agitation among Muslims in north India. The dispute was only settled after the Janata

³⁹ For a definition of Hindu nationalists and traditionalists that coexisted in the Congress Party see (Graham 1990: 5-7).

Government, the first non-Congress government in UP, reopened the issue in 1978, and when the Congress government under Indira Gandhi responded with a new amendment Act in 1981, under the terms of which the status of a minority institution was accorded to the university, with 50 percent reservation granted to Muslim students (ibid. 231-232).

Muslim discontent over the problem of Urdu and other matters related to UP Congress policies prompted the formation of an openly anti-Congress Muslim organisation, the All-India *Majlis-e-Mushawarat*, in 1964 (Ahmed 1967). Muslim discontent had begun to express itself in 1962 in a few areas of the state, but now it was more widespread. The *Majlis* aimed to raise awareness of Muslim problems and called for adequate safeguards for the Muslim community. Specifically, they directed attention to the importance of relief provisions for victims of communal violence, a constant monitoring system in all dimensions of the community life to be taken up to the authorities, and protection of religious and social lives of the community (Shahabuddin 2003).

The *Majlis* refrained from direct involvement in party politics but indirectly supported non-Congress candidates in constituencies throughout the state. The UP *Majlis* was established in Lucknow in June 1968 as a splinter group from the all-India *Majlis* and aimed for more direct participation in politics by contesting elections. But as a political party it was not well-organised and attracted only extremely conservative elements (Quraishi 1971; Ahmed 1967).⁴⁰ The Party was

⁴⁰ Imtiaz Ahmed points out that the all-India *Majlis* eventually came to undertake electoral activity prompted by the refusal of the Congress Party to accept their mandates (Ahmed 1967).

largely viewed as one of Muslim militancy, exclusively supporting the Muslim cause. The *Majlis*, for example, supported the movement to retain the minority character of the AMU. Mushirul Hasan has written that the organisation was 'stigmatised as a sinister, incipient revival of the old Muslim League', legitimatising Hindu communalism in UP and deepening a sense of insecurity among Muslims (Hasan 1990: 58). The conservative movement of the *Majlis* was among the first initiatives made by post-1947 Muslim political and religious leaders to consolidate the Muslim community as a political force. The Party contested the 1969 mid-term Assembly election and the 1971 General Elections in UP without success and faded away quickly after its founder's death in July 1974.⁴¹

After the Emergency regime of 1975-77, a shift in the Congress Party towards Hindu majoritarianism made for more dangerous conditions for Muslims in UP. In the 1984 General Elections (following the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by two of her Sikh bodyguards), the Congress election campaign of her elder son, Rajiv Gandhi, adopted the two principal slogans of 'One Country' and 'Security'. Paul Brass has observed that in UP the Congress campaign 'nearly exclusively' focused on national security issues bound up with so-called internal and external enemies. Economic issues were sidelined and the needs or demands of minority groups receded into the background. Some Congressmen speculated during the campaign about the adverse effect on the Muslim vote of police and PAC killings of Muslims in recurring riots in the years

⁴¹ The founder of the UP *Majlis* was Dr. A.J. Faridi, a politician-cum-physician who was actively involved in politics for the Muslim cause. Brass calls his politics 'Muslim militancy' (Brass 1974: 243).

leading up to 1984. Some Congress candidates indicated awareness of the potential loss of Muslim votes for the first time (Brass 1986: 663). Although the Congress Party increased its vote share by 15 percent in UP overall, it no longer enjoyed a monopoly of the minority vote. The available aggregate data indicate that Muslim support was sharply divided during this 'Rajiv-wave' election.⁴²

2.2.3 Political formations among UP Muslims

The participation of Muslims in Indian political life can reasonably be seen from two separate perspectives in this period — those of the Muslim elites and those of the Muslim masses. As far as the Muslim elites were concerned, they were well represented under the Congress system of elite incorporation. The grievances of the ordinary Muslim population, however, were in general not represented in the political sphere. There were two reasons for this. First, Muslim politicians in the ruling Congress Party generally came from the old landlord class, itself equivalent to the Hindu higher castes (Wright Jr. 1964, 1966), and there was a persistent perception gap between the leaders and the electorate regarding Indian social and political realities. The elite tended to have different views from those of the Muslim masses, many of whom were facing problems arising from the scarcity of state resources for their households. Second, the problem of Muslim representation reflected the objective

⁴² Six out of seven Lok Sabha constituencies where Muslims formed more than 50 percent of the population returned non-Congress candidates. In 22 constituencies, where Muslims comprised between 20 and 50 percent of the population, Congress candidates were elected. In the remaining 42 constituencies, where Muslims constituted a sizable minority, non-Congress party candidates were returned (Shakir 1990: 105).

circumstances of the Congress Party, which was still primarily a secular party made up largely of Hindu supporters. Muslim politicians had little power or will to address under such circumstances acute problems of low economic development, or the poor educational attainment of large sections of their community.

Some Muslim intellectuals were aware of this discrepancy between elite Muslim politics and the reality faced by the vast Muslim population on the ground (Engineer 1980; Zakaria 2004: 228-229). One critic, Moin Shakir, noted in 1980:

Muslim leaders are highly educated, their spokesmen in Parliament are on a par with the high-caste members in terms of educational qualifications, occupational affiliations and places of residence. Consequently they are not the persons who voice the real grievances of the communities (This includes minority Muslim, as well as SC and STs). [T]heir representation...has been quite ineffective in influencing the legislative process. The ruling class is always ready to accommodate this leadership of the minorities for maintaining the appearance of "consensus". The so-called Muslims' politics is dominated by all sorts of non-issues like the protection of Muslim Personal Law and the minority character of AMU. These are the issues which divert the attention of the masses from the real issues. The most important issue is of changing the system of which no Muslim leader speaks (Shakir 1980: 221).

If the Congress system failed to engage the vast majority of Muslims in Indian political life, equally important was that Muslim political formations were often highly fragmented. Major religious-political organisations were divided on ideological lines and pursued separate goals. Mushirul Hasan comments:

The supposedly monolithic structure of Muslim leadership and organisation did not exist either at the national or the local level. It is hard to discern a common pattern or a unified structure of political activity amongst Muslims (Hasan 1990: 58).

These organisations acted as intermediaries who conveyed and channelled Muslim grievances at the parliamentary level, albeit to little effect. At the time of elections, these organisations negotiated their support with various regional and national parties (Graff 1992: 215).

The fragmented character of Muslim organisations points to another important dimension of the broader Muslim political formation. It was difficult to develop community consciousness and a sense of belonging among the Muslim masses. This is manifest in the general pattern of Muslim party voting (Rudolph and Rudolph 1987: 47). Although most Muslims voted for Congress prior to the 1989 General Elections, many observers have pointed out that Muslim votes are nonetheless divided among different parties, something which works to the advantage of the Hindu parties, particularly the BJP. A key issue for Muslim politicians, therefore, has been how to create a Muslim political community out of this fragmentation, or how to effectively translate the numerical importance of Muslims into political power. I consider this point further when I turn to Muslim voting patterns in Meerut.

Asghar Ali Engineer (2005) points out another key dimension of Muslim politics when he maintains that it has to be a large extent centred around cultural and religious issues, not least because these issues are useful for the Muslim leaders' own political ends. Engineer's main point is that large segments of the Muslim

masses are comprised of people who are religiously conservative and only minimally literate, and that some Muslim leaders have sought to appeal to their constituency in emotional or cultural terms.

Another pivotal issue facing the Muslim community as a whole concerns its socio-economic condition. Muslims are among the most impoverished communities in India (ActionAid India et al. 2007). The Sachar Committee Report, issued in autumn 2006, suggested that the average economic condition of Muslims was just above that of the Scheduled Castes and worse than that of the OBCs.⁴³ The extremely low educational attainment of many Muslims was also a key factor in their severe under-representation in both public and private employment markets. Muslims have been discriminated against in terms of educational opportunities, as can be seen in the Hindi-only policy of Congress, quotas for government jobs, representation in central and state governments and police and army recruitment systems. In 1950 the UP state government approved the persistent demand of Hindus in UP for the reduction of the number of Muslim police officers who made up almost a half of the entire police force, in order to weaken the Muslim influence in the police, the main arm of the state (Brennan 1996). Muslims' socio-economic problems have almost never been adequately addressed by the ruling Congress or non-Congress state governments in UP or elsewhere (Engineer 1995a: 3130).

⁴³ 'Sachar Committee Report', *The Hindu*, 8 December 2006 (*The Hindu* (New Delhi)).

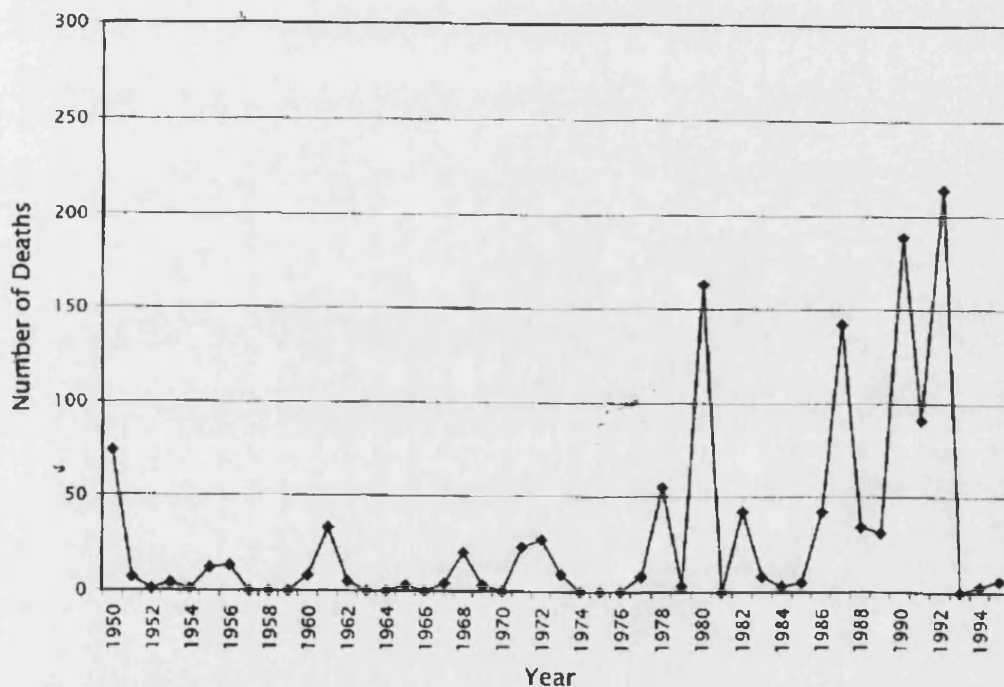
2.2.4 Hindu-Muslim violence from the 1960s to the 1980s

Against this backdrop of weak Muslim politics, the changing state of the Congress Party and the overall economic weakness of large parts of north India's Muslim population, it is perhaps not surprising that UP — itself the heartland of the Pakistan movement — should prove itself to be a fertile setting for anti-Muslim violence either side of 1947. Muslim communities in UP remained weak in macro-political terms, but strong enough culturally and geographically to make their presence felt as a significant — and significantly visible — non-Hindu minority group. Muslim demands for protection of their cultural symbols sometimes triggered Hindu communalism, or gave it an excuse. Anti-Muslim sentiments revived in intensity among many Hindus during the Indo-Pak Wars of 1965 and 1971. This period was followed by a destabilising pre-Emergency period which saw increasing clashes between Muslims and the police force and the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC). Following the 1972 amendment of the AMU Act (1951), for example, some Muslim demonstrators were killed by the police and the PAC in Aligarh, Firozabad and Varanasi in 1974. State forces were also 'communalised' during the Emergency regime under Indira Gandhi between 1975 and 1977. There were repeated incidents of police firing targeting Muslims under the pretext of the family planning scheme (Shakir 1990). Some Muslims were even killed by police during the Emergency in Meerut city (Brass 1985: 183).⁴⁴ These incidents were only a prelude to those during the post-Emergency period and onwards to the height of the communal politics of the 1980s. While an increasingly large number of Muslims came to feel threatened

⁴⁴ *Amar Ujjala*, 13 March 2004 (*Amar Ujjala* (Meerut)).

by the menace of Hindu communalism, 'secular' Muslim politicians generally did not or could not represent the Muslim cause. The powerlessness of Muslim politicians in the Congress Party became increasingly evident throughout the 1970s and 1980s. In many cities, including Moradabad and Meerut, ruling politicians were ineffective in protecting Muslims from attacks by the PAC. Indeed, the political system itself seemed to play a role in encouraging violence and the large-scale killing of Muslims (see Figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2 Total deaths in riots per year in Uttar Pradesh, 1950-1995



Source: Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 99.

2.3 Meerut City

As might be expected, many of Meerut's political structures and contests since Independence have mirrored those in UP more generally — but not entirely.

There are also important differences that need to be observed and taken into account.

Map 2.2 Uttar Pradesh and Meerut District



With a population just over one million, Meerut is one of the largest cities in western UP. The city has served as the administrative, political and educational centre of the Division of the Upper Doab region since colonial times (see Map 2.2). Situated in the fertile soil of Upper Doab, the Meerut economy is based on, among other things, agricultural processing industries (Khan and Lal 1973). The Doab region, particularly the north part, has well-organised irrigation and canal systems. Also the region's landholding structure, consisting of a relatively high proportion of independent and small-scale peasant proprietors, has brought a much higher potential for commercial farming than is the case in eastern UP (Brennan 1977).^{45*}

Meerut's industrial profile has also been rapidly changing since the city was included into a large industrial zone being constructed under the so-called National Capital Region policy (NCR).⁴⁶ The NCR has its origins in the recommendations of the first Master Plan of Delhi in 1962 to develop a metropolitan region around Delhi in order to divert the increasing pressure of an incoming (migrant) population. The NCR has brought Meerut city a number of new features in order to boost its economy, including the construction of a new bypass road branching out from the old Delhi-Dehradun highway in order to divert heavy traffic from the congested city centre. The new areas along the bypass road have seen a construction boom which has largely catered to

⁴⁵ Interview with the District Agricultural officer on 2 August 2003.

*For interviews conducted during my fieldwork, see *Fieldwork and Research Methods in Prologue*. Interviews were conducted in Meerut unless otherwise indicated.

⁴⁶ The NCR includes satellite towns of Ghaziabad, Noida and Gurgaon in Haryana.

commuters to Delhi (Sinha 1994: 39).⁴⁷ The city population more than doubled in size between 1981 and 2001 (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 Decennial population growth in the Meerut Municipal Corporation area, 1981-2001

Year	Population	Decennial Percentage increase
1981	512,317	
1991	753,667	47.1
2001	1,074,229	42.5

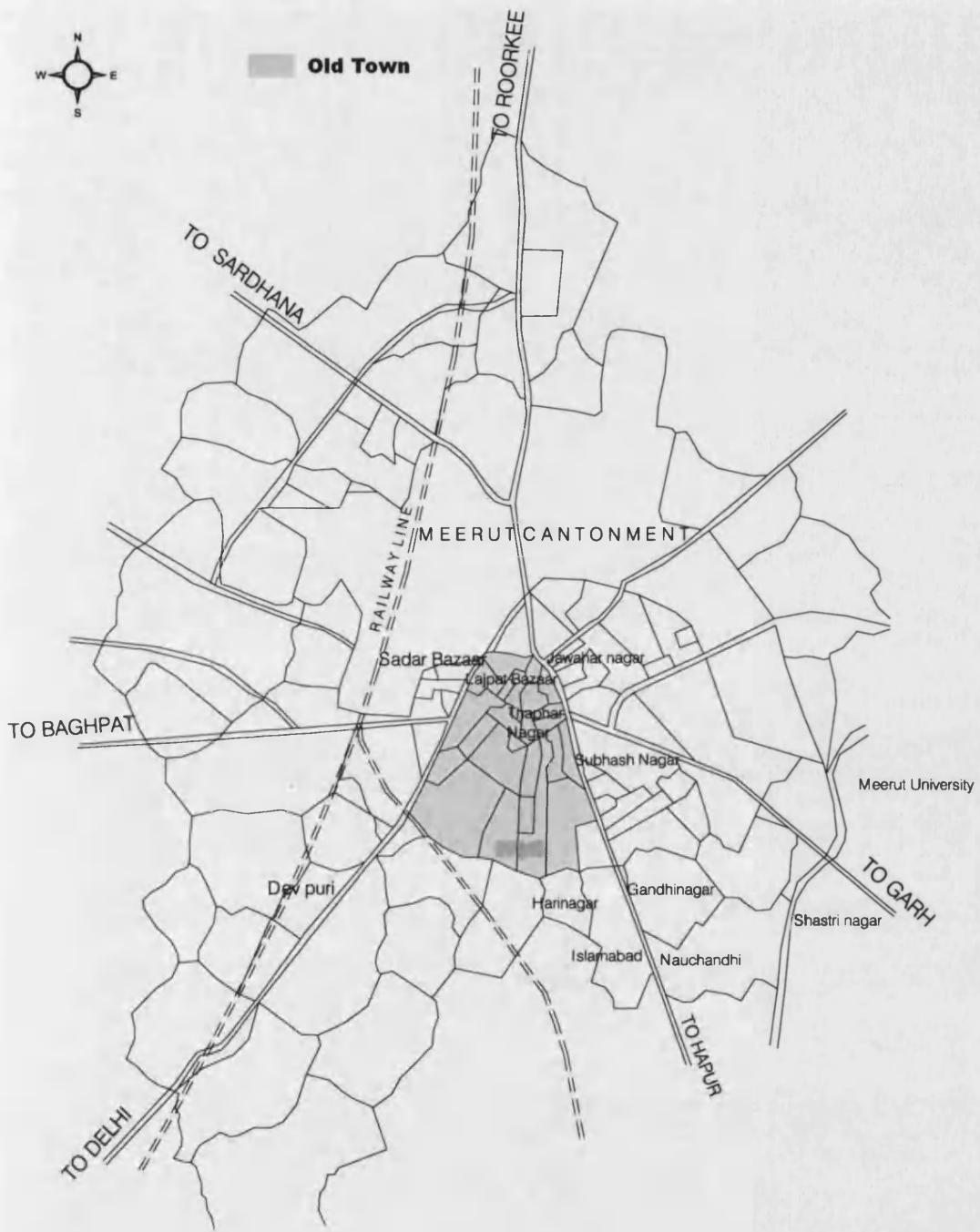
Source: Office of the Commissioner of Meerut Division, 2 April 2003 (Government of Uttar Pradesh 2001).

Part of this growth was fuelled by the NCR project and also by migrants of new richer farmers and Muslim workers from nearby villages. These migrants came in search of jobs or for the education of their next generation. Many residential colonies have been constructed in the outskirts of the city in order to accommodate the incoming population.

Despite its size, Meerut is more like a sprawling semi-modern town than a modern industrial city. A few tall buildings and shopping malls in its centre now make for a striking contrast with the Old Town at the south end of the city, which maintains the more static older structures of heavy Islamic influence. The Old Town is the original part of the city and still provides the residence area for the majority of the city's large Muslim population (see Map 2.3).

⁴⁷ Interview with a Hindu, possibly a Punjabi, owner of a successful textile firm living in the new colony along the bypass road on 7 April 2003.

Map 2.3 Meerut city



2.4 Local Politics in Meerut City, 1951-1986

The Indian National Congress (INC) was the dominant political force in both the Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies in Meerut city and District during the first three General Election periods (for details of different constituencies in Meerut District, see Appendix 2.1. The Meerut–Mawana Lok Sabha constituency is largely coterminous with Meerut District, but takes in some small areas from Muzaffarnagar and, later, Baghpat Districts. Meerut District in turn fields five Assembly seats, including that of Meerut city). Benefitting from the large Muslim and Scheduled Caste populations in both the District of Meerut and the city, the electoral power of the Congress Party in the Meerut constituencies was one of the strongest in UP. Muslims comprised 33 percent of the Lok Sabha constituency of Meerut District, and the Scheduled Castes, 19 percent.⁴⁸ In the city Assembly constituency, or municipal area, Muslims have always maintained 35 percent or above. In 2001, the Muslim population reached as high as 48 percent, while the Scheduled Castes comprised 18 percent of the city population.⁴⁹

After Independence, the Congress Party fielded two of the most powerful Muslim politicians left in UP after 1947, Shahnawaz Khan and Mohsina Kidwai, in the Meerut Lok Sabha constituency. These politicians dominated the Lok

⁴⁸ The Lok Sabha constituency figures came from ex-MP, Mr. Harish Pal's election data. Interview on 25 April 2004.

⁴⁹ The population data for the municipal area in 2001 came from the office record of the Commissioner of Meerut Division. Interview on 2 April 2003.

Sabha seats from the first General Elections in 1952 to the eighth General Elections in 1984. As for the Assembly seat of the Meerut city constituency, Congress fielded either Hindu Bania (commercial/business caste) or Brahmin candidates. The one exception to this general trend was a Muslim candidate who stood for the Assembly seat in 1977. This followed the major defeat of the Congress Party in the preceding Lok Sabha election of 1977.

Although western UP as a whole had never contributed significantly to the electoral strength of Hindu Rightist parties before 1993 (Duncan 1997: 982), the Jana Sangh remained a strong political force in the Meerut city constituency in the 1960s and 1970s. The Party dominated the Assembly election from 1967 to 1977 with its candidate Mohan Lal Kapoor. Kapoor was a Punjabi Kayastha and member of the RSS. He was a central figure of a thriving Hindu nationalism in Meerut city. The continued strength of the Hindu Right in the city was further sustained by the presence of large numbers of migrants coming from West Punjab after 1947, pouring into the city amidst the carnage of the Partition riots (see Tables 2.4 and 2.5).

Table 2.4 Elected persons, Meerut–Mawana Lok Sabha constituency, 1952-1989

<i>Year</i>	<i>Winner</i>	<i>Caste/ Community</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Votes Polled</i>	<i>% of Total Valid Votes</i>
1952	Shahnawaz Khan	Muslim	INC	125,288	59.90
1957	Shahnawaz Khan	Muslim	INC	158,280	65.70
1962	Shahnawaz Khan	Muslim	INC	133,172	52.90
1967	Maharaj Singh	Jat	SSP	146,172	49.14
1971	Shahnawaz Khan	Muslim	Congress (I)	180,181	51.02
1977	Kailash Prakash	Bania	BLD-JNP	253,035	63.35
1980	Mohsina Kidwai	Muslim	Congress (I)	179,004	42.15
1984	Mohsina Kidwai	Muslim	Congress (I)	238,236	50.36
1989	Harish Pal	Gujjar	JD	312,856	58.47

Source: Election Commission of India, <http://eci.nic.in/StatisticalReports/ElectionStatistics.asp>

Table 2.5 Elected persons, Meerut city Legislative Assembly constituency, 1952-1989

<i>Year</i>	<i>Winner</i>	<i>Caste/ Community</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Votes Polled</i>	<i>% of Total Valid Votes</i>
1952	Kailash Prakash	Bania	INC	26,542	60.34
1957	Kailash Prakash	Bania	INC	27,059	51.14
1962	Jagdish Saran Rastogi	Bania	INC	18,026	31.71
1967	Mohan Lal Kapoor	Punjabi	BJS	26,905	42.82
1969	Mohan Lal Kapoor	Punjabi	BJS	25,735	34.21
1974	Mohan Lal Kapoor	Punjabi	BJS	31,508	40.71
1977	Manzoor Ahamad	Muslim	Congress	42,004	53.51
1980	Manzoor Ahamad	Muslim	Congress (I)	32,407	45.80
1985	Jai Narain Sharma	Brahmin	Congress	48,517	47.75
1989	Laxmi Kant Vajpay	Brahmin	BJP	46,317	37.32

Source: Election Commission of India, <http://eci.nic.in/StatisticalReports/ElectionStatistics.asp>

Meerut received the largest number of Partition refugees in UP during the 1940s and 1950s. The Punjabis are mostly urban settlers and are oriented toward non-agricultural occupations. The Punjabi immigrants who settled in Meerut were skilled workers in sport goods manufacturing — cricket balls, nets, bats, and so on — and started their businesses upon their arrival.⁵⁰ Sports goods manufacturing had grown by 2000 into one of the most successful and rapidly growing export industries in Meerut.⁵¹ These Punjabi migrants usually support Hindu nationalist organisations and parties and their growing economy had a critical bearing on the remarkable growth of the BJP in the city in the 1980s (Engineer 1982). The following table shows the scale of migration in Meerut in comparison to Kanpur in 1961 (Table 2.6).

Table 2.6 Partition refugees from West Pakistan to Meerut District in comparison with Kanpur District, 1951-1961

	Meerut	(%)	Kanpur	(%)
Urban settlers	35,904	95.60	27,501	99.40
Rural settlers	1,648	0.44	143	0.06
Total number of refugees	37,552		27,644	

Source: *Census of India, 1961 Part I-A (1) General Report on the Census, Table 5.15 Migrants from Pakistan, p. 428 (Census of India 1961).*

⁵⁰ Interview with a Punjabi owner of a successful cricket goods manufacturing firm on 3 April 2003.

⁵¹ Interview with Mr. A.N. Singh, additional Director of the Meerut District Industries Centre on 28 March 2003.

Meerut also had a traditional presence of the Arya Samaj,⁵² which in turn contributed to the steady growth of Hindu Right forces in the city. The Meerut Arya Samaj attracted many Jat members from the colonial period onwards, as well as many of the city's Congress District Committee members.⁵³ These Congressmen, or many of them, shifted their allegiance to the Jana Sangh after Nehru's death in 1964. The Arya Samaj contributed to the strengthening of the Jana Sangh and the BJP by virtue of its capacity for organising large processions and other public events, particularly in the period preceding elections, along with the Hindu Mahasabha, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and other related organisations.⁵⁴ Many ordinary Muslims might have identified Congress itself at times as a Hindu Right organisation, given that many of its members were from the RSS and the Jana Sangh (Graham 1990).⁵⁵

Paul Brass, in his study of the Congress organization in Meerut District in the early 1960s, found very little political representation of Muslims, or indeed of the Scheduled Castes, in the District Congress Committee. Brass observes:

Muslims and Chamars, though numerically the largest communities in the district, have very little representation in the local Congress in proportion to their population and almost no real influence despite the fact that in Meerut as in most other districts excluding Aligarh, these two communities are considered major Congress supporters in the General elections (Brass 1965: 146).

⁵² The Meerut Arya Samaj was established in 1878 by Dayananda Saraswati, the original founder of the Arya Samaj in Mumbai.

⁵³ Charan Singh was also a member.

⁵⁴ Interview with a senior Arya Samajist and publisher in Meerut city on 20 April 2004.

⁵⁵ This point was mentioned by some Muslim respondents including Hakim Saffudin, the chairman of finance on the Municipal Board from 1950 to 1971 and a renowned Unani doctor. Interview on 25 November 2003.

Ordinary Meerut Muslims had little direct participation in state and national-level politics because the Muslim politicians elected from the Meerut constituencies were not from among the ranks of the majority Muslims. Shahnawaz Khan and Mohsina Kidwai did not 'belong to' Meerut District and were hardly present in Meerut. They were in the city 'only during the election campaign', according to some of my Muslim respondents. Both of these Muslim MPs were cabinet ministers who had high credentials as 'secular' and 'nationalist' Muslims who did not particularly represent the issues concerning local Muslims. According to Theodore Wright, who studied Muslim Congress politicians at that time, Shahnawaz Khan was an 'unimpeachable nationalist,' so that it was not possible for Khan to 'act only as a Muslim' — he 'must take a nationalist perspective' (Wright Jr. 1966: 128). There seemed to be a gap between the elite politicians and the electorate, and this condition continued until the end of the 1980s.

Reflecting their marginalized position in city politics, Muslims forged a political alliance with the Scheduled Castes from time to time in order to increase their political representation. These communities, however, did not make their coalition stand as an independent political force, but rather depended on co-optation by the Congress or other parties. One such example was the election of the Municipal Board in 1964. The RPI made an alliance with Muslims under the watchful eye of the Congress Party, with Congress symbols and emblems being used for the election campaign. The RPI was very successful in combining the votes of the largest caste and minority group and won 22 out of 40 seats. The majority of elected Muslim councillors were from the lower ranks of Muslims, and included Qureshi (butchers), Ansari (weavers) and Saiffie (blacksmiths)

(Chauhan n.d.: 10).⁵⁶ Muslims and the Scheduled Castes were already moving away from the Congress, albeit in slow and fragmented movements. The Emergency regime of Indira Gandhi critically changed the Muslim-Congress relationship, to the extent in which it would never return to the former state. The Scheduled Castes also saw their emancipation movement geared up to a new stage during the 1970s in protest against increased levels of caste violence. This accelerated the momentum to become a separate political force from the Congress, which still largely embodied a system of upper-caste dominance.

If we look at the electoral history of the Meerut Assembly constituency from the perspective of the Hindu electorate, we see that the Congress Party has been steadily losing support from each major religious constituency since around 1960. The largest Hindu population in the city, the Chamars, was shifting its allegiance steadily to its own parties after the 1950s, first to the RPI, and much later and more forcefully in the 1980s to the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP). A substantial part of the Hindu trading classes, including the Punjabis in the city, diverted their support to the Jana Sangh. In the meantime a large portion of the agrarian middle castes left the Congress and focused on supporting the BKD. The remaining support base consisted of a small proportion of high-caste Hindus, including Brahmins and Rajputs. As far as the Muslim electorate was concerned, its long-term allegiance to the Congress seems to have steadily eroded over this period, as ordinary Muslims became disillusioned by the Party's failure to protect their livelihoods and personal security. When the Congress

⁵⁶ Interview on 12 April 2004 with an Ansari ex-councillor elected in the 1964 Municipal election.

itself became more of a Hindu majoritarian party in the 1980s this had significant implications for Muslim security in Meerut.

An electoral history of the Meerut Assembly constituency decade by decade provides more insights into this larger trend of the steady decline of the Congress Party in the city. The electoral records also indicate the degree of strength of opposition parties at different times. Assembly election results in the 1960s indicate that opposition parties were increasingly cutting into the Congress base. The major opposition to Congress then comprised the Jana Sangh and the Socialist Parties. The top three contestants — the Congress, the Jana Sangh and the Socialist Parties — fought a close battle in the Assembly elections of 1962, 1967 and 1969. The Jana Sangh beat the Congress in the 1967 election. Given the close contest among the parties, the electoral victory of the Jana Sangh greatly benefited from a Muslim vote divided between the Congress and other parties fielding a Muslim candidate. The Muslim candidate for the SSP, Abdul Majid Ansari, obtained a substantial Muslim vote in the first two elections, which had the effect of weakening the Congress, a pattern repeated in later years (see Table 2.7).

Table 2.7 Election results for Meerut city Legislative Assembly constituency, 1967 (top four candidates)

<i>Candidates</i>	<i>Caste/ Community</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Votes Polled</i>	<i>% of Total Valid Votes</i>
Mohan Lal Kapoor	Punjabi	BJS	26,905	42.82
Abdul Majid Ansari	Muslim	SSP	17,553	27.97
Jagdish Saran Rastogi	Bania	INC	15,829	25.19
A.K. Mujti	n.a.	IND	1,646	2.62

Source: Election Commission of India, State Election, 1967 to the Legislative Assembly of Uttar Pradesh, Detailed Results, p. 79 of 84 (Election Commission of India 1967).

Most of the elections held during the 1960s were preceded by major incidents of Hindu-Muslim violence which greatly enhanced the prospects of some political parties, as we know already from Brass and Wilkinson. The first major violence, in October 1961, was probably helped by the Jana Sangh's contest in the forthcoming 1962 Assembly elections.⁵⁷ Violence originally took place on the occasion of student union elections in Aligarh Muslim University in Aligarh District and spread to other districts in western UP. In Meerut city, it began on 4 October and continued for almost two weeks, leaving 18 people dead, 30 injured and 511 arrested.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ The Jana Sangh had contested in the Meerut City Assembly constituency since as early as the first Assembly election of 1952 although the Party got only marginal votes before the 1962 Assembly election. In the 1962 election with Mohan Lal Kapoor it finished as a runner-up for the first time, obtaining slightly over the quarter of the valid vote (25.83 percent).

⁵⁸ Meerut Local Intelligence Report, non-dated (translated from Hindi) (Government of Uttar Pradesh n.d.). The local Intelligence Office in Meerut is under the jurisdiction of the state government in Lucknow. It worked closely with the local administration including the Senior Superintendence of Police (SSP). The office kept a 'Communal Register' based on the information gathered by local intelligent officers under cover. The register existed separately

Another violent event took place in 1968 before the mid-term elections in 1969. It was triggered by a large protest movement led by the Jana Sangh against a joint conference organized by the Congress and the the *Jamait-ul-Ulemae-Hind*, which was inviting Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah, the Prime Minister of Kashmir, to be its main speaker. The Jana Sangh alleged that the Party's founder, S.P. Mookerji, had died in a Kashmir jail as a result of Abdullah's conspiracy. Abdullah was a highly popular Muslim leader at that time, and the conference was expected to have a large Muslim audience, with Shahnawaz Khan, ex-MP, presiding. On 28 January, the day of the conference, the Jana Sangh took a large procession through the city and reached the conference site, the Faiz-a-am College, where their activists started shouting slogans. This led to brick-battling between the Jana Sangh processionists outside the gate and the conference workers inside. The violence continued until 4 February and resulted in 12 deaths, all Muslim, with 71 injured and 148 arrests. The Muslims were killed mainly by police firings.⁵⁹

Paul Brass emphasises political calculation and the instrumental use of Hindu-Muslim violence by political leaders at all levels and of different persuasions, including so-called secular nationalists (Brass 1997: 269-270). He refers to the

from the communal registers kept in each police station in Meerut. The one in the Intelligence Office seems to have relatively more thorough data than those kept at each station office because the latter was based on people's claims while the former was based on information gathering effort by professional intelligent officers. However, it must be treated with caution as official records of those incidents in India, as many writers in this field pointed out, often underestimate the figures and could be misleading.

⁵⁹ The number of deaths is based on the Meerut Local Intelligence Report. The accounts of the incident were based on interviews with the then manager of the Faiz-a-am College on 5 March 2004 as well as with other Muslim attendees at the conference.

'replacement of blame' used by almost all parties, including the Congress Party, for reasons of electoral gain (ibid.). The 1968 violence might be seen as a case in which the 'secular' Congress and its 'secular' politicians organised a sort of conference that was most likely to invoke mobilisations by the Hindu Right wing, leading to communal violence. The resulting violence would then give rise to the ethnic polarisation of the electorate which would benefit all parties involved, except the Muslims who most likely would face death either by Hindu rioters or by the police. In this case, too, the Congress was mindful that it had lost ground in the General elections of 1967, and that Shahnawaz Khan, who presided over the conference, had lost his seat to the SSP in the same election (see Table 2.8).

Table 2.8 Election results for Meerut–Mawana Lok Sabha constituency, 1967 (top four candidates)

<i>Candidates</i>	<i>Caste/ Community</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Votes Polled</i>	<i>% of Total Valid Votes</i>
Maharaj Singh Bharti	Bania	SSP	146,172	49.14
Shahnawaz Khan	Muslim	INC	107,276	36.06
S.K. Tyagi	Tyagi	BJS	24,403	8.20
M.M.P. Singh	n.a.	IND	19,612	6.59

Source: Election Commission of India, General Elections, India, 1967, Detailed Results, p. 66 of 79 (Election Commission of India 1967).

The 1969 mid-term poll was recalled by many of my respondents as 'communal', in the sense that Hindu and Muslim communal parties dominated the electoral contest. The preceding event of violence greatly enhanced the communal polarisation of the city electorates, and the Muslim *Majlis*, a Muslim communal organisation, decided to contest the election in Meerut shortly before the

election. After the violence in 1968, many Muslims were frightened by the increasing strength of Hindu Rightist organisations in the city and indicated the depth of their fear by their gravitation towards a communal candidate of their own. The Muslim *Majlis* candidate, Basir Ahmad Khan, appealed exclusively to the Muslim masses in his electoral campaign. Khan's campaign was essentially composed of old Islamic symbols to remind the Muslim electorate of the glorious past of Islamic rule — and their plight deprived of those Islamic values and religious rights. Khan organised many religious meetings called *Awaz* ('voice', or 'everybody speaks') in different places, inviting women and illiterate people in particular to listen to his religious and political preaching. A Muslim respondent told me:

Basir Ahmad Khan was clever, using religious feelings to gain power...he used religion for his own sake. Educated Muslims did not follow him. The 1969 Assembly was the first religion-based election. Khan made it communal.⁶⁰

The election ended with the defeat of the *Majlis* by a small margin of 2,500 votes. The defeat essentially derived from the split of the Muslim votes among the *Majlis*, Congress and the BKD (which had nominated a Muslim candidate) (see Table 2.9).

⁶⁰ Interview with a Muslim Ansari lawyer and a former election advisor of Manzoor Ahamad, ex-MLA, on 1 February 2004. The description of Basir Ahmad's election campaign is based on this interview.

Table 2.9 Election results for Meerut city Legislative Assembly constituency, 1969 (top four candidates)

<i>Candidates</i>	<i>Caste/ Community</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Votes Polled</i>	<i>% of Total Valid Votes</i>
Mohan Lal Kapoor	Punjabi	BJS	25,735	34.21
Basir Ahmed Khan	Muslim	IND	23,259	30.92
Shakuntla Pundikaksh	Brahmin	INC	17,340	23.06
Nazir Ahmed Ansari	Muslim	BKD	5,036	6.69

Note: Basir Ahmad Khan, the candidate of the Muslim Majlis, was registered as an individual candidate in the election commission list.

Source: Election Commission of India, State Election, 1969 to the Legislative Assembly of Uttar Pradesh, Detailed Results, p. 76 of 81 (Election Commission of India 1969).

It was notable, however, that the *Majlis* did attract substantial support from the Muslim electorate with its communal appeal, and almost won the election. After his defeat, Basir Ahmad established another Muslim communal party, a branch of the Indian Union Muslim League, and contested the 1971 Assembly election, losing by a large margin. It is important to note that these communal organisations or parties were hardly popular among Muslims in Meerut. After the 1971 elections, the *Majlis* and the Muslim League both quickly faded from the Meerut political scene. In retrospect, the 1969 Assembly seemed to be as far as a Muslim ethnic party could go. According to a leading Muslim intellectual, Muslims learned from this experience that a Muslim party aimed solely at Muslim interests would not gather enough momentum to win the election. It

would be important for Muslims to make an alliance with another numerically strong caste or religious community.⁶¹

Political developments during the decade of the 1970s were centred around the Emergency and the historic defeat of the Congress in 1977. The Meerut Lok Sabha constituency in 1977 followed the general pattern in north India wherein the Janata Party — a strange and unstable combination of the Hindu Right, socialists, and the BKD — easily defeated the Congress after gaining 63.35 percent of the vote share. The defeat caused in no small part by the defection of Muslim voters to the Janata Party. Various policies under the Emergency, particularly family planning and forced sterilisation policies, had, as elsewhere, given rise to strong resentment among the Muslim electorate in Meerut.

In the Assembly election held a few months later, however, the Congress sustained its seat by fielding a new type of Muslim Congress politician, Manzoor Ahamad. According to a BJP ex-MLA, the Congress Party chose a Muslim for the Assembly seat in order to ‘please’ the Muslim electorate after the Emergency (see Shakir 1990).⁶² Ahamad was a veteran Congress politician who had had a long career as an MLA before shifting his electoral battleground to Meerut city from his original constituency of Kithor, 25 km east of Meerut.⁶³ Manzoor Ahamad was a very popular leader among large sections of Muslims. Although he was an ‘outsider’, Ahamad rented a house in the heart of the Old Town and

⁶¹ Interview with Professor Shahabbudin Ansari, a respected Muslim academic on 14 January, 2004.

⁶² Interview with Mr. Amit Aggrawal, ex-MLA, on 16 April 2004.

⁶³ Interview with Manzoor’s son, Mr. Shahid Manzoor, MLA, on 20 August 2003.

spent a large amount of time in the city. Ahamad knew the art of political craftsmanship for mobilising voters. Although Ahamad's caste background was Muslim Tyagi, one of the land-owning castes, he succeeded in creating an image of a socialist Muslim representing the poor and the downtrodden.

Ahamad associated himself with the Scheduled Castes and low-status Muslims. He took a Scheduled-Caste assistant with him everywhere he went and was known for his 'big drama' public performances, holding babies and hugging children in Scheduled Caste constituencies.⁶⁴ He established a good rapport and a political base particularly among the Ansari community, the largest Muslim community in the city. Many local leaders among the Ansaris exercised their influence in their community to mobilise support for Ahamad, becoming political intermediaries linking him with local Muslims. In exchange for these activities the Ansari leaders enjoyed Ahamad's patronage and protection.⁶⁵ In this style of electoral campaign, Ahamad succeeded in winning the 1977 and 1980 Assembly elections consecutively. Ahamad stopped the dominant presence of the Jana Sangh in the Assembly seat, and the Hindu Right forces did not re-emerge in formal politics until the 1989 Assembly election in Meerut.

The revived electoral strength of the Congress was also evident in elections in the first half of the 1980s. Mohsina Kidwai seized the Lok Sabha seat in both 1980 and 1984, while the Congress won the Assembly seat in 1980 with Manzoor Ahamad and with Pandit J. Narayan Sharma in 1985. These election results

⁶⁴ Mr. Harish Pal, ex-MP on 25 April 2004.

⁶⁵ Ansari supporters of Mr. Manzoor Ahamad on 28 November 2003 and 1 February 2004.

show that despite Muslims' discontent with the Congress Party and the latter's increasingly hostile posture to the Muslim community during and after the Emergency, there were still many Muslims who supported the Congress. I often came across an expression of a special sense of attachment to the Congress Party among Muslim respondents as a source of hope and progress which reached back to an earlier Congress under Jawaharlal Nehru. On the other hand, I also heard negative comments about Congress 'lip-service' policies and empty promises. These mixed views towards the Congress among the Muslim electorate were a persistent feature during the old regime and led to the growing fragmentation of Muslim votes throughout these years.

2.4.1 Grass-roots efforts at political representation among non-elite Muslims

From the end of the 1970s there were sporadic attempts among a small section of low-status Muslims to increase their effective political representation. Although these attempts were small-scale and hardly successful, they showed that a section of low-status Muslims was conscious of the representation problem caused by the structural division between themselves and Muslim elite politicians under the Congress regime. It is important to note that these attempts were different from past efforts at consolidating Muslim votes, because they were not through co-optation by the political parties but via initiatives among local Muslims as an autonomous political force. These sporadic initiatives emerged at a grass-roots level and showed signs of change in Muslim politics. Shortly before the 1980 Assembly election, for example, Yusuf Qureshi,

a lawyer and representative of the political organisation of his community, the Qureshi Council, reportedly declared:

The Congress never gives the ticket to the backward communities. Congress belongs to the elite, but the Lok Dal gives the ticket to the weaker sections of the society and backward people. So we will support Charan Singh.⁶⁶

The Lok Dal candidate was Abdul Majid Ansari, who was a leading lawyer, a socialist and political activist.⁶⁷ Ansari contested for various socialist parties in the Assembly elections in 1962, 1967 and 1974 but never achieved office. The Bharatiya Lok Dal (BLD), for which he stood in 1980, was a merger between the BKD and SSP. The 1980 election took the form of a straight contest between Manzoor Ahamad for the Congress Party and Mohan Lal Kapoor for the BJP. The Congress won with small margin of slightly over 3,000 votes (see Table 2.10).

Table 2.10 Election results for Meerut city Legislative Assembly constituency, 1980 (top four candidates)

<i>Candidates</i>	<i>Caste/ Community</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Votes Polled</i>	<i>% of Total Valid Votes</i>
Manzoor Ahamad	Muslim	Congress (I)	32,407	45.80
Mohan Lal Kapoor	Punjabi	BJP	29,023	41.02
Abdul Majid Ansari	Muslim	JND (SC)	6,648	9.40
Kazi Zaheer Ahma	Muslim	IND	1,821	3.07

Source: Election Commission of India, State Election, 1980 to the legislative Assembly of Uttar Pradesh, p. 109 of 116 (Election Commission of India 1980).

⁶⁶ *Dainik Prabhat*, 28 May 1980 (*Dainik Prabhat* (Meerut)).

⁶⁷ Abdul Majid Ansari was actively involved in the first Muslim-Chamar political alliance under the RPI in 1964 mentioned above. Ansari was one of the elected councillors of the Municipal Board in 1964.

Yusuf Qureshi's declaration of support for Majid Ansari of the Lok Dal/the Janata Party underlined his electoral strategy of consolidating votes among Muslims against the Congress Party candidate, Manzoor Ahamad. Yusuf's call for the consolidation of the Muslim vote was particularly directed at the Ansaris and Qureshis, the two largest Muslim communities, and to the Scheduled Castes, as Majid was contesting from a Scheduled Caste constituency. It was apparent from the election result, however, that a large proportion of Muslim and Scheduled Caste votes went to Congress, with Yusuf's efforts being practically ignored on all sides. The Congress Party was in a particularly strong position in this election as it succeeded in drawing heavy support from the Scheduled Castes and Tribes at the national level (Brass 1994 (1990): 248).

The 1980 electoral result showed the limited influence of Qureshi political leadership at the time. The election was another example of the Muslims' inability to develop a strong anti-Congress posture or to forge a solid common political identity as a Muslim community. Yusuf Qureshi's initiative in 1980, however, might be seen as the forerunner of the emerging political alliance between the Qureshis and the Scheduled Castes, especially with the Chamar community that I discuss in Chapter Five. This political alliance became increasingly important for the Qureshis in finding political ground and space in local politics.

The first initiative between the two communities, however, took place slightly earlier than Yusuf Qureshi's public call for the consolidation of Muslim votes in 1980. The initiative was seen at the grass-roots level shortly before the 1977 Assembly election. I explain this with the help of the small episode below, which

indicates both a demographic and social proximity between the Qureshi and Scheduled Caste communities, particularly the Chamars.

2.4.2 Dr. Wahid Qureshi's initiative in the 1977 Assembly election⁶⁸

A Qureshi doctor contested the Assembly election of 1977. His support for Scheduled Caste communities in a personal capacity culminated in his contesting the Assembly seat. This was the first time in Meerut's history that the name of a Qureshi had appeared on the list of Assembly election candidates. Dr. Wahid Qureshi belonged to a wealthy family that owned land within and outside Meerut city. His family migrated to Meerut in the 1950s from a nearby village and settled in a locality called Purwa Ilahi Baxi or alternatively the 'Jatav Gate', where a large number of Jatavs or Chamars lived adjacent to the Qureshi community. It was located on the south edge of the Old Town.

Dr. Qureshi's clinic was called '*Darmarath Ausdhalaya*' (Charity Hospital)⁶⁹ and the name was written in Hindi rather than Urdu so that it would be identifiable by his Hindu patients, who were mostly from the Scheduled Castes. Dr. Qureshi gave free consultations to residents in the area, especially those from the Scheduled Caste communities. He donated his land to those who could not afford to have a house. Subsequently, a Scheduled-Castes colony was

⁶⁸ Interview with Dr. Wahid Qureshi on 18 March 2004.

⁶⁹ Dr. Wahid Qureshi was a local doctor who practiced not only Unani but also Ayurvedic medicine and allopathy (conventional/western medicine) according to patients' need.

constructed which he named 'Ambedkar nagar' after the respected political leader of the Scheduled Castes.

The 1977 election marked an historic defeat of the Congress Party both at the centre and the state. Dr. Qureshi's participation in the contest was rather a symbolic one, signifying the personal amicable relations between himself and the Scheduled Caste communities. Dr. Qureshi contested the election for the Congress for Democracy (CFD) which was created by a defected senior member of the Cabinet, Jagjivan Ram, with a broad national following of the Scheduled Castes in the revolt against Mrs. Gandhi shortly before the election. The CFD eventually decided to contest the election under the same electoral symbols and Party flag as the Janata coalition (Frankel 2005: 569) (see Table 2.11).

Table 2.11 Election results for Meerut city Legislative Assembly constituency, 1977 (top six candidates)

<i>Candidates</i>	<i>Caste/ Community</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Votes Polled</i>	<i>% of Total Valid Votes</i>
Manzoor Ahamad	Muslim	Congress (I)	42,004	53.51
Mohan Lal Kapoor	Punjabi	BJS	34,903	44.46
Deena Das Gupta	Gupta	HMS	773	0.98
Rajendra Kumar	n.a.	IND	321	0.41
Moh'd Sharif Siddiqui	Muslim	IND	291	0.37
Abdul Wahid Qureshi	Muslim	IND	206	0.26

Note: Dr. Qureshi contested the election on behalf of the Congress for Democracy.

Source: Election Commission of India, State Election, 1977 to the Legislative Assembly of Uttar Pradesh, p. 83 of 88 (Election Commission of India 1977).

A local newspaper carried news that a representative from the Scheduled Castes community had offered Dr. Qureshi 501 rupees as a symbol of their support.⁷⁰ Dr. Wahid Qureshi ultimately came in sixth with 206 votes. This small but symbolic initiative of forming a political alliance between two very marginalised communities must be seen against the background of the renewed vigour of political mobilisation among the Scheduled Castes from the late 1970s onwards in UP. During this period there was a new form of political mobilisation among the Scheduled Castes, or more specifically among the Chamars. Inter-caste violence, especially between Jat landowners and the Scheduled Castes in Meerut District, increased in intensity in the 1980s (Pai 2002). This accelerated the momentum of political activism among the Chamars in western UP in general and in Meerut in particular. A senior ex-MLA from the Chamar community recalled: ‘There were many attempts to create a coalition between lower-status Muslims and the Scheduled Castes [in Meerut, but the distance between the two communities] increased, as there was much Hindu-Muslim violence in the city’. ‘Higher-status Muslims never allowed Muslims in the lower rank to go forward’,⁷¹ and this was also the case for the upper-caste Hindus and the Scheduled Castes. The class issue brought the two most downtrodden communities together to make a political alliance across ethnic boundaries. A coalition with the Scheduled Castes increasingly became part of the strategy for the political mobilisation of low-status Muslims.

⁷⁰ *Dainik Prabhat*, 23 May 1977.

⁷¹ Interview with Mr. Raviti Saran Morya, ex-MLA on 17 March 2004.

2.5 Conclusion

The history of Meerut electoral politics after Independence largely illustrates the marginalised position of ordinary Muslims in city politics. Meerut Muslims were mostly treated as passive voters for a ruling Congress machine. Local high-status Muslims in Meerut, on the other hand, were generally not politically active (Khan and Kidwai not being from Meerut), and Muslim politicians from the lower rungs were never able to obtain tickets to contest elections from the Congress.⁷² Those who contested elections from the non-Congress parties were hardly ever successful prior to 1993.⁷³ While many Muslim respondents from the lower ranks expressed increasingly negative views of the Congress Party, based largely on promises that had never been fulfilled, it was also the case that Muslims were not able to grow a sense of solidarity among themselves as a unified force against the Congress. The Muslim vote was frequently split between two parties and candidates, to the advantage of a third candidate, often from the Hindu Right, who then won the election.

Insofar as Muslims did engage the organised polity as a collective force in the 1960s or 1970s they often did so by deploying what Anthony Smith calls 'ethno-

⁷² Interviews with a former political advisor to Manzoor Ahamad on 1 February 2004, and other Muslim respondents.

⁷³ There was one exception to this. Nazir Ahmad Ansari, a BKD candidate was successfully elected to office in the 1974 Assembly election in the adjacent Sardhana constituency. Ansari was a leading lawyer and had contested in the 1969 Meerut City Assembly constituency for the BKD and finished fourth. He came from a prominent family that had played the leadership role in village politics (*Pradhan*) in the village Panchayat for generations. It might be fair to assume that his family background linked him to Charan Singh and made his candidacy for the BKD possible.

symbolic repertoires' (Smith 1998: 224), wherein minority groups seek to assert separate group rights and identity. Such assertions of separateness — as, for example, that of the *Majlis* — drove the Muslim community further away from the majority society and helped provide fertile soil for Hindu nationalists seeking to deploy communal violence for their own political reasons. It was perhaps predictable that in Meerut city and District, even more so than in other parts of UP, a vicious cycle of riot productions emerged that linked Hindu-Muslim violence to the political cycle and left poor Muslim households increasingly vulnerable as the Congress Party moved further to the Right. As I explain in the next chapter, things got much worse in the 1980s, making it even more urgent to explain and understand the main tale of this thesis, the relative calm of the 1990s. Before I turn to this task, however, the events of the 1980s lie before us in Chapter Three, and most especially the Muslim killings in May 1987.

Appendix 2. 1 The Meerut District constituency for the Lok Sabha election

In Meerut District there are five constituencies for the State Legislative Assembly which form one large constituency for the Lok Sabha election, called the Meerut–Mawana Lok Sabha constituency (see Table 2.12).

Table 2.12 Five Legislative Assembly constituencies in Meerut District, 2003

<u>Constituency</u>	<u>Voters</u>
Kithor	239,060
Hastnapur	233,507
Meerut Cantonment	301,986
Meerut city	295,725
<u>Kharkhauda</u>	<u>214,171</u>
Total	1,283,449

Source: Local Office of *Amar Ujjala* newspaper in Meerut.

Two more Assembly seats in Meerut District, Sardhana and Siwalkhas, go to different districts on the occasion of the Lok Sabha elections (see Table 2.13).

Table 2.13 Two more Legislative Assembly constituencies in Meerut District, 2003

<u>Constituency</u>	<u>Voters</u>
Sardhana	258,829
<u>Siwalkhas</u>	<u>275,376</u>
Total	534,205

Source: Local office of *Amar Ujjala* newspaper in Meerut.

Sardhana goes under Muzaffarnagar District and forms one Lok Sabha seat. In the same way, Siwalkhas goes under the new Baghpat District (carved out from Meerut District in 1998) and forms one Lok Sabha seat. One of the five Assembly seats in Baghpat District, Barnawa, is divided between Meerut and Baghpat Districts on the occasion of the Assembly elections, and about 81,000 votes are counted under Meerut District. The total number of voters in Meerut District is 1,899,407.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Interview with a local veteran journalist of *Amar Ujjala* newspaper in Meerut on 15 April 2004.

Chapter 3: Bare Life? Anti-Muslim Violence in Meerut and the Events of April-May 1987

Dipesh Chakrabarty...has recently argued that the term “communalism” to describe ethnic relations in India should in fact be replaced by “racism”...for example, informal unwillingness to sell property to Muslims — to which one could add references to Muslims as dirty or having too many children...One can also link Indian Muslims ...to outsiders, secretly privileged and powerful, in short, the language once used of European Jews. In all these cases minorities are forced to play roles not of their own choosing, not least that of foil against which the unity of others — Hindus, the nation — can be constituted, and injustices of class and wealth obscured. The history that identifies Indian Muslims as aliens, destroyers, and crypto-Pakistanis, with its profound moral and political implications for citizenship and entitlements, is critical in sustaining that role. It presumably cannot be successfully challenged until, as has happened only partially and very recently in US in relation to African-Americans, the social and political interests that sustain belief in fundamental difference are changed (Metcalf 1995: 962-963).

3.1 Introduction

In Chapters One and Two I tried to give a sense of some of the fundamental problems that have faced Muslims in India, as well as in Uttar Pradesh and in Meerut, since Independence/Partition. At the heart of these problems are long-standing patterns of political dependence (notably on Congress Party patrons) that have done little to alleviate persistent discrimination against Muslims in private and public sector labour markets, including in relation to government jobs, and in the sphere of education. Divisions within the Muslim community

have only added to a perceived ineffectiveness of Muslim political leaders, not to say a sense of their apparent passivity in the public sphere. Worse, the surrounding political situation became increasingly dangerous for Muslims in UP from the time of the Emergency to the 1980s and early-1990s.

In this Chapter I provide a close reading of the ethnic violence that engulfed Meerut city and surrounding areas in April-May 1987, and which was directed above all at local Muslims in Meerut. As Barbara Metcalf explains above, in her presidential address to the (American) Association for Asian Studies in the mid-1990s, India's Muslims by the 1980s were increasingly being defined as outsiders, and not infrequently as dirty or menacing threats to the bodily integrity of an avowedly Hindu nation (*rashtra*). As is well known, violence against minority groups is often first made possible by processes of 'Othering', which render those populations as foreign, if not indeed as foreign bodies (in the doubly valent sense of an alien infection). In a large degree it was the political and cultural Othering of Meerut's Muslim populations which laid the foundation stone for the mass killing of Muslims by the PAC in May 1987. By the same token, it was the chilling ferocity of the 1987 violence, and the failure of the Congress Party to support its Muslim voters, that encouraged many among Meerut's Muslim populations to adopt new strategies for political empowerment and protection at the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s. The dynamics of this new Muslim political agency are mainly described in the second part of this thesis, in Chapters Four to Six, but I end this chapter by pointing towards the new forms of political engagement that would be developed post-1987 within Meerut's Muslim populations.

3.2 Communal Violence in Meerut after Independence

Writing about ethnic violence is never an easy matter. Much has been written about the rise or re-emergence of Hindu nationalism in India in the 1980s, and about its controlling ideology of *Hindutva*, but we know rather less about the political violence that communalist politics has spawned, and even less so about the perspectives of its victims, whether Hindu, Muslim or Sikh.

There are, however, some important exceptions to this rule. Stanley Tambiah's research (1996) on anti-Sikh violence in Delhi in October 1984 following the assassination of Indira Gandhi comes quickly to mind, along with Salman Rushdie's (1991) harrowing essay on the Sikh victims of a pogrom planned by Congress Party workers across the city. We know that violence is never as random as many news reports are inclined to suggest. Work and organization go into these awful outbursts of seemingly uncontained aggression, an observation that is very clearly underlined in Amrita Basu's (1997) careful ethnographic exploration of the Bijnor riots of October 1990. Basu, like Wilkinson and Brass (see Chapter 1) is mindful of the fact that most ward- or town-level episodes of communal violence have links to political calculations that take shape at state and possibly also national levels. Basu also remarks on what she considers a general tendency among media and scholarly circles to show a bias against Muslims (Basu 1997: 405-406), and this question of the 'politics' of writing about 'communal violence' is also to the fore in the recent work of Gyanendra Pandey, including his essay on the communal violence that took place in Bhagalpur in Bihar in October-November 1989 (note also Chakrabarty's

suggestion that the word ‘racism’ should replace ‘communalism’ in reference to Hindu-Muslim interactions).⁷⁵

Pandey points up a ‘homogenising’ tendency in ‘the historiography of sectarian strife’, including those models of communal violence that are rooted in ideas about economic or political competition. For Pandey, this kind of historiography neglects those critical aspects of violence which comprise ‘history or notions of honour, or the centrality of religion or people’s attachment to particular cultural and religious symbols’ (Pandey 1998: 17). Indian historiography, the central theme of which has always been the nationalism of the Hindu majority, according to Pandey, has had the Brahmanical Hindu middle class as its leading actor. The remaining ‘fragments’ of Indian society, including its religious minorities and its (numerically dominant) backward caste communities, are often nowhere to be found in this historiography. This state-centred explanation of violence provides little room, Pandey suggests, ‘for the emotions of people for feelings and perceptions — in short, little room for agency’ (ibid. 18).

In this chapter I draw on Pandey’s insight to emphasize the importance of understanding violence from the perspectives of its victims, or the forgotten ‘fragments’. I neither describe the violence of April-May 1987 as an end in itself, nor do I seek a complete explanation for *why* the violence took place in Meerut. Rather, I seek to explain *how* Muslims were caught up in the violence and how

⁷⁵ The Bhagalpur violence in October-November 1989 left more than 1,000 Muslims dead. It was the largest-scale Muslim killing during the decade.

they came out of it to reconstruct their lives and communities. My major purpose, in other words, is to illuminate those Muslim perceptions and feelings that set the foundation for the emerging new sense of Muslim 'agency' that is the subject of the chapters in Part Two.

In the following section I first briefly review academic literature on communal violence in Meerut city. I then go on to a close description and analysis of the violence in April and May 1987.

3.2.1 Academic literature on communal violence in Meerut

Meerut has been scarred by many incidents of Hindu-Muslim violence since Independence, just like many towns and cities in north India. It is a mistake to assume that communalism withered away in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s only to appear again in the 1980s (see Chapter 2). Key incidents prior to the 1980s occurred in Meerut in 1961, 1968 and 1973. The scale of killing in these incidents, however, *was* much smaller than those after the 1980s (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Hindu-Muslim violence in Meerut city after Independence

Year	Date	Incidents	Official death toll	Unofficial estimates
1961	5-8 October	Curfew 6/10 - 16/10	18	17*
1968	28-30 January	Curfew 28/1 - 4/2	12	17*
1973	11-Dec	Curfew 11/12 - 29/12	7	
1982	7-11 September	Large rioting involving murder	11*	
	29-30 September-1 October	As above plus mass murder of Muslims	31*	85*
1986	14-Feb	Muslim protest led to sporadic violence	no death, 24 injured	
1986	20, 26-28 February	Curfew after several incidents of stabbing	6	
1986	2-4 March	Curfew after several incidents of stabbing	3	
1987	April-July	Large rioting (see below)	172 (Hindu 41, Muslim 131)	163/329*
1988	14-15 April	One killed by police firing		
1988	12-Aug	One killed by police firing	1	
1989	21-Jan	Tension		
1989	3 and 24, 29, 30 April	No curfew		
1989	15 June, 21 July	Minor incidents		
1989	14, 23 August, 5 October, 9 December	Minor incidents	1*	
1990	20, 31 January	Minor property dispute		
1990	26 April, 11 May, 17 and 25-26 June	Arson, looting targeting Hindu shops, no curfew		
1990	24 October, 2-5 November	Two injured by stabbing, curfew on 2 November, arson and looting	12*	16*
1990*	12-13 December		1*	4*
1991	20-28 May	Election violence	31	
1991	12-13 June		1	

Sources: Meerut LIU Report. * Data from Brass, P. (2004) 'Development of an Institutionalised Riot System in Meerut City, 1961-1982' in *Economic and Political Weekly* (vol. 39, no.44, 30 October 2004), pp. 4839-4848 (Brass 2004).

Fewer than 20 people were killed during the 1961, 1968 and 1973 outbreaks of violence. On the other hand, the casualties of the September-October 1982 violence have been estimated at 50 to 80.⁷⁶

Stanley Tambiah in his monumental study of ethnic violence in south Asia describes Meerut as a city marked by 'intermittent ethnic riots', juxtaposing it with Colombo, the centre of recurrent and the most vicious ethnic riots in Sri Lanka (Tambiah 1996: 214). Intermittent ethnic riots occur, according to Tambiah, in a series with antecedent violence influencing the unfolding of subsequent ones (ibid.). Tambiah conceives that this recurrent state of violence is enacted less in forms of economic, class or other social conflicts, but more as a 'force and agency' that has obtained a 'self-legitimizing sphere of social discourse and transaction' in its own right that directs and shapes political actions (ibid. 223).

Tambiah's conception concerning the chronic state of ethnic violence or what he calls 'routinisation' of violence has a striking resonance in Paul Brass' work on the 'Institutionalised Riot System' (IRS), and Brass uses Meerut as the principal site to verify and exemplify its existence (2004). Based on an extensive interview with an eye-witness, Brass explains the 1961 violence in the city as the moment of the inception of the Meerut IRS. Brass argues that the IRS in Meerut was implanted by a Hindu student who had come from Aligarh. The 1961

⁷⁶ The wide difference in official figures of the number of dead probably came from the fact that it did not include those 30 Muslims who were killed by the PAC in the Old Town. This same practice of omission of the Muslim mass killing was repeated in the 1987 state-appointed Inquiry Report.

violence began in Aligarh and spread to different towns in western UP. The incident in Aligarh began with the severe beating of this Hindu student, Iqbal Singh, and several other Hindu boys, by Muslim students in the aftermath of a contentious Aligarh Muslim University Students' Union election. While the quarrel triggered rioting in Aligarh, according to Brass, Singh left Aligarh and came to Meerut where his father was stationed as a police officer in the Kotwali Police. Brass conceives that the violent incident in Meerut began in a similar manner as in Aligarh, that is, Hindu students from the local colleges were contacted and aroused by Iqbal Singh who was bent on revenge, and set out in a procession towards an old Muslim inter-college marching through Muslim localities. Brass maintains that the ensuing violence was deliberately triggered by the provocative Hindu procession rather than being spontaneous mob violence, which indicates signs of planning and organisation. The processionists included local politicians and key figures of the administration who all took the side of the Hindus and duly attacked Muslims. Brass maintains that the IRS usually functions in close connection with elections. In this case the timing of the riot was only four months before the third General Elections to be held in February 1962. The broader political implication of the riots in 1961 was, according to Brass, to increase both the Hindu and Muslim votes against the Congress in order to make the Jana Sangh the chief beneficiary (Brass 2004: 4843). The candidates of the Jana Sangh between 1952 and 1962 polled poorly because the Congress Party dominated the Meerut City constituency. In the February 1962 Legislative Assembly elections after the September-October riots, the Hindu militant parties (the Jana Sangh and the Hindu Mahasabha) did succeed in increasing their votes by swallowing the Congress vote (see Chapter 2).

According to Brass the IRS transplanted in Meerut from Aligarh grew steadily over the coming decades, and the full development of the Meerut IRS was seen in the 1982 violence, twenty years later. Brass notes that the progression of the Meerut IRS is observed in terms of the growing scale of police involvement, the larger spatial expansion of violence and the increase in numbers of casualties and degrees of atrocities committed during the event in 1982. Further, Brass claims that the 1982 violence had set 'the great trial run' of the riot system that worked during the May 1987 violence (ibid. 4843). While there were many repertoires seen in 1982 that reappeared in the 1987 violence, the mass murder of 29 to 30 unarmed Muslims by the bullets of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) in 1982 was in particular a 'rehearsal' for the larger scale Muslim massacre to be seen in 1987. Brass maintains that the 1987 violence was the 'culmination of a quarter century of development of the Meerut IRS' (ibid.).

Brass discerns that the IRS was constructed by various Hindu nationalist figures and organisations including the VHP and the RSS for their vested political interests. The existence of powerful Hindu militant organisations in Meerut is the consistent theme in the writings on communal violence in Meerut city. N. L. Gupta points out, for example, the high popularity (and strength) of the Hindu militant organisations in Meerut politics that include the RSS, Jana Sangh and Hindu Mahasabha prior to the 1968 violence in the city (Gupta 2000: 36). While those Hindu militant organisations gathered force in the mid 1960s in Meerut and elsewhere, according to Gupta, Muslims were divided among themselves because of the significant split within the *Jamait-ul-Ulemae-Hind* that yielded another Muslim communal organisation, the *Majlis-e-Mushawarat* in 1964. Gupta describes how rigorously political campaigns were waged by the

leaders of the local RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha, using the media and forming rallies with inflammatory posters and leaflets, in order to oppose the visit of Sheikh Abdullah (the Prime Minister of Kashmir) to Meerut city. Abdullah was invited jointly by the Congress Party and the *Jamait-ul-Ulemae-Hind*. This would eventually lead to the collective violence in 1968 (Gupta 2000: 37) (see Chapter 2). Donald Horowitz, on the other hand, points out that the violence in 1968 in Meerut was preceded by the 1967 General Elections that indicated Muslims were shifting away from Congress candidates. Horowitz rightly observes that the changes in the Congress Party votes have recurrently been associated with violence occurring thereafter (Horowitz 2001: 335). This will be the case again seen in the 1987 violence described below.

Meerut is also often seen as a 'typical' town which has all the socio-economic characteristics observed in the 'riot-prone' cities and towns in India. These characteristics were identified by several Indian scholars including Asghar Ali Engineer. These are essentially 1) middle-sized towns with a history of communal violence; 2) with the proportion of Muslims being more than 30 percent; 3) a section of Muslims being generally well-to-do and in competition with Hindu traders (Engineer 1987b, 1991 (1984), 1995b; Shakir 1991 (1984); Ghosh 1987; cf. Wilkinson 1995). Asghar Ali Engineer refers to these characteristics in his analysis of both the 1982 and 1987 violence in Meerut (Engineer 1987b, 1991 (1984)). Engineer observes that in 1982 a section of Muslims in the handloom industry and brass band manufacturing were quite prosperous. The Hindu traders, Banias, who controlled the handloom industry, formed the 'bedrock' of the RSS and also financed the local VHP. According to both Engineer and Paul Brass, the organisation was particularly active in Meerut

in 1982. Engineer emphasises that the VHP was trying to woo the Scheduled Castes to fight against the Muslims in order to split their votes which were normally exercised in favour of the Congress. The Sangh Parivar also carried out aggressive anti-Muslim propaganda in the Scheduled Caste localities. Such tactics, Engineer notes, 'keep Harijans away from the Muslims and wreck efforts at unity between the two' groups (Engineer 1991 (1984): 273). As a consequence, significant numbers of Valmikis (sweepers) were recruited by the RSS to fight against Muslims (Engineer 1982: 1803). The recruitment of the Scheduled Castes by upper-caste Hindus at the time of the violence was an important feature that was repeated during the 1987 violence.

The violence in September-October 1982 is relatively well documented by several authors (Chishti 1982; Engineer 1982, 1991 (1984); Khan 1992; Brass 2004). The incident began after a long dispute over property rights between a Muslim lawyer and a Hindu resident in March 1982 took on a religious dimension. The seeds of collective violence were sown when Muslims objected to the tolling of a bell at the time of *Iftaar* dinner during Ramadan. The bell had been installed in the temple built on the disputed property, which was allegedly a Hindu holy site. With the intervention of the local administration a time for the bell was fixed, but it continued to ring during Muslim prayer time. The murder of the priest of the temple finally triggered rioting between Hindus and Muslims. The event was concluded by the above-mentioned mass killing of Muslims that included children and women by the PAC in a closed building in

the Old Town (Brass 2007 (2004): 101-105).⁷⁷ The 1982 violence preceded elections to the Municipal Council, and occurred at a time when the BJP was trying desperately to expand its influence in Meerut. According to Engineer and others, the key political figures of the BJP, including ex-MLA Mohan Lal Kapoor, and cadres of the VHP and the RSS were actively involved in the violence. The election was consequently countermanded. On the Muslim side, on the other hand, Imam Bukhari of Jama Masjid in Delhi visited Meerut several times during the built-up phase of the violence. The Congress (I) incumbent MP, Mohsina Kidwai, and ex-MP, Shahnawaz Khan were also involved in creating reactionary Muslim response to Hindu provocations (Engineer 1991 (1984): 280).

Dildar Khan's study of the 1987 violence in Meerut is based on his survey data of 'perception' and 'allegations and apprehensions' of both Muslim and Hindu respondents that provide an interesting perspective to the actual event of violence. While Khan reveals neither in which part of the city the survey was conducted nor the number of respondents and their caste or community background, the survey data sensibly reveals historical antagonism between Hindus and Muslims in Meerut, as well as a sense of insecurity widely shared among the Muslims, particularly on account of the presence of the PAC in the Muslim-majority *mohallas* (Khan 1992: 457-463). In analysing the causes of the 1987 violence Khan emphasises the economic competition between the Hindu traders and Muslim new merchant-manufacturers in the artisanal industries,

⁷⁷ Interview with Mr. Yusuf Qureshi, president of the District Congress Committee at the time of interview, on 18 March 2004. Also, see 'The PAC: Ghosts of Meerut', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 28 November 1987, p. 2031 (*Economic and Political Weekly* (New Delhi)).

particularly the powerloom industry which was worst hit during the 1987 violence. Khan notes that the trading and marketing of finished products both in the textile and scissor manufacturing industries were dominated by Banias, Jains, Rastogis and Marwaris. Khan also reports that shortly after the 1982 violence a small number of Ansaris and Saifies (carpenters/scissor manufacturers) began to emerge in the cloth, yarn and scissors trades in an attempt to break the Hindu dominance. The economic competition was further accelerated when some of the Hindu traders and suppliers of raw materials established their own powerloom units (ibid. 467). Some Muslim manufacturers believed, according to Khan, that this was a conscious attempt by Hindu traders to displace Muslims from the textile industry. Khan concludes that those who instigated the violence in 1987 were local community leaders, traders and merchant manufacturers, seizing the opportunity to give their economic antagonism a communal colour.

Asghar Ali Engineer, on the other hand, provides the detailed accounts of the political situation in Meerut as an important background to the violence in April-May 1987. Engineer conceives the Babri mosque/Ram *janambhoomi* issue formed the underlying cause of the 1987 violence. The Babri Masjid rally held in Delhi in March to April 1987 significantly augmented communal tension in the city. Engineer also points out that there was the power struggle between Hindu and Muslim politicians within the ruling Congress. It was mainly derived from the high percentage of the Muslim population in the city, which made it difficult for the Hindu Congress candidates to obtain the ticket. Many Congress MLAs were encouraging the mobs to loot and burn during the violence, according to Engineer's many eye witnesses. Also, it is reported that a large

section of Muslims were 'totally alienated' from the ruling Congress, and even the current Muslim MP, Mohsina Kidwai, was largely elected by non-Muslim votes in the 1984 Lok Sabha. It is alleged, according to Engineer, that UP Chief Minister Veer Bahadur Singh 'wanted to teach these Muslims a lesson for not voting Congress' (Engineer 1987b: 22). Also, due to the rise of the middle castes, the Brahmins were beginning to lose their grip on political power. Engineer points out that they were hence attracted more toward religio-political organisations such as the VHP. Finally, Engineer maintains that the progress of democratic politics brought ever greater political consciousness and increasing assertion to the weaker sections and minorities on the one hand, and more ruthlessness and a greater degree of corruption among the upper and stronger sections of society on the other (ibid. 20).

Among the important features seen in the ethnic violence in May 1987, the massacre of a large number of unarmed Muslims by the PAC made the Meerut violence particularly distinct from other similar incidents triggered by the Ayodhya agitation in other towns and cities in UP during this period. Veena Das conceives that the 1987 violence in Meerut was a type of state violence under the legitimacy of the modern state apparatus. The so-called 'legitimate force' of the state transmutes itself into brutal terror particularly when the state forces are used to control expressions of discontent (Das 1990: 24). Das also points out that more people are usually killed in police violence than in communal clashes during the so-called communal violence in India. The violence came to be seen, according to Das, as not only involving the two communities of Hindus and Muslims but also the community versus the state. It is particularly the case in India because the perpetrators of such violence, the state forces, tend to go

unpunished and enjoy impunity (ibid. 19). After the 1987 violence, the commandant of the 44th Battalion of the PAC who led the Muslim massacre, for example, was suspended for one day and reinstated next day (Engineer 1987b: 31). The ostensibly biased local administration and the police who turned a blind eye to the killing spree of Hindu rioters or became active participants in rioting on the Hindu side were commonly observed in those incidents in 1961, 1968, 1982 and 1987. None of the officials and their men have ever been punished by the state or central government. On these occasions, Muslims are described as fighters in the initial stage of the violent incident only to become the object of massive retaliations from the Hindu side with the aid of the local administration and police forces in the later stages. The majority of the victims were usually from the Muslim side. It is notable that both the 1982 and 1987 violence ended with the Muslim massacre by the PAC.

This general observation however does not seem to be the case in 1990. In his contribution to N.L. Gupta's volume on communal riots in India, Devendra Singh, a local trade unionist, provides an interesting observation of the city from August to October 1990, the period of arguably the most inflammatory and dangerous communal situation in UP. Singh describes how frequently Hindu ceremonies and other similar events were held in Meerut in support of the temple construction in Ayodhya and the BJP-led procession, *rath yatra*. The leaders of Hindu militant organisations including the VHP and the Shiv Sena were actively spreading communal propaganda through the Bajrang Dal. In spite of these activities, however, Singh explains how the city of Meerut remained 'an isolated island of peace' surrounded on all sides by curfew and riot-affected cities—notably Delhi, Muzaffarnagar, Aligarh and Bijnor (Singh

2000: 207). Singh also provides a detailed account of sporadic violence in the form of arson, looting and stabbing that took place at different spots of the city for 2-5 November 1990. The local administration however quickly imposed a curfew on 3 November when the military flag march went through sensitive localities of the city (ibid.). Singh's description suggests the presence of a very efficient administration in contrast to the one we saw prior to the 1990s. The series of sporadic incidents in November 1990 in the end did not lead to the eruption of large-scale ethnic violence.

A similar instance occurred in May 1991 on the day of the General Election. Asghar Ali Engineer describes this incident as election violence (Engineer 1992). Violence began with booth-capturing⁷⁸ by BJP workers, which was followed by an altercation in the area of the election booths. The most gruesome event took place in a cinema hall where Muslim labourers were locked in while watching a film and massacred by Hindu BJP workers. The incident left 31 dead, 108 injured and led to over 1,000 arrests.⁷⁹ There were many Muslim eyewitnesses who saw injured Muslims bleeding and running in the streets to escape from Hindu BJP workers. The Election Commission of India countermanded both the elections for the state Assembly and for the Lok Sabha. According to Asghar Ali Engineer, the pre-poll analysis had estimated the high probability of a Muslim candidate, Ayuub Ansari, from the Janata Dal, winning the election. The BJP workers, therefore, created turbulence in order to effect the

⁷⁸ Booth-capturing means that workers hired by a political party prevent voters casting their vote at the booth.

⁷⁹ The Meerut Local Intelligence Unit Report (hereafter, Meerut LIU Report) unless otherwise indicated (Government of Uttar Pradesh n.d.).

countermanding of the elections (ibid.). Yet again, this incident did not lead to the eruption of large-scale ethnic violence. The following chapters in Part Two explain why and how a more peaceful Meerut appeared in the 1990s in contrast to the previous decades, focusing mainly on the story of changing Muslim politics and its agency.

3.2.2 Build up to the 1987 violence, 1984-1987

After the General Elections in 1984, the Ayodhya controversy had coloured public discourse in large degree, and this was reflected in the local scene in Meerut. The populist techniques of the new Congress Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, were increasingly revealed after the historic verdict of the Shah Bano case on 23 April 1985. After the reopening of the Babri Masjid in 1986, anti-Muslim rhetoric was actively promoted by a number of Hindu militant organisations that began mushrooming in Meerut. Many of my respondents remarked that polarisation between Hindus and Muslims was rapidly advanced by the various activities of communal organisations of both communities during this period.

Leaders of Hindu militant organisations, including the RSS and VHP, organised many mass rallies in the city in the mid-1980s.⁸⁰ Arya Samaj activists appealed

⁸⁰ The president of the Akhil Bharatiya Vidhyarthi Parishad, another Hindu nationalist organisation, reportedly said that what was anticipated was not just a riot but a war waged against the creation of a new Pakistan. The war was to be fought on the strength of (Muslims') petro-dollars and at the instigation of a neighbouring country. *Radiance*, 17-21 June 1987 (*Radiance* (New Delhi)). *Radiance* is Muslim weekly periodical published in New Delhi.

for the formation of a consolidated body of Hindu nationalist organisations to create a joint programme to promote the cause of the Ram temple construction.⁸¹ The Babri Masjid Action Committee (BMAC) of Syed Shahabuddin opened a branch in Meerut during the same period. These organisations addressed a number of small meetings at the *mohalla* level as well (Akbar 1988: 156). Also, the local administration banned the *Janaki Rath Ram* (Hindu religious procession) organised by the VHP from entering the city on 18 February 1986.⁸²

The unlocking of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on 1 February 1986 sparked a series of minor communal clashes in many cities in UP. On 14 February 1986, the BMAC called for an all-UP *bandh* (strike) to protest against the opening of the gate of the mosque two weeks earlier. In Meerut, tension mounted on the day of the strike. Shops were closed in Muslim localities and black flags flew on the rooftops, while in Hindu localities saffron flags were raised. The local Muslim League organised a petition against the unlocking of the Babri Masjid site and presented it to the District Magistrate (DM). The Meerut Local Intelligence Unit (LIU) Report notes that, after visiting the DM's office, Muslim League members began shouting provocative slogans such as '*Allah-O-Akbar*' (Allah is great). On the same day 200 Muslim youths organised a procession through Hindu market areas during which time Hindu youths taunted Muslim youths with: 'Have you got your Babri back?'⁸³ This comment triggered an

⁸¹ *Dainik Prabhat*, 22 February 1986 (*Dainik Prabhat* (Meerut)).

⁸² *Dainik Prabhat*, 18 February 1986 (*Dainik Prabhat* (Meerut)).

⁸³ Interview with Mr. V.K.B. Nair, then Superintendent Police (SP) in Meerut on 11 January 2001, Lucknow. He was in this position from January 1986 to 22 May 1987. At the time of

altercation that was followed by a wave of sporadic violence — stabbing, arson and stone pelting. Similar scenes occurred in many cities in UP on the same day and continued until early March.⁸⁴

New Muslim leaders, including Imam Bukhari and Syed Shahabuddin,⁸⁵ successfully encouraged Muslims to be more aggressive and assertive both in their public stance and in their demands. In Bukhari's huge rally at the Boat Club in New Delhi on 30 March 1987, both leaders made inflammatory speeches, implicitly calling Muslims to violent action to defend themselves against 'Hindu majoritarian aggression'. Their calls for violent protest resonated with many young people who were attending the rally on that day from Meerut city (Akbar 1988: 156). The Shahabuddin-led BMAC had actively been involved in the build-up phase by organising small meetings at the *mohalla* level prior to the April-May violence in Meerut city that occurred only a few weeks after the rally in Delhi. Both leaders frequently visited the city during the same period (Engineer 1987b).

interview he was Additional Director General of Police, CBCID (Crime Branch Crime Investigation Department) in Lucknow.

⁸⁴ *Hindustan Times*, February to March 1986 (*The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi)).

⁸⁵ These leaders emerged onto the national stage on the occasion of the Shah Bano affair in 1985. Bhukari was Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid in Delhi. Shahabuddin was a diplomat turned politician. They were known for their conservative and aggressive stance during the period leading up to the demolition of the Babri Masjid.

3.2.3 The events of April-May 1987

After the rally in Delhi, rumours were rife and tensions were building in Meerut.⁸⁶ There were rumours not only of a Muslim resurgence but also that Pakistanis were infiltrating Meerut with sophisticated weapons in order to destabilise the entire country.⁸⁷ Two weeks after the rally in Delhi, communal violence engulfed the city on the eve of the Muslim religious festival of *Shab-a-Barat*, a celebration which includes competitions with fireworks and crackers. On 14 April 1987 a group of young Muslims competed with one another to throw firecrackers onto the Muslim side of the Shah-Peer Gate in the middle of the preparations for the festival (see Maps 3.1 and 3.2 in Appendix 3.1).

Somehow their firecrackers fell on a Hindu shop and burnt blinds. A verbal quarrel followed which quickly turned into stone-throwing between two groups. A witness to the incident commented that Muslim youths at this point started shouting anti-government slogans, demanding as well that the Babri Masjid should be taken back. Police firing followed and two to five Muslim boys were killed on the spot. After this incident, rioting spread to different parts of the Old Town. The event left 12 to 14 people dead across both communities. Fifty-two shops were burnt down, and a curfew was imposed from 16–27 April (Meerut LIU Report). The April violence, however, did not come to an end because the

⁸⁶ This section is based on a local witness's statement during interview on 30 December 2001. A different report of this starting scene says that the firecracker fell on a constable who was drunk, and as a result started blindly shooting. *Mainstream*, 18 July 1987 (*Mainstream* (New Delhi)). Also, see *New Age*, 31 May 1987 (*New Age* (New Delhi)).

⁸⁷ *Radiance*, 21-27 June 1987.

tension did not fully recede until after another event of violence that occurred within less than a month. The two consecutive events of violence might be seen as one large and prolonged event in which the one in April was the basis of the more disturbing events of May 1987.

The second phase of this violence began on 16 May, with the worst of it ceasing around 30 May 1987. The May violence of 1987 was one of the most chilling examples of Hindu-Muslim (or anti-Muslim) violence in India since Partition. For seven days, arson, stabbing, looting and killing continued largely unabated despite the apparently large-scale deployment of police and paramilitary forces by the state government from May 19 onwards.⁸⁸ On 23 May the army was called into the city. Yet Meerut continued to simmer with recurrent incidents of sporadic killing, explosions and stabbing for well over five months.⁸⁹ The curfew was not lifted completely until 6 September 1987. Official figures at that time listed 172 deaths (Hindus 41, Muslims 131), with 623 houses, 344 shops and 14 factories destroyed, looted and burnt; the number of wounded was estimated at just 200, which is clearly not accurate, and the number of arrests at 4,500.⁹⁰ What distinguishes the May violence from numerous other similar incidents at the time was the extent and ferocity of the attacks by state forces on Muslims. The aggression of the Hindu police and the PAC was unprecedented, even for

⁸⁸ Fifty gazetted police officers and more than 60 companies of the PAC, the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) were brought into service on 19 May. 'Justice Out of Sight', *Frontline*, 7-20 May 2005 (Narain 7-20 May 2005).

⁸⁹ The Riot Registers at major police stations including Civil Line, Lisari Gate, Delhi Gate, and Kotwali show that these incidents continued until the end of September, 1987. A local historian's monograph records the prolonged atmosphere of fear and terror throughout the rest of the year (Mittal and Gupta 1987).

⁹⁰ Meerut LIU Report.

this region of western UP which had seen many police and PAC atrocities and killings of Muslims prior to April-May 1987.⁹¹

It should be noted that the official death toll did not include deaths from a major massacre of Muslims by state forces during the violence (Engineer 1988). Government records have been loathe to reveal state involvement in incidents of so-called communal violence. Unofficial estimates of the April-May violence range from 163 deaths to 329 deaths (Brass 2004, and see Table 3.1). Once again, the large majority of casualties were Muslims. Muslims also suffered much greater loss to their property and business establishments than Hindus. The following sub-section provides a description of the major incidents of the May violence from 15 to 23 May 1987, followed by some observations about what the violence signified to Muslim victims.

3.2.4 15–23 May 1987

Sporadic violence began in the evening of 15 May when a couple of bombs exploded in different parts of the Old Town.⁹² Stone-throwing, stabbing and fighting erupted sporadically in several places in the Old Town.⁹³ On the evening of 16 May a Hindu was shot dead near the Kotwali police station. Several Muslims were arrested on the spot. However, the murder prompted a

⁹¹ Recruitment to the PAC is dominated by the upper castes and backward castes, and there are very few Muslims in its ranks (Hasan 1998: 42).

⁹² This part is largely based on the People's Union for Civil Liberty (PUCL) Report on Communal Incidents at Meerut, April-May, 1987, unless otherwise indicated (PUCL 1988).

⁹³ Meerut LIU Report.

search operation for a Muslim culprit on the evening of 18 May by the police and the PAC. The target sites were the Hashimpura locality and adjacent areas, all of which were densely populated with Muslim weavers.

In the early hours of 19 May 1987, the PAC, accompanied by the local police, conducted a house search for a Muslim culprit twice in this locality. It was the month of Ramadan, and state forces interrupted the holiest hours of the Islamic religious calendar. Each time they met with firm resistance from Muslim residents. During the second round of the house search, a PAC commandant demanded that all residents come out of their houses or face being shot. The PAC allegedly took up positions on the roofs of Hindu houses at one end of the road and began to fire indiscriminately at the houses of Muslim residents. The police firing went on for three hours and resumed the next morning. The PAC was allegedly accompanied by Hindu *goondas* (criminals) who systematically carried out looting, arson, torture and killing (Engineer 1987a). The house search continued into the early morning of 19 May, until eventually Muslim resistance turned into mob violence that spread quickly to other parts of the city.

Below are some accounts by Muslim eyewitnesses of the house search in the early hours of 19 May:⁹⁴

⁹⁴ The following narratives are from interviews on 15 and 16 April 2002 in Meerut with Muslim victims in Hashimpura and other areas in the Old Town where the PAC conducted a house search. I have copied the Muslims' narratives from my fieldwork notes without any English editing. They might appear grammatically incorrect but they seem to carry more authenticity left as they are. Most of these narratives were translated from Hindi into English by my field assistants during the interviews.

1. An Ansari school teacher who lived in Ansar Gali adjacent to Hashimpura:

On 17th [19th] Ramadan, at 1 am about 700 people were arrested from our *mohalla*. Police broke the doors and even arrested the old persons and children. Even mad people were arrested. In the morning we all gathered before [Jama] Masjid. At that time a jeep came in which S.O. [Station Officer] Kotwali, D.P. Singh, was sitting. The jeep crushed eight to ten people, and one was killed. And after police started firing, nine people were killed [two women and seven men]. The injured were 30, in which 15 were women, by the police firing. We entered into our *gali* [alley]. We were sealed in this *mohalla*. My house was partially burned because our *mohalla* was attacked by Hindus. They threw burning tyres and clothes [onto our houses]. We tried to drag the injured into houses, who had been fired at while gathering in the *gali*.

2. An Ansari advocate who lived in Lisari Gate near Hashimpura:

People were beaten so badly. I saw with my eyes. I lost my desire to be alive. I kept thinking watching sky whether I will be alive until evening or not. Army was all around with guns. So I still face this fear.

...There was smoke all around, firing and ablaze were all around. One incident happened in this *mohalla*. There was a Hindu ex-army man, Mr. Sharma. He and his family were burnt alive by a mob because he could not maintain good relations with Muslim neighbours. In this colony Muslim set Hindu shops on fire in reaction to Imylian [adjacent to Hashimpura] incident. Then I saw all around smoke and firing and helicopters were hovering on our head, army was all around, beating and arresting people.

In this colony all Hindu houses were burned, and residents were killed. I tried to save some Hindus in my home who were working nearby. It was a personal relationship. That is why I saved them. During riots identity became very important issue, who Muslim is and who Hindu is. Like, for example, the PAC used to beat people, knowing their name. If he is Muslim, he has to face beating. If he is Hindu, he is set free. Army and police were taking out people from their home, and beating them like animals. Many were arrested and taken to different places...

Muslim women and children created a human barricade to prevent the PAC leaving with their arrested husbands and fathers and looted personal items. The barricade was their strongest expression of protest against the arrests, beatings and looting. The police jeep mentioned above, however, ran through the barricade and killed several women and children. This appears to be one of many incidents that led to mob violence spreading to other parts of the city.⁹⁵ On the other hand, constant calls through nearby mosque loudspeakers warned that Islam was in danger and that Muslims should resist the police during the house search operation. These calls continued throughout the night, until eventually Muslims came out of their houses and started throwing stones at the police.

3.2.5 The Massacre in Hashimpura

Three days later, while the communal carnage in the city was still at its peak, a mass killing of Muslims took place in Hashimpura, in an extension of another round of house search operations looking for illegal weapons and Muslim criminals.⁹⁶ On 22 May, the 41st Battalion of the PAC returned and surrounded the locality and forced all male residents out of their houses into the main road. The house-to-house search was about to begin again, but this time it was different from previous searches. The instructions from a PAC commandant were more specific and orderly. He told Muslims to come out of their houses and to line up on the street. Those over 50 years of age and younger than 10 to

⁹⁵ 'Meerut: The madness and the method', *Link*, 31 May 1987 (*Link* (New Delhi)).

⁹⁶ This section is based on the PUCL report 1988 unless otherwise noted.

12 years were all moved to one side of the street. All the others, 42 mostly young men, were instructed to board a police lorry. Another group of 324 were arrested and taken away by other police vehicles.

The 42 young men were taken to Muradnagar, near the Ganga Canal 20 km away from the city, where they were reportedly shot dead one by one and thrown into the canal. Their bodies were found downstream after a few days.⁹⁷ The other group of 324 persons were taken to the Civil Lines Police Station where they were severely beaten. Subsequently some were shifted to Fatehgarh jail, where some were killed by police torture. An Amnesty International Report observes that those who were arrested encountered beating, lynching and torture. Many Muslims were killed in police custody.⁹⁸ A Muslim victim describes what he and his brother had to face in the jail:

One of my brothers was killed in police line; he had been beaten very badly. Police soldiers urinated in the mouth of Muslims. Several beards were taken out from their faces. When we were taken to the jail, our bones were broken and we were not given food to eat. Beating and torturing continued till the city came back to calm. After three months we got bail and came out from the jail. But many cases still continue.⁹⁹

The state forces at this point were clearly operating outside the law. Their operations consisted of indiscriminate and arbitrary arrests, holding people

⁹⁷ Three people survived and one managed to report to the police station where the story of massacre was disclosed.

⁹⁸ UN Human Rights Commission and Amnesty International published a report after sending an investigation team to Meerut, both of which made allegations of 'extra-judicial killings by the PAC' (Noorani 1987).

⁹⁹ Interview with an Ansari labourer on 15 April 2002.

without trial, firing on crowds, instigating arson and looting and finally causing the 'disappearance' of men. The victims' families were almost never able to get compensation since it was particularly difficult to prove torture in jail. In addition, police officers were granted 'sovereign immunity'¹⁰⁰ by the Indian government, which had effectively given them a free hand in their dealings with Muslim prisoners.¹⁰¹

Many of these selected male Muslims were key sources of earnings for multi-generational families. The loss of these men, and of their 'lost' offspring of the coming generation came to symbolise a threat to the very integrity of the Muslim community in Meerut, and to its potency (see Tambiah 1990: 746).

The Hashimpura house search and massacre was followed by another incident of Muslim killing in Maliana village the following day. On 23 May 1987 at 2:00 pm, the PAC, led by senior officers, including the commandant of the 44th Battalion, entered Maliana, a village about 10 kilometres away from Meerut city.¹⁰² There the PAC took up positions around the village and on rooftops and announced that they would carry out a search operation. The PAC warned that firing would start if the residents did not come out. When the residents came out, however, the PAC reportedly began firing on them indiscriminately. The Scheduled Castes, including Chamars, hired from Multan nagar near Maliana,

¹⁰⁰ A doctrine precluding the institution of a suit against the sovereign (government) without its consent.

¹⁰¹ 'The Police: No help for victims', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15 August 1992, pp. 1705-1706.

¹⁰² This section is based on the Amnesty International Report unless otherwise indicated (Amnesty International 1988).

collaborated with the PAC, engaging in arson, looting and killing. After the massacre, PAC trucks again carried the corpses to the Ganga canal to dump them. The number of casualties was long the subject of controversy between the state government and the residents of the village. It was finally 'settled' as 68 deaths (Engineer 1988).¹⁰³

After the massacres in Hashimpura and in Maliana village on 22 and 23 May the violence began to subside. After the end of the April violence, Meerut Intelligence officers had recorded a wave of rumours among Hindu neighbourhoods that depicted a strong and aggressive constituency of Muslim 'extremists' eager to fight the Hindus. The LIU Report had also noted that rumours were rife in Muslim localities about Hindu plans to 'avenge' the April killings within the holy month of Ramadan. Attacks targeting a religious community during its sacred month were meant to 'trenchantly denigrate' the Muslim community.¹⁰⁴

After the massacre of Muslims in Hashimpura by the PAC on 22 May, however, the earlier reported Muslim 'aggressiveness' receded into the background as the violence took on a different character. It was now clear that state forces were directing violence against Muslims (Engineer 1987b). The Gian Prakash Committee, appointed by the UP state government to enquire into the April-May

¹⁰³ A slightly different report of the Maliana massacre by Engineer (1987b) maintains that the PAC and the PAC-hired Chamars ransacked a liquor shop on the morning of 23 May. The PAC *jawan* were drunk when they reached Maliana in the afternoon. Engineer's more recent writing states that the PAC started firing on Muslims who had come out of the mosque after prayers (Engineer 1996).

¹⁰⁴ Meerut LIU Report.

violence in Meerut, noted that workers of the Hindu nationalist organisations, which included the RSS and VHP, ran free in the city during the violence of May 1987. They armed themselves with axes, knives and petrol bombs. The PAC *jawan* abetted their killing sprees. The Inquiry's Report also drew attention to the fact that, during the 10-day course of the violence, most atrocities occurred during the hours of curfew.¹⁰⁵ In the May violence, a curfew was imposed only in Muslim localities (ibid. 25). This meant that Muslims were perforce trapped inside their homes, waiting to be attacked by the PAC and the Hindus. Also, adequate relief and rations often did not reach the curfew-bound areas or were exclusively distributed to Hindu localities (Banerjee 1990: 61).

At the height of the rioting on 23 May the Maliana massacre took place. This was a final blow for the Muslim community, especially when corpses were found floating in the canal on the following day. My respondents told me that Muslims became demoralised and weakened in the face of the combined force of Hindus and the state. The role played by state security forces in securing a one-sided massacre of Muslim youth was clearly deeply troubling, and reinforced the idea for many Muslims that they were not, after all, anything like full rights-bearing citizens within the 'secular' Republic of India.

Abundant reports and accounts of the May violence make severe accusations of passive or active complicity by the police forces, and a conspicuous lack of determined action to protect Muslim households by the state government and

¹⁰⁵ 'Gian Prakash Committee Report on Meerut Riots-Extract-II', *Muslim India (Muslim India (New Delhi))*, February 1988 (Government of Uttar Pradesh 1988).

local administration (eg. Bose and Pachauri 1987). The most surprising descriptions of government inaction pertain to the withdrawal of contingent forces from Meerut at the beginning of May. Despite the fact that the month of Ramadan requires more forces in the city than usual, and especially considering that this was in a period immediately after the lifting of curfew at the end of April 1987, UP Chief Minister Veer Bahadur Singh ordered the withdrawal of the extra forces that had been stationed in Meerut city in the aftermath of the April violence. The reason given for their withdrawal was to help secure the rally organised for Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in Delhi on 16 May. Furthermore, the withdrawal of forces was undertaken despite the fact that local intelligence were warning the administration about stocks of illegal weapons and explosives, and about dangerous moves by militant organisations of both communities.¹⁰⁶

After the April violence tension mounted once more throughout the city. There were strong rumours about the insurgency of both Hindu and Muslim groups. The local administration, however, implemented no counter-measures in the period preceding the violence, and instead took the contingent forces out of the city. After the eruption of renewed violence in May 1987, the Union Home Minister Buta Singh admitted that the administration had been caught 'by surprise' in the first place, and was not fully prepared to control the situation. The incompetence of the local administration was also compounded by the presence of top Congress Party state and union ministers during the violence. These included UP Chief Minister, Veer Bahadur Singh, the Union Minister for Urban Development, Mohsina Kidwai and Union Home Minister, Buta Singh.

¹⁰⁶ Meerut LIU Report. Also, see *Frontline*, 30 May to 12 June 1987 (*Frontline* (Madras)).

The Chief Minister, V.B. Singh, was actually resident in Meerut for two days at the height of the violence when the killings in Hashimpura took place. During their stays in the city none of these top officials was able to implement effective measures to abate the ongoing violence. The Chief Minister, particularly, was later accused of a lukewarm attitude concerning the PAC's brutal conduct towards Muslims while he was staying in the city, with some suggesting that his political motive was to foment violence rather than control it.

Furthermore, the local Congress Party in Meerut city, with its elected Muslim MP, Mohsina Kidwai, did not function to control the situation but rather abetted the on-going violence. Congress politicians in the District Congress were entangled with a power struggle between groups divided on religious lines.¹⁰⁷ Both sides were reportedly inciting their respective community's militancy. Local Congress politicians accused Mohsina Kidwai of worsening the situation with her plea not to take stern action against Muslims on the grounds that it would 'alienate the masses'. Mohsina Kidwai was confronted by local Congress politicians when she tried to enter Meerut during the violence, and indeed her entry was blocked by her Congress 'colleagues'. Eventually she cancelled her visit to Meerut and did not go back to the city until normalcy returned. Unsurprisingly, differences between Kidwai and Chief Minister, V.B. Singh reportedly surfaced at this time.¹⁰⁸ Deep divisions and conflicts within the District Congress Party also increasingly produced adverse effects upon the local administration's handling of law and order on the ground.

¹⁰⁷ 'Anguish Without End', *India Today*, 15 August 1987, pp. 32-33 (*India Today* (New Delhi)).

¹⁰⁸ *Frontline*, 30 May to 12 June 1987.

Steven Wilkinson's (2004) electoral incentive model does not address at length these more proximate factors at the local constituency level. Rather, his model directs attention mainly to state-level political calculations — between organised parties — to explain the occurrence or non-occurrence of ethnic violence. Wilkinson's model is, therefore, less able to explain variations in patterns of violence at the sub-state level. Why, for example, during the anti-Muslim massacres in Gujarat in February to May in 2002, following the incident in Godhra on 27 February 2002, did many towns remain free from ethnic polarisation and direct communal violence (Shah 2007) while other towns, including Ahmadabad, witnessed an unprecedented scale of gruesome anti-Muslim killings? Why too did Ahmadabad suffer from greater violence than Surat before 1992 when two-party competition between Congress and the BJP governed state politics more generally?

The contribution of Ashutosh Varshney (2002) forces itself to the forefront at this point. His focus is precisely on sub-state and city-level variations in the incidence of ethnic violence, both of which he links to the density of associational life across city-wide ethnic groups. I discuss Varshney's civic engagement model in the light of my research findings later in the thesis. For the moment, let me say that in 1987 in Meerut, at a time of intense electoral competition, *pace* Wilkinson, it clearly was the case that the District Congress apparatus had come to define its future fortunes in terms of the 'Hindu vote'. There were, however, far deeper political divisions within the ruling Party in the District Congress than a simple rational choice model of politics might suggest, and this much was apparent when Mohsina Kidwai tried to resist the Party's orientation towards the Hindu Right. Kidwai wanted instead to offer security to

her co-religious community in return for its votes. Significantly, 'Hindu' politicians within the Party rejected her efforts to trade Muslim votes for security, and, as we have seen, blocked Kidwai's entry to the city. This helped to reinforce the image of the local Congress Party as an anti-minority party, or even as a Hindu party in power.

Internal conflicts among Congress politicians divided on ethnic lines no doubt prevented uniform, prompt and decisive actions on the part of the local administration, and thus worked to worsen the situation in April-May 1987. It is worth pointing out, even so, that matters might have been different. Notwithstanding the importance of state-level electoral considerations, local-level clashes between political rivals do matter and their outcomes are not wholly predictable, and it is here, I think, that the in-depth case study method adopted by Paul Brass (2003) comes into its own. Brass, indeed, points out that even within the 'riot-prone' city of Aligarh, violence is generally concentrated in some localities while others remain free of violence. The causal sequences leading to full-scale events of ethnic violence are explained by Brass with reference to a combination of the interests of political actors backed up by the 'institutionalised Riot System' (IRS) and those of a compliant local administration. However, what Brass sometimes fails to notice is the intricate linkage between politics and the absence of violence. I will return to this.

Going back now to Meerut in 1987, Mohsina Kidwai, after having been pushed out from the local Congress, did not fight back to protect Muslims but withdrew and never returned to Meerut before the carnage came to an end. In the eyes of the Muslim electorate, a Muslim MP from the constituency did nothing but

allow Hindu attacks on their lives and properties. Rajiv Gandhi's brief visit after the peak of the violence was considered by many Muslim respondents no better than Kidwai's performance. He met some victims with a few messages and empty promises and returned quickly to Delhi.¹⁰⁹ Muslim respondents unanimously recalled that there was disillusionment and a sense of betrayal about the role of Mohsina Kidwai, Rajiv Gandhi and the ruling Congress Party.

3.2.6 The economics of violence

One of the most significant socio-economic dimensions of the May violence was the destruction of the economic base of Muslim artisans, particularly that of the booming textile industry at that time. The economic advancement among Muslim artisans in Meerut began at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s. The economy of the textile industry particularly expanded because of the introduction of powerlooms in the early 1970s. Although the Indian economy as a whole went into a drastic downturn during that decade, the Ansari weaving industry continued to enjoy an economic boom even during the Emergency years.¹¹⁰ Economic advancement among artisan Muslims who had long been suffering from impoverishment became increasingly visible from the end of the 1970s.

¹⁰⁹ *Frontline*, 13-26 June 1987.

¹¹⁰ Interview with an Ansari lawyer on 1 February 2004.

This phenomenon of economic advancement among the lower sections of Muslims was seen not only in Meerut but also in other cities in UP around the same period. Asghar Ali Engineer writes:

By the [19]80s a small section of Muslims in the north, especially those areas which were traditional centres of Muslim artisans like Meerut, Aligarh, Moradabad, Banaras, Azamgarh, etc. became prosperous by developing entrepreneurship on a small scale (Engineer 1992: 1784).

Muslim prosperity in Meerut, as elsewhere, also seems to have been helped by migration to the Gulf from the 1970s. This too was largely based on their own skill sets, and was independent of government employment or other public resources, in which spheres Muslims were still often discriminated against (Chapter 4).

Some respondents, both Hindu and Muslim, linked the 1987 violence to the Ansari weavers' rising challenge to Hindu traders in the textile industry. According to a Hindu textile union worker who used to work in the Hindu powerloom factory, successful Muslim weavers had been trying to advance into the direct textile trading, by creating a Muslim wholesale market. This was meant to break the conventional business structure of Hindu dominance in the textile industry of the city.¹¹¹ The established Hindu traders and suppliers of raw materials perceived a threat to their profits from these new Muslim entrants into

¹¹¹ Interview on 31 March 2003.

the field of textile trade (Khan 1992: 465).¹¹² Both handloom and powerloom factories suffered almost total destruction during the events of the violence in the 1980s. Handloom weaving practically died out after the 1982 violence, as buyers were afraid to come to Meerut for six months.¹¹³ Ansari weaving facilities, particularly the new Ansari trading markets for yarn and textiles established in Gola Kuan and Ansar Gali, adjacent to Imylian, were also among the first targets for destruction during the violence in 1987.¹¹⁴ The house searches conducted by the PAC symbolically concentrated on the localities of the Muslim weavers, Hashimpura and adjacent Imylian (see Map 3.2 in Appendix 3.1). After the 1987 violence, Hindu boycotts continued in order to ensure the further loss of economy and social power of Muslim weavers. An Ansari powerloom factory owner told me:

The 1987 riots affected powerloom badly. Hindus thought that Muslim weavers started the riots. After that we suffered huge setback in not only everyday life but in business relations. Business with our Hindu counterparts was reduced, and supplies of raw materials were reduced. Hindus also raised its price and commission. It took about three years to recover and catch up the losses.¹¹⁵

The textile industry in Meerut went into a long slump after the events of the violence, which continues to this day.

¹¹² Interview with a Muslim (Ansari) secretary to Mr. Avtar Singh Bhadana, an incumbent Congress MP at the time of interview. Mr. Bhadana had been elected in the 1999 Lok Sabha election from the Meerut-Mawana constituency, on 8 February 2004.

¹¹³ Interview with Mr. Yusuf Qureshi on 18 March 2004.

¹¹⁴ Interview with a Hindu eyewitness on 3 February 2002.

¹¹⁵ Interview on 7 August 2003.

An equally important socio-economic dimension of the May violence was its geographic expansion to the entire city and surrounding villages. The 'conventional' site of communal violence in Meerut was within the walls of the Old Town, which was predominantly populated by Muslims. The May violence, however, spread to entirely new areas of Hindu middle-class colonies such as Shastri nagar. This colony witnessed an intensive destruction of Muslim lives and households. Shastri nagar was among the earliest colonies developed by the UP government's Meerut Development Agency (MDA), the central agency for the construction of residential colonies to accommodate migrants to the city. Shastri nagar quickly became a status symbol for those who aspired to upward mobility among both Hindu and Muslim groups. From the 1960s onwards, a few emerging middle-class Muslims wished to buy property outside the Old Town in the Hindu colonies. These Muslims, however, faced fierce opposition from Hindu residents and largely had to give up moving into those colonies.¹¹⁶ So, when Muslims started to live in Shastri nagar from the early 1980s, they were not all welcomed by Hindu residents. One Hindu respondent told me:

Muslims wanted to construct mosques in Shastri nagar. But Hindu residents did not allow it. They said 'No Pakistan in this area'.¹¹⁷

This comment unequivocally indicated the intolerant and unapologetic attitudes of Hindu middle-class residents. The violence in May 1987 spread to the Section 4 and L-Block of Shastri nagar where Muslims had begun to live just before the

¹¹⁶ Interview with a Muslim property dealer on 3 August 2003 and others.

¹¹⁷ Interview with a Hindu retired academic on 13 April 2004.

violence (see Map 3.3 in Appendix 3.1).¹¹⁸ The systematic destruction of Muslim-owned property indicated the ferocity of Hindu resentment against Muslims making substantial inroads into their new 'posh' localities. The new spatial dimension of the violence signified more extensive popular involvement in the violence than in any previous events of violence in the city. The large-scale violence in Shastri nagar implied greater involvement by the ostensibly civilised middle class in the kind of violence typically associated with the lower classes.

Both in Shastri nagar and in Hashimpura, geographic space became a marker of socio-economic relations between Muslims and Hindus. The impact of the violence could be seen in the displacement of Muslims both geographically and occupationally. Following Albert Hirschman (1995) the latter may be seen as a case of 'non-divisible conflict' in which the economic resource could not be divisible between different ethnic groups, as symbolised by the displacement of the emerging Muslim entrepreneurial class from certain crucial areas of trade and business or from the physical terrain which housed a privileged class. 'Non-divisible conflict' signifies the contested areas of economic dominance in which Muslims were excluded from the economic share. More importantly, non-divisible conflict also implies the exclusion of Muslims not only economically but also socially and politically.

¹¹⁸ Interview on 3 August 2003 with a Hindu respondent who lost her Muslim sister-in-law in the Shastri nagar killing in 1987. Also, Communal Register (n.d.), a record of Hindu-Muslim incidents involving violence kept at the Medical College Police Station, Meerut (Government of Uttar Pradesh n.d.).

The May violence also accelerated alterations in the fabric of Meerut, not least by the destruction of houses belonging to Muslims in Shastri nagar and elsewhere in order to achieve a nearly complete exclusion of the Muslim population there. There are currently very few Muslims residing in Shastri nagar; hence violence succeeded in allowing ethnic control over the area in favour of the majority community. In effect, this was ethnic 'cleansing'. Non-divisible conflict might also be seen in the geographic polarisation between Hindus and Muslims in the city after the violence. Immediately after the violence, both Hindus and Muslims migrated from one locality to the other, seeking protection in areas where they were in the majority. This rearrangement of social space greatly helped to push the traditional boundaries between the two groups further apart, creating an ethnic enclave of the Muslim minority in a state of more isolation and segregation from the socio-economic mainstream. Muslims have not been able to build their houses in Hindu-dominated residential colonies, including Shastri nagar.¹¹⁹ There are now very few mixed localities in the city. The ethnic polarisation in geographic space was completed, according to many Hindu and Muslim respondents, after the 1987 violence.

3.2.7 The politics of sacred space and time

The intrusion of state agents into the sacred space and time of Muslims during Ramadan constituted one of the core events in the May 1987 violence. The search operations of the PAC were specifically conducted to interrupt the

¹¹⁹ Interview with a Muslim property dealer on 3 August 2003.

particularly important religious meal times during the fast of the Ramadan month. The control of sacred space and time is a significant motif of communal violence in south Asia, as elsewhere (Freitag 1980, 1989; Das 1990; van der Veer 1996 (1994)). Sandria Freitag argues that communities express and redefine themselves through collective activities in the public arena, which include religious ceremonials that form a symbolic expression of political power and cultural values (Freitag 1989: 30). Veena Das (1990) further explains how intrusions into the religious time and space of one group can prompt violent reactions by another, and can be generalised by the local administration into larger episodes of political-cum-communal violence.

The month of Ramadan consists of a series of specific events, such as reading and reciting the holy Quran collectively, many charitable activities for the poor and handicapped and special prayers in congregations. These religious activities and rituals are a ceremonial expression of 'Islam' in the public space (Freitag 1989: 27). If this public space is intruded upon, it violates the believers' religion, dignity and pride. This is why contestations over public space between two adversarial religions often became major issues of communal violence. The continuing calls from the mosque during the house search that 'Islam is in danger and Muslims should resist the police' was evidence of a growing sense of crisis for Islam among Muslims. The calls also indicated that Muslims interpreted the search operations as state oppression of their religious identity, sacred time and space. Within the larger context of 'Hindu agitation' the desecration of Muslim religious symbols by the Hindu police and the PAC was metaphorically linked to Hindus' attempts to build a temple in honour of a Hindu God-king, Ram, at Ayodhya.

The humiliation of Muslims in Meerut was established most brutally by the acts of mass killing in May 1987. Axel Honneth points out in an article written as a book review on the German National Socialists' extermination of the Jews (Holocaust) that the killing act implies 'the degradation of entire collective', and 'some aspects of humiliation will always inhere to the process of killing people' (Honneth 1997: 308). The crude and brutal act of selecting male Muslims to be taken to an isolated place where they were shot dead one by one and thrown into a canal amounts to a particularly cruel act of mass murder, and was described by many local observers and the press, precisely as a 'Holocaust' (eg. Engineer 1987a).

The brutal act of terror appears to signify a state dominance over the existence, identity and religion of the minority community. The massacre of unarmed Muslims in Hashimpura and Maliana also calls to mind Giorgio Agamben's (1998) account of 'homo sacer' — an outlaw whose life could neither be accepted by the gods (in sacrifice) nor protected by men (against homicide). Agamben suggests an existence — a 'bare life' — that is stripped by the governing power of all recognition, rights and human dignity. Muslim victims' accounts vividly indicate how the state came to confront them. An Ansari labourer told me of his arrest and beating in Hashimpura:

Our houses were attacked by Hindus who lived just behind us in Jaidevi nagar. They were throwing burning tyres and petrol. The PAC and police looted all the jewellerys and valuables (from our house) pretending a search operation. They attacked our house around 1:30 am and took us out on the road outside. The police and PAC started beating us badly while abusing and accusing us of creating the riots...I still cannot forget how badly the police and the PAC beat me at the

police station and at the roadside. After 1987, we live under constant fear of Hindus and the PAC. We have entered in the deep array of fear and insecurity.¹²⁰

A Muslim Chisti (water carrier) school teacher further told me:

The Muslim minority does not get any justice from the administration. That is the major reason of fear and insecurity. For Muslims there is no law. Police is anti-Muslim. All police officers and constables are anti-Muslim. Even in everyday life, they are not good to Muslims. [They are] very cruel in their behaviour.¹²¹

In short, a profound sense of insecurity and fear emerged along with a recognition of Muslims' permanently disadvantaged position as a minority:

I was arrested. How could I protect my family? I could not do anything. The police were so powerful.... During the riots, we felt like we were living in a different country. This country did not belong to us. Even the Hapur road seemed as though it was a border of Hindustan and Pakistan.¹²²

3.3 Everyday Forms of Violence

The idea that India no longer belonged to Meerut's Muslims is a disturbing one, and later provided a platform for a regrouping within the political constituencies of Muslim Meerut. Extreme events matter, as both Veena Das and Agamben have reminded us. But so too does a steady accumulation of experiences,

¹²⁰ Interview on 15 April 2002.

¹²¹ Interview on 15 April 2002.

¹²² Interview with an Ansari labourer on 15 April 2002.

including discrimination and what might be called, after James Scott (1985), 'everyday violence'. Stanley Tambiah refers to Meerut as a city of recurrent violence, which was by now (in the late 1980s and early 1990s) in a 'chronic' cycle of violence (Tambiah 1996: 214). The collective violence no longer consisted of episodic and discontinuous events between semi-normal or peaceful periods but had become 'an everyday and seemingly permanent state of affairs' (ibid. 223). It is important for our understanding of the phenomenon of the repetitive cycle of violence, Tambiah suggests that:

we should first travel byways of ongoing social life and view the solidarities and the tensions of everyday existence in family and neighbourhood, the cycle of festivals and ceremonies in public places, the routines and stratagems and factional battles deployed in mass politics, the trials of urban coexistence (ibid. 215).

As Tambiah rightly points out, a visitor in Meerut at this time could not help but feel the everyday tensions between the two communities, or between localities of different ethnic concentration. Everyday tension and distance between the two communities were embodied in geographical and symbolical boundaries that segregated the Old Town from the rest of the city. From outside, the Old Town took on an appearance of a 'Muslim bastion' that occasionally came up in Hindu discourse. The very label, 'Muslim bastion', naturally symbolised the gulf that existed between the two communities and the sense of 'Muslim otherness' that was becoming embedded in many Hindu minds. By pointing out the boundaries, however, I do not mean that Meerut Old Town was closed off from the outside world and the wider culture around it. I found in the Old Town many Hindu merchants in the market, Hindu residents in mixed *mohallas* who

naturally intermingled with their Muslim neighbours. Muslim residents in the Old Town also lived in a web of poisonous penetration by Hindu Right organisations that included the RSS. Once within the Old Town, however, one would have a sense of comforting self-contained entity, with mosques, *madrasahs*, hospitals and markets, separate from and independent of the outside world. This sense of separation might also come from an overwhelming presence of Islamic establishments within the Old Town.

Kathinka Froyestad's ethnographic work in Kanpur describes the perception of Muslims among ordinary Hindus during the period preceding the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992. Froyestad's study shows how deeply embedded was the conception of 'Muslim Otherness' in the minds of upper-caste Hindus (Froyestad 2000). Those upper-caste 'city-dwellers, depend on business of various kinds and fluctuating success'. Their standard of living is 'above the average, but below that of the elite in the city', and they have a stereotypical image of Muslims who make up 20 percent of the city population of Kanpur city. These upper-caste Hindus, and perhaps also the middle and lower castes, perceive Muslims 'as a homogeneous group of violent invaders, dirty illiterates, child-breeding fundamentalists and poor Pakistan loyalists' (ibid. 1). Froyestad writes that Muslims were made into scapegoats for virtually everything that had gone wrong in India after 1947. Among these upper-caste Hindus, Islam is routinely referred to as an alien religion as it originated outside India. Muslims are not therefore acknowledged as rightful inhabitants of a Hindu *rashtra*.

During the May 1987 violence in Meerut, Hindu rage was expressed in many utterances of the police and the PAC *jawans*, practically all of whom were

Hindu. 'We have not come to put out the fire, but to kill all Muslims', a police officer commented in Maliana on the day of massacre.¹²³ Many eyewitnesses testified that the PAC and the police had indulged in all sorts of actions of terror with Hindu rioters. A Muslim eyewitness who lost his brother during the violence mentioned to me:

Police mentality is Hindu mentality. The police sometimes come in front of a Hindu mob to attack Muslims, just to shoot them. Or sometimes, waiting on the both sides of a Muslim area, until the Hindu mob's attack is finished, and then come and arrest Muslims or kill them.¹²⁴

I often came across this notion of a 'Hindu mentality' during interviews with my Muslim respondents. It was somehow closely linked to everyday life and politics in Muslims' mind. The expression was also linked to the May violence within the context of everyday politics. In the minds of many Muslim respondents, there seems to be no gap between everyday life and the collective violence that occasionally took place to damage more severely their ordinary lives. It was as if everyday and collective violence are linked in and through the same value system (Spencer 2003: 1573; Das 1996). Rumours based on Hindu-Muslim animosity, memories of Partition, menace of the RSS penetration with a piece of pork meat thrown into mosques or the brutal conduct of constables on the streets, for example, were frequently referred to in their narratives to explain the violence in May 1987.

¹²³ 'Reports (on testimony at Delhi tribunal in March 1988): Meerut 1987: Reflections on an inquiry', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16 April 1988, p. 770 (Balagopal 1988).

¹²⁴ Interview on 3 August 2003.

Muslim respondents interpreted the anti-Muslim violence of 1987 as an extension of these unpleasant encounters with state actors or with Hindu militant organisations. Particularly, many Muslim respondents repeatedly emphasised the strong presence of the VHP and the RSS in the city's everyday life. In their minds these were closely associated with the event of the May violence. According to an Ansari factory owner:

The RSS and *Bajrang Dal* teach Hindus to hate Muslims and guide them to instigate violence. So riots continue. Progress of Muslims will be broken. We, Muslims, cannot think about business, but only first think about our security.¹²⁵

Muslims were also still being blamed for Partition 40 years later. A successful Muslim businessman, an owner of the large musical instrument manufacturing company in Meerut, commented on this point:

So the memory of Mughal empire for 300 years is still vividly there in the Hindu psychology. They want to revenge that rule. They are the majority so they can do anything they want. Muslims are feeling that revenge, and both communities are conscious of this fact – the majority is now ruling. In everyday life, we feel this although we live peacefully and interact with each other with no problem in business and other scenes of life.¹²⁶

There were many taunts from the police and the PAC *jawan* during the violence that particularly revealed the Hindus' fear and doubt about Muslims' loyalty being pan-Islamic. One such remark was:

¹²⁵ Interview on 5 December 2003.

¹²⁶ Interview on 20 November 2003.

You fellows applauded so much when Imran Khan was hitting sixes, now you face the consequence.¹²⁷

Also, the police and PAC often used a metaphor of 'Khalistan': 'We will not let another Khalistan here'.¹²⁸ Khalistan was the name to be given to the new nation of Sikhs in Punjab that was the object of Sikh separatism. Here in this context of the 1987 violence in Meerut, it was used to symbolise the creation of another Pakistan for Muslims.

Many Muslim respondents blamed the Congress Party for the 1987 violence and the destruction of the mosque in December 1992. Muslims saw the influence of the state and the formal political institutions that supposedly protected them function instead to destroy their lives, livelihoods and accumulated, albeit small, capital. Perhaps most critically, the fact that the state paramilitary forces and the local administration intervened strongly on the side of the Hindu mobs must have had a significant bearing on their identity formation as 'victims'. Following Amrita Basu (Basu 1997: 435), I also want to suggest that it was precisely during and after the 1987 violence that we see significant transformations occurring in Muslim political agency. When Meerut Muslims identified Congress as one of the principal perpetrators of the 1987 violence they felt a radical sense of political isolation and betrayal. The identification of the state as aggressor did not take place without pain. Beneath a sense of frustration and resentment there was a deep sense of grievance against the state for its betrayal:

¹²⁷ Imran Khan is a popular Pakistani cricket player. 'Reports (on testimony at Delhi tribunal in March 1988): Meerut 1987: Reflections on an inquiry', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 16 April 1988, p. 770.

¹²⁸ Ibid. above.

I was taken to a police station outside the district and interrogated for 6–7 hours [during the 1987 violence]. The police wanted to get my connection with Pakistan. There was no reason for that.... I told them honestly that I had a brother in law in Pakistan, but he had died...we are Indians. I am an Indian and brought up in India, Meerut. Whole education is in India. At Partition in 1947, we opted by our own choice to stay here and live here, and refused to go to Pakistan. So we are living here by choice, choosing this country as our motherland. We have been throughout loyal and faithful to our motherland. India gave us everything, but Pakistan gave us nothing.¹²⁹

This comment, made in 2003 by a successful Muslim entrepreneur, indicates that experiences of violence were progressively shaping his subjectivity as a victim. More importantly, however, his remark underlines a renewed sense of his loyalty to India and his rightful claim to citizenship. It is both a cry for citizenship and a manifestation of a sense of being alien which had been imposed upon him and which he had wanted to eliminate all his life by emphasising his identity as an Indian. What I will call ‘post-violence strategies’ among Meerut Muslims can be seen in the first instance as an attempt to remove this remoteness, or to fill in the distance between Muslims and the rest of Indian society by proactively transforming themselves through appropriations of a more expansive citizenship.

¹²⁹ Interview on 20 November 2003.

3.4 Conclusion

As we have seen in the case of the May violence above, local causes based on everyday animosities were important in shaping local, specific forms of violence. They appeared in the geographic, spatial distribution and concentration as seen, for example, in Shastri nagar during the event of violence. On the other hand, the particular local context simultaneously reveals supra-local and timeless issues in a larger matrix of socio-political contestation between Hindus and Muslims. These issues seem to have included the relationship between state and community, the historical context of ethnic relations in north India and everyday politics concerning the contested areas of identity and ethnicity.

Concerning the observation of local actors on the micro level, Paul Brass' work as well as that of Wilkinson and Varshney, speaks very little of the Muslim factor and its changing social organisation, education and employment at the local level within the larger dynamics of the political economy of a city. Brass emphasises the importance of the detailed ethnography of the structure of local life. He examines the density of the Muslim population, labour market competition between groups and various Hindu nationalist figures in several localities in Aligarh. However, these detailed local factors are aimed solely at the political calculation of 'the Brahmanical Hindu middle class as its leading actor' (Pandey 1998: 17). There is little, if any, examination as to how these Hindu forces were countered by Muslims in Aligarh. Brass' gaze, in other words, looks down at the local details from the 'grand project' of the *Hindu* nationalists' interests in electoral competition, in which Muslims in these localities are confined to the assumed role of a community, victims or targets.

The episodes of Muslim mass killing I have described in this chapter give rise to questions about why and how ‘democratic India’ allowed such gruesome events to take place. Following Stanley Tambiah’s insight, I want to underline here the fact that anti-Muslim violence does not take legitimated forms of violence such as class struggle or food riots (Tambiah 1996: 317). Muslims were killed because they were Muslim; that is, their very identity as Muslims caused their deaths. Nothing more was required.

The principles of Indian secularism and plural democracy simply did not exist in Meerut at this juncture of Congress rule. I would argue, indeed, that the mass killing of Muslims in Meerut took place precisely as one consequence of a style of Congress governance which increasingly failed to recognise the democratic rights of non-Hindu groups. Muslims were not citizens protected by the popular sovereignty of the state under a regime of liberal democracy. Instead, they belonged to what Partha Chatterjee calls ‘political society’¹³⁰ but — in Meerut by the mid-1980s — without the support of their traditional political protector, the local Congress machine. Meerut’s Muslims had come to form a largely voiceless and powerless minority, even as they sought small crumbs of Congress patronage in return for acting as a vote bank. Worse, they did not have strong or autonomous local leaders to protect them at a time when north Indian politics was ‘communalised’ by *Hindutva* forces in the 1980s. Certainly they did not seem to enjoy the protections of ‘civil society’ that Ashutosh Varshney highlights

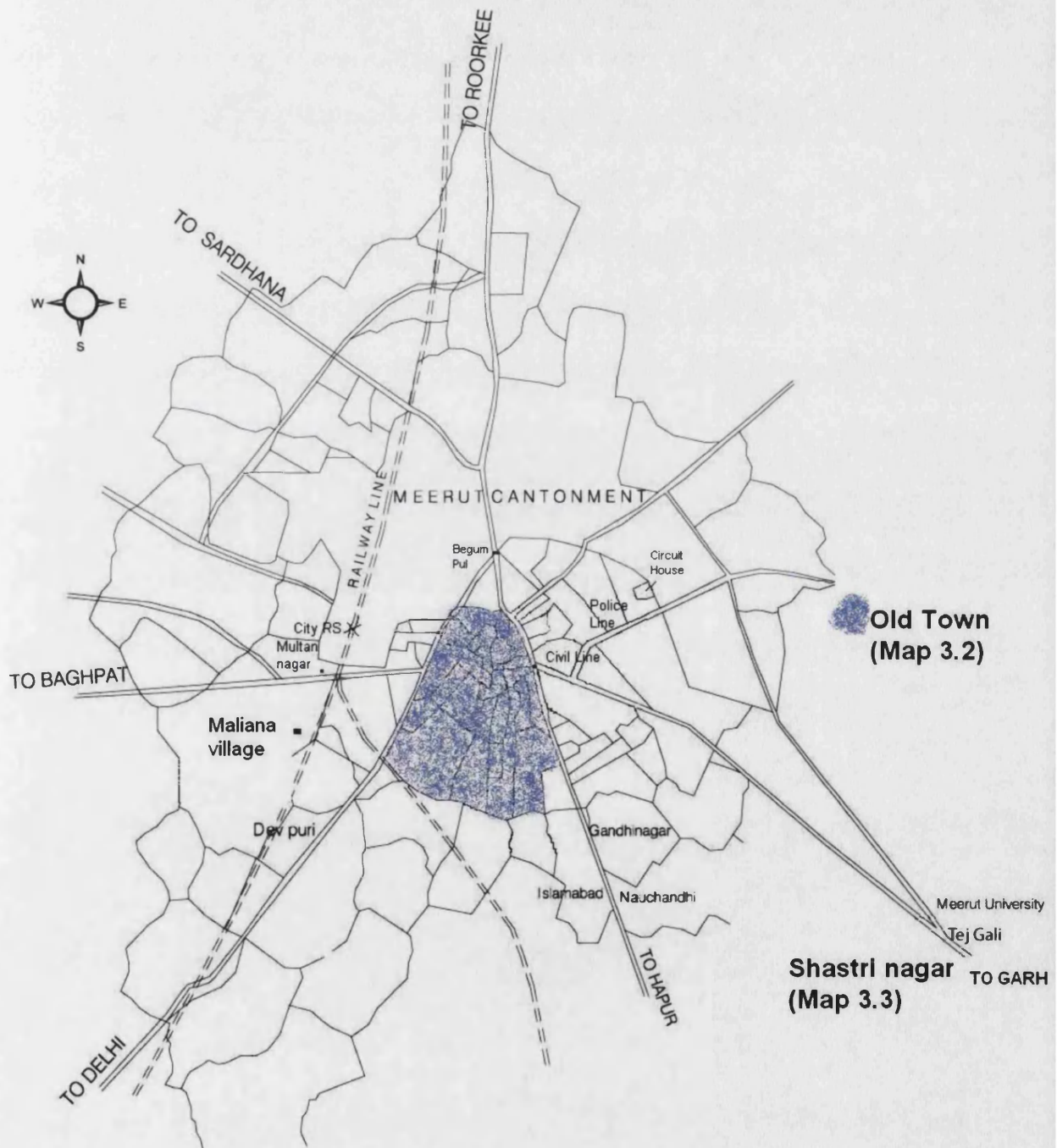
¹³⁰ Political society exists between the state and ‘civil society’, which forms the domain of citizenship and civic and social organisations based on contractual agreements and consent. In contrast, ‘political society’ works outside the framework of legality and constitutional norms, and its members, like low-status Muslims, are citizens only in a nominal sense (Chatterjee 2004: 74).

in his account of the geography of ethnic violence in India, and which presumably should be at the heart of the peace-building politics that I explore in the next part of this thesis.

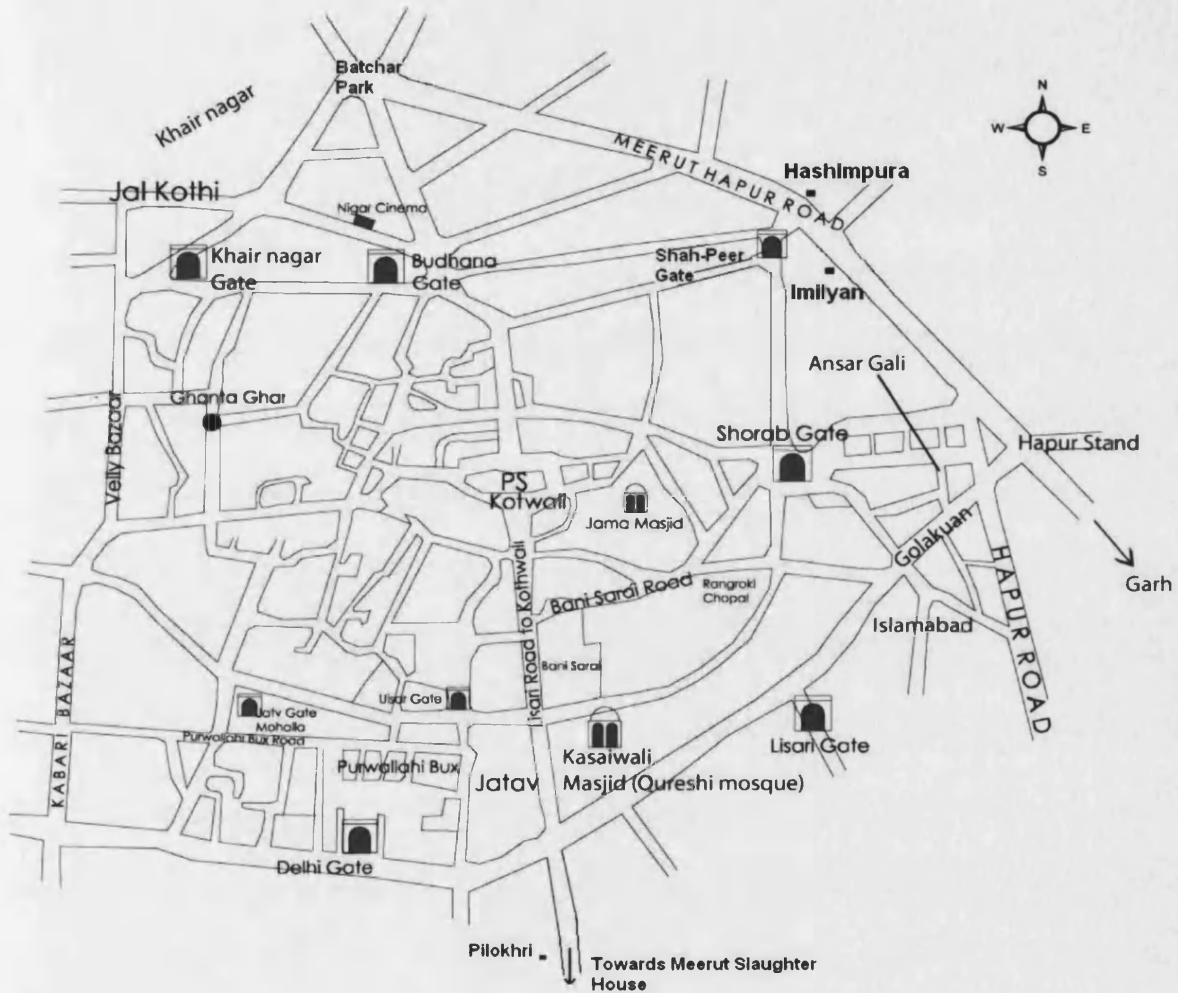
This chapter concludes my account of why the position of Meerut's Muslims became so tenuous in the 1980s that, to some degree, the anti-Muslim violence of 1987 became almost predictable, if not quite in the way that Varshney or Wilkinson would use that word. In the second part of the thesis I explore the contexts within, and means by which, new forms of Muslim political agency employed 'post-1987' sought the greater protection of Meerut's Muslim communities through new strategies of economic accumulation and political alliance-making. Chapter Four provides an account of an upward economic mobility among low-status Muslims that became more rapid in the wake of the ethnic violence in 1987 and which led to new investments in education and household 'human capital'. The partial conversion of this new capital into what I call the 'new Muslim politics' is the subject in turn of Chapters Five and Six. As ever, my aim is not just to understand *why* new forms of political alliance were struck (between Muslims and lower caste Hindus), but also *how* these identities were formed by active political agents and through important shifts in the idioms of 'Muslim politics'.

Appendix 3.1 Maps

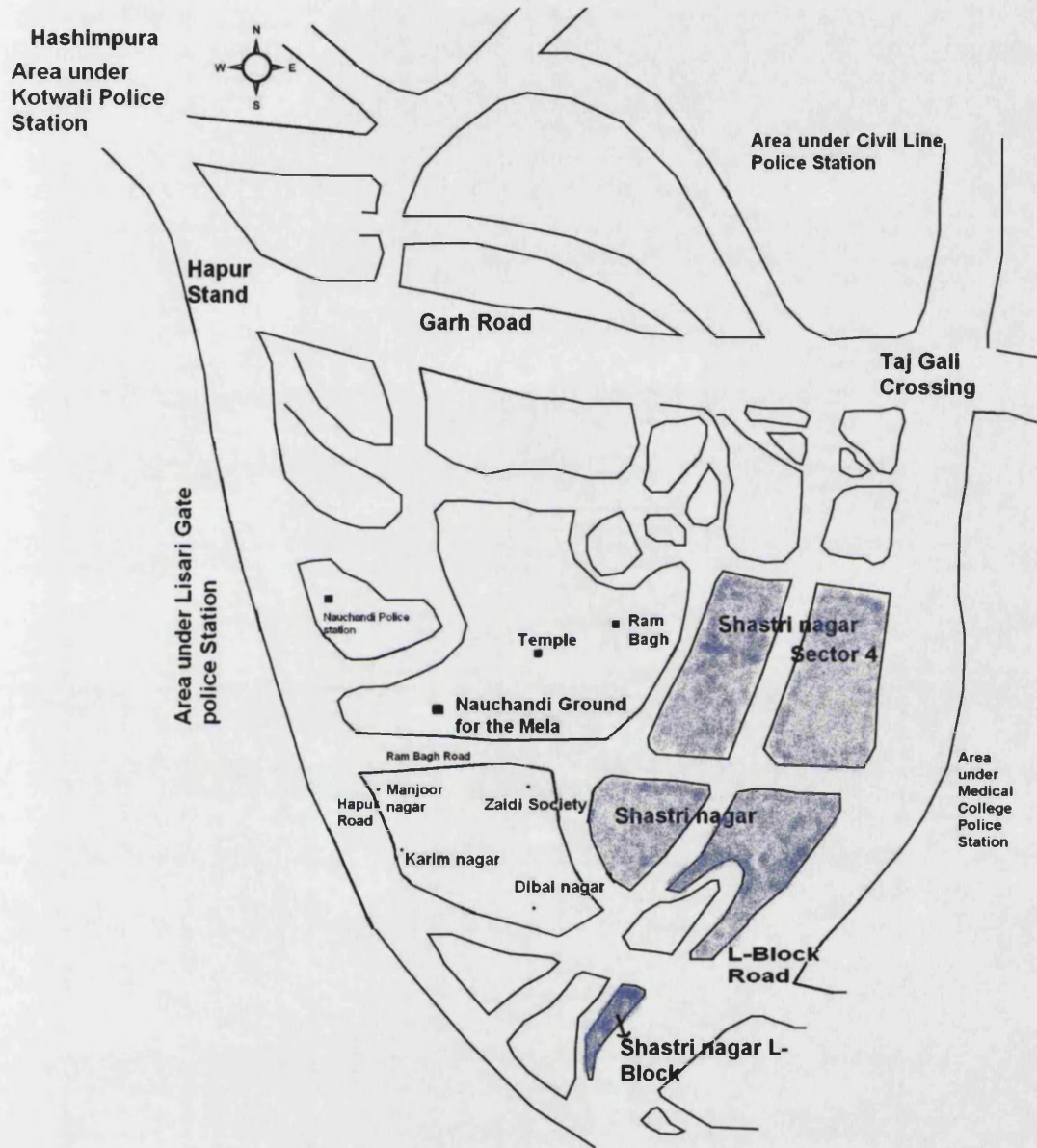
Map 3.1 Meerut city showing the location of Maliana village



Map 3.2 A map of Meerut Old Town drawn by the Station Officer of Kotwali Police Station, Meerut



Map 3.3 A map of Shastri nagar drawn by the Station Officer of Nauchandi Police Station, Meerut



Part II

Chapter 4: Economic Mobility and Social Organisation within Meerut's Muslim Communities

I found a new determination in the people of Hashimpura and Maliana. A determination to make a new beginning. People do not ask for monetary help, they ask for schools, training institutions and hospitals. Their determination to live and fight for a better life in the country of their choice has not been diminished by the bullets of the PAC. No one [is] migrating from these areas. Death and suffering hardened them but made them also more realistic. They do not talk in terms of revenge and violence: they say that they have suffered not only because of the communal and partisan attitude of the government but also because of the lack of education and poverty. They are determined to fight against educational and economic backwardness. They are less worried about what they have lost. They are more worried about what they are going to build. Life has lost all meaning for them, but they have not lost hope. There is anger against the police and administration but no bitterness against other communities. They have learned the meaning of communalism and secularism the hard way (Siddiqui 1988: 61).

4.1 Introduction

The anti-Muslim violence of April-May 1987 was both a low point, and in hindsight a turning point, in the post-Independence economic and political histories of Meerut's Muslim communities. In the next two chapters I show in detail how new Muslim political leaders emerged in the late-1980s and 1990s who would seek the protection and advancement of Muslims in Meerut by novel means. Central to my story is the rapid movement away from the Congress

Party and toward a political coalition that sought to unite low caste Hindus and Muslims against the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Before I consider these political developments, however, I first want to explore some important changes in the economic and social organization of Meerut's Muslim communities through this same period. The article cited above was written by a journalist who visited Maliana village in June 1987 when persistent tensions and sporadic violence continued in Meerut and its environs. Siddiqui's impressions about Muslim victim families in Maliana were echoed in my fieldwork findings from 2001 to 2004. My respondents, both Hindus and Muslims from different walks of life, pointed out to me again and again the remarkable efforts made by the Muslims for economic reconstruction and associated radical changes in their perception of education. After the violent events of 1987 many low-status Muslim families began to send their children, both boys and girls, to modern educational institutions. Sending children to secular educational institutions was a break from the past, not least because a majority of artisan Muslims neither had sufficient capital nor incentive to invest in modern schooling before the 1987 violence. This striking trend, however, became even more prevalent in the post-Ayodhya period. More generally, we see through the 1980s and 1990s a clear upswing in the economic fortunes of many Muslim families, particularly those of Qureshis — the butchers and meat-workers who for many decades had been subordinate to high-status Muslim groups like the Syeds, Sheikhs and Pathans, and who very often were despised by them.

I begin by first considering ideas of status and stratification within India's Muslim community and by drawing certain parallels with issues of stratification and mobility (through Sanskritization) within caste Hindu communities. I then focus on changes in the economic and social standing of the Qureshi community. These changes, most of which were positive for Qureshi households, began in the 1970s and were linked to changes in the organization of meat-related markets across India and internationally. Finally, I make use of household case studies to examine the manner and means by which economic wealth has been translated within the Qureshi community into human and social capital – both through investments in the education of children and in processes of Islamisation – and laid the foundation of some of the extraordinary political careers that I outline in Chapter Five. Crudely put, it is impossible to understand the new forms of political mobilisation that characterised 'Muslim' Meerut in the 1990s without first understanding something of the changing bases of power within that community in the 1980s.

4.2 Economic Mobility among Low-Status Muslims

There are a large number of sociological and anthropological studies of Hindu lower caste groups that began to climb the social ladder through processes of Sanskritisation (Cohn 1955; Lynch 1969; Rao 1979). Under the caste system, at least as it is traditionally described (as for example, by Dumont (1970)), status is determined not by economic position but by birth. The Brahmin stands higher than the Kshatriya or the Vaishya, the two castes (*varnas*) most likely to dominate local economies. Sanskritisation in turn signifies mobility along the

axis of ritual status through emulation of the socio-cultural practices of these twice-born castes (Srinivas 1967: 67-68). Sanskritisation is a means by which the caste system can authorise status changes as a result of newly acquired economic power.

In comparison with the vast literature on social stratification and mobility among Hindus, the study of caste and social status among India's Muslim communities has received much less attention. Muslim society embraces the proclaimed egalitarianism of Islam and denounces all distinctions based on birth and ancestry (Levy 1962 (1957): 155). Most scholars working on Muslim life in South Asia, however, take the view that there is a ranked social division that is to some extent comparable to the Hindu caste system (Ansari 1960; Ahmed 1973; Madan 2001 (1972)).¹³¹ They argue that occupations within Muslim society are as hierarchically graded as they are in the Hindu caste system, and that they affect the status of the group members traditionally associated with any given job. It has also been observed that low status Muslims can make claims to social advancement through a secular route that leads them to seek to acquire wealth, education and political power (eg. Goodfriend 1983). Muslim society in Meerut seems to exemplify these more general patterns in the sense that it exhibits forms of social stratification based around an occupational

¹³¹ Concerning the contradiction between the Islamic egalitarian concept and the existence of caste in Muslim society, Imitiaz Ahmed takes the view that caste among the Muslims in India was a product of the Hindu influence and has been reinforced by the justification offered by Islamic law that addresses the idea of birth and descent as criteria of status (Ahmed 1973: 30-31). In contrast to Ahmed's position, Francis Robinson takes an 'essentialist' view that asserts ultimate values of Islam that continues to influence ordinary Muslims' everyday life (see Robinson 1983).

hierarchy (much as in the Hindu caste system). The primary rationale for ranking groups among Muslims is based on claims of foreign descent. High-ranking Muslims in Meerut are mainly composed of Syeds, Sheikhs, Moghals and Pathans, and their sub-groups. The Syeds are descendants of the Prophet and come first in the status hierarchy. They are followed by the Sheikhs, who are descendants of Arabs or Persians, the Moghals, who are Turks from Central Asia and the Pathans from north India or Afghanistan. Lower-status groups consist of Indian converts to Islam who often retain caste or occupational names. These groups, in other words, are not entitled to be known by their ancestry, but are known instead by their occupations.

Higher-status groups in some cases have a system of hypergamy¹³² between the four main groups. The low-status groups, for their part, pursue a system of endogamy. High and low-status groups generally do not intermarry. Because of the fairly strict rule of endogamy among lower ranked groups, their social structure is in key respects characterised by a stronger sense of group identity and solidarity. Each occupational group or caste is an aggregate of different sub-groups which are classified by various categories, including region of origin, occupation and other affinities. These sub-divisions usually form a unit of endogamy. Family lineage is thus maintained carefully and strictly in lower ranked Muslim groups (see also Benson 1983).

¹³² Hypergamy is a marriage practice to seek a spouse of equal or higher socio-economic status or caste status than oneself. During my fieldwork, elite Muslim families often implied that hypergamy was used as the trading of daughters to families of both economic and social high-status. But I also came across cases in which upwardly-mobile wealthy Muslim families of the lower rank kept marrying their sons to higher-status family daughters through generations.

A wide social distance can be observed between Meerut's high- and low-status Muslims. Some of the traditional occupations of the latter category are considered 'dirty' or low status by other Muslims, in much the same way as the occupations of service castes are perceived as degrading by caste Hindus. Within each Muslim occupational group the same division of 'clean' and 'dirty' occupations exists and works to control social boundaries (Singh 1998).¹³³ Social distance among Muslim occupational groups is generally observed in terms of entry restrictions to a mosque built by another group. Group boundaries are also demarcated by residential locality. According to the Islamic principle of egalitarianism all Muslims are deemed to be of equal status. They should all be able to eat and attend mosque together. In practice, however, Muslim artisans in Meerut are not accepted as equals by high-status Muslims. Also, there seems to exist a subtle and arguably rather weak set of restrictions regarding inter-dining and social contacts between 'clean' and 'dirty' occupational groups among the Meerut Muslims. This is observable, notwithstanding that my Muslim respondents anxiously deny that there is any community parallel with the 'Hindu' caste system.¹³⁴

¹³³ Barth notes that there is an Islamic notion of pollution and a tendency to interpret the secular reality in terms of a polarity of purity and impurity among Pathans in the Swat valley in Pakistan. The pollution derives from physical processes including elimination, sexual intercourse and death.(Barth 1972 (1959): 17).

¹³⁴ Chris Fuller points out that in response to the Ayodhya crisis and the rising Hindu nationalism in the 1980s, Indian Muslims increasingly came to share the notion of a common Muslim identity which denies the existence of 'Hindu' caste. Fuller notes: 'the notion of a common Muslim identity that is definitely not Hindu is a more and more vital determinant of Muslim ideas about caste — namely, that they do not have it — and about status ranking — which they do have, but not in the form of caste, unless it is negatively invoked to demean other Muslims' (Fuller 1996: 20).

High-status Muslims in Meerut form a minority of about 7.5 percent of the Muslim population. The fortunes of the Islamic gentry class have recently been on the wane, not least when compared to those of the Qureshis. Those who belong to the higher status and relatively better-off classes usually possess some land and property in rural parts of Meerut District or in other districts nearby, although their landholdings have become smaller and more segmented since the *Zamindari* Abolition Act in 1952. Landed estates have also decreased in size as a result of being divided among multiple inheritors over several generations. Many landed-class Muslims now find that their social position is secured most comfortably in the service sector, in government or in the professional sector. One descendant of a Nawab family told me:

After the *Zamindari* Act we sold the remaining property and got income. In this way we tried to give good education to our children. But we have no talent in business, we have no skill. Our family has had very few members in business. Now some are in teaching or in service in the army or other kinds of civil services.¹³⁵

There is sometimes a sense of immobility and a lack of dynamism among high-status Muslims in Meerut that parallels that depicted by Elizabeth Mann (1992) in her study of Muslims in Aligarh.

Most of Meerut's lower status Muslims occupy a distinctive and socially separate economic sphere within the informal sector. These low-ranking Muslims are generally separated from Hindus and discriminated against in labour markets

¹³⁵ Interview on 11 December 2003.

because of their religion. Large sections of Muslim artisans are associated with low-paid manual labour and work in environments characterised by poor sanitation and health. Their economy is based on often minuscule household industries in which skills are passed down over generations. The main labour force generally consists of family members, some of whom are not paid (Ahmed 1975; Romatet 1983; Chandavarkar 1994). Very few business establishments from the Muslim artisan industry are registered with the state administration.¹³⁶

If the Muslim artisans suffer from discrimination they also take advantage of being in the informal sector to maximise their innovation potential. Highly skilled craftsmen traditionally take up those areas which are shunned by Hindus for fear of ritual pollution (Epstein 1962; Harriss-White 2002: 146). Their working world is regulated by rules, working ethics and an entrepreneurial spirit that are centred on their traditional skills (Epstein 1962: 33).¹³⁷ There is a strong consciousness among Muslim artisans that they belong to specific occupational groups. There is also a degree of unspoken agreement among them about the need to refrain for the most part from entering the occupational zones of other groups. That said, in comparison to some Hindu caste groups, Muslim artisans do move fairly freely between occupational categories and between traditional and modern occupations. An increasing number of Muslims are diversifying their occupational orientation. Economic differentiation and a competitive market are encouraging the gradual dismantling of occupational

¹³⁶Interview at Meerut District Industries Centre on 28 March 2003.

¹³⁷ Meerut had the largest number of household industry and manufacturing industries in UP, followed by Bijnor and Varanasi, in the 1961 census. The household industry sector's constant growth was mentioned in the 1991 census (*Census of India* 1961: 454; 1991, All India Town Directly).

boundaries and hierarchies (Shah 1990: 111). This relatively fluid system of employment nonetheless takes shape within a wider economy that is quite rigid. Many, if not most, Muslim artisans are bound to Hindu traders who supply them with raw materials and who remain in charge of marketing the final products. These business structures and practices are barely regulated and many Muslims feel they are exploited by Hindu middlemen (Khan 1992: 456-466).

Significant economic mobility among the Muslims in Meerut has been apparent since the early 1970s, although it accelerated in the 1980s. The most dynamic economic development has been seen among Muslim artisans of the lower echelons.¹³⁸ These artisans consist of Ansari weavers, Saiffie blacksmiths and carpenters, Gaddi cattle raisers and milk suppliers and Qureshi butchers. These four groups roughly make up 85 percent of the Muslim population of the city (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2).

Table 4.1 Muslim population within the municipal area, 2001

Total Population	Muslim Population	(%)
1,074,229	515,629	48

Source: The population figure is from the Nagar Nigam (Municipal Corporation) office record (Government of Uttar Pradesh 2001).

¹³⁸ Although I have only a small amount of interview data, it is most likely that as in other cities in western UP, Muslim economic growth was to a certain degree attributed to the stimulus of Persian Gulf remittances and exports to the Gulf countries in the 1970s and 1980s. For the case of Moradabad, where Muslims entered the business of exporting brassware in competition with Punjabi refugees, (see Hasan and Saberwal 1991 (1984): 218). For the case of Mumbai, see Hansen (2001: 167-171).

Table 4.2 An approximate proportion of different Muslim communities within the Muslim population in Meerut

Muslim Communities	(%)
Ansari (weavers)	50
Qureshi (butchers)	12.5
Saiffie (blacksmith)	12.5
Gaddis (milk suppliers)	10
Muslim gentry (Syed, Sheikh, Pathan)	7.5
Others	7.5

Source: The data is from Ansari, N. (1985) 'Muslim Voluntary Institutions: Context of modernisation', PhD. thesis (Chaudhuri Charan Singh Meerut University, Meerut:1985), p. 58.

The Ansaris are again the largest group, forming half of the Muslim population and they were the first to climb the ladder of economic mobility. Among the other three groups, the Qureshis and Saiffies comprise 12.5 percent each, while the Gaddis make up about 10 percent of the Muslim population. The Ansaris were already quite active in city politics at the time of the 1989 General Elections. The Ansaris have far more white-collar workers in their ranks, including lawyers and doctors, than do the other lower status groups. On the other hand, the Qureshis, the last to secure economic advancement for themselves (in the 1980s), have arguably been the most dynamic among the four groups in terms of improving their livelihoods and social standing.

The hereditary occupation of Qureshis is trading in animals and meat. Qureshis are also associated with trade in non-flesh commodities, including cloths, fruits and vegetables. There is a wide range of occupations associated with animal flesh. These include the recycling of animal bone, controlling tanning, glue-

making, making soap out of animal fat, hides and leather (eg. Harriss-White 2002: 146). In the government slaughterhouse in Meerut large rooms are assigned to the processing of different parts of animal flesh. Dealing with each part creates new opportunities for employment. The occupations associated with meat seem to have been a last resort or substitute for occupational groups dealing with traded commodities. Some cattle traders shifted to butchering when the demand for farm cattle declined because of the introduction of tractors. Other Qureshis moved away from butchering because of the low income that this occupation generated prior to the 1980s.¹³⁹ The hereditary occupation of Qureshis is considered 'dirty' and is a stigmatised category of manual labour. It might be said that Qureshis rank roughly equal with converts among Hindu Scheduled Caste groups (Singh 1998).

Tirthankar Roy notes that Meerut had a meat trade and local slaughtering facilities as early as the mid 19th century, alongside Agra, Aligarh and Delhi (Roy 1999: 177). Contemporary evidence of this fact is to be found in the existence in Meerut of a wealthy Qureshi family whose traditional occupation was to supply rations including meat to the British troops headquartered in Meerut. The family migrated from Allahabad to Meerut when the British captured the Doab and established the large cantonment in Meerut in 1804. This family, locally known as the '*Bhaiya-ji*' (brother) family, continued their traditional occupation

¹³⁹ Interview with Mr. Abdul Wahaf (Doulla), head of the Meerut government slaughterhouse on 26 March 2004.

as the main supplier of rations to the British and later became the government contractor, all of which brought them a huge fortune.¹⁴⁰

In a locality called Billai Joli in the south end of the Old Town there used to be a large pond where people slaughtered cattle. The British provided walls and roofs to the site of slaughtering, and in this way the original slaughterhouse was established in Bani Sarae on the other side of the pond from Billai Joli in the mid-19th century. The slaughterhouse was shifted to the present site in the south of Old Town along Hapur road in 1956.¹⁴¹ One Qureshi family, the Baxawalle, has traditionally controlled the everyday operations of the slaughterhouse over one hundred years in both the older and recent establishments. The present head, called Doulla, sits at the front of the slaughterhouse every morning to sell fresh meat. A customer of this family is unable to change his meat supplier to someone else. He would be threatened that he would not get any meat from the slaughterhouse if he changed his provider. In the same vein, no one would speak in front of Doulla or his many relations working in the slaughterhouse. These family members are called '*Goonda Galdhi*', signifying a unified muscle power which is also widely associated with the image of the Qureshi community from outside.

¹⁴⁰ The *Bhaiya-ji* family is mentioned in the Meerut Gazetteer as the largest landed proprietor in the entire District at the beginning of the 20th century (Nevill 1904).

¹⁴¹ Interview with a Qureshi local historian on 19 March 2004.

My interview data and the minutes of the *Jamiat-ul-Qureshi* (Qureshi Council),¹⁴² the political organisation among Qureshis, suggest that a majority of Qureshis had been long suffering from impoverishment and backward and isolated living circumstances before the 1980s. An Ansari factory owner told me:

Many Qureshi women came to Ansari handloom factories to take up a meagre job of winding or reeling yarns. Many of their men were unemployed. They used to live in a mud house without a roof. Men would leave for the job for mango orchards in rural areas before summer months came. ...When I was a child, Muslims surrounding me treated a Qureshi like a Scheduled Caste. They were economically backward, dirty and not civilised.¹⁴³

A Qureshi political leader, Mr. Yusuf Qureshi, described his own community people:

...[W]e are Qassab [the Qureshis' original name, meaning 'cut']. We are originally associated with this profession. Meat business is our traditional occupation. We were hated by people because we were very poor, backward in education...lower position in economy.¹⁴⁴

The economic domain of the Qureshis before the 1980s was largely confined to domestic supply of their commodities, including meat, cattle, fruits and vegetables. Some fruit and vegetable vendors were mobile enough to sell goods

¹⁴² The Qureshi Council was established in 1927 by a few literate elite of the *Bhaiya-ji* family mentioned above and a few others from outside Meerut. The Council now has more than five million members, and is one of the largest organisations of its kind in India. Interview with Mr. Alifuddin Sabri Qureshi of the *Bhaiya-ji* family on 11 January 2004. The UP state president at the point of 2004 was Mr. Yusuf Qureshi, one of the key political figures in Meerut after 1989.

¹⁴³ Interview on 6 March 2004.

¹⁴⁴ Mr. Yusuf Qureshi on 18 March 2004.

outside Meerut, but a large section of the meat trade depended on within-town consumption. Meat consumption in Meerut in the 1980s was much less than it is now.

Stagnation in the Qureshi economy largely came to an end when the export business of buffalo meat began in the 1970s. In the initial stages, countries buying Indian buffalo and sheep were limited to a few jurisdictions in the Middle East, including the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. After a decade, exports started to pick up pace, albeit some countries continued to ban Indian meat imports on 'hygienic' grounds. Most importantly, however, the genre of exporting products was expanded quickly from edible parts to all parts of the buffalo, including blood, intestines, bones, tails, ears and hooves. The demand mainly came from firms associated with the bio-chemical and medical fields, including those producing fertilisers, cosmetic products such as nail polish, and traditional medical products in Asian countries including China. The export business was very much confined to western UP and some other areas in north India. This was because buffalo meat, which was the main commodity, was produced only in Punjab, Rajasthan, Haryana and western UP. Meerut and Aligarh Districts were the main producers of the so-called 'best' buffalo meat in India. Eastern UP produced much less buffalo. Other meat export centres in India were Mumbai in Maharashtra, West Bengal and some southern states like Tamil Nadu. Punjab and UP together came to hold a 60 percent share of all meat exports from India.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁵ Interview with a Hindu manager of the export firm owned by Dr. Kamil Qureshi in Delhi on 22 January 2004.

Because of the social stigma attached to dealing with animal flesh, Qureshis have faced less competition in their business than some other groups. They have thus been able to take advantage of new occupational niches and internationalisation in a way that has escaped other Muslims (cf. Bellwinkel-Schempp 1998). Since the mid-1980s Qureshis have been the leading economic group in Meerut Muslim society, while the Ansaris began to face a stagnant economy around the same time. As we shall see in the next chapter, and not coincidentally, Qureshis have since replaced Ansaris in the political life of Meerut's Muslim community: indeed they have been a dominant force in local elections since 1993.

Each artisan class has a range of occupations or *biradaris*.¹⁴⁶ In the case of Qureshis, working in the government slaughterhouse or at butchering are considered the lowest status jobs. Trading cattle is ranked highest since cattle traders in rural Meerut are known for their wealth and power.¹⁴⁷ Those who aspire to higher status often shift to the trading of non-flesh commodities.

Qureshis are thus in practice an aggregate of different occupational groups. They are categorised and divided not only by occupational genre but also by territorial levels, structural orders and units of operation. The Qureshi butcher community (the (Q)*Kassai*/(Q)*Kassab* community) is considered to comprise the original inhabitants of the city, whose locality, Bani Sarae, is on the south edge of the Old Town. Many other Qureshis have come from outside Meerut

¹⁴⁶ *Biradari* is an occupational guild equivalent to caste.

¹⁴⁷ They are called *Sheikh Vayapari*, which implies high status with wealth and landowning. Interview with the principal of Faiz-a-am College on 19 March 2004. Also see Roy (1999: 192-194).

District and have settled in different parts of the city. They are identified by their occupation, through a binary distinction of rural or urban origin, and finally by the duration of their habitation in the city. These factors all form important status markers.

Let me give an example. There is a cluster of non-butcher Qureshis who have settled in a locality called Jali Kothi. These Qureshis are locally called '*Palledars*', literally meaning labourers engaged in loading and unloading goods, including animals and meat carried on their backs (cf. Deliege 1996). The *Palledars* have gone through an interesting path of occupational mobility. The older settlers of the *Palledar* group are now mostly associated with the manufacturing of western-style brass musical instruments. These *Palledars* mostly came from a major pioneer music instrument export company founded by a Muslim family at the end of the 19th century in Jali Kothi. Qureshis associated with musical instrument manufacturing thus abandoned their hereditary occupation of butchering and selling meat. They learned new skills as workers in this company and eventually became independent manufacturers after the 1970s.¹⁴⁸

Another *Palledar* group is composed of more recent migrants from Mathura, Palwal, Moradabad and Farridabad Districts, who settled in Jali Kothi in the 1970s. These *Palledars* control the scrap market and the recycling of physically polluting waste and scrap, including card, paper, metal, glass, rubber and

¹⁴⁸ A factory owner of manufacturing musical instruments from the Qureshi community in Jali Kothi, interviewed on 23 March 2004.

plastics (cf. Harriss-White 2002: 144-146). Both the musical instrument business and the scrap market business have been flourishing in Meerut since the mid-1980s. The *Palledar* group is now one of the most successful economic groups in the city. Other occupations of the larger Qureshi community, including meat export and trading in clothes and other materials, have also been important in creating a rising economic class.

4.3 'Modern' Education¹⁴⁹

Thirty years ago western education was virtually a monopoly of high-status Muslims. Very few Muslims in the artisan class saw the need for a secular or more western education at this time. Most children were sent to Islamic institutions for a few years before leaving to focus on the learning of traditional skills (Ahmed 1981). Educational backwardness among Muslims can also be attributed to financial problems (Engineer 1980). Even if Muslim boys were sent to school for a modern education many of them dropped out around the 10th grade (Jayaram 1990). They were often needed in the workforce of the traditional small-scale industries operated by their self-employed parents. A Qureshi clothes merchant who used to be associated with the meat business told me that:

¹⁴⁹ To clarify, I am well aware that Islam and Islamic forms of education are 'modern' in their own ways. It is common, nonetheless, for both Hindus and Muslims in Meerut to refer to (mainly) secular or Western forms of education, especially English-medium teaching, as 'modern' in the sense I use here and elsewhere in this dissertation.

I found education double-time useless. First, ten years of learning does not give any skill in business. There will be no chance for employment, as it is difficult for Muslims to get a job, especially in services and government employment. Second, ten years make them a late starter in business, which will make them backward. It is a waste of time and money.¹⁵⁰

The respondent's comment indicates that Muslims with traditional skills saw little tangible advantage in a modern education. Doulla, the head of the slaughterhouse operation, also commented on this point:

[Before the meat export began], Qureshis who were associated with the meat business were not oriented to education. We were interested only in our business, and never thought that we were backward. There was no sense of inferiority. We were happy with our skills and traditional occupation until very recently.¹⁵¹

I also met a Qureshi professor at Meerut College who was originally from Aligarh. His father, who had been interested in studying, and who visited one of the primary schools, was beaten by his father (my respondent's grandfather) because of this. He told me:

Before the *Zamindari* Act, education was not regarded as good to save anybody [among his Qureshi community in Aligarh].¹⁵²

Across north India, Muslims' lower attainment in education, and the markedly low proportion of Muslims going on to higher education, have been to a large degree associated with the occupational orientation of the majority of the

¹⁵⁰ Interview on 23 March 2004.

¹⁵¹ Interview with Doulla on 26 March 2004.

¹⁵² Interview on 6 February 2004.

Muslim population, and thus with the dominance of artisanal classes (Ahmed, 1981). For this reason, the Muslims tended to create a separate domain of education in isolation from mainstream educational institutions. The Indian Constitution encourages all minorities 'to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice' (Article 30 (1)), and there are many Muslim educational facilities in Meerut based on individual and mosque-related activities. Muslim children, particularly of poor families, have traditionally been sent to *maktabs* and *madrasahs*, the prime institutions for Islamic learning. These schools might provide a limited range of secular education options as well. However, after graduation from these schools, prospects for paid employment are generally very low, not least in prized public sector jobs where Muslims have faced differing degrees of discrimination (see Jeffrey et al. 2004).

In the last twenty years, however, there has been a significant change in attitudes towards modern education among Muslim artisans in Meerut. Aspirations to modern education, particularly that taught in English and higher education, have increased among most sections of the artisan class. The *Shahar Kaji* (religious judge) of Meerut commented:

After the violence in 1987 and again after the demolition [of the Babri Masjid] in 1992, there was a remarkable increase in educational attainment among Muslims. As many as 25 to 30 percent of the Muslim population now send their children to modern educational institutions.¹⁵³

A Muslim political advisor to Yusuf Qureshi told me:

¹⁵³ Interview with Mr. Zainur Rashedin, the assistant *Shahar Kaji* of Meerut on 13 February 2004.

Muslims are not against non-Muslims. We want to compete with them. We want to improve our lives to be able to stand in the same, equal position for competition. Muslims became more rational from emotional. We do not want to be called backward.¹⁵⁴

Yusuf Qureshi further commented in this respect:

The 1987 riots changed the consciousness and awareness of the Muslim community...After 1987, education has become the important vehicle in order to become equal to the Hindu community. Its purpose is to improve human quality. We want to claim that we are on the same plane [as Hindus]. We want to participate in this race, to obtain respect.¹⁵⁵

Ansaris were the first to be interested in formal modern education of the type that would qualify their children for civil service examinations. Aspirations towards progress and mobility then spread widely among lower status Muslims, particularly among Qureshis. Yusuf Qureshi explained how an aspiration to education came about among the Qureshis. He emphasised the adverse effect of illiteracy in conducting the meat trade:

Ours [the meat business] is a humiliating job and there is no government support to help our business...there is no government subsidy. It is very demoralising to Qureshi workers. The police also tortured us...they treated us with hatred. Many Qureshi traders were looted [after prosperity came in the 1980s], but the police did not prepare the appropriate documents for these cases. We were illiterate so the police misbehaved with us. It was not possible for us to obtain the contract in order for us to sell meat in Delhi as we were not educated well. Being illiterate

¹⁵⁴ Interview on 18 March 2004.

¹⁵⁵ Mr. Yusuf Qureshi on 18 March 2004.

means that entire business has to be done orally. Illiteracy negatively affects our business.¹⁵⁶

After the 1980s, Yusuf Qureshi continued, ‘prosperity made us realise we were backward, and we most regret being illiterate. We particularly realised the importance of higher education’.¹⁵⁷

The enrolment of Muslim children in English-medium schools increased steadily from the early 1990s onwards. I was impressed that every teacher, dean and administrator in the educational institutions I visited emphasised the rapid increase of Muslim children from the lower strata enrolling in school, especially in respect of girl children and their high academic achievement.¹⁵⁸ A Muslim ex-MLA told me:

Before 1992 Muslims were the “second-class” citizens. We thought that we were not able to get any government job since we were discriminated. After 1992, however, Muslims thought that the minority cannot flourish without education. Like Sikhs, they are very well educated.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁶ Elizabeth Mann who interviewed a Qureshi who acquired wealth through the meat trade in Aligarh, described the same problem of illiteracy: ‘The more money he earned, the more paperwork he had to deal with. As he was illiterate, as, in his opinion, were most of his *baradari* [*biradari*], he was obliged to recruit help in dealing with the paperwork and in promoting his new projects. He believed he had been cheated several times by these business partners’ (Mann 1992: 128).

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Mr. Yusuf Qureshi on 18 March 2004.

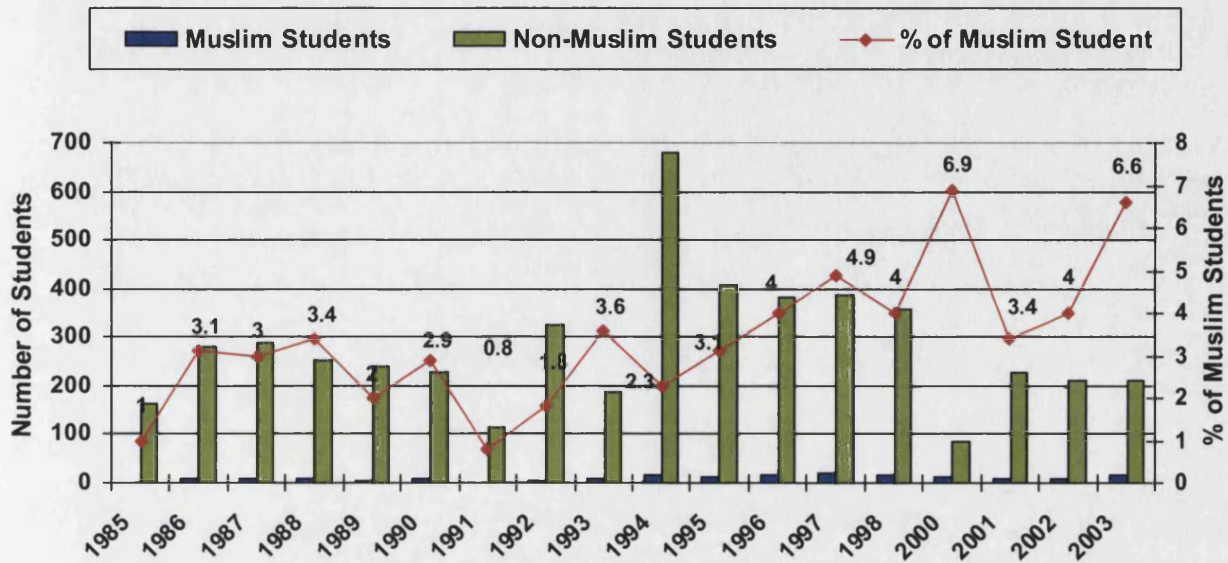
¹⁵⁸ Interviews with teachers and deans of English-medium schools in Meerut including St. Mary Academy, Godwin Public School, St. John Public School and St. Sophia Girls’ School.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Mr. Abdul Hareem Khan, ex-MLA, on 20 February 2004.

This orientation to investment in modern education has been seen not only in households that have successfully accumulated capital but also in families with little in the way of economic advantage. It seems to be the case that not just Qureshis but low-status Muslims in general are now prioritising modern education for their children, regardless of their level of economic advancement.¹⁶⁰ Those who could afford would send their children to English-medium private institutions, while those who could not afford those schools would send their children to Hindi-medium government schools. In comparison with Hindu children, the attendance of Muslim children in English-medium schools was dismal, but teachers at every English-medium school I visited still noted a remarkable increase of Muslim children attending from the lower echelons of society (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2).

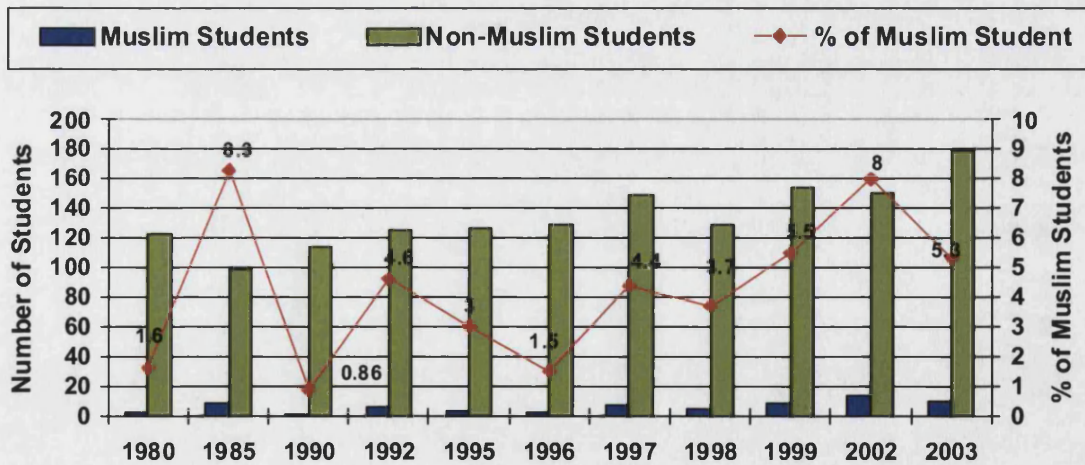
¹⁶⁰ Interview with Mr. Zainur Rashedin, the assistant *Shahar Kaji* of Meerut on 13 February 2004.

Figure 4.1 Muslim boys' attendance at an English-medium school (Class I)



Source: St. Mary Academy (for boys), Class One Admission Registers (St. Mary Academy n.d.).

Figure 4.2 Muslim boys' attendance at an English-medium school (Class X)



Source: St. Mary Academy, Class Ten Admission Registers (St. Mary Academy n.d.).

Another sea change in education is apparent in the number of Muslim girls being sent to modern educational institutions. The education of girls within Muslim artisan-class families was until recently limited to a domestic space of learning. A sizeable section of girls travelled to educated ladies' residences to

obtain an Islamic training, while others were taught in their own homes by female and senior members of the family (Ansari 1985). They learned to recite the Quran, write and read Urdu, and to observe various moral codes defining Islamic womanhood. It was generally considered that women did not require modern education but needed rather to learn the skills and knowledge required of an ideal housewife and housekeeper (Jeffrey et al., 2004). A rising trend of girls' education in modern institutions indicates that expectations of Muslim womanhood are slowly changing. A school teacher in a convent school commented:

Sixty to seventy percent of Muslim girls are now admitted to modern schools. People who live from hand to mouth send their children to English-medium schools, and that includes girl children. This is based on the belief that we are improving our new generation by educating future mothers.¹⁶¹

According to several teachers in English-medium schools, the educational attainment of Muslim girls exceeded that of boys by 2000. Changing values brought about different expectations regarding a mother's qualification. A mother should now be well educated, preferably in English, because only a mother is able to teach her children at home.¹⁶² Limited data regarding the rapidly increasing number of Muslim girl children in two of the most popular convent schools for girls is shown in the following table (see Table 4.3 and Figure 4.3).

¹⁶¹ Interview at Godwin Public School on 15 May 2004.

¹⁶² Interview with Mr. Dilshad Munna on 25 March 2004.

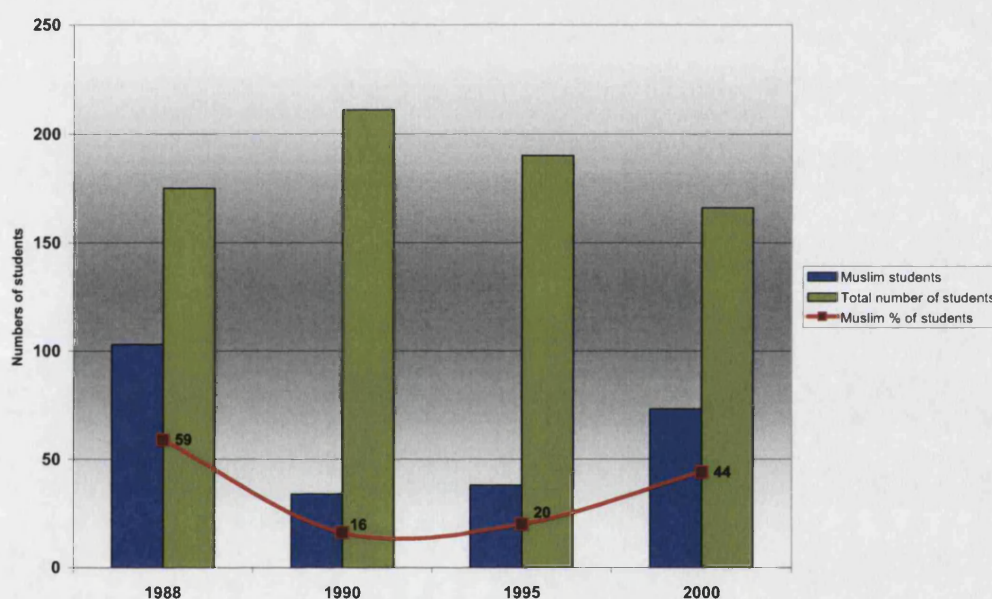
Table 4.3 Muslim girl students in an English-medium school at the 10th class

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total number of students</i>	<i>Muslim students</i>	<i>(%)</i>
2003 (1993 entry)	176	19	10.70
2002 (1992 entry)	169	9	5.30

Note: The school ranges from nursery to 12th class with about 2,000 students.

Source: Sophia Girls School, Class Ten Admission Registers (Sophia Girls School n.d.).

Figure 4.3 Muslim girls' attendance at an English-medium school



Source: St. Thomas Girls Inter-College, Class Nine Admission Registers (St. Thomas Girls Inter-College n.d.).

In Meerut, more than a dozen Muslims have established English-medium schools for Muslim children. These schools usually have facilities from nursery grades through to the 12th class. Dilshad Munna is a Qureshi politician who became the president of the city Samajwadi Party ruling committee in 2003. When I met him, Munna ran a prosperous milk dairy firm from his home/office in Khairnagar gate in Jali Kothi. He established an English-medium school mainly for Muslim children in 2000. The school has classes from nursery to 8th

grade. The number of students dramatically increased from 90 in 2000 to 200 in 2004. Munna commented on education among Muslims:

Muslims understand the importance of education. They are changing, understanding, and awareness is there. The English medium is necessary you would feel lower if you don't. Well-educated means that this person has a means to get a good job, expand his scope for the future... speaking English is a social status kind of thing, a status symbol. English is needed for business; if you want to go to Delhi or outside Meerut, English is must.

Munna's two children were sent to an English-medium public boarding school in Nainital. He saw his children only in the holidays. It was necessary to do this, he said, because no one in his family, and most especially their mother, could communicate with the children in English when they were back from school.¹⁶³

4.3.1 White-collar jobs

Behind this new orientation to modern education there are broader goals of progress and social mobility among Muslim artisan families, as voiced to me by many Muslim respondents including Qureshis and Ansaris. Accumulated wealth is being converted into symbolic and cultural capital at a later stage of household development (Osella and Osella 2000: 39). Those with educational attainments and high qualifications are clearly aiming for prestigious white-collar jobs, particularly in the government sector. This represents a drastic change in the occupational orientation of Muslim artisans, because their work

¹⁶³ Interview with Mr. Dilshad Munna on 25 March 2004.

culture has traditionally associated inherited skills with a strong sense of community identity and pride. A majority of my respondents indicated their hope that one of their sons would leave skilled manual work and obtain a professional or white-collar job, particularly in the government sector. Concerning this point, I interviewed several Qureshis working in the Meerut government slaughterhouse. Based on the interviews I sketch out below something of the lives of two Qureshi workers:

1. The case of A, a worker in the slaughterhouse

A is a meat contractor. His business has a routine. He buys five to six buffalos at the weekly market and takes them to the Meerut slaughterhouse. Then he sells the meat to local shopkeepers. His family has been associated with this occupation for generations. He worked with his father for 15 years in this business. He now owns twelve buffalos and a milk dairy where he sells milk every morning. After selling milk he comes to the slaughterhouse. His profit amounts to about Rs.1,000 per day, which he thinks is very good. He also thinks that both his dairy and his meat-selling businesses are becoming increasingly profitable. In his view, the Qureshis are now the richest Muslims in Meerut. He has four sons and six daughters, all in higher education in English-medium schools. All of them want to go on to post-graduate level. If educated, his children would not be interested in the meat business, but he is happy with this. Future decisions are up to his children.

2. The case of B, an independent meat supplier

Another Qureshi worker at the slaughterhouse is a generation younger than A. B is a supplier of flesh to a meat factory in Meerut. In this factory meat is frozen

and packed and then sent to an export firm in Mumbai.¹⁶⁴ B started his career at the slaughterhouse at age 15. He was first employed in the de-boning of flesh and fats. It was a contract-based job. There were about 125 people in the same section, most of whom were Bihari migrants. They were very poor and willing to do this menial job. He stayed in this section for eight years, but all his co-workers left their jobs during this period. Fifty of them changed their occupations and became fruit vendors or cloth merchants. B had an ambition to become an independent meat supplier. For this business he needed to acquire some initial capital, so he started a side business collecting different buffalo parts — brains, tongues, hearts, livers and tails — and selling them at a good price to soap manufacturers and others. In the mid-1990s it was relatively easy to collect and sell such things at a high price. This side business helped him to acquire enough capital to become a meat supplier. Fifteen out of 125 of his co-workers became meat suppliers like him. B studied up to the 7th class. He was not fond of studying at school. His community, the Qureshi, did not like schools. His grandfather was a cattle trader and his father a *hulya* who checked the stolen buffalo at the slaughterhouse. B is remotely related to Doulla. B now wants all of his five children to have a higher education in English-medium schools, including his three daughters. He wants his sons to become meat exporters. Even if they do not achieve this goal, he wants all his children to stay in the meat business.

The stories of A and B are fairly typical of the lives of rapidly upwardly mobile Qureshi workers at the Meerut government slaughterhouse. Many have now

¹⁶⁴ This factory is owned by Shahid Akhlaq, then the Mayor of Meerut.

started side-businesses such as meat shops or dairies. Their economic success has also opened up a number of new occupations within the same field of activity. For example, B became a meat supplier to meat export firms. The occupational genres of 'meat supplier' or 'meat exporter' did not exist 20 years ago. This means that there are now more chances for employment and economic success for the younger generation of Qureshis.

Education is considered to be the key to securing a different future from that of their ancestors. B saw the importance of his children having the ability to speak in English since, as he noted, meat exporting is an occupation that takes place in a global network. A said that he would be the last person in his family to be associated with the meat business. He expressed his wish that his children would go into a different field of trade, dealing with cloth or fruit but not with meat.

4.3.2 Changing social organisation among the Qureshi community

Socio-economic progress has had important impacts on social structures within the Qureshi community. The meat business, *Kabari bazaar* (scrap market), the clothes trade and the manufacturing of musical instruments are all thriving and seem to be working to reduce economic differentiation within the community. Spreading education also has the potential to create more coherence among Qureshi households (Beteille 1967).

Accordingly, there have been some moves to unify different sub-groups within the community. A key example is that in the last 10 to 15 years there has been an increasing trend to intermarriage within the *Palledar* and *Kassai* communities. Originally these groups were strictly endogamous in order to maintain group boundaries. The *Kassai* group, the 'authentic' butcher group within the Qureshi, perceived themselves as original residents of Meerut city and thus in a higher position than the *Palledars*. The latter were composed of migrants and settled in the city at a later date (although the oldest sections of the *Palledars'* settlement dated back to the 19th century). The *Kassai* group were more rigid about endogamy as they wished to maintain their perceived position of superiority. However, the strict boundaries of endogamy have become increasingly blurred in the 1980s and 1990s as each group's politico-economic achievement was recognised by the other. In order to create more business and political opportunities, both groups had slowly but consistently begun collaborative efforts to bring households together as partners and allies. Dilshad Munna, a young Qureshi politician, has been especially active in advocating intermarriage between the *Palledar* and *Kassai* communities.

While most of the current Qureshi political leaders have so far come from the *Kassai* butcher group, several political figures have also emerged among the *Palledars*. Munna is one of them. Munna started his political career as a member of the Municipal Corporation in 1989. Apart from becoming the president of the city Samajwadi Party (SP) ruling committee in 2003, Munna contested the Legislative Assembly election in 2002, gaining second position behind the BJP candidate. This was largely because the Muslim vote was split between Munna, another Qureshi candidate and an Ansari candidate. Munna

was previously a promoting member of the Janata Dal, in one sense a precursor of the SP, and had helped the campaign of Haji Akhlaq, a Qureshi Janata Dal candidate from the *Kassai* group who was elected as a city MLA in 1993. Here politics became a unification factor as Munna worked for support from all sections of the Qureshi community. Munna was also offered business partnerships by members of the *Kassai* group who wanted his political power behind them to launch their businesses successfully. Munna in turn wanted their votes so as not to repeat the divisions that hurt his election chances in 2002. He also wanted to unite a broader constituency of 'backward' class voters.

4.3.3 The Other Backward Classes (OBCs) category

Reservation quotas based on the backward status of religious minorities, including Muslims, have been a highly controversial issue since the colonial period. Muslims benefited from communal representation in the legislature and in civil service positions under British rule. These preferential policies were considered by Congress Party leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru, to have formed one causal element leading up to the Partition of India and the communal carnage that followed it. They were an example of the British dividing India to rule over it. Partition renewed the commitment of many political leaders to construct a secular state that would not be compatible with reservations on the basis of religion (Bayly 1999: 268). As a result, Muslim reservations ended shortly after Independence. The Indian Constitution denied Muslims access to 'compensatory discrimination', in particular in the areas of university places and public service appointments. The Constitution requires the

state to treat all citizens equally, with the notable exception of the Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

On the other hand, Article 346 of the Constitution provides for the appointment of a commission to investigate the conditions of the 'socially and educationally backward classes' that were placed outside the reservation quotas allocated to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. The first Commission was appointed with Kaka Kalelkar as Chairman in 1953, and its report was submitted in March 1955. The report recommended reservation of jobs in the government and seats in educational institutions for 2,399 classes or communities listed as Backward. However, it was not implemented because the report invited dissent from several members of the Commission, including the chairman of the Commission himself who expressed doubt about the wisdom of using caste — in effect — as the main criterion of backwardness. Prime Minister Morarji Desai appointed B.P. Mandal from Bihar to head a second Backward Classes Commission after the Janata government came to power in Delhi in 1977. The so-called Mandal Commission Report was presented to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1980, but its main recommendations were not implemented by Gandhi or by her successor, Rajiv Gandhi (Srinivas 1997 (1996): xxvi-xxvii). When the National Front Government under V.P. Singh adopted some of the recommendations of the Mandal Report in 1990, lower status Muslims found for the first time that they were entitled to reservation quotas in central government jobs and state educational institutions. The list of Backward Classes prepared by the UP state

government now included large sections of low-status Muslims, and most notably among them the Qureshis.¹⁶⁵

By the time of my fieldwork, most low-status Muslims in Meerut were well aware that they were included in the OBCs category and thus were entitled to a number of benefits in the areas of education and employment. The fact of being part of the OBCs category seems to have provided low-status Muslims in Meerut with a further stimulus to gain higher and English-medium modern education. The demand for educational concessions became a major plank in the OBC movement (Beteille 1967: 104). Muslim OBCs in Meerut still lag behind their Hindu counterparts in the attainment of education of the type required for civil service examinations. They are hence poorly represented in government jobs and white-collar occupations in general. But the number of Muslim children qualifying for competition for such prestigious jobs has steadily been increasing since the early 1990s.

There is now a strong notion of progress and a discourse of change among low-status Muslims in Meerut that is centred around the need for modern education and a desire for white-collar jobs. The Muslims came out of their isolated educational enclaves and began entering mainstream educational institutions. As Dilshad Munna commented, qualifications based on higher and English-medium education have become important markers of social status. This was not against Islamic teaching, I was told by many respondents. Key religious

¹⁶⁵ 'Citizen's Charter', Backward Class Welfare Department, Meerut, 2002 (Government of Uttar Pradesh 2002).

authorities in the city, including the *Ulama* (religious leader/priest) and the *Kaji* (religious judge), both of whom were experts on Islamic law, were by now encouraging modern and secular education for Muslims.¹⁶⁶ Islam is not a rigid or static religion (Ahmed 1983).

4.4 Islamisation and Muslim Ethnicity

Although Muslims increasingly pursue social mobility through the new status criteria of modern education and white-collar jobs, a stratification system among Muslims according to Islamic codes exists in parallel to these new orientations. Indeed, Muslims seem to cross freely over a wider spectrum of status markers than do Hindus when pursuing higher status. Charles Lindholm (1986 (1976)) stresses the significance of historical context in analysing the presence of Muslim 'caste' relations, which, he suggests, are not an 'ultimate and formal' essence ruling Muslim life. Rather, under one circumstance Muslim 'caste' may recede into the background and Islamic identity may appear with more salience, while under other circumstances the reverse may occur.

Frank Fanselow (1996) furthers Lindholm's argument in his study of social stratification among Tamil Muslims. Fanselow's study shows that an emphasis on caste-like stratification was made among those Muslim groups with a foreign lineage that gave them a prestigious position. However, for those groups 'without history', or without a foreign lineage, stratification may become more aligned to secular values, the social capital of education, consumption and

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Imam of Green Mosque in Khairnagar, on 21 November 2003.

wealth. Fanselow's study also shows that when two lower ranking Muslim groups came to be included in the list of Backward Classes — as a new category of Tamil-speaking Muslims as opposed to Urdu speaking Muslims — they dropped the use of their caste names; the difference between them was instead redefined in terms of different Islamic legal schools. Thus, caste was 'disinvented' and the stratification system was rethought and worked through. The submergence of two separate caste identities was accompanied by the development of a more egalitarian Islamic discourse based on achieved rather than ascribed religiosity, challenging hierarchical institutions and practices of caste. Fanselow suggests that the undoing of the ties of political and economic dependence that linked the two groups generated new social forces, leading to greater degrees of unity and equality among Muslims based on a more egalitarian ideology. Muslim stratification, therefore, must be understood in historical terms and in the context of changing political and economic conditions.

Janet Benson (1983) further argues that Islamisation occurs more as a result of inter-ethnic competition than in response to an internal need to acquire social status. Benson takes the view that Muslims emphasise Islamic identity when they 'face loss of power and status in a wider social system for status competition' (ibid. 42). Her study of Muslims in urban and rural towns in Andhra Pradesh suggests that political changes and heightened Muslim insecurity have direct relevance to a continuing emphasis on Islamic identity. In other words, Islamisation may be understood as the modern formation of Muslim identity in the context of Hindu-Muslim conflict.

My field data bear on this wider debate on the social organisation of Muslims in Meerut. As we shall see below, in Meerut city the social boundaries between Hindus and Muslims are clearly marked through various social attributes such as language, custom and attitude. Muslims differentiate themselves from Hindus by dress, religious activities and other cultural attributes. In the following sections I discuss Muslim ethnicity from two perspectives. I first explain the Islamisation process and markers of Muslim ethnicity. This explanation is followed by an ethnographic account that sketches out how this contested Muslim identity is actively pursued by low-status Muslims in the Old Town. I then introduce a more specific account of the Islamisation process within the Qureshi community, which is followed by a brief review of micro-level developments in the formation of a Muslim identity vis-a-vis Hindus after Partition.

4.4.1 Islamisation

The process of status claims among Muslims is based considerably on the concept of social mobility under Islamic religious codes. Social mobility is here pursued through 'Islamisation', in which a believer's status is defined by his or her religiosity. Individual religiosity is judged by commitment to the purest standards of Islamic behaviour, adherence to *Shariat* (Islamic legal code), and certain ethic codes and moral behaviour. The ascendancy of social status with acquired economic or political power should also be legitimised through an individual's 'achieved religiosity'. The link between status and religion encourages, therefore, the process of Islamisation in the community. Francis

Robinson emphasises that Islamisation has been steadily entering the local lives of Indian Muslims (Robinson 1983).

David Gilmartin (1989) provides a good example of Islamic egalitarianism in achieving social status in the light of one's religiosity. In the Central Punjab (Muslim) Assembly election of 1934, a Hindu Lala (trader) who had converted to Islam, and who had written a popular biography of the Prophet, stood as a candidate in opposition to a retired Kashmiri civil servant and judge. Lala was perceived by local religious leaders 'as a man of deep individual commitment to Islam; his candidacy thus symbolised the primary importance of direct, personal commitment to Islamic solidarity'(87-88). Lala's perceived high religiosity eventually overcame his ethnic origin in the eyes of the voters and he won the election with the popular support of the urban Kashmiri population of Lahore. The underlying egalitarian concept of being a Muslim shown in this story is premised on the fact that the accident of birth is irrelevant in judging one's religiosity. Rather, a person who embraces Islam out of conviction is seen as a better Muslim than others who follow it because it is their parents' religion.¹⁶⁷

4.4.2 Muslims in the Old Town

Let me now change scale. In contrast to the rapidly changing appearance of the northern half of the city, the walled city (the Old Town) in the south of the city

¹⁶⁷ T.N. Madan gives another case of a Brahmin convert. His ascriptive birth and behaviour as a Muslim meant that he was not seen as a 'good Muslim' by other Muslims. Madan shows that under certain circumstances the fact of birth does matter in determining a person's religiosity and hence social status under Islam (Madan 2001 (1972): 238-239).

appears to remain unchanged with a stable population and geographical structure. Muslims who live in the Old Town are proud of their sense of 'belonging' to the city over 'generations'. The nature of belonging is clear in the pattern of neighbourhood networks and tightly knit social enclaves within each *mohalla*. Residents prefer to dwell in *mohallas* with their kin or the same *Biradari* and to maintain ties of equal status. Therefore every *mohalla* has a dominant *Biradari*, and residents in each show tremendous loyalty to each other.

Being Muslim means — minimally — believing in a single God, attending Friday prayers when possible, observing major Muslim festivals (*Muharram*, Ramadan and *Baqr Id*) and referring to the Quran as the final authority. Muslims acknowledge the five pillars of Islam comprising creed, prayer, fasting, alms and pilgrimage (Robinson 1983: 185). A visitor cannot miss the existence of mosques, the major congregation point for Muslims, within the walled city. They are found in almost every corner of the Old Town with different colours, sizes and structures. The main mosque of the city, the Jama Masjid, is situated at the highest and most central point of the Old Town, overlooking the entire city. In principle, in each *mohalla* there must be a mosque for residents' congregation five times a day and for Friday prayers. Indeed, in almost every *mohalla* a mosque has been built by a *Biradari* predominantly residing in the *mohalla*. Building a mosque for one's community is a status symbol in accordance with the religious code. Mosques are a symbol of orthodox Islam, and their functions are closely connected with the everyday life of Muslims.

Firstly, large mosques often run the *madrasahs* or other types of religious training institutions on their premises. The *madrasahs* are where a Muslim first begins to find his religious identity: 'At the age four or five,' according to a Qureshi politician, 'when we start understanding the world, we begin to get religious teaching at a *madrasah*. That is when we come to know that we are Muslim. This is a very important stage, being born as a Muslim'.¹⁶⁸ While western education has increasingly spread among the lower strata for the last twenty years, Islamic training does not seem to have lost its primary importance in the lives of Muslims. While there are some criticisms among the city's Muslim elite that the *madrasahs* have contributed much to the 'backwardness' of the Muslim community as a whole, these traditional Islamic institutions continue to thrive in the city as the primary educational institutions for young Muslim children (cf. Jeffery et al. 2004).

Secondly, Muslims endeavour to increase their religiosity by fulfilling 'religious and worldly duties' through activities related to mosques. *Madrasahs* are run on donations from individuals in the surrounding locality. Funds are collected from Muslim households every month for maintaining the mosques and any educational institutions within the premises. There are no tuition fees for children. The *madrasahs* are most particularly for children belonging to the weaker and poorer sections of the community. Mosques also provide consultations to support the well-being of the congregation. Those consultations are usually by the religious leaders or elders of the mosque, and include arbitration based on Islamic law or supervision of life events including

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Mr. Noor Ilahi on 5 May 2004.

marriages and funerals. Mosques also maintain a burial fund for the poor or handicapped, as well as a dowry fund for fathers who cannot afford to provide a dowry to get their daughters married.

Among the older Muslim institutions in Meerut are several *dargahs* (saint's tombs) and the *Idgah*, dating back to the 12th century, which mark the oldest evidence of the arrival of Islam in Meerut. The *Idgah* is the remains of the fort built by Qutubuddin Aibak, Muhammad Ghori's general of who defeated Prithviraj Chauhan, the Hindu ruler of the region in 1192. The large area centred around the remains is now used as a place for public prayers. Mosques, *madrasahs* and other religious structures are the landmarks of Islam and the symbol of its survival in India. They serve in the everyday life of Muslims as a source of their identity, as well as a reference point to which they keep returning for solutions and encouragement. These religious establishments serve as an institutional support base for the well-being of the community. It is a domain which has largely been neglected by the state, and these establishments substitute for state institutions and explicitly function to forge solidarity among Muslims (Benson 1983).

On Fridays, and on the celebration day of the *Id*, streets in the Old Town are filled with members of the congregation. On Ramadan month evenings the market lanes are filled with joy and energy as the fast of the day is broken. On the last day of Ramadan all the mosques are decorated like brides, with huge crowds in brand new clothes waiting outside for the breaking of the fast. It is followed by the *Iftaar* party, the major social event to celebrate the ending of the Ramadan, which is held in individual homes and sometimes in public halls

hosted by Muslim politicians. The vibrant and joyful time during Ramadan is when Muslims show their utmost religious pride and happiness in being a Muslim. Their religious zeal is expressed in renewed charitable activities, vigour in studying the Quran, as well as in long hours of recitation and prayers. These are all constitutive of the Islamisation process, pertaining to heightening individual religiosity in order to become 'a good Muslim'.

Muslim appearance in Meerut is characterised at first glance by signs of Islamic orthodoxy. The large majority of men wear the *khurta* pyjama, impeccably starched and clean. Their faces are covered by a beard, and they wear their hair very short with a white cap. The Islamic dress code seems to be more strictly followed by those in the artisan class. High-status Muslims, on the other hand, tend to be more relaxed about their religion in general. Those who are in a modern profession, and who usually wear western clothes, change to the Islamic dress code for prayers. Muslim women wear the *burqa*, a black outer garment covering their body from head to toe when they go out of the house. Most of the married women of the artisan class follow this Islamic dress code to show their modesty and morality. On the other hand, young unmarried Muslim women of all ranks often do not wear a *burqa*. When asked if they would wear the *burqa* after marriage, a group of young ladies thought about it for a while, and said that they would. Another practice among Muslim women is *purdah*, or female seclusion, which is strictly followed by well-to-do and status-conscious families. Seclusion avoids contact with unrelated males and prevents illicit sexual relations, which are considered to destroy a family's honour. There is the ideology, in other words, that the control of female sexuality is the critical measure for deciding the family's honour (Benson 1983: 54). This kind of

Muslim outlook appears to be an eloquent and self-conscious statement of their being part of the Islamic brotherhood.

Islamisation has also been encouraged by larger religious movements that had long been in existence in Meerut. Among them is the Islamic school of Deoband, founded in 1867 in Muzaffarnagar District in western UP. The school was established in the era of increasing competition between Muslims and Hindus in both the economic and the political domains after the weakening of Muslim power and the advent of British rule in the late 18th century. The Deoband school is 'reformist' in the sense that it created a movement in the colonial period to correct everyday life practices by following and stressing the importance of pristine texts. Its teaching found a large circle of supporters in north Indian towns dominated by Muslims, including Meerut, Delhi and Agra, particularly after the school adopted new methods of spreading its reformist teaching through cheap publications (Metcalf 1982). Metcalf summarises the essence of the Deoband school:

...emphasis on encouraging a range of ritual and personal behavioural practices linked to worship, dress, and everyday behavioural practices deemed central to *shari'a* [*shariat*] – divinely ordained morality and practices (Metcalf 2004: 266).

The school's reformist spirit is pretty much alive to this day. The number of students enrolling in it has been increasing and there are currently more than 3,000 students learning in the school (ibid.). The support base for the Deoband school in Meerut city is centred around the Ansari weavers' community,

although the Qureshi community has increasingly been involved in activities related to the school, as seen below.¹⁶⁹

The Deoband's reformist movements have been even more widespread through various spin-off organisations, including the *Tablighi Jama'at*. The *Tablighi* aims to disseminate Islamic teachings away from the *madrasah* to a wider range of lay Muslims, including those who are illiterate, poor and marginalised. It encourages travel with a group of volunteers composed of different occupational groups to fulfil an Islamic obligation to faithful practices. The uniqueness of this movement is that it does not have any specific form of organisation. Its activities are based only on travelling in groups for a certain period of time, using dense networks among the faithful, not only in India but all over the globe. The movement has effectively brought Muslims from different divisions under one roof. The *Tablighi* conceptually created a Muslim community through its overarching goal of reshaping individual lives through collective activities while teaching certain ethical codes and moral behaviour.

4.4.3 The process of Islamisation of Qureshis

The *Tablighi* movement must be viewed as the primary agency of Islamisation among Qureshis in Meerut. According to an Ansari respondent who belonged to the *Tablighi*, about twenty percent of Muslims in Meerut were engaged in the

¹⁶⁹ Among many donors in the 19th century was a renowned Qureshi, Sheikh Ilahi Bakshi of Meerut, who became wealthy trading rations including meat with the British Army (Metcalf 1982: 127). Ilahi Bakshi was one of the most successful founders of the *Bhaiya-ji* family mentioned above.

activities of the *Tablighi Jama'at*. Qureshis formed the largest number of volunteers among the members. They were followed by Ansaris, and the rest were from other Muslim communities.¹⁷⁰ Of the seven names on the list of a *Tablighi* advisory committee in Meerut, three were Qureshi and the rest were Ansari, Sheikh and Syed. Haji Raes Qureshi, a scrap market owner in the Jali Kothi locality, was a Corporator in the Municipal Corporation at the time of my interview in 2004. His name was at the top of the list of advisory members. The organisation's local activities were based in a mosque in the Jali Kothi neighbourhood. Every Friday night after prayer the committee members of the *Tablighi Jama'at* came together to review their activities and plan the coming week. The aim of this highly popular religious movement among Qureshis and other Muslim communities was again to promote and spread Islamisation among lay Muslims. The movement provided a powerful medium to elevate individual religiosity with its highly visible preaching and disseminating activities in the public sphere — in mosques, on the door-steps of Muslim households, or in streets. Local mosques were considered the most important religious public space as 'decentralised centres of [*Jama'atis*] activity' (Mayaram 1997: 229). These collective activities provided the Muslim community with a larger frame of reference in forging a common identity of Islam from the local to global context.

Another manifestation of the Islamisation process among Qureshis was seen in their efforts to claim a higher status and to establish their links to Arab lineage and history. According to Islamic codes status is based on foreign (Arab)

¹⁷⁰ An Ansari lawyer and an active member of the *Tablighi Jama'at* on 1 February 2004.

ancestors, noble decent and occupational links to major Islamic events (Goodfriend 1983). One way for a community to claim a higher status was to change its last name. The butcher community, which used to be called Kas(s)ab or Kas(s)ai (also spelled Qassab or Qassai), adopted the new name, Qureshi, in the 1920s.¹⁷¹ It was in this decade, according to M.N. Srinivas, when there was an ‘all-around increase in caste-consciousness’ (Srinivas 1967: 78). Qureshis were said to be the tribe to which the Prophet Mohammed himself belonged. According to some respondents, a small section of Qureshis in Meerut began writing their new name in the 1950s. Many other Qureshis who told me the story of their Arab origin considered a person named Dr. R.A. Qureshi to be the original advocator of the new name:

Only 30 years before, Dr. R.A. Qureshi in Shapeer Gate started writing his name, ‘Qureshi’. He started among ‘Kassai’ [the butcher group] who had not been allowed to have this name. He had been fighting for this naming since then.¹⁷²

A high-status Muslim retired lawyer and a friend of Dr. Qureshi told me:

Dr. Qureshi succeeded in proving that Qureshi people are related to Mahammad Bin Kasim [see below]. Dr. Qureshi started writing his last name ‘Qureshi’ and advocated this lineage from the 1970s.¹⁷³

Another Qureshi respondent commented, ‘My father never wrote the name “Qureshi”, but I see many people now write this name. ... My daughter now

¹⁷¹ G. Ansari, who conducted fieldwork mainly in eastern UP, notes that the new name, Qureshi, adopted by Kassais started to appear in the 1920s in eastern UP (Ansari 1960).

¹⁷² Interview with a Qureshi textile merchant on 18 March 2004.

¹⁷³ Interview on 27 March 2004.

writes her last name “Qureshi”. Her mother might have told her that our last name is Qureshi’.¹⁷⁴ This respondent was in his mid-thirties. Another Qureshi respondent in his fifties, a manufacturer of gut sports rackets, told me that his father wrote his name ‘Sheikh Abdul Karim Qassab’.¹⁷⁵ These cases show that there were perceived differences in status among Qureshis. It appears that initially only members of the Qureshi community who were literate and had a need to write their names on papers — for example, a contract of some kind — could adopt the new name. This apparently excluded a large number of manual labourers living on daily wages. The vast majority of these people had neither the qualifications nor the status to do so, although this has changed. According to Doulla, ‘Kassais are uneducated and Qureshis are educated people. Now all of us think that we are Qureshi’.¹⁷⁶ My speculation is that the spread of the name Qureshi came to include Kassais, the butchers, only after the meat export business started to improve their economic fortunes in the 1980s.

Another way to claim the superior status of Arab lineage and to legitimise an Arabic origin, is to write a history. I came across a few books written in Urdu by Qureshi writers in Meerut and Delhi, most of whom were ‘family writers’ attempting to illuminate and legitimise a lineage, usually linked to an Arab origin. The local stories of this kind might be categorised into two story lines. The first is that the Qureshi ancestors originated from among the Islamic missionaries who had been invited to India and were under the protection of the

¹⁷⁴ Interview with a Qureshi office worker in the Social Welfare department in the district administration on 16 March 2004.

¹⁷⁵ Interview on 19 March 2004.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Doulla on 25 March 2004.

Slave Dynasty in Delhi. The second story line, which is more prevalent, related the Qureshi lineage to Mohammed Bin Kasim, the first invader from Arabia in the seventh century. Kasim's army included men whose job was to supply soldiers with properly slaughtered (*Halal*) meat. After Kasim returned to Arabia, these men settled down in Sindh and took up their traditional skills, adopting the profession of butchering for the supply of properly slaughtered meat. This story is essentially the one which had been disseminated by the above-mentioned Dr. Qureshi. And this was the story which was most likely to be written in family history books in order to show the Arab origin of the family lineage. I have a translated family history book originally written in Urdu which tells the Bin Kasim story (Akbarabadi 1928).¹⁷⁷ Some respondents, both non-Qureshi Muslim and Hindu, also pointed out that Qureshis used some Arabic words and vocabulary among themselves in daily life, as well as in business negotiations at cattle fairs and bazaars.

On the other hand, there were Qureshis who claimed more simply that Qureshis were Hindu converts who had adopted the occupation of selling meat. It was a widely accepted view that Qureshis' original characteristic trait was skill in trading. Qureshis were generally regarded as very clever, shrewd and highly capable in business transactions and negotiations. The story goes on to say that the Qureshis and the Hindu Baniyas had the same origin. Some chose to be

¹⁷⁷ I acquired the family book which had been owned by a Qureshi leather merchant while conducting interviews with him on 21, 23, 27 March and 2 April 2004.

Muslim (Qureshi) and others to be Hindu (Gupta), but basically both of them were Banias, the core trading people.¹⁷⁸

The process of name change within the Muslim community is a marker of status claims among Qureshis, but it must be also placed within a wider context of Islamisation involving both individuals and the community. Family history writing seeking to establish an Arab lineage is an important indication that the Islamisation process had long been taking place among common Qureshis.

The Qureshi Council (*Jamiat-ul-Qureshi*) also played a major role in claiming higher status and promoting Islamisation of the community. The Council was the political organ of the Qureshi community, and its activities were based on the teachings of the reformist Deobandi school. It, for example, promoted the movement to abolish dowry and excessive and luxurious life cycle celebrations, hence moving away from unIslamic (Hindu) practices and towards Islamisation. Another important feature of the Council's activity was that, in asserting Qureshis' economic, political and social rights, it significantly exemplified the link between religion and Qureshi politics. The Council's conference minutes indicate how important the religious idiom is for the unification of the community for this political aim (*All India Jamiat-ul-Qureshi* 1975). Participants frequently used the religious idioms of Islam. Shahnawaz Khan, then Congress MP from the Meerut-Mawana constituency, for example, wrote in his letter accepting the invitation to the conference:

¹⁷⁸ Interview with Doulla on 24 March 2004. Interview with the principal of Faiz-a-am College on 19 March 2004 and others.

If we perform this task sincerely, then God will certainly help us, and the followers of Islam will be able to create a better social life. I welcome this step of *Jamiat* and pray for its success. I also pray that God will always help us in leading our life on the path of “*sunnah*” [the way and the manners of the Prophet].¹⁷⁹

The unification of the Qureshi community was another important task taken on by the Qureshi Council. For this purpose, the Council incessantly stressed a common identity in order to override internal factionalism within the community. This was because the community was ‘divided into several segments. Yet they were endogamous, each of them thought to be superior to the other. They were at loggerheads with each other. So the Council aims at removing internal disputes from the segments and making the “*biradari*” as a unified unit’ (*All India Jamiat-ul-Qureshi* 1995).

The ‘oneness’ of the community was promoted by attempts to resolve issues of (endogamous) marriage and to encourage education. The Council advocated as its major plank inter-marriage for all income-level, occupational and regional groups. It was repeatedly mentioned in the ‘*Souvenir*,’ a minute of a conference in 1994, that all Qureshis were brothers whether they were labourers (Palledar), butchers (Kassai) or businessmen.¹⁸⁰ The name ‘Qureshi’ had been officially adopted by the Council in its 1974 conference in Meerut. The new name itself meant an establishment of a clear label that socially and conceptually reified a large category of people (Eriksen 1993: 90). This effect of self-identification was

¹⁷⁹ ‘The Success of Conference against Dowry’, *All India Jamiat-ul-Qureshi*, 1975.

¹⁸⁰ Interview on 19 March 2004 with a Qureshi respondent who attended several Qureshi Council conferences.

further strengthened when the new name obtained official recognition. This took place when the Other Backward Caste (OBC) certificate that the state government issued for various benefits came to carry the name 'Qureshi' in place of 'Kassai', in the mid-1990s.¹⁸¹ According to the Secretary to the Commissioner of the Municipal Corporation, many Qureshi workers visited his office in order to change the name on the certificate to 'Qureshi'.¹⁸² The official recognition of the new name constituted a significant medium for promoting a common identity among Qureshis. It is also important to note here that the process of identity transformation from Kassai to Qureshi simultaneously adhered to a growing global Islamic identity.

Another medium of Islamisation among Qureshis can be seen in the establishment of the Qureshi mosque.¹⁸³ The Qureshi mosque was situated in the middle of the Kassai heartland, Bani Sarae, at the south end of the Old Town (see Map 3.2). It had historically played a significant role as a symbol of the Kassai butcher community and its unification as a collective body. Its origin went back to the early decades of the 20th century when the head of the Meerut government slaughterhouse or '*chaudhuri*' of the Kassai community, Mr. Abdul Wahaf or 'Baxa', Doulla's great grandfather, started an initiative to help the poor, handicapped and widows by collecting money from customers at the slaughterhouse. It began in 1919 when the slaughterhouse shifted from Billai Joli to Bhumia Kapoor in the south, a short distance from the wall of the Old

¹⁸¹ Interview with a Qureshi office worker in the Social Welfare department in the district administration on 16 March 2004.

¹⁸² Interview with the secretary to Meerut Municipal Commissioner on 27 February 2004.

¹⁸³ This section is based on my interview with Mr. Abdul Wahaf, Doulla, on 24 March 2004.

Town. This initiative was a means of pursuing the higher religiosity among the Qureshi community. Baxa used his position as the collector of slaughter fees to charge simultaneously a separate fee to his customer for the poor. The fees were collected in the following way:

1 anna¹⁸⁴ (government slaughtering fee) + 1 anna (for the poor) = 2 anna for each head of cattle.¹⁸⁵

After a decade of setting aside the fund for charity, however, Baxa found out that much of the money was unused because of the Islamic tradition of 'self-respect' that prohibited asking for any advanced loans. The elders of the Qureshi community, including Baxa, then decided to establish their own mosque using the accumulated fund, as there was no mosque in the localities between Bani Sarae and Shorab Gate. The land was acquired in 1934 and the central part of the mosque was constructed in 1936. The mosque continued to expand after that and became the largest and most luxurious mosque in Meerut. However, in spite of its remarkable transformation in size, local people still referred to the mosque by its old name, '*Kasai-walle Masjid*'.

I appreciated its enormity when I approached the site of the Qureshi mosque in a rickshaw. It was impossible to see the mosque in its entirety because of its size. I could only see large marble pillars standing along the road and the meat shops with carcasses of buffalo or goat hanging from their ceilings between the

¹⁸⁴Anna was the monetary unit before it changed to Rupees. One anna was equal to 6 pessa. One hundred pessa were equal to 1 rupee.

¹⁸⁵ At the point of 2004 the charge for the slaughtering was different according to the size the animal. Camel was Rs.100 per animal, buffalo, Rs. 45; baby buffalo, Rs. 20 and goat, Rs. 10.

pillars. These shops were, of course, all run by Qureshi butchers. They were all located in the foundation level of the mosque. Beside these shops there was a long staircase leading to the wide courtyard on the upper level. The courtyard was surrounded by the large prayer room, which formed the main part of the mosque, with a pond creating a boundary between the space of a *madrasah* and the prayer room. There were also two towers from the top of which one could overlook the entire city.

Each time I visited Doulla's house, which was located on a small lane across the road from the Qureshi mosque, I had to pass by the small crowd which gathered in front of the shops selling meat both raw and grilled. As soon as the crowd saw me getting off the rickshaw, the news that 'the lady from London' had appeared again in the locality spread with an incredible speed. By the time I reached Doulla's house, in about two minutes, his family members already knew that I was coming. I still do not know how it was possible, but this speedy transmission of the news seemed to indicate an interesting aspect of the Qureshi community — its cohesiveness and of tightly-knit networks particularly within the home *mohalla*.

Collecting funds for the weak and poor became an important part of the activities of the mosque. Doulla, the present *chaudhuri* of Baxawalle (his family name), distributed the money to the people who came asking for a little help every morning, sitting in front of the entrance to the slaughterhouse where his great grandfather used to sit. Sometimes fathers came to ask for help for getting their daughters married, as they could not pay a dowry. Another times the handicapped came for some financial help. According to Doulla, those coming

for help included non-Qureshi Muslims and Hindus. The Qureshi mosque also regularly sent financial support to the school related to the Deoband school in Muzzafarnagar District as an important component of its charitable activities.

After the meat export business started in the 1980s the size of the mosque fund dramatically increased. In 2004, Doulla and other members of the mosque committee decided to establish a girls' inter-college within and adjacent to the mosque. The foundation part of the mosque was under renovation, being converted into space for administration offices for the new college. It would offer technical education, including tailoring and stitching, as well as modern subjects including English, Urdu and Hindi. Admission was free. The committee had begun acquiring property adjacent to the Qureshi mosque for the college buildings.

Several important observations could be made on the existence of the Qureshi mosque. First, the mosque was the symbol of religious life of the Kassai community. Being located in the Kassai heartland, it provided a holy space where Kassai residents offered *namaz* more than once every day, forming an important aspect of their religious and social life. The congregation activities genuinely cultivated a sense of one community. Second, the mosque also created a public arena which not only nurtured a sense of common identity internally among the Kassais but also helped to create an externally-projected collective identity of the one 'cohesive' Qureshi community. Third, building a mosque under the banner of a community was a strong status claim that

effectively ‘topped’ the religious and social spheres of the Muslim world.¹⁸⁶ The rapid expansion of the mosque in terms of its area and facilities, which was only possible because of the Qureshis’ growing income, naturally carried with it a strong sense of pride that their hereditary occupation had become an ‘export quality’. Fourth, it was a symbol of the linkage between religion and the economic activities of the Kassai community. The charitable activities of the mosque were based on an idea of philanthropy that linked the hereditary business of butchering to religious and social concerns. A part of the earnings of Qureshi workers contributed, on one hand, to the expansion of the mosque which signified their religious life and identity, and, on the other, to the welfare of their community. It was the process of capital conversion to social work or public welfare that simultaneously nurtured a sense of self-respect, prestige and status. Fifth, the transfer of new economic wealth into circuits of Islamisation seems to have enhanced, again, not only a more coherent Qureshi identity, but also a larger Islamic identity. In other words, the mosque, a religious symbol and catalyst of religious acts, symbolised the claim of new Qureshi political leaders that ‘we are Islam, we are Muslim in the global society’, through which the community was no doubt *politically* constructed. This sense of ‘oneness’ provoked by a larger Islamic identity was an implicit but assertive baseline of Qureshi political activism (see following chapters). A Qureshi activist, whose nephew was the slaughterman in the Meerut government slaughterhouse, told me:

¹⁸⁶ There were only a few mosques in Meerut symbolising the status mobility of a community like this one in Meerut – in particular, the Ansari and Rajput mosques. The latter was situated in the locality called ‘Chapaul Rajputani’, adjacent to Bani Sarae to the north.

In Islam there is no *biradari*. *Biradari* exists only in India. Otherwise in Arab, all Muslims are brothers. They are one. There is consciousness of being a Muslim...Oneness. Haji Akhlaq [a Qureshi political leader] fuelled this feeling, community feeling we are one. Since Akhlaq came to politics, there are no riots. The victory of Haji Akhlaq was a symbol of all Muslims [being] united'.¹⁸⁷

The political ascendancy of the Qureshi political leaders from the early 1990s will be discussed in the following chapters of Five and Six.

4.5 Resettlement after Partition

In the previous section I discussed how Meerut Muslims in general and the Qureshi community in particular pursued the Islamisation process. I suggested that the continuing emphasis on Islamic identity must be viewed not only as a process of social mobility in accordance with Islamic codes, but also as a means of creating a strong sense of Muslim identity within the context of Hindu-Muslim antagonism in a north-Indian town. The Islamisation process was therefore also encouraged by the particular development of Hindu-Muslim relations after Partition in north India. In the following section, I provide a brief account of how the larger history affected the everyday life of Meerut Muslims in such a way as to increasingly alienate them from the Hindus, and hence to constantly encourage and nurture the formation of a Muslim identity.

The post-independence political history of Muslims in north India cannot be properly discussed without including the impact of Partition in 1947. Partition

¹⁸⁷ Interview on 23 April 2004.

profoundly altered the foundation of livelihoods, security and socio-political life for Muslims in north India (eg. Hasan 1988). The social fabric of everyday life came to be more closely interwoven with a sense of alienation and distance from the rest of the society.

Upon the Partition of India at 12:00 am on 15 August 1947, many Muslims in Meerut felt that they 'suddenly became foreigners'. Partition created a new society for Muslims in which they were suddenly treated as non-Indians and were expected to migrate to Pakistan. One manifestation of the new society was that the administration forced many Muslims to move out of their houses in order to create living space for incoming Hindu and Sikh refugees from West Pakistan.¹⁸⁸ A Muslim lawyer told me that:

¹⁸⁸ A massive rehabilitation effort was implemented by the Indian state to provide relief and help to settle the many millions of refugees who flowed in. Urvashi Bhutalia notes that there was one Thakur who offered help in this rehabilitation process for refugees in Meerut. As mentioned earlier, Meerut received the largest number of partition refugees. An untold story behind the state rehabilitation programme was that it was implemented by uprooting Muslims from their homes (Butalia 2001).

The reconstruction after land-mark events such as the partition of states, big earthquakes or other natural disasters accompanies a process of public 'memorising practices'. The process which involves political actors is often a showcase for contemporary politics and political forces in power. In Meerut the 'Hindu' politics signified the reconstruction phase after Partition by uprooting Muslims from their households. An excellent study on the process of the ruling BJP's official memorial construction after the earthquake in Kachchh in Gujarat in 2001 shows how little has changed since Partition in terms of the politics of *Hindutva*. The reconstruction phase demonstrates the same *Hindutva* agenda, subtle as it is, to exclude former Muslim and Harijans (Scheduled Castes) inhabitants from the new villages constructed by the Hindu Right on the site of the destruction in Kachchh (Simpson and Corbridge 2006).

If we had known that Independence and Partition meant that we had to all leave our homes behind and move to Pakistan, nobody would have opted for Pakistan.¹⁸⁹

Muslims faced great fragmentation of their community after Partition. A majority of Muslim professionals, bureaucrats and businessmen of means left for Pakistan in a great exodus. Many remaining Muslims felt that they were 'reduced to an illiterate category'.¹⁹⁰ This was part of the reason why Muslims in general came to be subjects of political decisions made largely by and for Hindus after Partition. In Meerut, the introduction of adult suffrage and majority rule transferred control of political patronage to Hindu hands with the symbolic dismissal of the Muslim chairman of the Municipal Board, Aijaz Hussain in 1953.¹⁹¹ Political representation of Muslims was limited to a small number of Councillors elected in the 1964 Municipal election (see Chapter 2). The Muslim elite who remained in Meerut had never been very active in city politics. The fact that the Congress Party ticket had only been given to high-status Muslims from outside the district, and that Congress had never given the ticket to low-status Muslim politicians to contest the elections, seemed to have prevented the growth of local Muslim political leaders.

¹⁸⁹ Interview with a retired Muslim court lawyer on 28 February 2004.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with the same person above.

¹⁹¹ Aijaz Hussain was the Chairman of the Municipal Board from 1942 to 1954. He was a descendant of general Khairandesh Khan from the era of Aurangzeb in the 17th century, who left a considerable legacy in the Old Town that included Khairnagar Gate and many elaborate Islamic buildings. This Muslim elite family dominated city politics since the 1870s for almost a century against the severe political battle between Muslim elites and the rising Hindu merchant classes backed up by the Hindu revivalism in the late 19th- century north India. Hussain was symbolic of political power and prestige of the old Muslim gentry class in Meerut (see Jha 1979).

The conception of being an 'alien' was subjectively held to varying degrees among Meerut Muslims for a long period of time, if not indeed until today. Several writings by Muslim authors show that Indian Muslims established their identity as Indian only during the first Indo-Pak War in 1965. Balraj Puri writes:

The Indo-Pak war in 1965...was a war between two nation states which established, as nothing had done before, the position of India Muslims as part of the Indian nation (Puri 1993: 2143).

This was largely because many Muslims participated in and contributed to the war effort. At the same time, however, the Indo-Pak War of 1965 aroused a renewed sense of suspicion among many Hindus about Muslim loyalty to the Indian nation (Pandey 1999; Zakaria 2004). Hindus harboured the suspicion that many Indian Muslims were sympathetic towards Pakistan and wished for the country's victory over India. Puri notes: '...most Muslims could not match the intensity of hatred of an average Hindu towards the national enemy' (Puri 1993: 2143). After 1965 a new generation of Muslim leaders reacted to Hindu suspicion by abandoning an apologetic attitude for the creation of Pakistan, and, according to Puri, by beginning to assert both an Indian and a Muslim identity. Many Muslims now began searching for their indigenous roots, while they also made clear that their interests were distinct from the Hindus' through maintaining Muslim Personal Law and/or Urdu (ibid.). Their assertion of minority rights was in large part a response to the increasing danger to Muslims caused by the rise of communalism and violence in parts of north India in the 1960s and 1970s.

4.5.1 Muslim politics vs. Hindu politics

At ground level in Meerut city, the new Muslim nation, Pakistan, appealed to many Muslims long after Partition as a longed-for destination for ultimate migration. Journeys between Meerut and Pakistan continued for nearly three decades. During this period, some settled in Pakistan and others returned to Meerut. The migration to Pakistan largely ceased, however, upon the break-up of Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. The latter was seen by many Muslims in Meerut as the collapse of Jinnah's 'two-nations theory'. The Muslim homeland, Pakistan, was no longer 'safe'. After the birth of Bangladesh, Muslims in Meerut felt more finally settled in India. This was where they would build their homes, start businesses and send children to schools. Muslims came to identify India as their homeland.¹⁹² Hindu nationalism, however, did not recede after the resettlement of Muslims. It rather gained new momentum from the two wars against Pakistan. Local political parties such as the *Majlis Majlis-e-Mushawarat* or the Muslim League in the 1970s developed to articulate separate Muslim interests. However, these communal parties did not survive for long in Meerut city politics. In contrast to Muslim communal organisations, Hindu Rightist organisations and political parties grew steadily, particularly with the support of the powerful Punjabi business sector in the city, whose economic presence was increasingly felt during the decade of the 1980s.

On the other hand there was little public provision to support educational institutions for Muslims. Almost all the Muslim educational facilities in Meerut

¹⁹² Interview with a Muslim journalist on 10 February 2004.

were based on private funding, derived from either wealthy individuals or religious institutions. The UP government neglected the need to build institutions for the education of Muslim children in Urdu (Brass 1997: 38). Until 2001, there had been no Urdu Department in universities located in Meerut city. There was also a strikingly small number of Muslim students in post-graduate level educational institutions, including Meerut College and Meerut University (see Ahmad 1993: 83-100).

In the increasingly fragile state of security in the 1980s, Muslims in Meerut began to move away from the Congress Party (see Chapters 3 and 5). Symbolically, a Congress Muslim politician, Manzoor Ahamad, publicly denounced the Party for instigating the 1982 violence and was expelled from it. The Party increasingly came to be seen as anti-Muslim and, eventually, as one of the instigators of the large-scale ethnic violence in the city in May 1987 (Chapter 3). Congress was also held accountable for the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in December 1992. Many Muslims felt that they had been 'stabbed in the back'¹⁹³ by the Congress Party when they saw the shocking desecration of their religious symbol on TV broadcasts.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that extensive social mobility among Muslim artisans in Meerut works through a dense and cross-cutting assemblage of modern status

¹⁹³ Interview with Mr. Harish Pal, ex-MP on 25 April 2004.

markers and efforts to achieve higher status through appeals to Islamic orthodoxy. I have suggested that Islamisation should be viewed as the manifestation of self-conscious efforts to maintain a Muslim ethnicity vis-à-vis the Hindus, given a political history in north India which has been framed to a large extent by ethnic antagonisms between Hindus and Muslims. I have also explained in some detail the constant process of Islamisation among Qureshis using different means of identity construction located in both the public and the private spheres. The Islamisation process is linked not only to Qureshi religious life but also to economic and political changes.

As Meerut's Muslims discovered to their cost in the 1980s, however, maintaining a strong sense of Muslim identity, or worse, translating greater Muslim wealth into a politics of religious separatism was clearly not an effective means by which to secure protection against Hindu violence. To gain that security, Muslims in Meerut, as elsewhere in India in the 1990s, had to forge new political alliances — generally, in UP and Bihar, with *Bahujan* communities — in and through which their numerical weight could be translated into forms of political power at the city, state and national levels. My purpose in the next two chapters is to show precisely how these alliances were forged in Meerut — mainly by Qureshi politicians — and how this has helped once again to rework local Muslim conceptions of Islamic identity and Indian citizenship.

Chapter 5: The New Muslim Politics in Meerut, 1993–2004 — I: Citizenship and Identity

Common men supported him (Haji Akhlaq), especially poor sections of society. He was so powerful that the BJP was afraid of him. He put up a slogan of 'Peace and Trade' in the public arena. He succeeded it. After Akhlaq became MLA, the city does not have any violence. In the 1993 election Hindu votes were split, and almost all Muslims voted for him. Akhlaq corrected mismanagement of water bill, provided blankets to the poor and gave sewing machines to the widows (Muslim taxation lawyer in Meerut: interview on 22 February 2004).

5.1 Introduction

Opportunities for social change for Meerut's long-oppressed Muslims came amid moments of transition in India's broader political structure from a single-party to a multi-party system. Following the decisive defeat of the Congress Party in the General Elections of 1989 some radical shifts came about in terms of political configurations among different caste groups and communities. New political alignments among lower-caste parties also formed the critical foundation for a new direction in local Muslim politics. By the end of the 1980s it was clear that the Meerut Muslims had become far more aware than previously that their numbers were a commodity of political value. More importantly, new political leaders emerged among them who understood the meaning of India's broader political changes and who could now advance growing political aspirations among ordinary Muslims in western Uttar Pradesh. These Muslim leaders took a cue from two key social changes on the ground:

first, increasingly assertive social movements among underprivileged classes for equality and rights; and, second, new aspirations for upward mobility among low-status Muslims following the large-scale ethnic violence in Meerut of 1987 and the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992. The first of these changes helped bring about the establishment of lower-caste political parties, and this in turn provided Muslim leaders with an incentive to mobilise ideological and institutional support networks in new ways.

This chapter and Chapter Six explore what I shall call the new Muslim politics in Meerut. I examine how responses of Meerut Muslims to *Hindutva* came to be expressed, and how they were transformed into a set of concrete strategies in the domain of formal politics. In previous chapters I have examined new aspirations to upward mobility among Meerut Muslims through essentially secular markers of status, albeit hand in hand with a strong sense of Muslim ethnicity. The latter was particularly expressed in the process of Islamisation (Chapter 4). The main argument of this chapter, and the one that follows it, is that the most striking features of the new Muslim politics in Meerut have been bound up with expressions of the duality of Muslim identity, at once civic and religious. These two identities are being expressed in the political field in ways that mutually feed into each other (rather than in opposition to one another).

In this chapter I examine electoral mobilisation by two key political entrepreneurs from the Qureshi community — Haji Akhlaq Qureshi and his son, Shahid Akhlaq — in the UP Legislative Assembly election of November 1993 and in the Lok Sabha election of May 2004 respectively. Both politicians achieved remarkable victories with unprecedented support from the Muslim constituency.

By tracing their innovative and imaginative strategies for electoral mobilisation, I explore how appeals to new civic identity were constructed on the basis of traditional religious identities. In the next chapter I show how the wider political party system in India has significantly helped to 'induct' new Muslim leaders into the political arena (Chandra 2004: 96), and how the direction and concrete strategy of Muslim politics changed within this larger political system. I also explore how these strategies worked in terms of controlling Hindu-Muslim violence in Meerut city.

5.2 Political Entrepreneurship of Haji Akhlaq Qureshi

Muslim politics in Meerut in 1993 were in transition. It was a critical moment for the Meerut Muslims, who strongly felt the need for change in order to improve their livelihoods and security. After the violence of 1987 there was now an increasing desire for social reform and progress, which in turn was reflected in new investments in education and economic recovery. A multi-party political system now provided Muslims with the opportunity to strike new political alliance with various lower caste parties, while old alliances under the auspices of the Congress Party began to collapse. This was a point at which political entrepreneurs had an opportunity to create new visions of an improved (and more secure) social order.

Of course, structural changes in a polity do not always give rise to new forms of political entrepreneurship, and they certainly do not fully determine the forms in which such entrepreneurship are made flesh. Local circumstances matter,

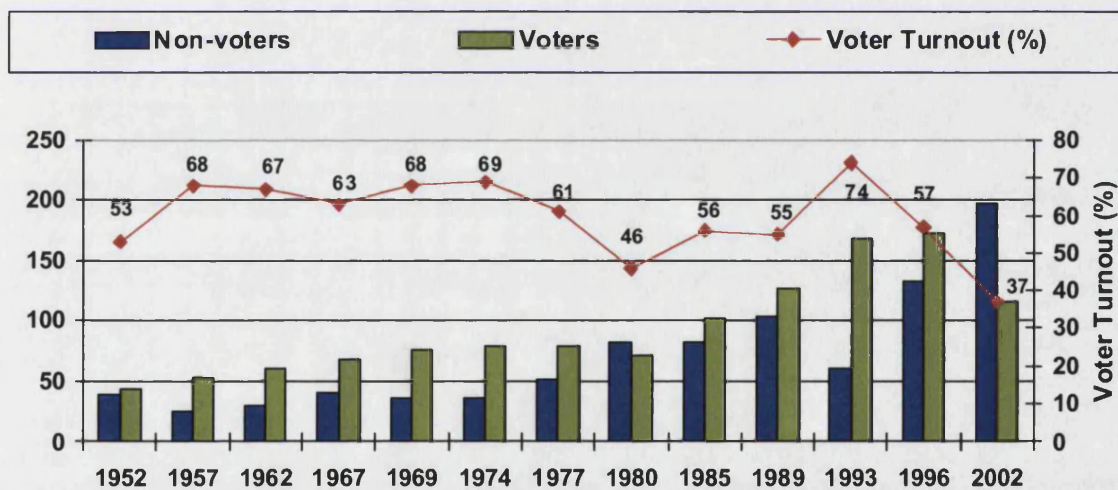
and this has clearly been the case among Meerut's Muslim communities, where it was a new political agent, Akhlaq Qureshi¹⁹⁴, who most obviously and rapidly grasped the opportunity and directed the transitional process with the support of the lower-caste parties. The political ascent of Haji Akhlaq from a virtually unknown politician to a Meerut city MLA was remarkable, and his son, Shahid, would succeed and further articulate his father's political vision and direction a decade later. The most extraordinary aspect of the mobilisations prosecuted by both men was the promotion of a modern identity of citizenship and civic participation for Muslims in India's larger civil and political societies. Key civil rights ideas were derived from the platform of the lower-caste political parties for which both politicians came to contest elections. Both Haji Akhlaq and Shahid Akhlaq used the institutional and ideological support of lower-caste (or subaltern) parties as a foundation for many of their secular and egalitarian appeals. Electoral mobilisations by father and son, however, clearly also aimed to win mass adherence based on some 'traditionally' shared symbols of Islam. Their discourses of integrative and participatory politics were juxtaposed with appeals to Muslim religious identity in the form of an 'ethnic' mobilisation. Although both political campaigns were organised on the basis of religious identifications of the Muslim electorate, they also took care to build a non-fundamentalist platform. The Akhlaqs advocated and articulated a 'religiously oriented civic project', to adapt David Laitin's phrase (Laitin 1986: 91), by creating a new political space in which it was possible to imagine the Muslim as a citizen of India.

¹⁹⁴ Akhlaq Qureshi is commonly called among people in Meerut with his title, 'haji' (see footnote 234 below). I accordingly refer to him as Haji Akhlaq, in order to distinguish him from his son.

5.2.1 The UP Assembly election in the Meerut city constituency

The 1993 Assembly election was in many ways a watershed that produced a number of 'surprises' (Duncan 1997), setting the scene for a new era without the dominant presence in UP of the Indian National Congress. The secular parties, including the BSP and SP, took a common stance against communalism and the BJP. The BSP and the SP forged a successful coalition that greatly hindered the return of the BJP to power in UP (Hansen 1999: 198). The 1993 Assembly election was marked by a significant increase in voter turnout all over UP, and Meerut was no exception to this (see Figure 5.1).¹⁹⁵

Figure 5.1 Voter turnout for the Assembly elections in Meerut, 1952-2002



Source: The data for all elections is from the official reports published by the Election Commission of India, <http://eci.nic.in/StatisticalReports/ElectionStatistics.asp> (Election Commission of India Web page).

¹⁹⁵ The voter turnout in UP rose to 57 percent in 1993 compared with 49 percent in 1991. This election also marked a major improvement in voter participation compared with other Assembly elections in the 1980s. In 1980, it was 44.9 percent and in 1985, 45.7 percent (Duncan 1997: 982).

The enthusiasm with which Muslims voted, as well as their tactical voting in order to defeat the BJP candidate, were also noted features of this election (Pai 2002). V.P. Singh, a political scientist and veteran watcher of Indian elections, also reports the outstanding enthusiasm that Muslims and lower caste groups demonstrated during the election in the Azamgarh Lok Sabha constituency in eastern UP. According to his observation, the enthusiasm of disadvantaged groups in casting their votes largely exceeded the efforts shown by the upper caste groups (Singh 1996: 127). V.K. Rai notes that the most important factor of the 1993 Assembly election in UP was the phenomenon of tactical voting by Muslims and the effect of combining Yadav and the Scheduled Castes votes with Muslim votes (Rai 1999: 2404). The rising consciousness of Muslims was another marker of change in the landscape of Muslim politics.

In this election, both the BSP and SP achieved an impressive electoral performance and jointly took government office in UP. The Congress Party, on the other hand, was pushed out of the race. The election confirmed the decisive decline of the Congress Party, whose vote in UP fell sharply from 31.8 percent in 1989 to 15.1 percent in 1993 (Yadav 1997: 196).

In the Meerut city constituency the main contestants for the Assembly election in 1993 were Laxmi Kant Vajpay for the BJP, Haji Akhlaq Qureshi for the Janata Dal, Azalal Nawaz Khan for the SP, and Krishna Kumar Sharma for the Congress Party. Vajpay was the incumbent MLA, having been elected in 1989. Azalal Nawaz Khan was the son of Shahnawaz Khan, who had been the Congress MP from the Meerut–Mawana constituency for three terms between the 1952 and 1971 General Elections. Pre-poll speculation focused on the Ansari vote, the

Ansaris being the largest Muslim community and political rivals to the Qureshi. Ayuub Ansari, a Janata Dal contestant in the Assembly election of 1991, had been denied the ticket in this election, with Akhlaq instead successfully obtaining it. Ayuub Ansari became Akhlaq's principal campaign officer in exchange for the latter's support in the 1991 Assembly election. Some observers speculated that many Ansari votes would go to Khan instead of Akhlaq, and that the Muslim vote would be divided to the advantage of the BJP, as in many past elections.¹⁹⁶

Contrary to all these speculations, there was no split in the Muslim vote. The post-poll analysis indicated that a majority of the Ansari vote went to Akhlaq. Neither the Congress Party, nor the SP (which fielded a Muslim candidate), succeeded in winning many Muslim votes, with virtually none going to the Congress.¹⁹⁷ To the surprise of many observers, the Hindu vote was divided between the BJP and the Congress Party, with the latter winning enough Hindu votes to defeat the BJP. The election results are shown in Table 5.1.

¹⁹⁶ *Amar Ujjala*, 23 November 1993 (*Amar Ujjala* (Meerut)).

¹⁹⁷ *Amar Ujjala*, 29 November 1993.

Table 5.1 Election Results for Meerut city Legislative Assembly constituency, 1993 (top five candidates)

<i>Candidates</i>	<i>Caste/ Community</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Votes Polled</i>	<i>% of Total Valid Votes</i>
Haji Akhlaq Qureshi	Muslim	Janata Dal	80,339	48.18
Laxmi Kant Vajpay Krishna Kumar Sharma	Brahmin Brahmin	BJP INC	74,842 7,522	44.88 4.51
Mohammad Ashraf	Muslim	ML	1,159	0.70
Ajmal Nawaz Khan	Muslim	SP	877	0.53

Source: Election Commission of India, State Election, 1993 to the Legislative Assembly of Uttar Pradesh, Constituency Summary, p. 202 of 216 (Election Commission of India 1993).

5.2.2 Haji Akhlaq Qureshi

Nonetheless, it was a close contest, with the Janata Dal winner receiving less than 4 percent more votes than the BJP runner-up. Harish Pal called it a remarkable election¹⁹⁸ because a lower ranking Muslim with virtually no political experience became the city MLA for the first time. Haji Akhlaq Qureshi was the first non-elite Muslim politician in Meerut's history to win the Assembly seat. The election was marked by a very high voting rate, particularly among the Muslim electorate. A polling agent¹⁹⁹ for the 1989 and 1993 elections at Saddique Nagar, a Muslim locality, stated:

¹⁹⁸ Mr. Harish Pal was the winner of the 1989 Lok Sabha election from the Janata Dal in the Meerut–Mawana constituency. Interview on 25 April 2004.

¹⁹⁹ The polling agent was a political advisor to Mr. Yusuf Qureshi.

We cannot prove this as there is no data with us. But I tell you that the Muslim votes increased tremendously in this [1989] election, and further increased in the 1993 election.²⁰⁰

According to him, voting rates among some of the city's Muslim-populated neighbourhoods must have reached 60 percent. According to a Qureshi activist of the city Samajwadi Party, on the day of the election 'even bed-ridden people went to vote for Haji Akhlaq. Many Muslim women came out to cast their votes'.²⁰¹ Doulla, a Qureshi workers' leader in the Meerut government slaughterhouse, recalled that:

It was a sea change. There was more awareness. Media expanded its coverage on the elections, and consciousness among people increased.²⁰²

Haji Akhlaq, the victorious Qureshi candidate from the Janata Dal, first became a Municipal Councillor in 1989. Akhlaq had been a member of the city Congress Party since 1986 and came to join the newly-established Janata Dal in 1989. He thus had very little political experience prior to the 1993 election. At the time of the 1989 General Elections the Janata Dal was clearly seen among Meerut Muslims as a substitute for the Congress Party. The Janata Dal aimed to represent the classes discriminated-against by reserving for OBCs — including Muslims 27 percent of administrative posts, including in the prestigious Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the Indian Police Service (IPS), as well as other government jobs and some educational places. By widening reservation to the

²⁰⁰ Interview on 18 March 2004.

²⁰¹ Interview on 23 April 2004.

²⁰² Interview on 14 May 2004.

long-neglected OBCs, the National Front government of V.P. Singh made use of parts of the Mandal Report to transform this hitherto moribund bureaucratic category into 'a vibrant and subjectively experienced political community' (Chandra 2004: 290). Haji Akhlaq structured and framed his mobilisation processes according to this new constituency, which joined the OBC and the Scheduled Caste communities to create a large section of Backward Classes.

Coming from a working-class family,²⁰³ Haji Akhlaq had little formal education. He was known as a shrewd businessman, itself a stereotypical image of the Qureshi community. At the time of his candidacy in 1993 his main occupation was selling buffalo meat to shopkeepers in Delhi and Meerut. He also ran a factory established by his brother which manufactured soap from animal fat. The factory was quite profitable and Akhlaq's financial condition began improving around 1992.²⁰⁴ He had an extensive criminal record including a murder case associated with business rivalry. Many respondents remembered more than a few 'shoot-outs' in public places between Akhlaq and his business rivals, with Akhlaq typically accompanied by his son Shahid and other family members. His plebeian background, basic literacy and few political credentials represented a substantial break from earlier Muslim leadership. Akhlaq's popularity among the Muslim masses in Meerut was largely drawn from his plebeian background and familiarity with the structures of their everyday life. In this sense, Akhlaq's campaign 'captured' and made 'explicit' the popular voices that he had experienced as a lay Muslim (Chatterjee 1998 (1989): 209).

²⁰³ Akhlaq's father sold meat in a small shop near *Ghanta Ghar* (Clock Tower) in the Old Town.

²⁰⁴ A friend of Akhlaq's from the Qureshi community, interview on 4 April 2004.

Haji Akhlaq and other low-status Muslim leaders explicitly sought to build political alliances with the Chamars in the last quarter of the 1980s. These ambitious leaders recognized the implications of the Chamars forming their own political party, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which started its networking activity in 1986 in Meerut. Akhlaq in particular conceived that wider opportunities for political power would open up if political alliances between low-status Muslims and Chamars could be realized. United as a political force, Muslims and Chamars would form well over 60 percent of the electorate of Meerut city Assembly constituency.

As early as 1987, at the height of a vicious period of communal violence, Akhlaq and other low-status Muslim leaders organised Peace Committee meetings and sought to talk with representatives from the Chamar community who were active in founding the BSP in Meerut. The meetings of Muslims and Chamars held during that year were symbolic of the decisive estrangement and departure of both communities from the Congress Party. Within an emerging context of assertive lower-caste politics, these meetings were intended to mould a new political solidarity among the underprivileged classes vis-à-vis the upper castes.²⁰⁵ The meetings also moved towards discussions of a peace settlement to end the Hindu-Muslim violence that was engulfing the city at the time. They were intended to facilitate inter-ethnic class solidarities against the upper castes, some of whom had hired Chamars and Valmikis as a fighting force against Muslims on occasions of communal violence in Meerut. A Corporator from the

²⁰⁵ Interview with a Valmiki Corporator of the Municipal Corporation on 27 February 2004 in Meerut. The Corporator had been involved in the organisation of the political alliance between the BSP supporters and the low-status Muslim leaders.

Chamar community, who was one of the organisers of the BSP in 1987, mentioned to me:

During the [1987] riots Muslims and the Scheduled Caste leaders met almost everyday for harnessing the feeling of brotherhood....Lower categories of society are effective in riots. But now, the meetings between the Scheduled Castes and Muslims paved a way of understanding. They are now brothers to each other. There have been no riots taking place after these meetings.²⁰⁶

Two years later, at the Lok Sabha election of 1989, the Scheduled Castes in Meerut city voted for the Janata Dal *en bloc*. While the BSP was still in its formation stage in the city at this point, it is significant that the Scheduled Caste constituency identified itself with the newly formed lower-caste party, the Janata Dal, led by V.P. Singh. The Janata Dal mainly represented the interests of the middle and lower-middle agrarian castes. The Party's candidate, Harish Pal, belonged to one of the most numerically important agrarian castes in Meerut District, the Gujjar community. Muslims also made a decisive move in shifting their allegiance from the Congress to the Janata Dal. Pal had a landslide victory against Mohsina Kidwai of the Congress Party, obtaining 58.47 percent of the total vote compared to 35.66 percent for Kidwai. Apart from the 1989 Lok Sabha election, the election of the Municipal Council in January 1989 was another landmark in terms of the beginnings of a new Muslim politics in Meerut. The Municipal election was the first held after more than a decade. Many of the new non-elite Muslim (Qureshi) politicians began their political

²⁰⁶ A Chamar Corporator of the Municipal Corporation and the main organiser of the BSP in Meerut, interview on 31 January 2004.

careers with this election.²⁰⁷ They were replacing the old elite Congress leadership on the ground. The election of a large number of Muslim Councillors may be seen as an indication of the new Muslim political identity that was emerging after the 1987 violence (see Table 5. 2).

Table 5.2 Percentage of elected Muslim Corporators in Meerut Municipal government, 1974-2000

	1974	1989	1995	2000
Total number of Corporators	36	30	71	71
Muslim Corporators	8	19	21	21
% of Muslim Corporators	22	63	30	30

Note: In 1994 Meerut Nagar Nigam (Municipal Corporation) was introduced as the population of the municipality was becoming over 1 million. Accordingly the number of seats of Corporators was increased from 30 to 71. The elected Muslim Corporators were coincidentally the same number, 21, at both the 1995 and the 2000 elections.

Sources: For 1974, the figures are from Sadhana Chaturvedi, 'Religious Minorities and Problem of Human Rights: A case study of Muslims in Meerut', PhD. thesis (Chaudhuri Charan Singh Meerut University, Meerut: 1994) (Chaturvedi 1994). For 1989 onwards, the figures are from the record in the Municipal Corporation Office, Meerut (Government of Uttar Pradesh 2000).

Having been elected as a Councillor, Akhlaq joined the Janata Dal in 1989. While helping the Janata Dal's formation process, Akhlaq expanded his networks to the Other Backward Caste and Scheduled Caste constituencies that formed the major support bases for the Janata Dal in 1989. During his time with the Party, Akhlaq built up substantial personal connections with its leading politicians in the city, including Harish Pal, the winner of the 1989 Lok Sabha

²⁰⁷ Yusuf Qureshi was not included in the list of Councillors in 1989. He became the president of the District Congress Committee in 1990 and remained in this position until 2003.

election in Meerut, and Arun Jain, who became the Mayor of Meerut in the 1989 Municipal election.

The political alliance between Muslims and the Scheduled Castes became stronger in the 1990s, particularly after the BJP came to power in UP following the General Elections in May 1991, and more so after the destruction of the Babri Masjid on 6 December 1992. On the other hand, the Janata Dal-led National Front government in the centre declared the adoption of the Mandal Commission Report in 1990. The substantial increase in reservation quotas for the Other Backward Classes invited increasingly intense caste violence against the Backward communities in UP (Pai 2002).

In the 1993 Assembly election, Akhlaq was able to make use of already well-established activist networks among the Chamars in every part of the district and beyond, and these formed the primary electoral resource for his electoral campaign. His ultimate victory was based largely on the support of the Chamar community, the core of the BSP, which comprised 11 percent of the city's population. An example of such broader inter-ethnic networking was observed in an election rally held in the dense Muslim area of Gola Kuwan, at which point Haji Mastan, national president of *Bharatiya-Dalit Minorities Security Mahasangh*, addressed the audience:

If Dalits and Muslims are united, both can change the government and we will be able to rule soon both the state and the central government.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁸ *Amar Ujjala*, 29 November 1993.

Mastan's words were symbolic in that they asserted the overarching identity of the 'Dalits' (the Scheduled Castes). The term 'Dalit' is literally defined to include 'the oppressed, the weak or marginalised' beyond the boundaries of caste, community or gender (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998: 3-4). Rajiv Kothari observes that the 1993 Assembly election saw the emergence of a new Dalit movement in India. Kothari remarks: 'It is based on the solidarity of the poor and discriminated classes of the people, long held back and frustrated, its leadership divided and bought over, distanced from the masses and positions' (Kothari 1996: 149). The Dalits embraced a political platform that embodied civil rights, civic identity and political representation — concepts which would now guide the city's new Muslim politics.

5.2.3 Religious institutions

Akhlaq also chose religious institutions in Meerut as a major location for political networking during his 1993 electoral campaign. Interestingly, Akhlaq had been imprisoned for a gunfight in 1986. During the time he spent in prison he began to support his fellow prisoners and after his release he continued to aid the poor and widows in need with money, food and sewing machines.²⁰⁹ These charitable activities were clearly intended to meet Islamic value standards so as to qualify him as a man of religious status. Akhlaq also used the mosques, the most popular religious establishments in the city. He organised large meetings with religious leaders of the city including *Maulanas*, *Malvis* (scholars of

²⁰⁹ Interview with a friend of Akhlaq's from the Qureshi community, on 4 April 2004.

Islamic teaching) and *Shahar Kaji* (religious judges), particularly inviting the weaker sections of the Muslim population, the poor and the illiterate, to address political issues with him. These activities were critical in establishing and expanding a range of informal networks among lay Muslims. They were even more critical in legitimising his social status in accordance with the Islamic value code.

In the Meerut Muslim world, therefore, religion and politics went hand in hand. It is important to explore the role of religion in politics in Meerut, and I do so by first looking at the case of the Mumbai Muslim world described by Thomas Blom Hansen (Hansen 2001: 160-185). Hansen's account of the relationship between religion and politics in Mumbai makes an interesting contrast to that prevailing in Meerut. The following section sheds light on the extent of the convergence between religion and politics in Meerut in comparison to what Hansen saw in Mumbai Muslim society.

5.2.4 Religion and politics in Mumbai

Thomas Blom Hansen suggests that Muslims in Mumbai were caught between two different political positions after the 1993 riots in that city. Muslims came to have an introverted and sometimes 'conservative' orientation towards internal purification by means of religious activities, on the one hand, while deploying an outwardly oriented political pragmatism which used a 'plebeian' style of political representation, on the other. Hansen observes that adherents of both positions tried to maintain a distinction between 'politics and culture'.

That is, Mumbai Muslims who wished to make purification efforts separated themselves from the wider society and particularly from 'politics', which was now dominated by those from the lower classes. Such Muslims, according to Hansen, sought their own legitimacy through a visible separation from politics. On the other hand, 'plebeian politics' was essentially derived from the political aspirations of local '*dadas*' and *goondas* arising from Mumbai's criminal world. These local heroes, and strong men from lower ranked Muslim groups, tended to belong to the Samajwadi Party, which represented a wider plebeian identity for Mumbai Muslims. The Party denied the need for the backing of religious authorities or leading community figures (Hansen 2001: 182). The supposedly apolitical religious population in Hansen's Muslim world was mainly composed of the well-educated Muslim middle-class, or those who despised the domination of local politics by men with criminal records and a plebeian background. These religious leaders regarded politics as the work of the low classes or low castes, and by separating themselves from it they refused to sanction it.

Hansen notes, however, that a sharp separation between politics and culture is 'impossible', as both positions somehow maintain connections with or reliance upon one another. Some prominent religious leaders or well-educated individuals of religious organisations were, for example, backed by the Samajwadi Party or affiliated with the Muslim League (ibid.). Hansen maintains that '...any articulation of a sense of community inevitably was shot through by political identifications'(ibid. 175). While Hansen is aware of 'ambiguities' around the distinction between culture and politics, his emphasis is still placed on the projection of a dichotomy between politics and culture in Muslim society

in Mumbai. This dichotomy also maps onto an observed chasm between a Muslim middle class engaged in the purification project (culture) and rising political entrepreneurs from the lower classes (politics). According to Hansen, the presence in local politics of local *dadas* and *goondas* was not registered in the mainstream network of the Mumbai Muslim community. Instead they proliferated through informal networks of kinship, business connections and patronage. Hansen maintains that:

The new prominence of *dadas* and *Ajlaf* Muslim entrepreneurs in local politics has been articulated only to a limited extent within the network of institutions, trusts, and associations that make up the cultural establishment of the Muslim community. Instead, most of these men have established themselves and their credibility through extended kinship structures, *biraderis* [*biradaris*], and other informal relations of trust, trade, and patronage. In other words, they have emerged from social environments whose ethos of action, violence and male honour are strikingly similar to those that form the basis today of Shiv Sena's hold on popular neighbourhoods in other parts of the city (ibid. 181).

5.2.5 Coexistence of religion and politics in Meerut

The two leading Qureshi politicians in Meerut clearly shared the same type of 'plebeian' background as key political leaders in Mumbai. They came from the labouring class and had criminal records. But while there was a chasm between middle-class Muslims and those in the lower classes in Meerut, the division did not translate into a split between religion and politics as it did in Mumbai. In contrast to the Mumbai case, both Haji Akhlaq and Shahid Akhlaq were well accepted by the mainstream religious establishment in Meerut, including those who formed the highest religious authority, such as the *Maulanas*, *Malvis* and

Shahar Kaji. These religious leaders believed in the high religiosity of both politicians and considered them ‘men of religion’ — a synonym for higher status under an Islamic religious code that also legitimised their political power. The religious authorities not only believed in the religiosity of the Qureshi politicians but also supported their electoral campaigns.

Hansen describes the *Tablighi Jama’at* in Mumbai as one of the most important religious institutions in the city, one representing an inward-looking and radically anti-political position that pursued purification of the community’s inner life and unification of the different sects and interpretations of Islam (ibid. 172). Hansen also describes the organisation as the hub of ‘the educated Muslim middle class’ (ibid. 176). The *Tablighi Jama’at* in Meerut, on the other hand, contrasts strongly with its counterpart in Mumbai. It was headquartered in one of the mosques in Jali Kothi, the locality of Qureshi scrap market owners. The majority of the members of the *Tablighi Jama’at* were Qureshis and Ansaris, and its advisory committee included Haji Raes Qureshi, the owner of the largest scrap market in Meerut and a Corporator of the Municipal Corporation. Haji Raes was a highly respected figure in both the political and religious worlds and his reputation went beyond the religious divide — notwithstanding that he came from the *Palledars* (courier) group, which is considered even lower than *Kassai* (butcher) Qureshis. The *Tablighi* was functioning to unite disparate Muslim groups under both one roof and one Islamic tenet (Chapter 4), and as a resource that was being actively used by Qureshi politicians for political purposes. The *Tablighi*, therefore, provided Haji Akhlaq with an ideal space for his electoral

campaign. He and his wife²¹⁰ actively used this increasingly popular religious movement (see Appendix, no. 1–7). The *Tablighi* provided the Akhlaqs with a large public arena of religious crowds drawn from the dense networks of the faithful across sects, ranks and occupations.

I suggest, therefore, that the distinction between politics and religion that Hansen observed in Mumbai did not exist in quite the same form in Meerut. Religion and religious identity among Meerut Muslims formed an intrinsic part of the city's new Muslim politics. Both Haji Akhlaq and Shahid Akhlaq Qureshi began their political careers by obtaining higher status under Islamic value codes and established themselves in the domains of both politics and religion ('culture' in Hansen's term) to a much greater degree than their counterparts in Mumbai. Muslim political leaders who dominated local politics in contemporary Meerut, for that matter, all projected themselves as devoted Muslims. The majority possessed the title of '*Haji*', the mark of high religiosity and status attached to those who had made a pilgrimage to Mecca. They knew that high individual religiosity attached to political power and needed to be recognised and legitimised by religious leaders in the city.

The mobilising forms of the two Qureshi politicians saliently revealed the reciprocity between politics and religion within which these politicians attempted to effect a new sense of active Muslim citizenship in India without compromising their religious identity. In order to achieve a new modern civic

²¹⁰ Mrs. Akhlaq reportedly made speeches to Muslim women at gatherings in their homes and appealed for their support for her husband in the coming election. Interview with a Muslim academic, Professor Shahabbudin Ansari, on 14 January 2004.

identity, in other words, traditional symbols and values were fully utilised as an essential part of the production of a new sense of self (see Appendix no. 8–10). The convergence of politics and religion was most distinctively seen in the physical appearance of Shahid Akhlaq, who projected himself as a pious Muslim during his electoral campaign in 2004 and who visibly juxtaposed his figure with the plane of the BSP's secular and egalitarian appeals.

Jonathan Spencer's reading of Hansen's Muslim world in Mumbai (Spencer 2007) brings us one step further forward. Spencer aptly calls the distinctively plebeian style of Muslim politics in Mumbai a 'pluralising strategy'. Muslim politics, based on the 'well-known criminal-political hybrid in urban India', seeks to network with the outside world in a new style of urban politics. Spencer, on the other hand, regards the work of purification represented by the *Tablighi* as 'counter-pluralism'. He takes a cautious view of Hansen's separation of politics and the religious purification project among Mumbai Muslims. He sees the relationship between politics and religion not as separated but rather as intricately connected. Spencer claims that the new style of Muslim politics in Mumbai confounds the distinction between politics and religion as much as the genuinely 'hybrid' nature of new Muslim politics breaks barriers among different communities in the Muslim world (ibid. 161-162). Spencer suggests that no cultural group can live in an isolated, culturally 'sealed bubble' but must rather live in complex interactions with the outside world and perhaps with also the politics of the wider society.

Key religious establishments in Meerut endorsed the Muslims' pluralising strategies by authorising and legitimising the new spaces and identities that

were created and advocated by the two Qureshi politicians. These establishments helped to create a new notion of the Muslim community by providing a public articulation of Muslim identity on one hand, while on the other hand supporting the plebeian desire for upward mobility through investment in education and economic advancement.

5.2.6 Religiosity and secular organisations

It is important to note that Akhlaq's 'mobilising structure' (McAdam et al.: 1997 (1996): 141-151) was organised within the existing religious institutions of Islam at the informal level and that its primary component was an appeal to Muslim religious crowds. It is also important to note that Akhlaq made very little effort to network with secular organisations that included both Muslim and Hindu members. Business associations, Urdu poetry reading groups or informal Peace Committees, for example, were not part of his efforts to create building blocks for electoral campaign. One notable feature of Qureshi politics was that the Qureshi leaders consciously stayed away from 'pseudo-secular' institutions in civil society which might produce an image of an artificial Hindu-Muslim cordiality.²¹¹ The civic stance of Qureshi politics, as we see below, was mainly

²¹¹ A BJP Municipal Corporator criticised Shahid Akhlaq for never paying obeisance at Hindu temples on the occasion of the *Nauchandi Mela* in Meerut. The *Mela* is a large annual festival that lasts for a month and is considered a symbol of communal harmony. Public figures including politicians paid tributes to both Hindu temples and *Dargah* of Bala Mian, a Muslim saint, irrespective of their religious background. This constituted an important public performance during the *Mela*. The BJP Corporator also mentioned that Shahid, when he was Mayor, left his seat when India's national anthem, *Vande Mataram*, was sung before the Municipal Corporation session, interview with a BJP Corporator, 26 April 2004.

derived from an alliance with secular institutions in the formal political setting, notably via the BSP and SP. At the informal level Qureshi politics did not cross ethnic boundaries and remained within the domain of the Muslim world.

It may be useful here to further examine Ashtosh Varshney's (2002) 'civic engagement' arguments in order to understand the meaning of this particular aspect of Qureshi politics. The kinds of 'civic engagement' and associational life which Varshney claims can forge peace between Hindus and Muslims are found in precisely those kinds of secular organisations that the Akhlaqs avoided. Varshney's stress on the importance of an associational life that encourages interaction between Hindus and Muslim has strikingly little reference to political life in urban India. Steven Wilkinson rightly points out, in this regard, the methodological difficulty of singling out the effects of inter-ethnic contacts from the influence of all the other socio-economic and political factors that are likely to predispose a town to peace or violence. Wilkinson also argues that associational life may be more the result than the cause of communal peace, given that many societies with rich traditions of inter-ethnic associational life have experienced very high levels of ethnic violence (Wilkinson 2004: 53-56).

Paul Brass also questions the explanatory power of cultural contact and associational life to control the level of ethnic violence in a town. Brass shows how communal political mobilisations can be powerful enough to override all inter-communal relations, associations and common actions to maintain or restore peace when the administration and police fail to take action (see Brass 2003: 27). In his more recent work, Brass refutes the idea of associational life in controlling ethnic violence in reference to the 1982 violence in Meerut. He

refers to the strike of the leading commercial and professional organisations of Meerut city, the Traders' Association and the Bar Association, both dominated by Hindus, in protest against the decision of the District Magistrate to lock up the disputed site between the Hindu and Muslim protagonists in Shah Ghasa in the Old Town (Chapter 3). The members of these associations considered the sealing of the place illegal. This was during the explosive moment before full-scale rioting engulfed the Old Town in September 1982. According to Brass, the members of these organisations did not significantly help to reverse the ongoing ethnic polarisation. Those organisations' strikes were instead mostly motivated by 'Hindu' passions of Hindu attorneys, and their interventions were 'unnecessary, provocative, and communal entirely on the side of the Hindu protagonists in the disputes' (Brass 2007 (2004): 100).

In the light of the nature of Qureshi politics in Meerut, questioning the direct relevance of the town's associational life to communal peace does not appear to make much sense. It might be more relevant to inquire about the location of those associations in the town's political geography — what kind of political roles are assigned by political actors to these associations? How are they linked to the political structure of a town and the relationship of those associations to real politics? In other words, social capital theory must be engaged in the dialogue of real politics and the power structure, which ultimately decide the levels of communal violence of a town. In the style of politics developed among low-status Muslims in Meerut, those 'pseudo-secular' organisations that were detached from the city's political life and the state structure were dismissed altogether. In the context of a developing country where vast resources are controlled by the state, those struggling to get ahead would not expect their life

chances to be boosted by relying on these non-state institutions (Kohli 1990: 266). Rather, the obvious path to political power was to become a part of the state by maximising their cultural resources and obtaining better positions within the state structure for negotiating Muslim interests, including the maintenance of peace and security.

5.3 Electoral Mobilisation by Haji Akhlaq

Haji Akhlaq used as his main political rhetoric the image of himself as a 'saviour of Muslims' who would protect them from the BJP and the other Hindu Right forces, including in his view the PAC and the police. Thus, the growing threat from the BJP, as well as leading issues of security and survival facing the Meerut Muslims, were the major framing factors of his campaign. The image of a saviour reflected the popular demand arising from the Muslim masses for a particular type of political leadership. In my interviews it appeared to be a widely accepted view among Meerut Muslims:

Muslims looked for a *goonda* with money and muscle power, with which he could protect us from the BJP.²¹²

Muslims are the minority and always scared of atrocities by Hindus. Haji Akhlaq came as a protector of Muslims from Hindus. He was the only person for Muslims at that time. Goal was to defeat the BJP.²¹³

²¹² A comment by a Muslim (Ansari) secretary to an incumbent Congress MP, Mr. Avtar Singh Bhadana at the time of interview on 8 February 2004.

²¹³ Interview on 11 January 2004.

After the communal violence of 1987, Muslims were in search of a strong man physically, mentally and economically. Haji Akhlaq was a popular choice when elected. ...He was a symbol of courage.²¹⁴

Entire Muslims had fear after the destruction of the Babri [Masjid] and the riots [in 1987]. Akhlaq had been known to everyone in the city because of the murder cases. Muslims believed that he was the only person who could save them. He was a wrestler that was the first image...strong man who can fear Hindus and can fight for Muslims.²¹⁵

Muscle men and *goondas* were particularly needed to protect the election booths. According to a political advisor to the late Manzoor Ahamad:

In order to defeat the BJP, we vote for a winning candidate who is to win over the BJP candidate. In order to defeat the BJP, money and muscle power are necessary. The BJP has well-organised *goondas*. They are trained by the RSS. They disturb election meetings, capturing booths, threatening voters. They use weapons and will crash Muslims. ...One needs muscle power to protect his voters. It is the second qualification of the Indian politician.²¹⁶

Akhlaq's political rhetoric in projecting himself as a saviour of Muslims was closely connected with Muslim collective memory of the 1987 violence. Akhlaq also consciously used the BJP card in relation to violence. He opened his election campaign, for example, with the statement:

²¹⁴ A Muslim owner of an English-medium school. Interview on 28 January 2004.

²¹⁵ Interview on 4 April 2004.

²¹⁶ Interview on 1 February 2004.

I have got a ticket to contest from peoples' blessings and love. I need your support to win this time — to make people free from fear which was created by the BJP.²¹⁷

Meerut people know who started the riots. Now these Meerut people want secular leadership.²¹⁸

5.3.1 'Saviour of Muslims'

Haji Akhlaq apparently succeeded in achieving these 'distinctive role qualifications' as a political leader (Bailey 1970: 26). His background helped him to attain this position. Most importantly, the 'image' that was created at his public performance enormously contributed to Akhlaq's political rhetoric. Another contributing factor to the image of a saviour was derived from the specific strategies or political rhetoric he used in order to convince Muslims 'that he could face and confront the Hindu communal forces.'²¹⁹

Akhlaq's father was known as a petty criminal. After spending his youth without a stable job, Akhlaq entered the meat business aged about 32. He trained as a professional wrestler in his youth. After his imprisonment in 1986 his public appearances, often involving violence and gunfights, were increasingly geared towards his political ambitions. From this period of his life onwards Akhlaq appeared to have consciously created an image of himself as a protector of Muslims. He increasingly used his performance in the public arena, showing his

²¹⁷ *Amar Ujjala*, 31 October 1993.

²¹⁸ *Amar Ujjala*, 1 November 1993.

²¹⁹ Interview on 14 January 2004.

muscle (gun), money and manpower. Akhlaq's famous public performance in May 1991, when booth capturing by the BJP workers took place on the day of the election, was clearly a precursor for the election campaign in 1993. As a Muslim property dealer recalled:

Akhlaq took out a chair, stood on it with a rifle in his hand, screaming 'Kill me. If you want to kill Muslims, kill me first, if you can'. It was at the intersection of Budhana Gate, a famous Hindu area. He was challenging Hindus, and he stood for Muslims.²²⁰

Akhlaq also used the occupational image of the Qureshi butcher community to his advantage. In India every occupation invokes a particular image framed by certain behavioural patterns, work ethic and sense of morality (Reiniche 1996). The image of the butcher is very much stereotyped. It was interesting to discover that a consistent image of this occupation was held by both Hindu and Muslim respondents of all walks of life. The consistent image of the Qureshis can be summarised as follows: They are aggressive and cold-hearted because they can kill big animals; they are clever and shrewd because they are perfect businessmen; they are muscle men, they have a tendency to fight, money-centred, using abusive language, hard working but uncultured and backward.

In contrast, the image of the Ansaris, for example, is that they are religious, industrious and better educated. The Qureshis and Ansaris are, therefore, supposed to have different work ethics deriving from their occupational

²²⁰ Interview on 26 November 2003.

backgrounds. The Ansaris in general do not provoke an image of a *goonda* with muscle power, whereas the Qureshis do.

The image of a wrestler was also associated with Akhlaq. On the gate leading to the large house of Haji Akhlaq in Gudari Bazaar in the Old Town near Kotwali, there is a plate with his name on it which says 'Akhlaq *Palhan* [Wrestler]'. Apart from being trained as a professional wrestler, this image was derived from his physical appearance. Akhlaq was then an imposing man, six feet tall and with a large body and face. People imagined that killing a big animal required these kinds of physical features, connecting the image of the Qureshis with that of muscle men. The Qureshi in general, however, were also known as a trading community consisting of shrewd money-makers. In people's imaginations the two images of the Qureshi as animal killers and money-makers seemed to coexist without contradiction. Many respondents indicated that the sole aim of Qureshi politicians was to make money.²²¹ Even politics was a means to achieve this aim. Haji Akhlaq, however, successfully transformed his 'ascribed' characteristics from his hereditary occupation and his 'achieved' roles attained through his life history into a means for political ascendancy.

It was also a widely accepted view that Akhlaq was a good orator. His words 'came to your thoughts and imagination'.²²² With his communication skill, Akhlaq restated and articulated Muslims' fears and grievances in a language that

²²¹ Frederick Bailey points out that 'in traditional Indian reckoning there was nothing heroic or admirable in the act of making money; it was a combination of undeserved luck and double-dealing' (Bailey 1998: 94).

²²² The quotes from Akhlaq's speech cited in this section come from my interview with Professor Shahabbudin Ansari. Interview on 14 January 2004.

could be understood by Muslim masses which were largely composed of low-income and illiterate groups. Muslim sentiments were magnified through Akhlaq's speeches and slogans. His speeches in Urdu:

I am powerful. No communal element would dare to face me.

I put the glass of milk here on the ground. Nobody would put his feet over it because I put it there.

You, Muslims, said that Ayub Ansari is a gentleman. He will do nothing. You again said that Akhlaq is a *goonda*. Then who do you want?

5.3.2 Appeals to civic identity

The most dramatic aspect of Akhlaq's campaign was his appeal to a civic identity. It came through his famous slogan: 'Neither hate nor riot, we shall promote love and trade'.²²³ It appeared strikingly secular and universal, particularly against the background of ongoing ethnic polarisation in the city. Although Akhlaq used anti-BJP rhetoric which drew on the collective memory of violence, his campaign was not staged exclusively for the Muslim electorate. During his election campaign he visited both Hindu and Muslim neighbourhoods in the city and appealed to elements within the Hindu electorate as well (see Appendix no. 11). Akhlaq was overtly against the BJP, but not against the city's Hindu community:

²²³ The same interview on 14 January 2004.

In 1989, the BJP could win only talking about 'Ram'. But now the BJP cannot make fools of the people of the city. The Hindu secular-minded people will also caste their votes for me.²²⁴

The slogan was at the same time a brilliant summation of popular sentiment among the Muslim electorate. It reflected the struggle of the Meerut Muslims to recover from the huge economic set-back caused by the 1987 violence, beyond which lay their vision to be integrated into the mainstream of Indian society (Chapter 4). The central idea of electoral mobilisation behind this slogan was an ideology or a set of beliefs that Muslims should open up and participate as citizens of India rather than as a separate and isolated ethnic minority.

Most of Akhlaq's appeals to the Muslim masses were straightforwardly civic, even secular (see Appendix no. 12 and 13). He used Islamic symbols for his major constituency, the Muslim religious crowds, but his appeals were far from communal since he stayed away from the repertoires of the so-called 'minority issues'²²⁵ that had very little to do with the everyday life of lay Muslims (Shakir 1980) (see Appendix no. 14 and 15). More importantly, his appeals were contextualised within the larger social movements of the lower-caste parties, particularly the Janata Dal, for which he was contesting the election. Akhlaq spoke in Urdu when he addressed the Muslim electorate because Urdu was an important cultural symbol among Muslims. Yet no specific appeal was made in terms of retaining Urdu as a symbol of separate Muslim identity. It was this subtlety of 'Muslimness' in Akhlaq's campaign which rather saliently pointed to

²²⁴ *Amar Ujjala* 1 November 1993.

²²⁵ These included issues related to Muslim Personal Law.

a commitment to and an assertion of the 'civic' order that transcended the communal divide (see Appendix no. 16 and 17).

5.4 The Local Political Scene from 1994 to 2004

After the Assembly election in 1993, Muslim participation in elections became more enthusiastic. Every election at the municipal, state and national levels drew a high voting rate in Muslim localities, particularly those with a concentration of low-status Muslims. Muslim candidates in these elections were predominantly from the lower ranks, and particularly from the Qureshi community.²²⁶ Low-status Muslims, primarily Qureshis, had now established themselves as a new political force in city politics. On the other hand, there were very few higher-rank Muslims in the formal political scene of the city. Many high-status Muslims believed that the elections were for those in the lower ranks who wished to improve their status by voting. They saw no need to come out to the election booth and cast a vote. The voting rate among high status Muslims was declining as steadily, as was that of upper caste Hindus.²²⁷ The absence of a Muslim elite in Meerut city politics became increasingly salient after the 1990s. In some interviews, higher-status Muslims told of not being able to pay the deposit required to stand as a candidate.²²⁸

²²⁶ The increase in the participation of Muslims in the democratic process was a general trend at the all-India level (see Alam 1999: 757).

²²⁷ *Amar Ujjala*, 11 May 2004.

²²⁸ Yaqoob Qureshi, the-then UP Minister under the SP government, publicly denounced Mayawati, the leader of the BSP, for requesting money from prospective candidates in exchange for tickets to contest elections, *Amar Ujjala*, 3 March 2004.

The remarkable political ascendancy of the Qureshis did not necessarily mean, however, that other political forces in Meerut city were reduced to the sidelines. The BJP had been a strong contender for power in the city since 1989, supported by large numbers of trading castes and Punjabis. In the General Elections of 1996, both Lok Sabha and Assembly seats were returned to the BJP. Laxmi Kant Vajpay of the BJP achieved a narrow victory over Haji Akhlaq contesting for the Samajwadi Party.²²⁹ In the General Elections of 1998, the BJP maintained its position, and in 1999 a Gujjar candidate from the Congress Party won by a small margin from the runner-up, a BJP candidate (Tables 5.3 and 5.4).

²²⁹ The defeat was largely derived from the loss of the Scheduled Castes votes as the Samajwadi Party had split from its coalition partner, the BSP, prior to the election.

Table 5.3 Election results for Meerut city Legislative Assembly constituency, 1989 to 2002

Year	Winning Political Party	Winner	% of Total Valid Votes	Second Runner	Name of Second Runner	% of Total Valid Votes	Third Runner	Name of Third Runner	% of Total Valid Votes
1989	BJP	Laxmi Kant Vajpay	37.32	JD	Ayuub Ansari	25.54	IND	Basir Ahmad	16.08
1993	JD	Haji Akhlaq Qureshi	48.18	BJP	Laxmi Kant Vajpay	44.88	INC	Krishna Kumar Sharma	4.51
1996	BJP	Laxmi Kant Vajpay	49.02	SP	Haji Akhlaq Qureshi	41.94	BSP	Yunus Qureshi	5.16
2002	BJP	Laxmi Kant Vajpay	42.02	SP	Dilshad Ahmed Munna	21.84	INC	Yusuf Qureshi	20.23

Source: Election Commission of India, <http://eci.nic.in/StatisticalReports/ElectionStatistics.asp>

Table 5.4 Election results for Meerut–Mawana Lok Sabha constituency, 1989-2004

Year	Winning Political Party	Winner	% of Total Valid Votes	Second Runner	Name of Second Runner	% of Total Valid Votes	Third Runner	Name of Third Runner	% of Total Valid Votes
1989	JD	Harish Pal	58.47	INC	Mohsina Kidwai	35.66	BJP	Sangh Piryam Gautam	2.45
1991	Election counter-manded	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1996	BJP	Amar Pal Singh	48.66	JD	Mohamad Afzal	22.33	BSP	Haji Noor Ilahi	16.36
1998	BJP	Amar Pal Singh	42.22	SP	Jagveer Singh	35.77	BSP	Arun Kumar Jain	15.03
1999	INC	Avtar Singh Bhadana	34.74	BJP	Amar Pal Singh	31.4	BSP	Haji Yaqoob Qureshi	30.53
2004	BSP	Mohammad Shahid Akhlaq	36.2	RLD	Malook Nagar	26.26	JD(U)	K.C. Tyagi	23.97

Source: Election Commission of India, <http://eci.nic.in/StatisticalReports/ElectionStatistics.asp>

5.5 The Lok Sabha Election in May 2004

A decade later, in the Lok Sabha election in 2004, Shahid Akhlaq, Haji Akhlaq's son, contested for the BSP and again achieved a remarkable victory, with unprecedented support from the Muslim constituency. Shahid Akhlaq largely followed the example of his father's principal ideologies and mobilisation resources in his electoral campaign. His principal resource was a political coalition with the Scheduled Castes, particularly the Chamars.

The General Elections of 2004 again saw a continuing upsurge in rates of participation among socially marginalised groups. The election also marked the significant advancement of OBC politics led by the SP and the BSP (Kumar and Palshikar 2004).²³⁰ The BJP, on the other hand, faced a dramatic defeat at the polls in 2004. The BJP had been the core party of the governing coalition in Delhi since 1998. Upon its defeat in 2004, a new coalition, the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), under the Prime Ministership of Dr. Manmohan Singh of the Indian National Congress, the major partner, took over in New Delhi.

In the Meerut–Mawana Lok Sabha constituency in 2004 the major contestants were all Hindus except for Shahid Akhlaq. The BJP did not stand for election as it had made a pre-election pact with the Janata Dal, whose candidate, K.C. Tyagi, finished in third place (see Table 5.5).

²³⁰ Yogendra Yadav, 'Radical Shift in the Social Basis of Political Power', *The Hindu*, 20 May 2004 (Yadav 20 May 2004).

Table 5.5 Election results for Meerut–Mawana Lok Sabha constituency, 2004 (top five candidates)

<i>Candidates</i>	<i>Caste/ Community</i>	<i>Party</i>	<i>Votes Polled</i>	<i>% of Total Valid Votes</i>
Mohammad Shahid Qureshi	Muslim	BSP	252,518	36.20
Malook Nagar	Gujjar	RLD	183,182	26.26
K.C. Tyagi	Tyagi	JD(U)	167,221	23.97
K.K. Sharma	Brahmin	INC	65,914	9.45
Anil Rastogi	Bania	SHS	15058	2.16

Source: Election Commission of India, http://eci.nic.in/archive/GE2004/States/index_fs.htm (Election Commission of India 2004).

The BJP, represented by Tyagi, mainly focused on development issues and toned down communal appeals in this election (cf. van Dyke 2007). Although Shahid gained less than 40 percent of the total vote, the average voting percentage in the Muslim concentrated wards in the city was reportedly even higher than in the Lok Sabha election of 1999 and the Assembly election of 2002. The local newspaper commented that large scale of Muslim participation in Indian democracy was particularly remarkable in this election.²³¹

Shahid Akhlaq Qureshi was one of Haji Akhlaq's five sons. He entered politics as the president of the Youth Janata Dal of Meerut city through the support of ex-MP, Harish Pal, in 1989. Shahid's father began his political career in the same year as a Municipal Councillor. Shahid Akhlaq himself was too young to contest the Municipal election of that year. He was elected as the Mayor of Meerut in

²³¹ *Amar Ujjala*, 11 May 2004.

2000 at the age of 30 and was a Member of Parliament in 2004 at the age of 34, both for the BSP. Shahid Akhlaq established one of the most successful meat packaging firms in Meerut in 1997. His firm worked in close connection with the Meerut government slaughterhouse, as did most Qureshi leaders from the *Kassai* (butcher) group. His political power was very much grounded on the wealth generated by the meat business, through which Shahid Akhlaq conducted numerous charitable activities for the poor and handicapped. For example, he has established a secondary school for Muslim children of low-income families. The school offered both secular and religious education without a fee.²³² Those activities signified his Islamisation process and therefore qualified him as a man of religion, which again legitimised his political and economic power.

5.5.1 Electoral mobilisation of Shahid Akhlaq in 2004

The distinctive style of electoral mobilisation of the current (as of April 2009) young MP representing the Meerut–Mawana Lok Sabha constituency is his striking image as a pious Muslim. Shahid Akhlaq strictly follows the Islamic dress code and always appears in the public arena wearing a white *khurta*, a cap and long beard (see Figures 5.3 and 5.4 below). Nowhere in his campaign is there an image of *goonda* or a ‘saviour of Muslims’ such as his father had created through his Pathan (warrior) dress. This might at least partially be explained by the absence of a BJP candidate in the Meerut constituency in this particular election.

²³² Interview with the then Mayor, Mr. Shahid Akhlaq, on 17 August 2003.

Some respondents told me that Shahid has several allegations of criminal misconduct against him, some of which still stand, including cases for ‘shoot-outs’.²³³ Shahid has, however, never been convicted in court. He has little education and spent his youth without a stable job. Despite his varied past, Shahid has been consciously building up his image of devotion by fulfilling religious duties since the mid-1990s (see Appendix no. 18). He achieved the most important duty, the pilgrimage to Mecca, at an early age, while his father did this much later in his life (see Appendix no. 19).²³⁴ Shahid frequently also visits religious establishments in Meerut in order to gain the acceptance of the leading religious circles in the city. He organises meetings with *Maulanas* and *Malvis* at almost every mosque in Meerut. The message that he attempts to get across is that he is a good and devoted Muslim who is modest and respectful to community elders.²³⁵

Shahid Akhlaq’s appearance as a pious Muslim consciously not only stresses his Muslim identity but also underlines his upward mobility. Given his past record as a delinquent youth, the construction of the image of a devoted Muslim must

²³³ Although some people informed me of the allegations for criminal conducts, many more, and arguably most people of the religious circle in Meerut, including *Malvis*, consider of Shahid Akhlaq highly as a religious man. Shahid has also considerable following among the Muslim youth and elders, as I discuss in this section and in Chapter Six.

²³⁴ His father, Akhlaq Qureshi, was not able to make pilgrimage to Mecca until his old age and the reason was presumably that his economic status did not allow this very expensive journey. This meant that Akhlaq had been given the title of *Haji* quite recently. Those who have returned from pilgrimage to Mecca are respectfully called ‘*haji*’ and the pilgrimage is a rite of passage to a higher status. It also marks a certain personal change, a shift in priorities to the things of the afterlife. The title ‘*haji*’ is a marker of middle-class status and financial stability (van der Veer, 1996 (1994): 126-127). See also the discussion on religiosity in the later section in this chapter.

²³⁵ Interview with Doulla, the head of the government slaughter house, on 4 April 2004.

have been a big leap, yet it is still the quickest way to appeal to the Muslim masses in the city. It is particularly useful in order to appeal to the religious crowds that have formed the core mobilising structures of Shahid's electoral campaign. Shahid appears to have been mainly successful in changing his image from *goonda* to man of religion, particularly among the elders and religious leaders of the city.

These fundamental changes in Meerut's new Muslim politics are thus revealed with more salience in Shahid's campaign than in that of his father. This is because Shahid Akhlaq uses an elevated notion of Islam in order to reconcile Muslim identity with a wider civic identity. Below I examine Shahid Akhlaq's election hoardings, which vividly show the contrast as well as the convergence of the two identities. I try to illuminate their visible effects, particularly on Muslim viewers (see Figures 5.2 and 5.3).

Figure 5.2 The BSP election hoarding-1 with Shahid Akhlaq in 2004



Neither Hate Nor Riot: We Shall Promote Love and Trade.

All societies/castes/*biradaris* will receive respect. Entire regions will receive development. Vote for the honest and development-minded candidate.

Upon declaration, Mohamed Haji Shahid Akhlaq as a candidate of the BSP from the Meerut–Mawana Lok Sabha seat, Ms. Mayawati, people of Meerut feel immense happiness on this occasion. (Sponsored by the BSP, Meerut District.)

Source: *Amar Ujjala*, 14 April 2004.

Figure 5.3 The BSP election hoarding-2 in 2004



Long Live Bhart Ratam Baba Bhim Rao Ambedkar. BSP Zindabad. Greetings from Ambedkar Jayanti to all residents of Meerut region. Last year on April 14, 2003, residents of Meerut presented a special gift to the followers of Dr. Bhim Rao Ambedkar – an Ambedkar statue in front of Metro Plaza. Yours. Haji Shahid Akhlaq.

Source: *Amar Ujjala*, 8 April 2004.

One obvious visual effect of these hoardings is that the most marginalised groups in society, the Scheduled Castes, symbolised by the BSP, and the Muslims, symbolised by the sole figure of Shahid, are sharing a space under the banner of the BSP, which is aiming to seek control of the state in order to obtain not only material benefits but also to gain respect and dignity (Chandra 2000: 27). The white figure of Shahid Akhlaq makes a striking contrast with the rest of the symbols of the BSP; the elephant, the BSP leaders of Dr. Ambedkar, Kanshi Ram and Mayawati. There is no cultural symbol for Muslims on these hoardings apart from the figure of Shahid Akhlaq. There is no image of Jinnah, for example. The slogans written on the hoardings always begin with the phrase '*Kanshi Ram Zindabad*,' '*Ambedkar Zindabad*' and '*Mayawati Zindabad*' (Live long in prosperity). Under these slogans are messages from Shahid to the electorate, which always underline his BSP candidacy rather than his Muslim identity. While Shahid uses the same slogan as his father: 'Neither hate nor riot: we shall promote love and trade', it is addressed not exclusively to the Muslim electorate but rather to the larger constituency of the BSP, the majority of which, to repeat, are Scheduled Caste groups. The slogan, derived from the electoral campaign on the unknown Muslim politician of a decade ago, has returned to the electoral scene and become a symbol of an inter-ethnic class coalition. It is obviously an advantage to use the slogan from his father's very successful election campaign with which his constituents are familiar. Shahid's adoption of this slogan, however, more importantly suggests that it is the legitimate voice of the oppressed and marginalised classes of both communities, capturing a new political culture in the age of popular democracy.

5.5.2 The hoardings' effects on Muslim viewers

Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge's study of the 'public sphere' helps us to understand the meaning of these hoardings in greater depth. It is particularly helpful with regard to their focus on the readers', viewers' and spectators' 'subjective experience of modern life' (Appadurai and Breckenridge 1995: 5). The 'public sphere' refers to a set of arenas where viewers and image producers create an interacting effect that traverses public and private spaces, the community and the state, and 'where everyday life is linked to the projects of the nation-state'. The public sphere is also an arena in which social groups of different class, ethnicity and gender constitute their identities through their experience of 'viewing,' 'reading' and 'experimenting' with various forms of public culture, in this case the hoardings (ibid. 3-4). Muslim spectators of Meerut's political hoardings are 'apt to consume' the hoardings of the BSP according to their own expectations of modern life. Consumption is a productive work of imagination that draws attention to new forms of social identity.

The BSP hoardings appear to indicate what modern democratic politics could bring to Meerut Muslims through the images of Dr. Ambedkar, the champion of the Dalit cause, Kanshi Ram, the founder of the BSP and Mayawati, the successor to Kanshi Ram within the BSP. In addition to these figures, the slogan of each hoarding emphasises not only secular issues centred on development and equality, but also the fight for lost ethnic pride, dignity and respect. According to basic BSP ideology (Chandra 2000: 27), caste divisions, Hindu-Muslim differences, and rural-city differences are supposed to become non-

existent as a broader body of the common people (*Bahujan*) is formed. Everybody is entitled to an equal share of what modern democracy is able to offer. What the BSP embodies in these hoardings might be seen as 'a newly humanised and individualised version of secularism', to use Nicholas Dirks' apt phrase. It seeks to express a 'political utopia' envisaged in the construction of a post-colonial nation-state undertaking a universalising project of cultural diversity (Dirks 2001: 179).

The hoardings symbolise both a particular conception of modernity and the means to achieve it (Appadurai 1995). The aims of modernity here, or what modern life and values would bring about from the perspective of Muslim viewers, surely include upward mobility, inter-ethnic peace and equal opportunities, while the means to achieve these goals are political integration, democratic participation and the self-recognition embodied in leading BSP symbols. These images link spectators to a larger project of modern nation-building that attempts to forge an overarching civic identity of citizenship which promotes participation in the life of the nation. In this sense, the image makers, and particularly the viewers, come to be included in the modern nation-building project in and through their entitlements to citizenship.

At the same time, these hoardings are also the manifestation of a contested public sphere that corresponds to the divisive demands of class and ethnicity made on the nation-state. Modernity envisaged through entitled citizenship and civil rights is juxtaposed in the hoardings with an image of a Muslim politician that depicts the religious values of Islam. The sole Muslim figure could be linked in the viewers' imagination to the claim for a separate identity for Indian

Muslims and the collective memory of Partition, intertwined with images of communal strife, suffering and sacrifice; in a word, a memory of loss. This very image of Indian Muslims ultimately forms an antithesis to the claims of universality and citizenship of the modern nation-state, notwithstanding that Indian secularism makes room for claims to religiosity. The hoardings, in other words, reveal the most contradictory aspect of the universalising project of modern nation-building, caught in 'the chasm between utopia and irrationality' of cultural nationalism (Dirks 2001: 179).

This juxtaposition of modern values and the religious values of Islam forms probably the most striking visual image in these hoardings. The symbolic juxtaposition also suggests an image of a reconciling convergence of the two worlds, expressed largely through the BSP's language and symbols. The Muslim politician is a symbolic figure taking part in a larger nation-building project without losing his identity as a Muslim. The politician also appears to be a moderator in negotiating the contours of modern life, using the most user-friendly language of Islam for the Muslim masses in Meerut.²³⁶

Muslim women formed a significant proportion of the spectators of the hoardings and were key participants in the election process. A local newspaper

²³⁶ Owen Lynch maintains that the transition of the Jatavs in Agra towards a modern civic identity went smoothly because the revolutionary message of Ambedkar was embedded in religion, a Neo-Buddhism the foundation of which was its unequivocal rejection of Hinduism. Lynch, rephrasing Geertz (1963) notes, 'Buddhism...pours the new wine of political modernity into the old bottles of religious tradition'. Ambedkar defined 'the roles of Buddhism in virtually the same terms as those of a citizen of democratic India'. The inter-changeability of these two identities made it possible to appeal to both the traditional and the secular minded among the Jatavs, yet both worked for the same revolutionary goals (Lynch 1969: 143) (Geertz 1963).

reports that a large number of Muslim women attended a huge rally addressed by the BSP leader, Mayawati, in Victoria Park in Meerut on 4 May 2004. Those women, concealing their bodies with the long cape with cap and veil, all in black, the '*burqa*', sat among male spectators under the scorching sun at noon with blue flags in their hands.²³⁷ They also queued to vote on voting day.²³⁸ Muslim women in India formed the most segregated part of the Muslim population under the protective wall of Personal Law that governs Muslims' own social norms and systems. Muslim women in seclusion from the public sphere symbolised the cultural autonomy of Muslims while being excluded from the dominant discourse of Indian nationalism and nation-building. In this sense Muslim women spectators, particularly from the lower strata, had previously been shut out from elections at least twice; by the Islamic norms of seclusion, '*pardah*', that confined them to the domestic living space,²³⁹ and also by the fact that they had been placed outside the nationalist project and the state protection.

Significantly, many Muslim women attended the election rally by the BSP leader, Mayawati, and listened to the female political leader from the Chamar

²³⁷ *Amar Ujjala*, 5 May 2004.

²³⁸ The local newspaper says: 'At polling booth no. 47 — despite the scorching heat and stuffy weather, one could see long queues of Muslim burqa clad women standing and waiting for their turn to cast vote. The similar enthusiasm is seen on a number of booths in Muslim dominating areas such as 78, 79, 80 (Hapur road); 64 (DN College), 65, 66 and 117 (Podi Wada); 234, 235 and 236 (Tahsil (Kotwali)); including Tara Puri, Lisari Gate, Soharab Gate and Gudari Bazaar', *Amar Ujjala*, 11 May 2004.

²³⁹ The life of Muslim women belonging to the Ansaris in Varanasi in eastern UP is vividly described in (Kumar 1995 (1988): 53-62).

community and her call for solidarity among the oppressed.²⁴⁰ Muslim female spectators were eager to be part of 'a citizen's erotics to the utopian aspirations of the nation' (Dirks 2001: 180). 'Erotics' here corresponds to what Appadurai has elsewhere called the eroticism of men in their enthusiasm as spectators of cricket between India and Pakistan. The notion of erotics is linked to the nationalist passion that the cricket game produces among the male spectators, in whose body, according to Appadurai, cricket is 'inscribed' through playing in their youth. Cricket creates imagined communities through 'the appropriation of agonistic bodily skills that can then further lend passion and purpose to the community so imagined' (Appadurai 1995: 45).

Muslim female spectators leapt over the barriers of Personal Law and the patriarchal power of male dominance in order to cease being 'the Other' within and to become 'the feminist source of the nation's power and virtue' (Dirks 2001: 180). The presence of the Muslim female gaze, consuming and experimenting with modernity as much as male spectators, seems to be demanding equal citizenship regardless of their gender. In other words, their presence, covered by their black *burqas*, was an attempt to claim inclusion in the Indian nationalist mission as fully entitled citizens, again without losing their identity as Muslims.

²⁴⁰ Mayawati's success story of rising from the lowest strata of Indian society to become one of the most powerful politicians commanding ever expanding clout in the Indian polity today motivates women across the country irrespective of their economic, social or religious status (article commemorating Mayawati's inclusion in the *Forbes*' list of the most powerful women in the world), *The Hindustan Times*, 30 September 2008 (*The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi)).

Mukulika Banerjee (2007) has used ethnographic data from rural West Bengal to address the continuing increase in voter turnout in elections in India, particularly among the poorest and most socially disadvantaged, who are more likely to vote than those belonging to upper castes or upper classes. Vividly describing the enthusiasm and ‘suppressed excitement’ on election day — like that often seen at important festivals — Banerjee argues that people vote because the elections constitute something like sacred rituals for them. On the day of the election Muslim Syed women, for example, who hardly ever left their home, changed their everyday mill *sari* into a ‘proper’ handloom *sari* and hired an expensive bullock cart to go to the polls with a group of female voters in order to maintain their rules of *purdah* (ibid. 1557-1558). Many of Banerjee’s respondents perceived voting as a duty or ‘expression’ of citizenship. The elections provided those voters with an opportunity to prove their membership of the nation and confirm their status as citizens. A physical presentation of one’s body at the ballot box was ‘the ultimate validation of one’s identity as a citizen, above everything else...’ (ibid. 1560). The elections also provided an opportunity to exercise the right to vote ‘in a more appealing and dignified mode than merely claiming one’s rice ration’. The elections formed a rare occasion in which equality was brought to the real life of those villagers (ibid. 1560-1561).

Enthusiasm and excitement on election day in Meerut in 2004 had much resonance with that of Banerjee’s villagers in West Bengal. The sense of empowerment that the election brought to the Muslim electorate in Meerut, however, was particularly strong because the winning candidate was identified with the most marginalised sections of the Muslim electorate.

5.5.3 The public spectacle of procession

The integration of Muslims into the lower-caste civil rights movements, and the promotion of civic participation for Muslims, continued to be displayed in spectacles within the public arena during Shahid Akhlaq's election campaign. A local newspaper reports that after filing a nomination form for the electoral contest at the city office, Shahid Akhlaq went to Dr. Ambedkar's statue outside the office and put garlands on it. Although idol worship is not allowed in Islam, Shahid put garlands on the Ambedkar statue while maintaining the dress code of a pious Muslim, wearing an immaculate white Khurta pyjama, cap and beard.²⁴¹

The procession that took place after the formal nomination was also an impressive spectacle, and one that demonstrated that a Muslim candidate was standing for the lower-caste political party, the BSP (see Appendix no. 20). The procession comprised a large number of Muslim youths who had put BSP election signs on their faces, particularly on their cheeks. Many Muslim supporters in the procession were wearing blue scarves around their necks and blue caps on their heads.²⁴² The colour blue is the symbol of the BSP, as seen in

²⁴¹ Haji Akhlaq, as a City MLA, conducted a similar public performance in 1994 when the statue of Dr. Ambedkar was destroyed by Hindu protestors in Shergarhi, a periphery of Meerut, with two Dalit boys killed by police firing during the incident. Haji Akhlaq conducted the unveiling ceremony of the restored statue, which was symbolic of the ongoing alliance between the two communities, *Amar Ujjala*, 16 April 1994 (Pai 2002: 192-219). There were increasing numbers of incidents of caste violence between the Backward Castes and the Scheduled Castes in UP like this one in Meerut during this period. These incidents, among others, led to the split between the BSP and SP forming the coalition government after the 1993 Assembly election with Mulayam Singh Yadav as Chief Minister (Duncan 1997; Pai 2000).

²⁴² *Amar Ujjala*, 20 April 2004.

the blue flags held by many spectators in the mass rally addressed by Shahid Akhlaq shown on the BSP Hoarding (see Figure 5.2).

It is notable that Shahid was not contesting the election merely for the Muslim cause but stood on the Dalit platform as well as for the wider cause of the '*Bahujan*', (the majority of the people). The fact that a Muslim represented a large section of Hindus through a caste-based political party implied profound changes within Muslim society and politics (and indeed in parts of Hindu society). Muslims had, of course, been participating in electoral politics under the Congress regime. The difference that this procession scene indicates, however, was a sense of 'actual' participation as an equal partner with the BSP; Meerut Muslims were no longer a mere vote bank only tenuously incorporated into the regional or national power structure (Chandra 2000: 44). Also, there was a sense of proximity between the candidate and some of the Muslim supporters. This was derived in part from his plebeian background and young age, but also from a sense of 'rightness' that he would serve their cause as he was one of them. Although a sense of proximity between the candidate and the electorate varies enormously in every election, in this particular election it was striking for Muslims in comparison to the period under the Congress regime. Muslims participated in democracy under the Congress Party by casting a vote mostly for strangers whose social background rendered them distant and which made it difficult for them to understand the living realities and grievances of the Muslim masses (see Appendix no. 21). Since the end of Congress Party rule, Muslims had matured as an electorate, fully knowing the weight of their votes (Rai 1999; Alam 2004).

5.5.4 The BSP banners of civil rights

Shahid Akhlaq's electoral campaign stressed the demand for the civil rights for Muslims as part of a broader *Bahujan* community (see Appendix no. 22 and 23). Shahid was mobilising the Muslim electorate under demands for reservation, development and education (see Appendix no. 24). In part, he was treating Muslims as equivalent to Dalits on the BSP platform, but he was also using the language of the BSP in his own imaginative style. For example, he used a poster of his father's face talking to the electorate. The poster carried different messages written in different languages according to the viewers' social background. In the localities of Meerut city where low-income and low-status Muslims concentrated, the poster said: 'My son assures you that he will bring peace and harmony to this town. Please vote for my son'. It was written in Urdu. In the Scheduled Caste neighbourhoods in Meerut and Mawana, a rural periphery of Meerut, the same poster said: 'My son protects your rights. Please vote for him'. It was written in Hindi. Muslim city dwellers, in a sensitive north-Indian city like Meerut, would generally prefer to see Urdu rather than Hindi, while the Scheduled Castes constituencies would naturally prefer Hindi. Likewise, while in rural constituencies issues of development were given priority, for city dwellers, those of security and social and economic well-being were placed within a generalised context of violence and threat. Accordingly, in urban centres, social harmony and the construction of a riot- and crime-free city were given priority.²⁴³

²⁴³ Mr. Yusuf Qureshi, a Qureshi political leader, mentioned to me. 'the Hindu-Muslim divide is more sharply felt in the urban city than in rural areas' (18 March 2004, Meerut). According to

Shahid strategically addressed different sections of society with different messages and emphases, addressing urban and rural, upper caste Hindus and lower-castes and Muslims. Walking door to door to people's homes in rural areas of the district, Shahid stressed his efforts to develop villages with similar infrastructure to that of urban areas (see Appendix no. 25). On the other hand, in his campaign in Meerut city Shahid changed his tone and promised that he would work for social harmony and release Meerut from the crime and fear that had engulfed the city over a long period of time.²⁴⁴ Shahid, therefore, extensively used the card of the 1987 violence for city dwellers. Mayawati in the above-mentioned huge rally in Meerut, also invoked the memory of the violence of 1987. Mayawati referred particularly to the massacre of Muslims by the PAC in Maliana village and sharply criticised the Congress Party for allowing it to happen.²⁴⁵ Shahid, for his part, said that the BSP was the only Party that could provide equal partnership for Muslims with respect and security. He repeatedly emphasised his claim that Meerut must be a riot-free city:

We will eradicate communalism from western Uttar Pradesh. My father, as a MLA from the city, worked to make Meerut a riot-free city. I have followed my father since I was elected as the Mayor and will continue my efforts to make this city riot free and a symbol of development in western UP.²⁴⁶

Ashutosh Varshney, Hindu-Muslim violence in India is primarily an urban phenomenon since 94 percent of the incidents took place in urban areas against only 3.6 percent in villages since 1950 (Varshney 2002: 103-107).

²⁴⁴ *Amar Ujjala*, 7 May 2004 .

²⁴⁵ *Amar Ujjala*, 5 May 2004.

²⁴⁶ *Amar Ujjala*, 6 May 2004.

The collective memory of violence was also used to forge solidarity among Muslims, not least with the aim of bringing the Ansari community into the camp. On the last day of the election campaign, Shahid visited the localities of Hashimpura, Gola Kuwan and Maliana village. The first two of these localities were Ansari heartlands. Shahid spoke about the communal violence of 1987 and touched upon the role of the Congress Party and the PAC. Pre-poll estimates had predicted that the Ansari vote would go to the Congress Party.²⁴⁷ The Ansaris and Qureshis were known for their rivalry, as I have stated before. A young man from the Ansari community enthusiastically told me that the Mayor came and apologised for his conduct and misbehaviour in the past. The Mayor also apologised for not doing much work for this particular locality as the Mayor of the city. His speech started with:

First, we are Muslim and occupational identity [*Biradari* divisions] may come under [the overarching] Muslim identity. After the election, we can resolve issues between us, but now we should be united.²⁴⁸

Fragile relations had to be strengthened with apologies and promises with an emphasis on Muslim identity. It is worth noting that Shahid visited these Ansari localities on the last day of a campaign that had stretched over almost four months. It was critical to obtain the Ansari vote as it was still the largest Muslim community. He had visited other Muslim localities in the city during this period but had never been to Gola Kuwan. This shows the sensitivity of the relations between Qureshis and Ansaris. And this was exactly what his father had done a

²⁴⁷ *Amar Ujjala*, 5 May 2004.

²⁴⁸ *Amar Ujjala*, 14 May 2004.

decade earlier. Haji Akhlaq did not come to these localities with his campaign until the last day of the election. In other Muslim areas of the city, Shahid's speech emphasised a corporate identity among the entire Muslim community:

I have fought at the local level for my society [Muslim] and want to take this fight to Parliament. I would represent you [Muslims] in the Parliament. This is the only good for our "*Kaum*" [community]²⁴⁹ at present — do not forget this.²⁵⁰

On the day of voting it turned out that most Ansari votes were cast for Shahid. Many Ansaris changed their mind after Shahid's speech in their locality and on their way to the booth on the following day. They voted for Shahid although many Ansaris were afraid of saying that they would do so. I also heard, while having tea with them, Ansari women saying, 'we will vote for *our* candidate, *our* Mayor. Because he is Muslim'. According to two polling agents who stood by the booth checking the voters, the voting rates in Islamabad²⁵¹ went up to 80 percent and the Ansaris and Saiffies (who were also reportedly against the Qureshis) voted for Shahid *en bloc*.²⁵²

5.5.5 Islam for Integration

The most remarkable feature of Shahid Akhlaq's electoral mobilisation was that he reconciled the binary identity of Muslims in a broader interpretation of

²⁴⁹ The word '*Kaum*' can mean an occupational group, religion or community. In this speech, it seems to include all of these meanings to emphasise the oneness of the Muslim community.

²⁵⁰ *Amar Ujjala*, 8 May 2004.

²⁵¹ Islamabad is the name of the ward that includes Gola Kuwan, Hashimpura and Imylian.

²⁵² Interview with polling agents of the Islamabad ward on 14 May 2004.

Islam. Shahid reinterpreted Islam in order to connect traditional religious identity with the modern identity of the nation-state. His notion of Islam seemingly pointed to an engagement with a wider Indian society and polity, while sustaining and further scrutinising individual religiosity as a Muslim. According to this interpretation, scrutinising individual religiosity as a Muslim did not contradict an emphasis on citizenship but rather promoted it as an integral demand for social, economic and political rights based on democratic equality (see Appendix no. 26–29).

During my interview with him, Shahid Akhlaq emphasised the acute need for Muslims to ‘return to Islam’. He told me that the sense of decline felt by many Muslims came from the fact that they had moved away from Islam, their religion. He underlined the importance of the religious education. He also stressed the need to adopt more Islamic ethics and morals in the daily lives such as charitable activities to help the poor and encouraged people to increase their personal religiosity through attendance at daily prayers (*namaz*) five times a day or by making a pilgrimage to Mecca.²⁵³

This inclusive usage of religion stands in sharp contrast to an earlier political discourse that aimed to assert separate rights and to emphasise Muslims’ difference from the rest of the society. This might be most saliently observed in the discourse of the Muslim leaders who had led the anti-Ayodhya agitation from the last half of the 1980s until its demolition in 1992. These Muslim leaders demanded the preservation of the Babri Masjid since ‘their pride and

²⁵³ Interview with the then Mayor, Mr. Shahid Akhlaq on 17 August 2003.

self-esteem was bound up with the glorious past of the Mughal empire' (van der Veer 1996 (1994): 9). In their view, the 'facts' of the empire and being part of the ruling power stood squarely opposite to the 'fictions' of Hindu mythology that said that Babur, the builder of the Mosque, had destroyed the Hindu temple, birthplace of a God-king, Ram. The exclusive discourse of Islamic religious nationalism invoking the memory of Partition significantly reinforced the confrontational mode between Hindus and Muslims, ultimately leading to the destruction of the Babri Masjid by the Hindu forces (Engineer 1992; Hasan 1994).

A similar conception of religious separateness had emerged in the domain of local politics in Meerut during Basir Ahmad's electoral mobilisation for the Muslim *Majlis-e-Mushawarat* in the Assembly election in 1969 (Chapter 2). Ahmad attempted to construct a Muslim community drawing on the separate cultural symbols of Islam, which were very much linked to the glory of the Muslim rule in the past.²⁵⁴ These symbols were a cultural symbol not only of Islam, but also, more importantly, of the conception of grandeur of Islamic political power. The idea of returning to the glorious past, which guaranteed the Muslim elite a life of prestige, to a large extent framed the discourse of conservative Muslim elite politics after Partition.

²⁵⁴ Islamic symbols included a flag with the motif of a star, moon and a camel. According to a Muslim political advisor to the late Manzoor Ahmad, the flag invoked an image of the camel taking the Muslim audience to Mecca or Medina, the centre of Islamic faith and the symbol of the larger Islamic world outside India, interview on 1 February 2004.

Arguing why there were few Muslim liberals in India, Hamid Dalwai, a Muslim social reformer, wrote in 1968 that Indian Muslims believe that they form a perfect society and are superior to all other communities in India. According to Dalwai:

Indian Muslims resent being a minority and still dream of spreading their faith throughout India or at least of ruling India. They suffer from delusions of grandeur... (Dalwai 1968: 87).

Dalwai indicates that statements by Muslim political organisations such as the *Jamaat-e-Islami* and the *Majlis-e-Mushawarat* provided evidence that Muslim dissent was centred around their memory of the glorious past. Basir Ahmad Khan, on the other hand, founded the Muslim League in Meerut shortly after his defeat in the 1969 Assembly election. The Muslim League is a synonym in north India for the Muslim communalism that (supposedly) led to Partition. In the pre-Partition era the League had used religion as a principal tool in order to create a separate identity among Muslims. Khan's discourse mirrored the undercurrent of Muslim politics after Partition which essentially evoked the past and inspired Muslims to want a separate nation exclusively for Muslims.

In contrast, both Shahid Akhlaq's and his father's religious discourse was remarkably universal and inclusive. Islam was interpreted not as the antithesis of Hinduism but as a force for promoting Muslim participation in the life of the nation (see Appendix no. 30 and 31). The Akhlaqs' Islam addressed only the present and never referred back to the past. They never talked, for example, about the Mughal empire. Similarly, Shahid Akhlaq's emphasis on contact with the wider community of believers did not imply or invoke the exclusive identity

of Muslims whose loyalty was allegedly placed outside India. Shahid Akhlaq's reference to Global Islam by far transcended narrow and parochial conceptions of the modern nation-state. According to Peter van der Veer, the reference to religious symbols and centres of global Islam is anyway not monolithic, as cultural symbols for political mobilisation may be used in different forms and have different meanings according to the historical context (van der Veer 1993: 33). Shahid simply referred to the long tradition of pan-Islamism as a means of providing a wider frame of reference for his Muslim brethren to help scrutinise their religiosity. Shahid emphasised Islam from the universal perspective as a catalyst for harmony, sincerity and honesty which would help Muslims to engage in wider Indian society and polity. Hence in his conception, religious identity was not placed in sharp opposition to the universal citizenship of a modern liberal democracy; rather it was understood as an important medium to help Muslims become 'good Indian citizens'. It is important to note that Shahid Akhlaq's usage of religion, which appeared outstandingly open, humanistic and universal, matched the needs and interests of a newly emerging Muslim consciousness in Meerut (see Appendix no. 32–34).

The changing consciousness of many low-status Muslims was vividly shown in a small incident that occurred during my fieldwork. I was interviewing a Qureshi respondent who used to belong to the Muslim League. On the second day of my interview, as soon as I reached his house, my respondent told me that his Muslim neighbours had gathered after I had left him the night before and asked him why a 'foreign lady' had been here and what he had told her. He said that one of his neighbours would come soon to meet me to ask what this was all about. It turned out that the neighbours were worried that I was a foreign agent

of a terrorist group who had come to ask about his connection with the Muslim League. They worried that my respondent would give wrong information to this foreign agency about Indian Muslims and do some harm to the community. Given that this respondent had been affiliated with the League, he was not seen as trustworthy by his neighbours. When I was faced with his neighbours' representative I felt his acute anxiety to avoid any trouble and to be a good citizen, a good member of the middle-class in India.²⁵⁵

Contact with the global Islamic community traditionally took the forms of pilgrimage to Mecca (*Haji*), the exchange of scholars, migration of Indian Muslims to Arab countries and financial support for educational institutions from these countries to India (van der Veer 1996 (1994): 115-116). These contacts have always been critical for Indian Muslims in providing a notion of religious community and hence are sources of nurturing religious identity (van der Veer 1993: 33, 1996 (1994)). Apart from these general contacts with Islamic centres, the local Qureshi community was also in a strong position (from the early-1980s) to contact the Islamic world through their meat export business. The life of local Qureshi butchers is thus placed in an interesting dialectic of religion and economy. The hereditary occupation of the Qureshis, slaughtering livestock cattle, is considered a religious act since they do so according to instructions in the holy Quran. It produces what is called '*Halal*' meat, the central item in the Islamic diet.²⁵⁶ The job of slaughtering animals is assigned to

²⁵⁵ Interviews on 18 and 19 March, 2004.

²⁵⁶ The method for producing '*Halal*' meat is to let all the blood run out of the body by cutting all the veins in the neck while chanting the lines from the Holi Quran. The '*Jhatka*' method, in contrast, is to kill animals instantly so that the blood remains inside the body. Interview with

a Qureshi family in the government slaughterhouse as a hereditary job for this particular family. The person who 'cuts' is required to have a recognised religiosity following Islamic codes of appearance and behaviour. He has to be religiously honest, faithful and pure. He has to offer a prayer five times a day, constantly read the Quran and keep the Islamic dress code of '*Lungi*' (male skirt), small cap, short hair and beard. Before slaughtering each animal, this person chants: '*Bismillaha Allha-O-Akbar*' thrice.²⁵⁷ The product, *Halal* meat, connects the local Qureshi butcher community with the global Islamic world that follows an Islamic diet.

Qureshi exporters, butchers and all others associated with the meat export business in Meerut have directly or indirectly been in constant contact with the web of their counterparts, buyers and sellers of their meat products in these countries following the Islamic diet. A sense of belonging to the brotherhood of Islam must be constantly invoked and strengthened by these contacts through their occupation. Also, no matter how far their networks reach, the connection between Meerut Muslims and their counterparts is essentially generated through their following the same diet, culture and religion. Yusuf Qureshi, a Qureshi politician, lawyer and meat exporter, commented:

Dr. Nafee R. Khan, chief veterinary officer of the government slaughterhouse in Meerut on 23 February 2004.

²⁵⁷ Interview with a member of the family assigned to performing the slaughtering. The respondent's nephew was the current slaughterman in the slaughterhouse. According to this respondent, the 'cutting person' was the fourth generation over the time span of 150 years. Nonetheless, the status of the family was not particularly high. This respondent worked as a canteen manager for Shahid Akhlaq's meat packaging factory in Meerut. Interview on 23 April 2004.

We feel comfortable with the export to Arab countries because of the similarity of the community and religion. These countries are open to us.²⁵⁸

The meat export business, however, is only one of many points of contact for Meerut Muslims in the wider world of Islam. There are Muslim businessmen who go back and forth between the subcontinent and Arab countries, some of whom permanently migrated and settled there with their families. There are also other channels of contact with a wider Islamic society, including the Deobandhi reformist school for which Meerut Muslims have formed one of the most important funding sources since the colonial period. Most importantly, the influential *Tablighi Jama'at*, the offshoot of the Deobandhi which has aimed to forge the global identity of Islam, has actively been creating a web of contacts outside Meerut and India imbued with Islamic universalism. These contacts are a source of inspiration for Meerut Muslims in their pursuit of greater religiosity and reinforce their strong attachment to religious symbols and values that, in turn, keep strengthening the sense of belonging to Global Islam and a wider Muslim ethnicity.

5.6 Conclusion

Peter van der Veer's work on religious nationalism in India (1996 (1994)) provides useful insights for understanding the convergence of 'traditional' and 'modern' identities seen in Shahid Akhlaq's political mobilisations. Theories of

²⁵⁸ Interview with Mr. Yusuf Qureshi on 18 March 2004.

nationalism that assume a sharp dichotomy between the traditional community as 'primordial' and the wider framework of the nation as 'modern' have little purchase for explaining the electoral mobilisation of someone like Shahid Akhlaq. Van der Veer maintains that frameworks of religious tradition that long predated the colonial expansion still provide major sources for the construction of religious identity, and nationalism, in contemporary India. In both earlier times and in the present, in other words, religious identity is constructed with reference to similar sets of sources and/or resources.

As we have seen in this chapter, both Shahid and his father made remarkable efforts to create new imaginaries of what it meant to be a Muslim in post-1987 Meerut. They did so both with reference to changing practices within Islam, and with regard to new possibilities for political involvement — and alliance-making — that were being presented to previously low-status Muslims, especially, in the changed political contexts of post-Congress Raj northern India. It is these contexts and practices that I want to explore further in Chapter Six.

Chapter 6: The New Muslim Politics in Meerut, 1993– 2004 — II: Negotiating New Alliances

North Indian Muslims have stoutly defied the widely prevalent trend among ethnic-religious minorities to form their own political parties. Instead, they have opted for assimilative, integrative politics within a broadly secular-pluralist framework. They would have a ‘voice’ rather than ‘representation’. ...they opted for multi-ethnic, pluralist ‘mainstream’ parties, led by non-Muslims. That...is a tribute to the political maturity of the community and its devotion to an anti-separatist identity. ...a strong current — one might call it ‘wave’ of social reform, modernisation and redefinition of identities — is sweeping through India’s Muslim community (Bidwai 2002).

6.1 Introduction

Praful Bidwai’s observations regarding the changing political landscape of north-Indian Muslims is useful for placing an understanding of the meanings of the new politics among the Meerut Muslims in broader context. Bidwai notes that the most distinctive and significant feature of the new Muslim politics across north India is the efforts now being made to forge a coalition between Muslim and *non*-Muslim political parties. Bidwai makes the further point that Muslims are seeking alliances with political parties with both secular and pluralist credentials. He also suggests that Muslim political interests can be harmed where Muslim political leaders simply pursue the immediate interests of their co-ethnies — recall the *Majlis-e-Mushawarat* or Muslim League in north India from Chapter Two.

In the previous chapter I have examined the electoral mobilisations of Haji Akhlaq in 1993 and Shahid Akhlaq in 2004. I discussed how these mobilisations brought together new ideas of Muslim identity framed by aspirations for social reform and upward mobility among the Muslim masses in Meerut. As I have shown already, the dramatic change in the nature of political representation of Muslims in Meerut and the emergence of Qureshi political activism were due in large part to the rise of those secular parties mentioned by Bidwai, particularly the BSP and SP, which courted support from lower-caste constituencies. It is important, therefore, to now examine the role of these political parties and some aspects of the party structures that have contributed to the development of a new Muslim politics. I discuss the role of the BSP and the SP in the first section of this chapter. In the second section I explore the significance of the political ascendancy of the Qureshis from a perspective from within the Meerut Muslim world. I discuss the political ascendancy of the Qureshis vis-à-vis other Muslim communities, particularly the Ansaris. In the third section I discuss the political strategies of the Meerut Muslims more broadly and in relation to those of various Hindu lower caste groups.

6.2 Political Parties and the New Muslim Politics

According to Pradeep Chhibber and Irfan Nooruddin, changes in political party structure in post-Congress UP seem to indicate a more favourable setting for Muslim electors. The number of political parties that are represented in Parliament has increased, and this phenomenon of party fragmentation is most noticeable in the Hindi-speaking belt that includes Uttar Pradesh (Chhibber and

Nooruddin 1999: 37). The area has close to a three party system while elsewhere in India the average is closer to two-and-a-half parties (ibid. 46). The three party system in UP consists of the BJP and its allies, the Congress, and various regional and caste-based parties (ibid. 48-49). Under the increasingly competitive situation of party fragmentation, every party has been compelled to form a coalition with other ethnic groups because no single group has a large enough electoral constituency to win the election on its own. The logic of electoral arithmetic compelled political parties, therefore, to court multi-class or multi-ethnic alliances to build up their strength in the political arena (van Dyke 2007: 131-134). No party could now possibly ignore the Muslims, forming as they do 18.5 percent of the UP population — second only to the Scheduled Castes that form 21 percent.²⁵⁹

Kanchan Chandra maintains that ‘post-Congress politics’ in Uttar Pradesh is best characterised as a politics that invokes ethnic identity (Chandra 1999). The BSP aims to include in its supporting constituencies different minorities that collectively constitute the *Bahujan* (majority) community. The *Bahujan* community consists of those who are not included in the three Hindu upper castes — that is, the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Muslims, Backward Castes and Christians and Sikhs. The Party courts the electoral support of these communities by ‘inducting’ a candidate from each constituency and providing political representation.²⁶⁰ Incorporating elites from the target ethnic category and providing them with representation, therefore, is the key for the BSP to

²⁵⁹ *Census of India, 2001 (Census of India 2001).*

²⁶⁰ To contrast this with the Congress’ electoral strategy, which invoked ethnic identity more discreetly and never used the rhetoric of identity, see Chandra (2000).

attract voters from new constituencies. The BSP has been cultivating and expanding new networks and constituencies. The Party, for example, no longer draws a sharp distinction between upper castes and others in UP where it has confidence in itself as a winning party (Chandra 2000: 39). The Party began to allot tickets and party posts to upper castes, as for example in UP during the period of the General Elections of 2004, when the BSP put up seven Brahmin candidates. The Party forged the Dalit, Muslim and Brahmin coalition as its core strategy.²⁶¹

The Samajwadi Party (SP) is a spin-off of the Janata Dal led by Mulayam Singh Yadav. The Party is a major driving force of middle-caste mobilisations in UP. For the SP, ethnic incorporation in exchange for representation is the key electoral strategy. The SP's political community comprises all Muslims and the Backward Castes. It is still primarily defined by the religious identities of Hindus and Muslims. Muslims are treated as an internally homogeneous and cohesive religious minority. The Party highlights the threat and danger posed by the BJP and portrays itself as the only party committed to protecting the lives and security of Muslims (Chandra 1999: 76-77). In his campaign in the 1998 General Elections, for example, Mulayam Singh Yadav frequently referred to the large-scale ethnic violence that followed the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992.²⁶² The SP attempts to keep the threat of the BJP alive and indeed the

²⁶¹ *India Today*, 10 May 2004 (*India Today* (New Delhi)).

²⁶² Mulayam Singh Yadav, then the UP Chief Minister, intervened with paramilitary forces to prevent Hindu militants from entering the disputed site of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in October 1990. The BJP withdrew its support from V.P. Singh government, leaving him without a majority, resulting in his losing his prime ministership. Mulayam Singh Yadav continues to use

Party benefits greatly from the BJP's Hindu communalism, which allows the SP to consolidate its support among Muslims (ibid. 78-79).

The gap between the upper castes and those in subordinate ethnic categories in the UP Council of Ministers narrowed dramatically in 1989, according to Chandra, when the Janata Dal government came to power in the state. Under a BSP or SP government, Muslim representation in the Council remained roughly the same as in the Congress government. However, because of competition for the Muslim vote between the two parties there was an 'outbidding' effect between them as each offered Muslims greater representation than the other. In 1996, when the BSP and SP competed against each other, the percentage of Muslim MLAs in the SP doubled from 10 percent in 1993 to 20 percent.

The best prospects for Muslims in UP therefore paradoxically lay in competition between secular parties (ibid. 88-93). An important change was that individuals elected from each ethnic category could achieve power and representation. In order to succeed, parties must have the ability to incorporate office-seeking elites from the target ethnic category. In return, these new elites must mobilise their co-ethnic followers in order to increase their bargaining power vis-à-vis the dominant elites in the parties to which they seek entry (Chandra 2004: 102-103). These elites mobilise, for example, Muslims and Dalits as independent political forces. Furthermore, the need to ensure their political survival provides the elites with an incentive to be more responsive to their own ethnic category

his image as protector of the Muslim cause which he created on this occasion in his electoral battle.

members than was the case for a previous generation of Muslim legislators elected from the Congress (ibid. 93).

Although it is not mentioned in Chandra's study, those Muslim legislators inducted by the BSP and the SP in Meerut were significantly different from those under the Congress Party, as they were predominantly from the low caste (ethnic) categories. These were the categories that had been denied representation by the Congress Party.²⁶³ Ambitious Muslim leaders from the lower ranks were consistently inducted by the BSP and SP from the early 1990s in Meerut. It was remarkable that for all of these leaders these occasions marked their first lifetime opportunity. Following Haji Akhlaq for the Janata Dal, who became the first non-elite Muslim MLA in Meerut in 1993, Ayuub Ansari became the Mayor of Meerut from the BSP in 1995. Yaqoob Qureshi, younger brother of Yusuf Qureshi, shifted from the Congress Party to the BSP in the mid 1990s and became a deputy Mayor in 1997, subsequently contesting the General Elections for the BSP in 1999. He would become an MLA from the adjacent Kharkhauda constituency on a ticket of the BSP in 2002, and shortly after he was elected he shifted to the SP. Shahid Akhlaq became the Mayor of Meerut from the BSP in 2000, and then achieved national-level representation as a BSP MP in May 2004. These outstanding achievements in political representation have had enormous symbolic meaning for the Meerut Muslims' aspirations for upward mobility.

²⁶³ The distribution pattern of tickets, which tended to focus on the lower strata must have been partially related to the economic affluence of the lower sections of the Muslim population in Meerut.

6.3 The Political Ascendancy of the Qureshis and the Ansaris

Before discussing the political strategies of the new Muslim leadership, I now turn to explore some of the social relations among Muslim communities in Meerut in order to examine the Qureshis' political ascendancy within the context of the Meerut Muslim world. The BSP provided the Qureshis with the necessary framework to forge an inter-ethnic class coalition with the Chamars. This coalition opened up critical leeway for Qureshi political ascendancy. With this coalition, the Qureshis became the primary political force in Meerut, replacing the Ansaris who had been the leading economic and political force since the 1970s.²⁶⁴

Although the Qureshis' rising economic fortunes led the way to their remarkable political rise, the change in the power structure within low-status Muslim society in Meerut cannot be explained only with reference to the economic advancement of the Qureshi community. The change was apparently more profound in its nature since it was grounded in the broader political changes that had taken place after Congress' supremacy came to an end. Although the Ansari community in general had some privileges over other low-status Muslim communities in terms of obtaining patronage from the Congress Party — such as a licence to start a power-loom factory or the bus transportation business — the Ansaris could not obtain much political representation from the ruling Congress (see Chapter 2). After the 1990s, on the other hand, the Qureshis were able to

²⁶⁴ A Muslim school principal aptly expressed the shift from the Ansaris to the Qureshis: '...money can lead to political supremacy, hegemony. Economic power brings you political power. It was Ansari and is now Qureshi'. Interview on 19 March 2004.

take advantage of broader changes in the UP political system that yielded genuine opportunities for new political alliances directly linked to political representation. The major difference between the politics of the Qureshis and the Ansaris thus derives from the fact that the Qureshis have come to have the Indian party system on their side. That is to say, the Qureshis are aided by a new Indian party system that more fluidly incorporates new leaders of different ethnic minorities into its structures (Chandra 2004: 96).

Further, the Qureshi political leaders were not passively waiting for the BSP to come and induct them into its party structure. These leaders were rather proactively and creatively grasping the political opportunities that opened up for them (Chapter 5). Both the BSP and SP provided low-status Muslims, particularly the Qureshis, with not only an idea of representation but also the space for them to achieve office. The coalition between the Chamars and the Qureshis was also critically grounded in an historical proximity between the two communities. This demographic as well as sociological dimension brought them together as alliance partners in a way that did not exist for the Ansari community.

The inter-ethnic class coalition between the Qureshis and the Chamars can to some extent be attributed to the proximity of the two communities' socio-economic status and occupations. Qureshis and Chamars (both meat-eaters) lived in segregation from the rest of their communities. These two communities came to share, therefore, geographic space far enough from their Hindu brethren not to trouble them with the smell of meat being cooked in their homes. Chamars and Qureshis lived side by side for generations along the edge

of the south walls of the Old Town and the outer edge of the city border in Meerut.²⁶⁵ Also, the two communities shared occupational proximity. Meat and skin constitute different parts of the same profession. The Ansaris in general, on the other hand, would not be able to have the same relationship with the Chamars since they did not share any of these common factors, especially occupation.

Another point relevant to the political rise of the Qureshis concerns the development of a community political consciousness oriented to power. This trait can be discerned in the conference minutes of the Qureshi Council (*Jamiat-ul-Qureshi*). The minutes of the Qureshi Council conference held in 1974 particularly provide information about important features of the Qureshi political organisation. The conference was held in the Qureshi mosque in Meerut in November 1974. The principal aim of this conference was to adopt a resolution against the dowry system. The reasons for abolition seemed to lie in, among other things, the progressive and reformist spirit of the Qureshi leaders at that time under the influence of the Deobandhi reformist Islamic school. The conference minutes written in Urdu were compiled in a small pamphlet for the purpose of wider distribution. It indicated, on one hand, the importance of the religious idiom in Qureshi politics, which was ubiquitous throughout the entire proceedings. The minutes, on the other, also pointed to other significant political features of Qureshi discourse. They were particularly manifest in the

²⁶⁵ The physical proximity of the Qureshis and the Chamars was not unique in Meerut. Qureshis traditionally lived with the Scheduled Castes, particularly with the Valmikis and the Chamars all over India (interview with a Qureshi respondent, 4 April 2004). The allocation of space according to occupation, religion and recreation was an important element of traditional Indian city planning (Rao 1974: 106).

concluding speech made by Dr. Kamil Qureshi, the Secretary of the Council and the owner of a large meat export firm based in Delhi:

From meat, bones, horns and skin, huge export business is being run, and in crores of rupees. Some lakhs of rupees go to the Government of India. This community besides this benefit to the nation, has come forward whenever any leader has given a call — be it Motilal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi, Maulana Aboul Kalam Azad, Dr. Muktar Ahmad Ansari and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Jazl Sahab (Shahnawaz Khan). Our youth have always come forward and supported these leaders. While closing my speech, I would say that now time has changed, and situation has changed. After June 1974 entire atmosphere of the country has changed. After all these changes you must also change. Your rights are written in the Constitution of India. You can take your rights and you can take them only through one path, i.e. education. Make it a public awareness. Educate as many people as you can. Give your youth this ornament and make a bright future of yours (*All India Jamiat-ul-Qureshi* 1975).

Dr. Qureshi's remarks indicate that the essence of Qureshi politics lies for him in an emphasis on rights and an entitlement to equal opportunity, as well as on the need for the education of the younger generation and economic upliftment — while all these things must be based on the promotion of Islamic tenets and religiosity. His speech explicitly stresses the strong linkage with the central power, especially with the Congress leadership, including Jawaharlal Nehru. The conference minutes have as an appendix a lengthy sequence of letters from the President of India or Cabinet Ministers of the ruling Congress offering congratulatory addresses and support, which again evidences a strong power orientation on the part of the Qureshis. The minutes of the Qureshi Council over decades indicate that it has always been inviting a number of leading politicians from the ruling Party. In the 1995 conference in Nagapur, Maharashtra, the core

group of participating politicians was actually the BJP (*All India Jamiat-ul-Qureshi* 1995), again indicating the pragmatism of some Qureshi leaders.

Given these broader political configurations, we should note that a political alliance between the Qureshis and the Chamars in Meerut indicates certain structural tensions within Muslim society in the city, as well as a measure of political realism. The alliance between the Qureshis and the Chamars has remained at the political level and has not extended to the social level or to shared cultural symbols. Yet efforts to effect a political alliance between the Qureshis and the Chamars in the city have a long history both in formal and grass-roots circles. There were, on the other hand, very few signs of political cooperation among different Muslim communities that had autonomously been generated from within. The efforts to consolidate the Muslim community as a political force had generally come from larger political developments, such as the post-Emergency Lok Sabha election of 1977 when Muslims voted *en bloc* against the ruling Congress Party. Nonetheless small and sporadic initiatives to create an autonomous political force from within did emerge from individuals such as Yusuf Qureshi in 1980 or Dr. Wahid Qureshi in 1977, but both initiatives appeared to have set the foundation, after all, for the Qureshi-Chamar political alliance to unfold in the coming future (Chapter 2).

The Muslims in Meerut were by no means a homogeneous and monolithic community. They lived in a grid of different identities and loyalties including those of class and *biradari* that overlapped, competed and strengthened each other. *Biradari* identity has particularly been stressed in the domain of politics. These competing divisions gave rise to the challenge to create a coherent Muslim

community for electoral mobilisation. In the context of this challenge, the growing threat of Hindu Right-wing organisations formed one of the most powerful bonding factors to politically unify Muslims as a consolidated force. A senior Muslim political leader commented: 'Muslims are increasingly divided by *biradari*. Only we are united against the BJP'.²⁶⁶

6.4 Pragmatism vs. Identity and Political Representation

It is imperative to clarify at this point how this major theme of defeating the BJP came into the general picture of Muslim voting in the 2004 Lok Sabha election. For this purpose I now explore in more depth the relationship between the BSP, Shahid Akhlaq and Muslim voters in Meerut in the 2004 election. There was evidently an aspect of instrumentalism in Muslim voting patterns in the 2004 Lok Sabha election. That is, there were many Muslim respondents who pointed out that their priority choice in the election was for a Muslim candidate who would most likely defeat the BJP. This indicated that Muslims placed their priority of choice on the ethnic background of the candidate rather than on political parties. The BSP, for example, came to be seen with less credibility among Muslims when the Party forged a coalition with the BJP on more than one occasion.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁶ Interview with Hakim Saffudin on 25 November 2003.

²⁶⁷ The BSP's 'flirtation' with the BJP took place first from June to October 1995, then from March to September 1997 and finally from March to October 2002 (Chandra 1999: 73).

The negative effect of the BJP-BSP combination was, for example, reflected in a small 4.7 percent of the Muslim vote cast for the BSP in 1996 (Chandra 1999: 73; van Dyke 2007: 130).²⁶⁸ There was also some criticism of Shahid and his family, as well of their alleged criminal records, although none of them have been convicted by the court. But those Muslims, including high-status Muslims who usually despised the Qureshis, tended to cast their vote for Shahid or other strong Qureshi (Muslim) candidates when it came to the election. This might lead us to think that it did not really matter if it was Shahid or the BSP, but the important thing for Muslim voters was that Shahid was Muslim and that he was most likely to defeat the BJP candidate.

All that said, I want to underline here that my strong sense of Muslim voting in 2004 was that it went beyond instrumentalism and pragmatism. Muslim voters were significantly attracted to the BSP's *Bahujan* ideology, which mainly consisted of calls for social justice, proportional representation/share in political power and more government resources. The BSP and SP were anti-BJP with secular slogans and a pro-minorities stance. These parties provided Muslims with space and opportunities for political representation. Political representation also denoted ideas of respect and dignity, which particularly appealed to low-status Muslims who had been marginalised and discriminated against as much politically, economically and socially as the Chamars and other north Indian Scheduled Caste communities.

²⁶⁸ Kanshi Ram, the founder of the BSP, however, knew that voters would often be attracted by a candidate from their own community. Ram also indicated that a ticket from the BSP would implicitly offer the large fixed vote of the Chamars in addition to the vote of the ethnic constituency from which the candidate originally came (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998: 220).

Another important aspect of Shahid Akhlaq's electoral mobilisation was that he was widely accepted and identified as a pious Muslim among the Muslim community in Meerut. Shahid was largely regarded as a man of religion who could also protect and pursue Muslim interests on behalf of the Muslim electorate. Here arose the issues of Muslim identity and representation, which were particularly well articulated in the election campaign of Shahid Akhlaq, and which were also embodied in BSP hoardings in May 2004 (Chapter 5). Religious ideology and practice once again played a significant role in Muslim politics. By fulfilling religious duties the Qureshi leaders gained faith and respect from a larger Muslim community that included religious leaders in Meerut. Shahid and Yaqoob Qureshi, for example, both spent significant parts of their capital on religious occasions in the public arena, including huge *Iftaar* dinners at the end of Ramadan month. Those public events also formed an exhibition of their wealth and money power, which in itself formed an important political process, creating a particular social relation with the spectators. The exhibition, in short, offered an important opportunity to ensure their legitimised status and power in both religious and secular terms (cf. Osella and Osella 2000: 127).

It is thus important to underline the fact that pragmatism has not formed the sole foundation of a new Muslim politics in Meerut. Both Shahid and Yaqoob were considered by many as protectors and saviours of the Muslim community. Yaqoob Qureshi, for example, openly murdered a notorious Qureshi Unani doctor who had been molesting local Muslim women in 1988. With this murder his popularity in his locality went up tremendously. Although many people witnessed the murder scene, no one presented themselves to police as a witness and Yaqoob was never arrested. Many Muslim women came to Yaqoob with

gifts to show their gratitude for the elimination of this menace from the locality. Since the local administration and the police had not done anything to save these women, Yaqoob became a local hero not only for these women but for the entire Qureshi community. In the 1989 Municipal election Yaqoob was elected as a Councillor, using his popularity based on this incident. Muslim women in his ward in particular voted for him *en bloc*.²⁶⁹ The murder case might be seen as the basis of Yaqoob's successful political career. There were also many Muslim respondents who thought strongly about the broader Muslim identity and representation that Shahid exemplified. Shahid Akhlaq brilliantly constructed an image of a *Muslim* representative who also believed in development and peace, and which benefitted everyone in the community.

6.5 Strategies of the Meerut Muslims in the wider political system

I now consider the changing course of Muslim politics in Meerut from a strategic point of view. Although political Muslim strategies in the city can be seen as expressions of dissent and struggle for survival in the face of *Hindutva* and the political forces that endorsed it, they were also characterised by a degree of compliance with existing political structures. When Meerut's Muslims deserted the Congress Party they did not form separate ethnic-based parties, which most likely would have generated a Hindu backlash. Instead they moved to the

²⁶⁹ Interview with an Ansari factory owner on 28 November 2003, and with Doulla on 14 May 2004.

Janata Dal or BSP and largely endorsed the platforms of these parties, including the pursuit of civil rights by Dalit and other subaltern groups (Laitin 1986: 107).

The public representations of claims by subordinate groups, James Scott tells us, nearly always have a strategic or dialogic dimension that influences the form they take (Scott 1990: 92). Scott shows that there are three steps in 'a gradient of radicalism in the interrogation of domination'. The least radical step is to criticise some of the dominant stratum for having violated the norms by which they claim to rule; the second is to accuse the entire stratum of failing to observe the principles of its rule; and the most radical step is to repudiate the very principles by which the dominant stratum justifies its dominance (ibid. 92). Strategic action from below will always and necessarily be addressed in compliance with the wider institutional framework so as to ensure that it will gain 'a hearing' from the authority above (ibid. 93). Muslims in Meerut followed suit and chose to take the least radical step; that is, to largely observe the 'rules' of the game albeit with a hidden transcript in mind for bending the system to become more favourable to them. In other words, the dissident group maximises or exploits the existing system as a valuable political resource in its social conflict rather than taking radical steps to challenge its very coordinates.

The strategies adopted by the Meerut Muslims in the public arena were those that would enable them to become an integral part of the majority game. In this sense the claim to active citizenship can be considered an expression of the Muslims' strategy for becoming part of the game at the highest level, the Indian nation-state, albeit not as individuals but as a collective unit. According to the widely accepted definition by T.H. Marshall, citizenship means 'full and equal

membership in a political community' (Marshall 1964). It has an 'integrative function' to bring into its fold marginalised sections of the population under a wide and overarching identity. Citizens' membership of the nation-state also assures entitlements to a share of national resources. Membership of a political community also signifies a wider identity that *masks* all other identities. Equality is, therefore, premised on erasing ascriptive inequalities and masking differences (of culture, caste and gender, etc.) in order to make them irrelevant to the exercise and enjoyment of the rights of citizenship (Roy 2001: 240).

At the second highest level, the Meerut Muslims adapted political configurations that predominated in mainstream Indian politics. That is, the Muslims played the game of pursuing OBC politics in alliance with the Dalits and Backward Castes. The accord between the Muslims and these lower-caste communities had been cemented by the political disposition of OBC leaders such as Mulayam Singh Yadav. The Meerut Muslims sought solidarity across their *biradari* divisions to form an ethnic bloc that could more effectively pursue political power and representation. But while complying with the game of the majority, the Meerut Muslims were also simultaneously negotiating cultural boundaries and reconciling a changing sense of Muslim identity. In the terminology of multiculturalism, this was a response of the Muslim minority community in order to negotiate the terms of integration when accepting the principles of state-imposed integration (Kymlicka 1998: 39). This negotiation between compliance with universal citizenship and sustenance of Muslim identity was, I suggest, the essence of a new Muslim politics in the public arena.

It is important to note, however, that it was a ‘*re-negotiation*’ rather than a ‘negotiation’ because the negotiation of cultural boundaries as well as the binary identity of being a Muslim and an Indian had always existed structurally for Indian Muslims. This issue occasionally appeared in the public discourse, most prominently perhaps in the Shah Bano affair in 1985 in the form of a contestation between Personal Law and the unified civil code. It would not be too mistaken to state that the public discourse about the Muslim community established by the Muslim leadership in post-Independent India functioned to create almost a sole image of an ‘exclusive political and religious category’ (Hasan 1990: 53). The Shah Bano affair was also concluded in a way that reinforced this image, bringing conservative Muslim leaders to national-level prominence. Beneath such public discourse, however, we know very little as to how diverse Muslim communities have nurtured their self-images and self-perceptions, or how they have tried to be both Muslim and Indian.

6.6 Negotiations of a Binary Identity in the Political Life

The Qureshi leaders’ re-negotiation of religious and civic identities appeared to be more distinctively balanced between the two identities than that previously seen under an earlier Muslim leadership. The process increasingly appeared to be seen in different forms in the public arena, particularly after 2000. First, it was seen in a series of performances by Yaqoob Qureshi. The SP-led UP state government appointed Yaqoob Qureshi as the Minister of Minority Welfare in 2002. His main responsibility was to improve the welfare of the minority communities in India. In this capacity, for example, Yaqoob took as many as

800 Muslims on a pilgrimage to Mecca in 2003, the largest number ever taken by the UP government.²⁷⁰ The *Haji* apparently constituted an important on-going 'nation-building' project of constructing a Muslim community through this significant religious symbolism (van der Veer 1996 (1994): 127).

In the local public arena, on the other hand, Yaqoob Qureshi celebrated the victory of the Indian cricket team over Pakistan by distributing sweets in the neighbourhood, which was a Muslim, particularly Qureshi, heartland.²⁷¹ Arjun Appadurai, in his article entitled 'Playing with Modernity: The decolonisation of Indian cricket' (Appadurai 1995) points out that cricket became an ideal focus of national attention and nationalist passion as 'an emblem of Indian nationhood' (ibid. 45). Cricket produces, according to Appadurai, 'a confluence of lived interests...and consumers can share the excitement of Indianness without its many divisive scars' (ibid. 46). Given this described significance attached to cricket in giving rise of nationalist passion, it is not hard to imagine that the game between India and Pakistan must have attracted overwhelming public attention in Meerut. And it is also understandable that given the historical antagonism between Hindus and Muslims in the city, the general understanding

²⁷⁰ There was a dramatic increase in the numbers of pilgrims to Mecca from the 19th century onward. The *haji* had been organised by the state power since the 20th century because the British colonial government was concerned about anti-colonial Islamic influence. After independence state institutions took over the role of control and surveillance and the *haji* became a system of national pilgrimage to a transnational site (van der Veer, 1996 (1994): 127). Yaqoob Qureshi as the Minister of Minority Welfare was obviously in charge of the *haji* in UP under the SP government. The number of *Haji* pilgrims entitled to government subsidy has increased by 10,000 from 1 lakh (100,000) in 2005 to 1.1. lakh (110,000) for *Haji* 2006-II (the second phase of 2006), *The Hindustan Times*, 16 November 2006 (*The Hindustan Times* (New Delhi)).

²⁷¹ *Amar Ujjala*, 22 March 2004 (*Amar Ujjala* (Meerut)).

among Hindus had been that Muslims in Meerut always celebrated when the Indian cricket team lost to the Pakistan team. This kind of Muslim reaction sometimes had led to tension in some localities in the past. The celebration by Yaqoob Qureshi, as the Minister of Minority Welfare in Lucknow, of the victory of the Indian team over Pakistan, therefore, was a public gesture of great social and political significance. On the other hand, Yaqoob Qureshi made a public statement that anyone who would bring him the head of the cartoonist who had drawn a cartoon of the Prophet would gain a Rs. 51 crore reward.²⁷² This news attracted wide attention not only from Indian observers but also from the international community. A few weeks later, however, the same newspaper carried an article declaring that the Minister of Haji in UP, Yaqoob Qureshi, was in charge of the relief camp operations for the victims of the bomb blast in Varanasi in eastern UP that took place in early March 2006. The article describes Yaqoob visiting the camp and distributing relief goods to both Hindus and Muslims alike. These public performances showing him to be part of the Indian nation were always paralleled by a balancing act which underlined his specifically Muslim identity.

Another dimension of Muslim politics was using mainstream state institutions to make claims for equal civil rights. In this dimension Yusuf Qureshi, an elder brother of Yaqoob, played a central role. The families of Muslim victims' in Maliana and Hashimpura have continued to pursue judicial proceedings since 1987 in order to convict the 19 PAC constables who were most directly involved in the Hashimpura and Maliana incidents under criminal law. These accused

²⁷² *The Hindustan Times*, 22 February 2006.

include the commandant of the 44th battalion responsible for the mass killing at Maliana. They were accused of murder, attempted murder and destruction of evidence. However, none has been either prosecuted or convicted under criminal law.²⁷³ The UP state government ordered an inquiry by the Crime Branch Central Investigation Department (CBCID), whose report, submitted to the state government in 1994, was never made public.

In early June 2000, 16 of the 19 accused surrendered in a group but quickly got bail. On this occasion, again they were neither suspended, arrested nor produced before the court. All of these accused have been active in their jobs with known postings and residential addresses. Charges against the 16 accused continued to fail until 2002. Yusuf Qureshi, as a lawyer-cum politician, has consistently been providing Muslim victims not only with moral support but also with funding and legal assistance. He has been assisting them throughout a process of appeal to the session court, to the High Court and to the Supreme Court (Rahman 2003). Finally, in 2002, a few months after the Mulayam Singh Yadav-led Samajwadi Party came to power in UP, the PAC pickets were removed from Meerut city.²⁷⁴ The removal was attributable to Yaqoob Qureshi's influence as the then-Minister of Minority Welfare of the state. The removal of the PAC had been one of the most important post-1987 demands among the

²⁷³ 'Unpunished Guilty', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20 May 1989 (Editorial 1989). 'The Police: No help for victims', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15 August 1992 (Editorial 1992). 'Is There Any Hope of Justice?: Hashimpura (Meerut) killings by the PAC', PUCL Bulletin, 2001 (PUCL 2001).

²⁷⁴ 'Justice Out of Sight', *Frontline*, 7-20 May 2005 (Narrain 7-20 May 2005) (*Frontline* (Madras)).

Meerut Muslims. Under the same Yadav government there was also a significant increase in the number of Muslims joining the police force.²⁷⁵

In the domain of local politics these Muslim leaders empowered the Muslim masses at different levels. The areas of empowerment and their roles sometimes overlapped or contested, yet the process of empowerment also maintained the binary character of civil and Muslim identity. It seems to me that it was Yusuf Qureshi who was the catalyst in the grass-roots transformation of the Muslim masses. In 1986 Yusuf Qureshi became the chairman of the Faiz-a-am College, which had always been the central institution and opinion maker in terms of Muslim education in Meerut. After Yusuf came to this position the project of establishing more educational and cultural institutions for the Meerut Muslims seems to have begun. These institutions aimed at both secular and Islamic education. Yusuf upgraded the Faiz-a-am College to a degree college that now provides higher education to Muslim students, offering both graduate and post-graduate degrees. The Faiz-a-am College was originally a boy's college, but the higher education section became co-educational. The new university section included an Urdu department and Islamic teaching courses. Meerut University (for post-graduate degrees only) also started a new Urdu department while I was conducting my fieldwork. Yusuf Qureshi was also engaged in establishing a number of vocational schools for different professions for Muslim students from low-income families. The Qureshi mosque, the centre of the religious life of the Qureshi butcher community in Bani Sarae, for example, was constructing a new

²⁷⁵ *The Hindustan Times*, 10 May 2007.

vocational school for girls from poor families by buying up the surrounding properties.²⁷⁶ Yaqoob Qureshi was the treasurer of the mosque at that time.

Haji Raes, a well-respected Qureshi politician in Jali Kothi and the owner of the largest scrap market in Meerut, established two schools in Meerut. One of these, *Millat* Public School (English-medium), was established in 1990 with funding from the Minority Welfare Society, which has been set up late in 1987 with Haji Raes as president. The *Millat* public school became increasingly popular among Muslim children, with as many as 250 students enrolling in 2003. Another school that Raes was involved in running was the *Madrasah-al-Qureshi* Girls' School, which belonged to the *Madrasah Jamal-ul-Quran*, an Islamic teaching institution established in 1924. The school provided girls from the Qureshi community with both religious and modern education in English, Urdu and Hindi. According to Raes, both schools had Hindu teachers. The parent organisations funded these schools, and there was no fee requirement for students. The funding was also supplemented by individual donations, but there was no governmental support.²⁷⁷

These activities to strengthen the educational sector of the community informed both the political and religious life of the community. They aimed to strengthen religious ties and Muslim identity. They were also useful in that they demonstrated the power that adhered to those successful Muslim businessmen-cum-politicians. At the same time, these activities embodied Islamic charitable

²⁷⁶ Interview with Doulla, whose grandfather began raising funds to build the Qureshi mosque in the 1930s. Interview on 24 March 2004.

²⁷⁷ Interview with Mr. Haji Raes on 2 December 2003.

values. The religious leaders in the city, including *Maulanas*, *Malvis* and *Imams*, were assisting the politicians' projects for educating the Muslim masses in their own capacity. These religious leaders were encouraging the Muslim masses, the sections of the most 'emotional' and 'backward' religious crowds, to understand the importance of modern education. The leaders preached that the holy Quran advocated the importance of a secular education (Chapter 4).²⁷⁸

These Muslim political leaders seemed to empower the Muslim community in a more general and profound sense. Muslims from the lower strata such as the Ansaris or the Qureshis, who could not obtain the benefits of state patronage under the Congress regime, could now go directly to the offices/homes of those Muslim leaders to claim their rights. On several occasions I saw fathers of the Ansari families with whom I was acquainted visiting Yusuf Qureshi's office in Bani Sarae for his or for Yaqoob's signature on their daughters' OBC certificate. Their daughters were preparing for the entrance examination of the prestigious institutions for higher education. Bani Sarae — the locality of the Qureshi butcher community which had been one of the most impoverished and deserted areas of the Old Town — was now well-known among the local administration and media as a leading Muslim power centre.²⁷⁹ In this general process of empowering the Meerut Muslims, there was Shahid Akhlaq's symbolic existence as the Mayor and now the MP of the city. He was taking a more top-down approach to constructing a Muslim community through political Islam. His role

²⁷⁸ Interview with *Imam* of Green Mosque in Khairnagar on 21 November 2003.

²⁷⁹ Conversation with one of my Hindu assistants.

as a symbol of power was most saliently manifested in his efforts to control Hindu-Muslim violence in the city.

6.7 Shahid Akhlaq's Control of Hindu-Muslim Violence

During the period of his mayorship, Shahid Akhlaq with his Hindu and Muslim Corporators stopped a huge mob on the verge of full-fledged communal violence several times. In 2003 there was a series of incidents that could have developed into large-scale communal violence on 22 July, 21 September, on several occasions in October and on 3 and 17 November.²⁸⁰ Among them, an incident in Pilokheri in the south of the Old Town was the occasion of the most dramatic efforts by the Mayor and his Corporators to prevent an unruly mob from going on the rampage.

On 3 November 2003, following the murder of a Muslim by Hindu perpetrators, huge Muslim crowds gathered on the streets and started shouting slogans of revenge. The Muslims captured the body of the deceased and did not let the police approach it. Shahid Akhlaq, with his Hindu (BJP) and Muslim Corporators, made their way through the crowds, reached the spot and tried to control the mob. Shahid assured them that the culprit would be taken into custody. In other words, Shahid promised the Muslims that they would obtain justice under the rule of law. At this moment, another incident in a nearby factory occurred. There, a Muslim mob was pelting stones and trying to set it on

²⁸⁰ Interview with then Mayor, Mr. Shahid Akhlaq, on 17 August 2003. See also *Dainik Jagran*, 17 November 2003 (*Dainik Jagran* (New Delhi)).

fire. Fifty factory workers, of which 16 were Hindu were locked inside the factory. The Mayor and Corporators rushed to the site and tried to calm the mob and save the factory. The local newspaper article reports that while trying to control the situation, many local leaders, including the Mayor, got their *khurtas* torn off and even suffered minor injuries. But in the end these leaders succeeded in calming the mob, and the body of the victim was taken for post-mortem by the police.²⁸¹ This scene most pertinently demonstrates Shahid Akhlaq's symbolic presence as a powerful Muslim leader who had the power, legitimised by the state authority, to intervene and control a huge angry mob.

It was the consolidated view among the high-ranking police officials, mostly Hindu, that I interviewed in the major cities in UP in 2001 that the Muslims generally reacted more strongly than the Hindus to national and local events that stimulated religious feelings because of their sense of vulnerability as a minority. The stronger their feeling of insecurity, the more acutely they felt the need for Muslim leadership at state and central government. A Muslim businessman who had lost his shop and his relatives during the 1987 violence said to me:

After the demolition, we thought that we need someone at the centre. Having a Muslim Mayor at the top, we feel we have power... It helps us to develop our business, bring up peace for us.²⁸²

²⁸¹ *Amar Ujjala*, 3 November 2003.

²⁸² Interview on 26 November 2003.

It was the first time that the public saw Muslim leaders with their Hindu counterparts coming out onto the streets and directly controlling a riotous situation. They did so under the gaze of the Hindu administration and the police. The fact that Meerut had been relatively peaceful since Haji Akhlaq had become the city MLA was well recognised by members of both communities. Many observers pointed out that only because the Mayor was a Muslim was it possible to influence the mob and prevent large-scale violence. If this had not been the case, communal violence would definitely have ensued. This Muslim reaction demonstrates that if Muslims had the legitimised power of the state on their side, they would respond to the precipitating event in an entirely different way. The DIG Meerut, who was known for his high integrity and capacity to control a number of difficult riot situations in UP, told me in 2001:

For example, in UP we are having the Samajwadi Party, Mr. Yadav. After 1986 somehow he was identified as pro-Muslim. So whenever the Samajwadi Party is in power, the Muslim community feels safer than when the BJP is in power. If the BJP is in power, Hindu people feel more comfortable. Pro-Muslim people would feel automatically and psychologically that this is not our government, and something wrong can happen at any time. ...Who is ruling at Delhi and the state of UP is very important for them. ...For example, in Meerut now there are two senior MLAs from the BJP, the Mayor from the Muslim community and the pro-Muslim party is also in power. So there is a balance of power. This makes Muslims feel a part of power. If Muslims are not represented properly in one local area, it becomes more vulnerable and tensions become high as far as local scenarios are concerned. Local scenario becomes much more important. A sense of participation of one community at the local level, state level and national level, influences communal configuration or tension of that particular area.²⁸³

²⁸³ Interview with Mr. Arum Kumar, Deputy Inspector General of Police, Meerut, 30 December 2001.

It is therefore imperative to consider the impact of having Muslim leaders in the power structure on the psychology of the Muslim masses when facing riotous situations. Seeing members of the community becoming a part of the state's power structures seems to uplift the minority community from a previous sense of doomed insecurity which had formed the foundation of Muslim political consciousness and identity. As a consequence Muslims trust the administration to do justice to the community and not respond to anti-Muslim mobilisation by Hindus (see Brass 1997: 253-259). The depth of the Akhlaqs' understanding of Muslim psychology was well expressed in their famous slogan 'Peace and Trade'. Shahid Akhlaq underlined his commitment to bring peace and to invite more trade and business to Meerut through this slogan. As a strong political leader, he needed to keep his word in order to be able to establish himself and maintain his credentials as a strong political leader of both Hindus and Muslims.

The scene of Shahid Akhlaq trying to control the riotous situation represented one of the 'political spectacles' in the public arena which constitute the peoples' struggle for democracy and civil rights (Hansen 2001: 229-230). It was a 'realm of negotiation' in which the Muslim crowd demanded social justice, recognition and legitimation of their identity as Muslims. Shahid Akhlaq was in this case an intermediary between the Muslim community and the state. He responded to his brethren using the political rhetoric of 'authentic religion', pointing out that 'the criminals have no religion'. By assuring the Muslim crowds that the culprits would be taken into custody, Shahid displayed his legitimised power to negotiate with the state to bring the Muslims justice. His action was almost a state action that presupposed both a will and strategy (ibid.). He was simultaneously displaying to the Hindu administration his power over the minority community

while consolidating his political position as a symbol of justice and power for the weaker sections of society (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1 Shahid Akhlaq trying to persuade the mob not to fight, emphasizing religiosity in Pilokheri



Source: Amar Ujjala, 3 November 2003.

In the large office at his residence I saw Shahid sitting cordially with his Hindu BJP Corporators who came into his office as soon as I finished my interview with him. The BJP at the time constituted the second largest faction within the Municipal Corporation. This scene visibly impressed on me how much Shahid was now inside the power structure of the city. His reputation as a Mayor among the BJP and Muslim Corporators was not always positive. But his position in power made interactions between him and his counterparts more overt and transparent as these were brought up to the public level. The

intentions of the 'Muslim' Mayor in the public arena were better communicated to other Corporators, including those of the BJP. In the same vein, the BJP and others were forced to bargain and work with Shahid Akhlaq on an equal level. Representing the Meerut Municipal Corporation, Shahid was now able to exercise his authority to instruct the local administration and police forces to control a riotous situation in a timely manner. Whether the ruling Party is pro-Muslim or pro-Hindu also to a great extent influences the response of the police forces. If it is a pro-Muslim government, the local police would intervene swiftly to protect Muslims (Wilkinson 2004; Brass 2003). Many Muslim respondents mentioned that since the early 1990s the local police were generally efficient and quick to take pre-emptive actions to prevent ethnic violence. Prior to 1993, Muslims had been outsiders as regards the power structure. Muslim voices had not often been heard and their claims for justice and equal treatment had been dismissed or ignored by the administration. But the situation had now dramatically changed. The District Magistrate (DM) and the Senior Superintendence of Police (SSP), for example, stand up to show their respect and honour to Shahid upon his entering a room. Shahid is now addressed by the DM and the SSP as 'Sir'.

Equally important is that Shahid Akhlaq stands on a platform that represents key non-Muslim groups — namely large sections of Hindus from the Scheduled Castes. This fact apparently effectuates peace-making efforts, as the latter would not want to fight the Muslim community from which their political representatives have come. Kanchan Chandra argues that contrary to the conventional theory of ethnic party systems (eg. Horowitz 1985: 291), ethnic party systems in India may constitute an effective check on the escalation of

ethnic violence in the long run (Chandra 1999: 88; 2000: 57; cf. Wilkinson 2004). Ethnic parties keep searching for new allies, even among those that had been formerly excluded. According to Kanchan Chandra, 'the electoral incentives of ethnically heterogeneous constituencies have led parties to switch from the strategy of demonising and excluding outsiders to the strategy of building bridges between included and excluded categories' (Chandra 1999: 84). No single group, therefore, would be permanently excluded from the political system. The BSP and SP made it possible to create new political alliances against the upper castes among Muslims, Dalits and Backward Castes. The BSP and SP, in other words, deflected the BJP's efforts to construct a narrowly religious identity as the dominant category, and instead forged caste identities in order to create a political community.

The fluid political party system allowed different political configurations to emerge at ground level. The alliance among the Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Castes and Muslims that emerged in Meerut seems to have worked thus far to reduce Hindu-Muslim violence in Meerut. During ethnic violence, lower caste groups of both Hindus and Muslims formed the major fighting force hired by upper castes. In Meerut it was mainly the Valmikis (sweepers) and the Chamars who became the fighting forces during the large-scale violence in 1982 and 1987 (Engineer 1991 (1984): 273-274; 1987b: 29). A Corporator of the Municipal government from the Chamar community told me:

Upper-caste politicians or political leaders give money to the Scheduled Castes and Muslims to become rioters for their own big benefit. The Scheduled Castes or Muslims were in the labourer class, working in Hindu leaders' house construction. They belong to the low-income group and not well educated. So

they follow their bosses' instructions to fight. ...Positive thinking about each other nurtured in the meetings [between the Scheduled Castes and low-status Muslim leaders during the 1987 ethnic violence]. No riots take place after this. Upper-caste Hindus know that they [the Scheduled Castes and Muslims] would no longer obey their instructions.²⁸⁴

After the formation of the BSP, very few Chamars and other Scheduled Caste groups were interested in being hired by the upper castes for ethnic violence.²⁸⁵ The political alliance among the Other Backward Castes meant that it was no longer possible for the upper castes to purchase the lower castes' services to kill or damage members of another ethnic group who were now their allies in jointly promoting and protecting their political economy.

6.8 Conclusion

Shahid Akhlaq elevated the demand for citizenship initiated by Haji Akhlaq to a more holistic ideology by including at its core a reading of Islam. His broad and largely presentist interpretation of Islam encouraged Muslims to use their religion as a catalyst in becoming good citizens. Shahid used the power of religion to construct a modern sense of political community. His use of religion demonstrated that the religious identity of Islam could be constantly redefined as a resource for political mobilisation. The elevated notion of Islam as an integral part of citizenship also signified a site of negotiation of cultural boundaries and a reworking of Muslim identity.

²⁸⁴ Interview with a Chamar Corporator on 31 January 2004.

²⁸⁵ The same interview above.

In her post-structuralist and anti-essentialist critique of Jurgen Habermas' universalist conception of democracy, Chantal Mouffe (1995) argues that rationalist, liberal thinkers reduce politics to a calculus of interests, with individuals being presented as rational actors aiming to maximise their self-interests. Habermas, too, and more explicitly, suggests a model of a rational and universal consensus to be achieved by means of free discussion. These thinkers put aside or ignore disruptive issues such as antagonisms, passions, 'everything that can lead to violence' (ibid. 262), and believe that a rational agreement on principles (read 'universal reason') is enough to sediment pluralism among different political subjects in modern societies. Mouffe points out that the rationalist approach to reach 'consensus' without exclusion is almost always a creation of an 'us' which does not have a corresponding 'them'. However, this is impossible because every identity is relational (ibid. 263). Mouffe argues that a simple denial of the dimension of antagonism between diverse groups does not make it disappear, and that a democratic approach therefore needs to come to terms with the 'ineradicable' character of antagonism. Mouffe also points out that the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions but to 'mobilise' these passions in a way that promotes democratic designs with recognition and legitimation of social conflict (ibid.).

Mouffe's conception of a democratic practice that acknowledges ineradicable nature of antagonism sheds light on one important dimension of the new Muslim politics in relation to democracy. The claim for citizenship among the Meerut Muslims, and the continuing negotiation of the boundaries of their identities as Indian Muslims, may be seen as a consequence of a democratic project that cannot eradicate power relations among diverse groups or

antagonisms among those groups. The claim for citizenship among the Meerut Muslims is further seen as a democratic project that recognises these differences and social conflicts. The Muslims' new democratic practices, in other words, have not been guided by a concept of 'consensus' based on 'universal human nature', but rather by a sense of vulnerability that has encouraged them to construct new 'democratic' identities for reasons of protection in a precarious and vulnerable democratic terrain.

This leads us to another important dimension of Muslim political strategy. Having in mind that the Hindu Right and the BJP might at any time return to power at state and central government, the Meerut Muslims appear to be preparing themselves by creating a system of 'protective ingratiation' (Scott 1990: 89). That is, Muslim strategies are not limited to temporary remedies such as the removal of the PAC from Meerut city, or to increase representation of Muslims in the state police force, although both of these efforts are important. It rather points to far-sighted defensive planning to blunt a potential attack from a world peopled with hostile and brutal enemies. Ingratiation can help transform this dangerous world into a safer place by 'depriving the potential antagonist of any pretext for aggression'.²⁸⁶

New and more active forms of political representation have transformed relationships between Muslims, the state and the judiciary, in Meerut as elsewhere in India. Prior to 1991, neither the state nor the law reflected or protected Muslims' needs in Meerut. Yet less than fifteen years later, Shahid

²⁸⁶ Edward E. Jones, 1964, quoted in Scott, p. 89, fn45.

Akhlaq, could stop a huge mob in the most dangerous moments of potential riot construction. The reduced level of ethnic violence in Meerut, however, is not only derived from the fact that powerful Muslim leaders are now part of the state structure. It is also to be accounted for through a different psychology of Muslims that yields an entirely new reaction to precipitant ethnic violence. Since Muslims now largely *trust* the administration, they are less minded to respond to provocations with the counter-mobilisation that were common prior to the 1990s. When the Muslims did not trust the administration they came out on the streets and fought to protect their religion, property and family themselves. This no longer seems to be required in Meerut.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

Hindu-Muslim relationships have formed a critical axis around which the political history of north India has evolved, in part, from the early modern period to the present day. The historical legacy of Muslim power over more than three hundred years in north India is still evident in a number of the features of cities and towns in Uttar Pradesh, Meerut included. The city is also characterised by some of the most contentious and dangerous Hindu-Muslim relations in the whole of India. The 1987 violence is still a living memory for many Meerut Muslims, particularly the mass killing of Muslims in the Hashimpura locality and in Maliana village by state forces. These and other events in the 1980s can be viewed as a form of ethnic cleansing in much the same way as the anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002 (following Godhra), albeit on a smaller scale.

7.2 Multiethnic Coalitions and the Reduction of Violence

Against this background, the relative absence of Hindu-Muslim violence in Meerut during the critical and dangerous years around 1992, and afterwards, has formed a puzzle that this thesis has sought to address. My research findings demonstrate that a strategic alliance across the Hindu-Muslim divide, in which Muslims proactively allied with lower-caste Hindus, proved crucial in reducing

levels of Hindu-Muslim violence after 1987-91. I accept Steven Wilkinson's argument that state-level forms of electoral competition largely determine whether Hindu-Muslim violence breaks out, even in the most riot-prone towns (Wilkinson 2004: 57). I also agree with his argument that state governments which rely heavily on Muslim votes will implement significant measures to prevent possible 'precipitating events' turning into large-scale violence. This was apparent in Bihar under Lalu Prasad Yadav, and what has happened in Meerut bears out Wilkinson's contention that large-scale mobilisations around a backward-caste identity — which was the basis for the Muslim-Scheduled Castes-Other Backward Castes alliance — tends, *inter alia*, to produce lower levels of Hindu-Muslim violence. It is as if north Indian politics has been following the course of events in such southern states as Kerala and Tamil Nadu, where high party fractionalisation forced successive state governments to prevent anti-minority mobilisations (save for those against Brahmins, perhaps), all of which resulted in low levels of Hindu-Muslim violence and relatively low levels of violence against subaltern castes (see Wilkinson 2004: 172-203; cf. van Dyke 2007). The South has been moving North.

At the core of this dissertation, however, is not a macro political science model of the type that can be found in Wilkinson (or in Varshney for that matter), but rather an in-depth case study at the micro-level which is focused on Muslim political agency and which insists on the continuing importance of locality. Whether and how a mechanism for the reduction of violence emerges in any given town or city depends to a significant degree on how local, non-state actors respond to wider political changes at the state level. Local actors in Meerut responded in definite and determinate ways to the opportunity structures of a

wider system change that increasingly made possible new forms of (inter-ethnic) coalition politics after c.1990. It also needs to be clearly said, however, that large-scale Hindu-Muslim violence generally did not occur if Muslims did not react to provocative anti-minority events precipitated by Hindu nationalist organisations and individuals. At this point the mechanism of what Paul Brass calls 'the institutionalised riot system' ceased to function, and the state, local administration and police were not even required to intervene. Increasingly, Muslim political leaders resolved communal problems in Meerut on their own, without troubling the state forces.

Looking at the period of transition from 1989 to 1992, which was a period of intense communal tension and violence in many parts of UP, we see much lower levels of violence in Meerut than would seem to be predicted by models focused on state-wide electoral considerations. According to Wilkinson, it was during this period that Hindu nationalists instigated Hindu-Muslim violence through provocative anti-Muslim mobilisations across UP in order to corral the floating Hindu vote. The position of UP's Muslims was not helped at this time by the tendency of many politicians from the ruling Congress Party to court the 'Hindu vote' in order to remain in power. This situation, in which the two leading national parties competed for the Hindu vote, created a dangerous situation for Muslims — a point well to the fore in Wilkinson's model. Wilkinson notes that a total of 33 riots took place in UP during this period, in which 295 people died, with more than half of the riots taking place in constituencies in which the BJP had been one of the two leading parties in the 1989 election (Wilkinson 2004: 49-51). This was exactly the case in Meerut, but, interestingly, the period ahead of the 1989 General Elections passed rather peacefully with only a few small,

sporadic violent incidents. The BJP finished in third place in Meerut, its defeat engineered by an alliance between large sections of Hindu lower-caste groups and Muslims. The winner was Harish Pal for the Janata Dal, with an overwhelming majority vote of 58.47 percent; the runner-up with 35.66 percent was Mohsina Kidwai for the Congress Party. The BJP gained just 2.45 percent of the vote. In the Assembly election of the same year the BJP seized power for the first time in Meerut since its inception (or re-branding) in 1980. It is possible that the BJP won because there was much less interest in the Assembly election as the Muslims' electoral goals had already been largely fulfilled with the victory of Harish Pal in the Lok Sabha election. The low level of interest could also be derived from the fact that a large number of Muslim Councillors had been elected to the Municipal Council earlier in the year. Finally, Ayuub Ansari, the runner-up candidate for the Janata Dal in the Assembly election, was hardly the kind of political leader to consolidate the Muslim vote at this point.

After the 1989 elections, Meerut remained relatively peaceful through several tense years, with only intermittent incidents of skirmishes and sporadic killings, most notably in 1991. It is my belief that these incidents, or at least some of them, could have been attempts by Hindu nationalists to provoke counter-mobilisations among Muslims with a view to igniting large-scale ethnic violence. This would fit in part with Paul Brass' work on institutionalised riot systems. However, violence did *not* occur, mainly because Muslims did not react to these provocations — and this, I would suggest, is where this thesis adds significant value to existing work on ethnic violence in northern India. This also begins to explain why there was no Hindu-Muslim violence in Meerut at the time of the destruction of the Babri Masjid in December 1992. The national-level anti-

Muslim provocation did not lead to large-scale ethnic violence in Meerut as it did in several other cities in UP. The presence of the Janata Dal in the Municipal government, solidarities based on a broad *Bahujan* identity among Muslims, Scheduled Castes and Other Backward Castes, and perhaps also the influence of Haji Akhlaq as a rising Muslim political leader, helped to control and contain the troubling situation facing the Muslim community in Meerut.

Many Muslim respondents recalled the impressively effective and timely intervention of the police and local administration after news came of the demolition of the Babri Masjid.²⁸⁷ Some respondents also recalled that members of *mohalla*-level Peace Committees worked to control Muslim protesters coming out on the streets soon after the demolition. My respondents heard many elders of the Committee spread the word to those Muslim protesters: ‘The police are Hindu. The government is Hindu. There is no point in fighting. We cannot win’. The Muslims, in short, made a co-ordinated effort *not* to respond to Hindu provocations. Their agency here — as a group armed mainly with what James Scott calls ‘the weapons of the weak’ (Scott 1985) — was that of organised unresponsiveness, or assertive forms of self-control and community discipline. The only incident that saw the deaths of more than ten Muslims occurred during the election violence in May 1991. But this incident

²⁸⁷ From the side of the Meerut local administration there was an interview with Mr. Mukul Sinhal who was the Chief Development Officer in Meerut in December 1992. He told me how prepared the local administration was at that time in the building-up phase to the demolition of the Babri Masjid. He told me, ‘We knew some kind of final stage will come when tension built up due to the Babri Masjid agitation....We were very prepared in logistics, concrete assignment, contingency plans and mentally prepared. Concrete task had been assigned. We were...fully geared. We were able to stop everything within three hours’. Interview with Mr. Mukul Sinhal, District Magistrate in Kanpur on 16 January 2002.

was a deliberate attack on Muslims by BJP workers, a killing spree on the very day of the election that was clearly aimed at countermanding the election itself, in order to stop Ayuub Ansari contesting — and winning — for the Janata Dal (Engineer 1992). Large-scale collective violence between Hindus and Muslims did not occur in Meerut city after 1987.

At the core of this dissertation is a demonstration of how some of the most despised segments in Indian society — low-status Muslims and low-caste Hindus — were mobilised amid new regimes of coalition politics to make Meerut a safer place for the poor of both main religious communities. I have shown in particular how Qureshi political activism successfully rallied a broader Muslim community behind a politics of vote-trading that in turn allowed Muslim political leaders to negotiate with mainly Hindu political parties in order to increase protection of Muslim livelihoods. In order to do this, the new Qureshi leadership, as I have also shown, had to forge a new sense for the Muslims in Meerut of what it meant to be both a Muslim and a citizen of India.

7.3 Religion and Democracy

Unlike in the case of the Mumbai Muslim community described by Thomas Blom Hansen (Hansen 2000, 2001), in Meerut religion and culture were not separate from politics, nor was there a dichotomous view of politics and religion. Rather, those cultural assets of the community were all endorsed in the sphere of formal politics in the pursuit of secular goals and helped to create a new democratic identity among the Muslim masses. Furthermore, religion was used

as a critical cultural resource for creating a Muslim political community, legitimising the new political leadership and helping the largely illiterate Muslim masses to follow and understand the new social movements they directed. Religion plays a central role in social movements in India (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967; Lynch 1969; Barnett 1976; Juergensmeyer 1982) and the power of religion was used in Meerut to create a new Islamic identity as one response to the demands of modern politics (Eriksen 1993). A secular logic of citizenship was pursued in formal politics, but this was possible only because the major religious institutions and establishments provided support and legitimisation in terms which made sense to non-elite groups.

Although religion and religious identity played a substantial part in the electoral mobilisations of 1993 and 2004, both mobilisations were very far from being communal (in the sense here of being confrontational to other ethnic groups). The two leading Qureshi politicians did not appeal to parochial, narrow, separate group identities but rather opened up, so to speak, Islamic identity into the new political identity of citizenship, in the process addressing the wider interests of lower-caste groups as well as uncontroversial elements of the dominant political discourse. There was thus little danger of provoking Hindu communalism in return. Moreover, their message indicated that Islam and citizenship were converging rather than being sharply demarcated. The conversion was shown most saliently in the election campaign of Shahid Akhlaq, in which Islam became a powerful medium to bridge a mainly Muslim identity and a mainly civic identity. These two identities were reciprocally enhancing each other, or indeed greatly overlapping each other. Shahid Akhlaq used Islam, which in Meerut for many years had been a marker of difference and separate

identity (not least with regard to Muslim rule in India, and Pakistan), as an effective tool to transform the Muslim masses into visibly 'good citizens' of India.

A more expansive vision of Islam was not, however, the sole factor to consolidating a Muslim political community in Meerut. The presence of militant Hindu forces in the city long after Partition also created a strong sense of unity among Muslims. This was clearly shown in the closing gap between high-status and low-status *ajlaf* Muslims in everyday Muslim life in Meerut. The 'plebeian politics' of the *ajlaf* (Qureshi) Muslims were first criticised and despised by the Muslim elite, as in Mumbai (Hansen 2001). This elite claimed that politics were coming increasingly into the hands of 'outlaws' and 'criminals', and hence had become 'dirty'. When it came to the post-1987 elections, however, the same elite voted for these same Muslim plebeian leaders in order to defeat the BJP (and thus to protect themselves). I witnessed a few cases in which Shahid Akhlaq successfully convinced highly influential elite Muslim families to support him and the BSP during the pre-election period in May 2004.

The reengineering of Muslim identities in Meerut was also reflected in long-term education projects initiated within the community. As I showed in Chapter Four, more and more secular educational institutions were established in order to produce Muslims qualified to become respected 'citizens' (Hansen 2000: 259) who would participate in the life of the nation on an equal basis with Hindus. Those Muslim 'citizens' were also expected to bring about social reform within the Muslim community. What was new about the situation in Meerut was that the Qureshi and other Muslim political leaders endeavoured to establish not

only secular but also religious institutions; they created a sort of cultural activism in which both Islamic and secular education were flourishing with the same aim — that of producing ‘good’ Muslim citizens. Islam was not seen as an obstruction to citizenship, or for that matter to the acquisition of more obviously secular markers of social status. Rather, religious qualifications were considered to be one critical asset for producing a well-respected and educated Muslim citizen. Religion, therefore, functioned as an important resource for the participation of ordinary Indians (Muslim and Hindu) in the workings of a secular democracy.

7.4 Being ‘Muslim’ in North India

An examination of the changing circumstances of low-status Muslims in Meerut reveals a community of the oppressed and marginalised who have long lived on the edge of two worlds, the old modern-state structure and the cultural world of an ‘alien’ religion. What I have called the ‘new Muslim politics’ should be understood as one part of broader repertoire of changes promoted by social movements among the weaker and long-disadvantaged groups to assert their rights and entitlements as citizens of India.

From the perspective of managing or eliminating ethnic differences and conflict, this study suggests a new insight into Muslim politics in north India. The integrative strategies among the Meerut Muslims appeared to be remarkably positive for the following two reasons. First, Muslim political mobilisation post-1987 in Meerut did not take a course that would pose a potential threat to the

existing framework of the sovereign state, as did Partition in 1947 or various demands for *Azad* (Free) Kashmir. Muslims demanded recognition within the framework of the Indian state. This must be accounted for, at least partially, by the workings of Indian democracy, including the party system more effectively incorporating the marginalised sections of society into the polity. Secondly, their integrative strategies within the system can be seen as evidence of Muslims' commitment to and affirmation of the existing political system and the Indian state, rather than a compromise on the part of Muslims who otherwise might have wanted to pursue a separate political identity.²⁸⁸

This pragmatic use of democracy might prove to be especially viable in an age when global Islam is increasingly being read against the so-called 'War on terror'. During my fieldwork I came across a few occasions where Meerut Muslims reacted rather sharply to news of a US-led invasion of Islamic countries to India's west. Thus far, however, it remains the case that most of the Muslims I know in Meerut have stayed loyal to their goal of becoming 'good' middle-class citizens of India, perhaps in the process hiding some of their deeper anxieties about both the US and of being seen as a fifth column within India. Being 'Muslim' in Meerut and across much of northern India is not easy, and the pragmatic desire for social reform and citizenship that I have documented here

²⁸⁸ Veena Das makes an insightful comparison between Muslims and Sikhs in Punjab in their approach to the state institutions. Das maintains that Muslims indicated their reliance on state institutions through their extensive use of the public arena as well as state agencies in their reaction to the Shah Bano verdict. The discourse of the Sikhs, on the other hand, who were associated with militant separatist movement, essentially facilitates 'a self-conscious rejection' of uses of state agencies. This example demonstrates the Muslim orientation towards inclusion rather than separation from the Indian state (Das 1995: 116-117).

doubtless coexists with more subterranean yearnings that are properly the subject of another thesis. The threat of violence against Muslims in Meerut remains a real one for many Muslims, even after almost twenty years of relative — and real — calm in the city. The vital work of becoming and scrutinising what it is to be Muslim in Meerut — of being safe, prosperous, educated, and pious — continues on an everyday basis. That work, that contested agency, is what I have tried my best to examine and discuss here, and to place against the backdrop of new forms of coalition politics in India since c.1990.

Appendix: Excerpts from Interview Transcripts and Writings on Haji Akhlaq and Shahid Akhlaq Qureshi

1. Interview on 3 April 2004 with a cousin of Haji Akhlaq, who was actively involved in the *Tablighi* as a volunteer:

[Talking about the *Tablighi Jama'at*], Volunteers make a group of minimum 11 [people] under *Aamir*, the head, and go to different places, villages, towns, *mohallas* for 3 days, 10 days, 40 days or one year to preach to people on the importance of *namaz*. We visit people's homes and tell them how one can be a good Muslim. We also organise meetings in the mosques where we [*Jama'atis*] were staying to tell the common people about the teachings of the Quran. We stay together in a mosque and we cook and sleep there, with *ulamas*, men, the common people. I have gone for a trip of the *Tablighi* five times so far. My cousin, Haji Akhlaq, had been a *Jama'ati* many times [there is no restriction about becoming a *Jama'ati*. One can be a *Jama'ati* for a week or a month, or several times in a week] and went home to home to spread Islamic teachings in Islamabad, Zakir colony, Rashid nagar, Kanch ka Pul and other *mohallas* in Meerut.

2. Interview with Mr. Haji Raes, Municipal Corporator, on 2 December 2003:

Haji Akhlaq was a *Jama'ati* in Jali Kothi, our locality, for a week. He came to know many Muslim religious leaders including *ulamas* and *malvis* through his activities as a *Jama'ati*. ... Akhlaq also spent his money to organise and finance the activities of the *Tablighi* if a mosque in a *mohalla* did not have enough funds to support ten *Jama'atis* for a week or for a month.²⁸⁹

3. Interview with a well-respected Muslim academic, Professor Shahabbudin Ansari, on 14 January 2004.

²⁸⁹ Shail Mayaram's study of the Islamisation process among Meo Muslims in Haryana by the *Tablighi Jama'at* is useful for understanding the context of Haji Akhlaq's activities in relation to the *Tablighi*. Mayaram, for example, writes, 'Each member of the *jama'at* is responsible for paying for their own travel and share in the cooking, cleaning and washing...but hospitality is often extended locally by traders and other persons who might also contribute money towards the purchase of an Islamic centre and or mosque' (Mayaram 1997, 229).

Tablighi Jama'at campaigned for Akhlaq. It is not a political organisation but it sometimes has a discreet political function. It is an organisation to propagate *namaz* for those who do not go to the mosque. Haji Akhlaq's wife was a member and she used the *Tablighi* for her husband's political campaign. It was significant since there was no history of woman *Jama'ati* [in Meerut]. What she did was that she went home to home with other women in Islamabad, Rashid nagar, Gola Kuwan, Bani Sarae and other localities to spread Islamic teachings among women, how to become a good Muslim.

4. Interview with the Hindu secretary to the Meerut Municipal Commissioner on 27 February 2004:

Haji Akhlaq used to be very famous for his Friday charity at the Qureshi Mosque in Bani Sarae and the one in Khair nagar. Akhlaq stood in the courtyard of these mosques and distributed money to whomsoever came to the mosques, Hindu or Muslim – both poor. Akhlaq also earned an image of pro-poor man even among Chamars.

5. Interview with a Qureshi textile merchant and a friend of Akhlaq's on 4 April 2004:

Haji Akhlaq helped many poor Muslims financially. He also used his position as a Ward Councillor [after 1989] to help people with the development work, like paving the roads and cleaning the drainage in Bani Sarae and Islamabad.

6. Interview with Mr. Rafik Ansari, Municipal Corporator on 3 April 2003:

During the 1993 election many Muslim households in different *mohallas*, which Haji Akhlaq and his wife had visited during the *Tablighi Jama'at's* work, became his election campaign offices, like my house in Islamabad.

7. Interview with a Qureshi businessman and a friend of *Shahar Kaji*, (religious judge) on 16 March 2004:

Haji Akhlaq was intelligent because he used his wealth for charity, for the poor in order to create his political support base.

8. *Amar Ujjala*, 11 April 2004:

During the on-going election campaign Shahid Akhlaq starts his typical day by offering early morning prayers (*Fazir ki Namaz*), and then he and his *namazi* or prayer fellows all visit nearby *mohallas* such as Karim Ali. They sit or stand at a

friend's house where neighbours start gathering. Shahid begins talking about the importance of the prayers (early morning prayers or *Fazir ki Namaz*) and the value of being a good pious Muslim. He goes on to stress the importance of being a good and honest Muslim who offers prayers five times everyday. Then, Shahid Akhlaq shifts his subject to the issues of development, how important it is to provide people with drinking water, regular electric supply and good paved roads.

9. My observation during the fieldwork in 2003-2004:

While he was the Mayor of the city, Shahid Akhlaq expanded the major intersections as part of the development or 'beautification' projects. These intersections included Batchar Park and Jali Kothi (see Map 3.1). The expansion was a routine job for the MDA (Meerut Development Authority), yet the newly installed pedestrian bridges or fences appear to show a degree of influence from Islamic architecture. It seemed to me that this was a marker of religious identity for Muslims in the public space as well as in a civic domain.

10. Interview with a BJP Corporator on 26 April 2004; and the Hindu secretary to the Meerut Municipal Commissioner on 27 February 2004:

Mayor [Shahid Akhlaq] closes the Nagar Nigam [Municipal Corporation] office during prayer times on Fridays. We have to wait for the office to be reopened for the meetings which were postponed...'

11. *Amar Ujjala*, 1 November 1993:

In November different Hindu organisations with the RSS and BJP organised 'Shri Bhagvat Katha' (religious reading) at Zim/Jim Khana Maidan in Meerut. In response to that Haji Akhlaq said, 'I will not allow communal forces and the BJP to disturb peace in the city'.

Akhlaq condemned the allegations that people feared him. Akhlaq said, 'I am visiting both Hindu and Muslim *mohollas*, and I will get their votes. Just the BJP is spoiling my image'.

'Ajmal [SP] candidate and the Muslim League candidate will definitely eat my votes but I will get Hindu secular votes also'.

12. *Amar Ujjala*, 2 November 1993:

Haji Akhlaq promised the voters to bring more civic amenities to the city, saying that 'Communalism is not only issue in the election. There are important issues like high court bench in Meerut [presumably about the PAC], weavers' need for

separate *mandi* [market], development of scissors and sports goods manufacturing industry, and peace in our city'. 'These issues cannot be tackled by a small councillor like me. That is why I am fighting the election to resolve other problems of the people of the city'.

13. *Amar Ujjala*, 6 May 2004:

Shahid Akhlaq said in his electoral campaign, 'My father, ex-MLA Haji Akhlaq, fought for the 'haq'²⁹⁰ of the poor, backward and weak. I have been following his path since I was elected as the Mayor of the city, and would like to carry this fight forward to fulfil the dreams of my father who wanted to see the development of the region and of all communities'.

14. *Amar Ujjala*, 29 November 1993:

On the day that Haji Akhlaq was declared elected, thanking the voters for their support the MLA said that 'fighting communalism will be my first priority'. He also said, 'My victory is the victory for secular forces'.

15. Interview with Professor Shahabbudin Ansari on 14 January 2004:

[Haji] Akhlaq was not communal although he openly said that he was a saviour of the Muslims and he would like to work as our protector.

16. Interview with Mr. Haji Raes on 2 December 2003:

...[Haji Akhlaq] was an aggressive and bold politician, but he served for poor people. He contested from the Lok Dal, which meant that all castes and communities supported Akhlaq. He served for all the people, not only for Muslims.

17. Interview with a retired Qureshi art teacher on 29 February 2004:

Haji Akhlaq gave a slogan, 'Peace and Trade' for all communities in Meerut. He helped the poor people, and worked for peace.

²⁹⁰ This Urdu word, 'Haq', literally means 'right', but it also involves/carries a more comprehensive sense of entitlement. This word, which frequently appeared in Shahid Akhlaq's speeches and discourse, most likely came from Haji Akhlaq's parlance. My Hindu research assistants who had done the translation work of these newspaper articles confirmed this point.

18. Interview with one of the aides of Shahid Akhlaq from the Qureshi community on 8 August 2009. This Qureshi man used to run a fruit cart and now worked in Shahid Akhlaq's office at his residence:

In 2004 [during the election campaign] he [Shahid Akhlaq] joined the *Tablighi* preaching activities. He sometimes also provided food to the *Tablighi* volunteers [*Jama'atis*] when they were staying in mosques near his house, like the Qureshi mosque or one in Gudari Bazaar. The *Jama'atis* do not eat at someone's house. They only eat in the mosque, their preaching centre, and people living in the neighbourhood give food to them. As far as I remember, he has done this many times at least five to seven times in the past... Shahid is also well known for his Friday charity. He does not do this every Friday like his father, but he distributes clothes, food, money once a month after Friday prayer. Shahid also distributes a lot of these items on the last Friday of the Ramadan--holy month--to the poor after the prayer.

Shahid also gave donations to mosques in Meerut that included Qureshi mosque. When he was elected as the MP in 2004, he donated Rs. 50,000 to the Qureshi mosque and Rs. 10,000 to the mosques in Kanch ka Pul and Zakir Colony. Shahid also constructed *pucca* [paved] road in front of these mosques using his MP development fund.

19. Interview with a Qureshi textile merchant and a friend of Haji Akhlaq's on 4 April 2004:

Haji Akhlaq had been famous for going to Mecca with a group of people from his own *mohalla*, helping to finance those who could not afford going. Shahid inherited this very practice from his father. Since he became the Mayor of the city he went every year to Mecca with a large group of people in his *mohalla*. Shahid helped all of them, his supporters, in everyday life as well as in [financing] the trip to Mecca.

20. *Amar Ujjala*, 7 May 2004:

Shahid Akhlaq said to the reporter, 'I have joined the BSP since the Party envisions an egalitarian society in India, in which all communities and castes are equal and respected. That is why I want to be part of the BSP project. I want to work for an egalitarian society'.

21. *Amar Ujjala*, 19 March 2004:

Addressing a street corner meeting at Hapur Bus Stand Haji Shahid Akhlaq said, ‘The land of Meerut has always been the mother of revolution. In the history, the people of Meerut were the first to rise against the slavery of the British to end it. Now on the coming 10 May one more revolution is going to take place. On that day the people of Meerut District will vote for a local candidate and would make sure the defeat of outside candidates. In the Revolution of 10 May 1857 the people of Meerut threw the British out of Meerut. The revolution would be repeated again on the coming 10 May 2004. But this time the people of Meerut would throw out outsider candidates. I am the worthy son of Meerut and I am sure the people of Meerut will not tolerate the insult of their son. After Independence outsider candidates had been imposed on Meerut city, and these candidates after winning the elections cheated upon the people of Meerut — not paying attention to the development of the District. But this time they will not allow doing so. This will not happen again this time. The people of Meerut will throw out all the outsider candidate at any cost’.

Shahid Akhlaq’s hoarding at Ghanta Ghar (clock tower) says,

‘Meerut Ke Awam ki Aawaz, Bahari Dekha Bar Bar Sathaniya hoga Abki Bar’.

The voice of the people of Meerut is that they have seen an outsider every time of the election repeatedly. However, they want to make win the local candidate this time.

Note: This hoarding was very popular and much talked about in tea stalls and other public spaces among both Muslims and Hindus, as well as in media circles. It was popular not only because people agreed with the issue of insider vs. outsider, but also because many people thought that Shahid Akhlaq was an important candidate as he was an insider (local) candidate. It is important to note that Shahid Akhlaq, through the issue of ‘insider and outsider’, referred to the common struggle of Hindus and Muslims against the British, unity of Hindus and Muslims during the first War of Independence, and to himself as a son of the soil. He also placed Meerut and himself within a larger history of the struggle for Independence or, to state it differently, the struggle to obtain a respectable place in contemporary India.²⁹¹

22. *Amar Ujjala*, 20 April 2004:

²⁹¹ I am grateful to Dr. Satendra Kumar, one of my research assistants, for this information.

After filing his nomination in the City office, Shahid Akhlaq said to a journalist of the *Amar Ujjala* newspaper, 'Baba Saheb [Dr. Ambedkar] was not only a Dalits sympathiser and champion of the poor but also the architect of the Indian Constitution which gives the right [haq] to vote and equality to each and every Indian citizen'.

23. Interview with the then-Mayor, Mr. Shahid Akhlaq, on 17 August 2003:

...Last 30 years our community was harassed, and their fundamental rights [haq] were not given. Ninety percent of the Muslims here are poor and do not know their fundamental rights [haq].

... Every single Muslim has right [haq] in the Constitution. I want to give this to them. I have done my best in establishing a school for the Muslim children from poor families.

24. *Amar Ujjala*, 3 May 2004:

An appeal to the people of Meerut by Shahid Akhlaq [election manifesto];

1) Title 'Development of the entire region and respect for all communities and castes';

2) A list of development projects that were carried out in the different parts of the city that included road pavement, cleaning of the drainage system, providing drinking water and so on;

3) A list of beautification projects in the city that included electrification, park construction, division and expansion of roads and the construction of the parking space;

4) His statement on how first his father and later himself consistently made conscious efforts to bring peace and communal harmony in the city after the communal riots in 1982 and 1987;

5) Campaign slogan, 'No hate but we shall give love, no riots we shall give trade';

6) His statement promising that he will make Meerut a highly modernised and environmentally sensitive city with more industries and new transportation systems.

25. *Amar Ujjala*, 28 April 2004:

In Megharajpur village in a political meeting during his election campaign Shahid Akhlaq said, 'After winning the election the first thing I will do is to remove all the liquor shops from the neighbourhoods of the poor, backward, and Muslims. One

of the major reasons for the poverty in these neighbourhoods is liquor since the poor and labourers spend their hard earned income on liquor every evening while their families keep waiting hungry at home. The second, I will set up schools in these neighbourhoods for the kids of poor’.

26. Interview with the then-Mayor, Mr. Shahid Akhlaq on 17 August 2003:

Modern western education has its own value while the essence of Islam is with *Imam* and *Allah*. Western education is good for business and science. Islamic education teaches to stay away from sins, and do the best for humanity. Whereas modern western education teaches crimes and problems of the society. I would think the combination [of both western and Islamic education] is the best.

27. *Amar Ujjala*, 9 May 2004:

In an interview given to the *Amar Ujjala*, Shahid Akhlaq said, ‘I am asking vote in the name of development and peace for all. I respect all religions and castes. I would like to stress that Islam teaches us to live with peace and love. I respect all Hindus and Muslims and would like to advocate the right [haq] of the poor, the weak, backwards and the most backwards, Dalits and Muslims. I want to be a pure secular leader like V.P. Singh.

28. *Amar Ujjala*, 4 May 2009:

During the candidates’ question-answer session in the city office of *Amar Ujjala*, in an emotional moment Shahid Akhlaq stressed, ‘I have worked for the education of Muslim children. I am running a public school, which is giving computer training and English education to Muslim kids from poor families’. Answering the question if he is first Muslim or Indian, Shahid Akhlaq said, ‘I am a *Hindustani* as well as a Muslim. These two are not contradictory and there is no need to put either one first. Both can go hand in hand together’.

29. Interview with Professor Shahabbudin Ansari on 14 January 2004:

Shahid is not representing only the Muslim. He tries to be a secular leader. He poses as Manzoor [Ahamad]. He is for the BSP. He is a religious man but not sectarian. He looks like a missionary Muslim, but it is for his personal life. He is a business man as well. He presents himself as a broad-minded, secular man. This is the requirement of contemporary India.

30. *Dainik Prabhat*, 30 April 2004:

In Sardhana, in a political meeting at Idgah road in *Mohalla* Islamabad, Shahid Akhlaq said, ‘The basic reason of the Muslim backwardness is lack of education. The lack of education has made Muslims backward in all areas of life – politics and jobs. I would like to encourage the Muslim community to focus on the education for their children and stop spending a large amount of money for marriage. I would also like to stress the need for religious education along with modern–technological education. While modern education equips us with the contemporary life of trade and politics, religious education teaches us about our culture and history, and it shows us a path to live with peace and harmony. Religious education also teaches us to respect other religions and communities. Modern and religious education go together hand in hand, not separately’.

31. Interview with Mr. Shahid Akhlaq on 17 August 2003:

[to my question that he was representing only the Muslim community], I am representing all communities and the poor people. I am honest to every community, and trying to send a message of humanity.

32. Interview with a highly educated young Ansari entrepreneur in the textile industry on 7 August 2003:

In 1992 [the demolition of] Babri Masjid, people realised that in order to survive in India, we have to get good education, be in the administration, be in the mainstream. But this does not mean that we are shunning Islamic ideology and education. Western education is added to the category and broadening our vision.

33. Interview with a Muslim (Ansari) founder of an English-medium school in Meerut on 28 January 2004:

I had difficulty to send my children to English-medium public schools. They are so expensive, and the dress code of these schools [western-style uniform of blazers and skirts] does not match the Muslim way of life. But I wanted to have both English-medium and religious [Islamic] education for my children. So I established my own school using the space upstairs. Students wear their own (Muslim) clothes. It started with 22 students in 1993, boys and girls at the

nursery level. Now [in 2004] there are about 200 students. We are also providing our students with the IT training.²⁹²

34. Interview with a Qureshi (a putative descendent of Arabic Qureshi) retired tax official of the Nagar Nigam on 27 February 2004:

[Shahid Akhlaq] is a man of crores, his business is to supply meat. Before he became Mayor of the city, the BJP was dominant in the Municipal Corporation. Shahid Akhlaq is doing his job, helping the poor, financially supporting widows and solving city problems. Mayor is a religious man, open-minded and good fellow. If Mayor runs for the election, he deserves support.

²⁹² Maintaining the Muslim dress code was the common practice in all English-medium schools established and run by Qureshi and non-Qureshi Muslims. Many of the school owners were simultaneously politicians. These included Mr. Dilshad Munna, Shahid Akhlaq and Hakim Saffudin, a renowned Unani doctor and the chairman of finance on the Municipal Board from 1950 to 1971.

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