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# Forgetting the Violence, Remembering a Report: The Paradox of the 1931 Kanpur Riots

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# Forgetting the Violence, Remembering a Report: The Paradox of the 1931 Kanpur Riots

## **Abstract**

This project is the culmination of my efforts to understand Hindu-Muslim relations in the twentieth century. My thesis revolves around a paradox surrounding the Kanpur Riots, the major finding of my research last year. After reading about the "carnage at Kanpur" in *The Construction of Communalism in North India* in the February of last year, I was inspired to learn more about the 1931 Kanpur riots. My efforts to find a secondary source recounting the riots, however, were fruitless. While surveys of modern India mentioned the violence at Kanpur, no single monograph detailing the riots existed. Instead, scholars wrote about the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, a Congress Party authored Report that recounted the riots and included a 293-page history describing Hindu-Muslim relations.

My research at the National Archives of India (NAI) and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) in New Delhi from August 3-September 3, 2007 fine-tuned this paradox. The newspapers I consulted at NMML, *The Leader* and *The Statesman*, focused on the atrocities committed and the ineffectiveness of police forces to quell the riots. Similarly, the testimonies of British officials involved in the riots that I examined in the National Archives evidenced how official (British) inaction was the notable feature of the Kanpur Riots. Yet, secondary sources that included brief references to the Kanpur Riots attributed its significance not to official inaction or the brutality of the violence but the literary consequences of the riots, the Kanpur Riot Commission Report. This thesis will explore the Report and the context in which it was written.

## **Comments**

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To Dad, Mom, and Rashmi

## CONTENTS

Preface.....	v
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: The Momentum of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report.....	11
Chapter Two: A Narrative of the Kanpur Riots.....	43
Chapter Three: Identifying the Voices of Riot Participants.....	70
Conclusion.....	99
Appendix I: Images of the Kanpur Riots.....	101
Appendix II: Maps.....	104
Bibliography.....	106

## PREFACE

This project is the culmination of my efforts to understand Hindu-Muslim relations in the twentieth century. My thesis revolves around a paradox surrounding the Kanpur Riots, the major finding of my research last year. After reading about the “carnage at Kanpur” in *The Construction of Communalism in North India* in the February of last year, I was inspired to learn more about the 1931 Kanpur riots.<sup>1</sup> My efforts to find a secondary source recounting the riots, however, were fruitless. While surveys of modern India mentioned the violence at Kanpur, no single monograph detailing the riots existed. Instead, scholars wrote about the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, a Congress Party authored Report that recounted the riots and included a 293-page history describing Hindu-Muslim relations.

My research at the National Archives of India (NAI) and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML) in New Delhi from August 3-September 3, 2007 fine-tuned this paradox. The newspapers I consulted at NMML, *The Leader* and *The Statesman*, focused on the atrocities committed and the ineffectiveness of police forces to quell the riots. Similarly, the testimonies of British officials involved in the riots that I examined in the National Archives evidenced how official (British) inaction was the notable feature of the Kanpur Riots. Yet, secondary sources that included brief references to the Kanpur Riots attributed its significance not to official inaction or the brutality of the violence but the literary consequences of the riots, the Kanpur Riot Commission Report. This thesis will explore the Report and the context in which it was written.

Because only two competing narratives of the 1931 Kanpur riots exist, the British Commission Report and the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, the essential challenge of my

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<sup>1</sup> Gyan Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 24.  
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work has been to substantiate claims about the 1931 Kanpur Riots using limited primary sources. I have sought, wherever it was possible, to corroborate claims made in British testimonies and in the periodicals, *The Leader* and *The Statesman*, with evidence presented in other primary documents. In short, my efforts have been to put the nationalist version of events in dialogue with the official (British) account.

While the aforementioned primary documents are the basis of the second and third chapters, they do not comprise the totality of my research. The final body of sources I examined were nationalist histories written between the 1930s until today. These histories are termed nationalist because they were written in opposition to colonial histories, authored by British historians and carrying an imperialistic ideological bias. Nationalist histories are a reaction to this type of history and focus on depicting Indians as part of groups that would naturally be identified as Indian.<sup>2</sup> These histories provide a framework for how nationalists viewed their past and of special note is their treatment of communalism, one of the most highly charged words of Indian histories. “Communalism” was a term coined by the British to exclusively describe religious relations in India. Because a plethora of books deal with communalism, I have depended on the guidance of my thesis advisor to direct me to the most notable tracts on the subject. His help has been invaluable. Together, the sources I have compiled provide insight into the daily events of the Kanpur riots while placing the riot into a wider framework of how nationalists remember and write about sectarian strife.

I have engaged in this project for a year and a half and in coming to its conclusion, I would like to express my gratitude for all the help I received. A travel grant from the Center for the Advanced Study of India allowed me to spend one month in India while additional funds

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<sup>2</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 261.

from the Benjamin Franklin Scholars Program, the Penn Humanities Forum, the College Alumni Society Board of Managers and Presidents, and the History Department defrayed research expenses. I am additionally grateful to a number of people, all of whom I wish to acknowledge here. I want to thank Dr. David Nelson, the South Asia bibliographer for helping me track down a variety of sources and always being available to answer last minute queries. Daniel Crowley deserves my thanks for editing the draft version of this thesis as do my fellow thesis writers who inspired me with their own works and passion for history. I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Kristen Stromberg for providing endless support during the last year and a half. Finally, I wish to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. Ramnarayan Rawat, for pushing me to test my limits as a historian and becoming my mentor in the process.

## INTRODUCTION

“And what havoc have we done! Women insulted! Children done to death! Let no Hindu comfort himself with the thought that they were Musalman [Muslim] children: let no Musalman feel happy in the knowledge that it is Hindu children who have been killed. I do not know their religion. Let it be recognized that both Hindus and Musalmans had lost their senses. They were all children of the soil, children of the common Motherland.”<sup>3</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi, *Young India*, April 2, 1931

### *The Birth of a Report*

The Kanpur Riots resulted in the deaths of over 400 people and left a city devastated. In six days, from March 24<sup>th</sup> to March 30<sup>th</sup> 1931, eighteen mosques were burnt, forty-two temples plundered and over 250 houses damaged.<sup>4</sup> Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, the President of the United Provinces Provincial Congress Committee, died attempting to protect Hindus from a Muslim mob, and in every *mohalla* (neighborhood) of the city, stories emerged of the brutal atrocities that had taken place. The aftermath of the riot saw the Governor in Council of the province dismiss District Magistrate, J.F. Sale, the highest British civil servant in Kanpur, and charges of official (British) inaction during the riots coupled with the mismanagement of police forces became front-page news. The riots, in 1931, conjured up “scenes of devastation,” that *The Leader*, an Indian newspaper with a pro-Congress Party slant, daily depicted in April editions of the newspaper.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> M.K. Gandhi, “Cawnpore and its Lesson.” *Young India* XIII, no. 14 (1931): 6.

<sup>4</sup> Findings of the Committee appointed to hold a departmental enquiry into the conduct of the subordinate police during the Cawnpore Riots, 1931, file 215, Purushottam Das Papers, National Archives of India (hereafter cited as the British Commission Report).

<sup>5</sup> *The Leader*, “Devastation at Cawnpore,” April 9, 1931; *The Leader*, “Scenes of Devastation,” April 11, 1931; *The Leader*, “Scenes of Devastation,” April 17, 1931. For illustrations of the wreckage caused by the Kanpur Riots and documented in *The Leader*, see Appendix I.



What is remembered now of the Kanpur Riots, however, is that in its aftermath, a small group of prominent Congress Party members wrote a report about what had happened.

Paralleling the British investigation into the causes and course of the riot, Purushottam Das Tandon, Khwaja Abdul Majid, T. A. K. Sherwani, Zaraful-Mulk, Pandit Sunderlal and Bhagwan Das crafted the Kanpur Riot Commission Report. All six authors were well-known members of the All-India Congress Committee and were involved in the United Provinces Congress Committees. Beginning on April 11<sup>th</sup>, ten days after the riots had ceased, they began “sittings, for recording evidence in a couple of rooms kindly placed at the disposal of the Committee by the authorities of the Gaya Prasad Library.”<sup>6</sup> Bhagwan Das recollected:

From the 12<sup>th</sup> onwards, some members of the Committee used to go round daily for local inspections, spending about four hours each day in this work, recording notes of what they saw and heard, also addressing small gatherings on the need for and the way of harmony and peace. In the afternoons, they sat in the Gaya Prasad Library from 3 p.m. till 8, 9, sometimes 10 p.m., recording evidences.<sup>7</sup>

Their work in Kanpur lasted until May 25<sup>th</sup> when, after completing the interviews, they shifted to Benares where they remained for the next 109 days until September 19<sup>th</sup>.<sup>8</sup>

As the authors began to make sense of the Kanpur riots, what had initially begun as an investigation into riot events evolved into a “historical retrospect covering the Muslim and the British periods...intended to show the development of the social and political forces which [were] responsible for the present situation.”<sup>9</sup> The expanded scope of the project justified the “nearly two months of collection of evidence and three months of writing” that Das explained

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<sup>6</sup> Bhagwan Das. Memorandum of Work (1931), reprinted in N. Gerald Barrier, ed., *Roots of Communal Politics* (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1976), 35.

<sup>7</sup> Bhagwan Das, Memorandum of Work, Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 36.

<sup>8</sup> Bhagwan Das’ memorandum does not make it clear why Benares was chosen. While ruling out Lucknow, Maulana Zafarul-Mulk’s hometown saying, “arrangements could not be easily made there,” Das gives no reason why “it was decided to do work at Benares.” Memorandum of Work, Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 37.

<sup>9</sup> Bhagwan Das, Memorandum of Work, Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 41.

could not be “grudged in a matter of such vital consequences.”<sup>10</sup> The Kanpur Riot Commission Report was organized into three parts. The first and most substantial part was an overview of Hindu-Muslim relations dating back to 630 A.D when the first Muslim colonies were established in India. The second component was a daily narrative of the Kanpur Riots while the third part consisted of a list of remedial measures to correct Hindu-Muslim antagonism. It was the first section that was the most controversial and largely the reason why the Report was banned upon its publication. “On April 29<sup>th</sup>, a crate of 190 advance copies were seized just before dispatch to Calcutta. Acting hurriedly, the police confiscated the copies as ‘unauthorized newsheets’ on the grounds that the publication was a Congress document and therefore fell under the provision of emergency legislation.”<sup>11</sup> In a memo to the Imperial Home Department, the British official involved explained, “the thesis of all these chapters may be summed up as follows. Hindu-Muslim enmity, which never existed at all before 1800 A.D, is a creation of the British Government for its own selfish ends.”<sup>12</sup> The Kanpur Riot Commission Report was received by governmental outcry in the nascent phase of its publication and as it became increasingly controversial, the denouement was a Report that became more famed than the subject it covered.

### *Forgetting the Kanpur Riots, Remembering the Report*

In the annals of Indian nationalist history, the Congress Report occupies a significant place. In his introduction to the 1976 reprint of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, *Roots of Communal Politics*, N. Gerald Barrier notes the Report “marks an important phase in nationalist historiography” because it represented the authors’ “systematic efforts to come to grips with the stages [of] Hindu-Muslim interaction.”<sup>13</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, author of *The Construction of*

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<sup>10</sup> Bhagwan Das, Memorandum of Work, Kanpur Riot Commission Report 41.

<sup>11</sup> N. Gerald Barrier, introduction to *Roots of Communalism*. (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann Publishers, 1976) 21.

<sup>12</sup> Barrier, *Roots of Communal Politics*, 22.

<sup>13</sup> Barrier, *Roots of Communal Politics*, 25.

*Communalism in North India* (1990), writes, “the Committee’s Report contains perhaps the most elaborate contemporary nationalist statement on the history of Hindu-Muslim relations in the subcontinent.”<sup>14</sup> Bipan Chandra describes his work, *Communalism in Modern India* (1984), as “basically a work of synthesis; and the ideas and analytical insights of a large number of authors have influenced it or, in many cases, have been incorporated within it... This has been particularly true of the pioneering work of Jawaharlal Nehru, K.B. Krishna, Beni Prasad... and the Kanpur Riots Enquiry Committee appointed by Congress in 1931.”<sup>15</sup> All three authors cite the Congress Report as being fundamental to an understanding of communalism. Even though the Report was released more than seventy years ago, celebratory receptions continue to greet reprints. On April 23, 2006, the National Book Trust of India (NBT) celebrated the release of an Urdu translation of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report entitled *Firqavarna Mas’ala* (Communal Problem). Founded in 1957 by the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, the National Book Trust of India was an autonomous organization that received governmental funding to promote book reading across the nation. With respect to the reprint, the editor noted, in the June 2006 NBT newsletter, “the Report is a most valuable document on the reasons and factors responsible for the rise and spread of communalism in the country.”<sup>16</sup> From the time it was published until today, the Kanpur Riot Commission Report continues to play an important role in discussions on Hindu-Muslim relations.

What has been obscured by the glorification of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report is the Kanpur Riots. In historians’ rush to examine the contents of the history included in the Report, the impetus that motivated the Congress Report has been largely forgotten. The history

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<sup>14</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2006), 250.

<sup>15</sup> Bipan Chandra, preface to *Communalism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1984), xi.

<sup>16</sup> Parsa Venkateshwar Rao, “Mediating Communalism,” *NBT Newsletter* 22 (2006): 6, [http://www.nbtindia.org.in/download/july-06/nbt\\_news\\_letter\\_july'06.pdf](http://www.nbtindia.org.in/download/july-06/nbt_news_letter_july'06.pdf)

of Hindu-Muslim relations in India from 630 A.D. to 1931 in the first chapter has overshadowed the riot participants and their stories. Even the footnotes of the history have generated more discussion than the events of the Kanpur Riots. Barrier recounts how “the disagreement over fact and interpretation, in footnotes and in notes of dissent, shed further light on the process whereby a group of educated Hindus and Muslims dealt with a large assortment of evidence and tried to produce a statement acceptable to all parties.”<sup>17</sup> Studies of historical literature on the Kanpur riots reveal a paradox between the event and the Kanpur Riot Commission Report. While the latter has been the subject of numerous discourses on communalism, the former has virtually been ignored in Indian histories. The Kanpur Riot Commission Report has had a major impact on the development of nationalist historiography whereas the Kanpur riots have come to be seen as simply another example of Hindu-Muslim conflict in the twentieth century. The subject of one of the most studied Reports by the Congress is one of the least studied riots. In short, scholars have not focused on the riots but rather written about the Report.

Monographs of riots in the 1920s and 1930s reveal that the events of Kanpur have not been the subject of major historical investigations. Excepting the reprint of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report in N. Gerald Barrier’s book, *Roots of Communal Politics* and subsequent releases of reprints, no other narrative of the events of the riots exist.<sup>18</sup> While the Kanpur riots are not unique in this sense—the 1920s saw Hindu-Muslim relations deteriorate to the tune of twenty-eight instances of sectarian strife, not all of which have been documented in separate monographs—what makes the Kanpur riots interesting is that the Kanpur Riot Commission

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<sup>17</sup> Barrier, *Roots of Communal Politics*, 25.

<sup>18</sup> While the Kanpur riots have been cited in works that deal with communalism, the events of the riot have never been the focus. Examples of this type include: Chitra Joshi, “Hope and Despair: Textile workers in Kanpur in 1937-38” *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 33, no. 1-2, (1999) and Nandini Gooptu, *The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early Twentieth Century India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) both of which draw upon the Kanpur Riot Commission Report.

Report has generated so much controversy while its initial purpose to recount the Kanpur riots has been unremembered.<sup>19</sup> The Kanpur Riot Commission Report, however, is bound up in the Kanpur Riots. The question this thesis attempts to answer is what specifically about the Kanpur riots triggered the writing of the Congress Report and how and why has the Report been remembered so well in historiography while its subject has been forgotten?

### *Resolving the Paradox*

The answer revolves around the riot participants. They were the subject and audience for the Kanpur Riot Commission Report. When the authors of the Report began their endeavor to explain the riots, they realized that the Kanpur Riots had occurred at a point in time when “communal riots,” violence between Hindus and Muslims, had become part of the nationalist jargon. The 1920s witnessed the gradual deterioration of Hindu-Muslim relations with a particularly vehement bout of violence occurring between 1923-1927. Beginning with the Mappilla Rebellion in 1921, riots in different parts of the country affected religious relations in other parts of the nation. Appreciating this fact, Bhagwan Das, in his memorandum to the Report, noted:

The Cawnpore [Kanpur] riots were not an isolated and unusual occurrence. The Benares riots which preceded them by only six weeks were serious enough to have required a full investigation. They were only put into the background by this much greater tragedy. Other extraordinary occurrences have been taking place since, in British as well as in Indian India, in various places. Things have come to such a deplorable pass that riots can be caused almost at will by interested parties wherever and whenever it may suit them.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report document riots occurring in Malabar (1922), Multan (1922, 1927), Ajmere (1923), Saharanpur (1923), Amritsar (1923), Sindh (1923), Jubbulpur (1923), Agra (1923, 1931), Rae-Bareilly (1923), New Delhi (1924, 1926), Kohat (1924), Nagpur (1924, 1927), Indore (1924), Lucknow (1924), Calcutta (1925), Allahabad (1925), Sholapur (1925), Lahore (1927), Betiah (1927), Bareilly (1927), Kanpur (1927, 1931), Surat (1928), Hyderabad (1928), Kalipaty (1928), Mumbai (1929), Azamgarh (1930), Dacca (1930), Muttra (1930), Mymensing (1930), Daravi (1930), Basti (1931), Benares (1931), Mirzapur (1931), 228.

<sup>20</sup> Bhagwan Das, Memorandum of Work, Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 39.

The Congress Report was a timely intervention, intended to correct a “perverted view of history” and erase “the conviction [that] had sunk deep into the public’s mind” that Hindu-Muslim strife was an age long phenomenon.<sup>21</sup> The reason why the Kanpur riots gave way to the *Report* was because it was at this point, the authors discovered a new way to interpret Hindu-Muslim riots that did not rely upon framing Hindu-Muslim relations in rancorous terms. They discovered an alternative framework to discuss Hindu-Muslim relations that did not necessitate British rule. Chapter One will explore this framework and argue that as the findings of the Kanpur Riot Enquiry Committee were taken and used more ambitiously in nationalist histories, the Report became increasingly famous while the violence of the riots was forgotten.

Drawing upon the voices of riot participants, the authors of the Congress Report had framed their discourse in terms of the people they claimed to represent, citizens of Kanpur unaffiliated with the Congress Party or the British Government. In other words, the authors of the Congress Report made their work the medium by which the people were able to tell their stories. The day-by-day account of the riots was presented in the quotations of riot participants, and using their words, the authors of the Congress Report were able to show how the people’s thoughts and the Congress Party’s platform were indistinguishable. Chapter Two will elaborate on these findings while tracing the actions of ordinary citizens of Kanpur during the riots.

The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report called upon the people to overturn two justifications of British rule; first, that Hindu-Muslim strife was an ongoing problem in India, and second, British rule was necessary for the maintenance of peace. While riot participants successfully overturned these two assumptions, the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report went one step further, extrapolating that the Congress Party was free from any “communal” feelings. The words of riot participants do not agree with this claim and

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<sup>21</sup> Bhagwan Das, Memorandum of Work, Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 40.

Chapter Three will examine what can be gleaned from the quotations used in the *Report* as well as those included in a “Note of Dissent” by one author, Maulana Zaraful-Mulk.

My overarching argument is that the Report became a famed piece of nationalist writing because it was the first attempt by the Congress Party to comprehensively state their position on Hindu-Muslim relations while the Kanpur Riots became unimportant because it was only the vehicle through which the Congress authors presented their findings. Yet, the riots were important because they gave the authors the opportunity to couch their discovery in the voices of riot participants. The authors sought to cement their position as the people’s representative through the Report but were not ultimately successful when the voices of riot participants did wholly resonate with their claims; to a certain extent, riot participants held the Congress Party responsible for increasing Hindu-Muslim tensions.

#### *The Evolution of this Study*

When I began this project more than a year and a half ago, my intention was not to study the Kanpur Riot Commission Report. I expected to use the source to aid my investigation of the Kanpur Riots not to evolve into the subject of my investigation. I have my fieldwork in the National Archives of India and conversations with my thesis advisor to thank for leading me to discover the richness of the Report.

My time in India, August 3, 2007-September 3, 2007, allowed me to access the private papers of British officials involved in the riots, government correspondences, the British Commission Report in the National Archives of India and examine two newspapers, *The Statesman* and *The Leader* in the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library in New Delhi. Every aforementioned source discussed, if not decried, the official inaction during the riots. In 1931, the Kanpur Riots were not only notable for the tremendous loss of life but also the moral

illegitimacy of the British Government in the aftermath for failing to take control during the strife. Yet, when I consulted secondary sources, these two facets of the Kanpur Riots were overshadowed by the publication of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report. Histories of modern India cited the historical findings of the Report more than they delved into the Report's narrative of what had happened during the riots.<sup>22</sup> What I discovered was the paradox between the impact of the Kanpur Riots in 1931 and how the Kanpur Riots have been remembered today.

As I began to outline my thesis in the September of last year, I realized that the allegations of police inaction during the riots were undisputed and the British response in Kanpur was not unique. In essence, what had captured the media and government's attention in 1931 were facts that left little room for historical interpretation. My initial idea of assigning culpability for the Kanpur Riots dissolved and I faced the problem of providing a context for the paradox between the memory of the Kanpur Riots and how they were written about in 1931. During a meeting with my thesis advisor, I recall him asking what the assumptions of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report were. His questions led me to re-examine the contents of the second part of the Report, the daily narrative of the Kanpur Riots, and as I documented each quotation by a riot participant, I made the discovery that shaped my thesis: the Kanpur Riot Commission Report was the Congress Party's attempt to portray themselves as the people's representative and their efforts were only partially successful when some of the riot participants did not agree.

I hope the following three chapters illuminate the impact the Kanpur Riot Commission Report while establishing how the people of Kanpur are critical to an understanding of its historical significance. Collectively, these three chapters explore a piece of nationalist writing

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<sup>22</sup> Examples of works include: Bipan Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1984); Chitra Joshi, "Hope and Despair: Textile workers in Kanpur in 1937-38" and the 1990s" *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 33, no. 1-2, (1999): 171-203; and William Gould, *Hindu Nationalism and Language of Politics in Late Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).



that has long dominated discussions of communalism and nationalism. By making the riot participants the centerpiece of my thesis, I hope to draw the reader's attention to the way the Kanpur riots have been remembered and the dichotomy between the people and the Kanpur Riot Commission Report.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE MOMENTUM OF THE KANPUR RIOT COMMISSION REPORT

“The Kanpur riots were only a most violent manifestation of a deep-seated *disease* which has been growing actively for the last ten or twelve years, out of *germs* fostered in the body politic of India, for some generations at least. From the conditions we saw and the evidence we recorded, we became convinced that mere temporary *palliatives* would be of no avail, and that by confining efforts only to areas of violent repercussions the Congress would be wasting energy.”<sup>23</sup>

Bhagwan Das, Chairman of the Congress Committee

#### *Introduction*

Perhaps the Kanpur Riots present a valid paradox. By 1931, sectarian strife had become a common phenomenon in India and from a bird’s eye perspective of Hindu-Muslim relations, the Kanpur Riots were a blip in a long sequence of religious clashes. The Kanpur Riots, in some respects, were unremarkable. Yet, the Kanpur riots led to the Congress Report. The violence in Kanpur was the reason the Congress at Karachi on March 31<sup>st</sup> passed a resolution “appoint[ing] a Committee to discover the causes of the tension and to take such measures as may be necessary to heal the breach and to prevent the poison from spreading to the adjoining areas and districts.”<sup>24</sup> The Kanpur Riots spurred the Congress Party to recognize that religious strife had become a nationwide phenomenon where deteriorating religious relations in one part of the country could affect religious relations in a different part of the country. The question then remains: why has the memory of one of the major religious riots in the 1930s faded while the

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<sup>23</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 40.

<sup>24</sup> Bhagwan Das, Memorandum of Work, Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 33.

Congress authored Kanpur Riot Commission Report become such an important text? To put it briefly, why does this paradox exist?

The answer lies within the pages of the Report and is bound up in the context of sectarian strife in the 1920s. The riots occurred at a time when nationalist leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi decried the primacy of religion over nationalism. The Kanpur Riot Commission Report was a formalization of a number of findings that had already been articulated by the intelligentsia. The Report was a comprehensive statement of ideas and feelings that had long been expressed before its creation. In his introduction to the reprint of the Report, Gerald N. Barrier maintained, “the attempt to reinterpret the evolution of communalism constituted a major document in itself...The overall handling of data and the systematic effort to come to grips with the stages in Hindu-Muslim interaction are vital. They mark an important phase in nationalist historiography.”<sup>25</sup> Occurring after a decade of religious strife, the Kanpur Riot Commission Report was formulated as a rejoinder to the increasing sectarian strife “which appeared to be deteriorating with each passing year.”<sup>26</sup>

The findings of the Commission revolved around the argument that Hindus and Muslims had been moving toward a synthesis that was disrupted by the British who actively sought to instigate tension and conflict. This version of history, formalized in the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, became part of the nationalist school of history. The fundamental tenets of this type of history “emphasized not only “tolerance” and synthesizing capacities that had gone into the making of Indian civilization but also the automatic commitment of India’s inhabitants – older and newer to the soil of the land and the Indian nation.”<sup>27</sup> The nationalist version of history, in short, stressed how India’s inhabitants shared an innate “Indian-ness” that connected

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<sup>25</sup> Barrier, *Roots of Communal Politics*, 24-25.

<sup>26</sup> Barrier, *Roots of Communal Politics*, 8.

<sup>27</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 247.

them to each other and the land. This view of history was *first* propagated by the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report and then taken and used more ambitiously in later secular histories of India. Nationalist authors such as Jawaharlal Nehru (1936), Beni Prasad (1946), Nilakanta Sastri (1950), Bipan Chandra (1969), S.N Sen (1979), S.K. Ghosh (1987), and S.R Bhat (1990) would take the framework presented in the Kanpur Riot Commission Report and use it to write about Indian history. This framework was a nationalist rejection of colonial formulations that, for the first time ever, provided a formal nationalist statement on Hindu-Muslim relations that continues to be invoked today.

This chapter will resolve the paradox between the Kanpur Riot Commission Report and the Kanpur Riots. In Part I, I will present a detailed overview of religious relations in northern India from 1920-1931. The purpose of this history is not to recount every incident of religious tension that occurred in the decade preceding the Kanpur riots but rather to depict how sectarian strife became increasingly virulent. I will contextualize the Kanpur Riot Commission Report to the events of the 1920s to argue that it was a response to this decade. Part II will centrally build on Part I by showing how the Report challenged colonial assumptions on Indian history and offered an alternative perspective to interpreting medieval India. The authors argued that, instead of conflict, this period was marked by synthesis and Hindu-Muslim amity. Part III will chart how the Report influenced the writing of Indian history through each subsequent decade following the Kanpur riots. I will show how nationalist historians borrowed the framework of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report to interpret medieval and modern India. These three sections will explain the significance of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report by examining the endurance of the framework the authors created to view Hindu-Muslim relations.

*Part I: The Context of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report: the 1920's*

The Mappilla Rebellion set the tone for the 1920s. Coming after the postponement of the Nationalist Movement by Mahatma Gandhi, the rebellion was in essence, “the culmination of a long series of Mappilla ‘outrages’ carried on for six months by peasant bands.”<sup>28</sup> The Mappillas were the Muslims of Malabar, a region in southern India located between the Arabian Sea and the Western Ghats, and these “outrages” they committed were largely crimes against landlords, Europeans, and recent Hindu converts to Islam who had reconverted to Hinduism.<sup>29</sup> In Malabar, the landlords and moneylenders were predominantly Hindu while the tenants, Mappilas, were largely peasants. The “class cleavage and antagonism” based along religious lines were sources of tension and numerous monographs of the riot document how *mullas* (Islamic priests) could successfully incite sectarian violence by pointing to this economic fact.<sup>30</sup> The violence began in August 1921 and continued into 1922. During that time, a government force comprising of “almost two brigades of infantry and 700 special police” was raised to oppose the 10,000 Mappilas.<sup>31</sup> The strife officially ended on February 25, 1922 when British authorities removed martial law. In the aftermath:

Battle casualties totaled 169 on the government side whilst about 4000 rebels were killed or wounded... According to official figures, 320 Hindu temples were destroyed in the course of the rebellion and 900 Hindus forcibly converted to Islam in Ernad alone. Of some 20,000 refugees who fled the zone of rebellion, the great majority were Hindus.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr. “The Mappilla Rebellion, 1921: Peasant Revolt in Malabar,” *Modern Asian Studies* 11, no. 1 (1977), 58.

<sup>29</sup> Hardgrave, “The Mappilla Rebellion, 1921: Peasant Revolt in Malabar,” 62.

<sup>30</sup> Chandra, 59. See Conroy Wood. *The Moplah Rebellion and its Genesis*, revision to author’s PhD diss., University of London. (New Delhi: People’s Publishing Press, 1987); Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr. “The Mappilla Rebellion, 1921: Peasant Revolt in Malabar,” *Modern Asian Studies* 11, no. 1 (1977); Bipan Chandra. *Communalism in Modern India*. (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1984) for justification.

<sup>31</sup> Conroy Wood, *The Moplah Rebellion and its Genesis*, revision to author’s PhD diss., University of London,, (New Delhi: People’s Publishing Press, 1987), 169.

<sup>32</sup> Wood, *The Moplah Rebellion and its Genesis*, 170.

Stories of the atrocities spread across the nation and “four months later, when the full impact of the Mappilla outbreak was beginning to be seen,” Gandhi exhorted his readership in *Young India* to believe that “nationalism is greater than sectarianism...in that sense we are Indians first and Hindus, Mussulmans, Parsis and Christians after.”<sup>33</sup> The Mappilla Uprising evoked a nationalist response from Gandhi in the sense that he used it as a lesson to emphasize national ties over religious ties.<sup>34</sup>

As sectarian strife increased throughout the decade, the dominion of nationalism over religion would become a hallmark of Gandhi and Nehru’s speeches and writings. In an article entitled “Hindus and Moplahs [Mappillas]” in his newspaper *Young India*, Gandhi wrote:

When a Hindu or Musulman does evil, it is evil done by an Indian to an Indian, and each of us must personally share the blame and try to remove the evil. There is no other meaning to unity than this. Nationalism is nothing, if it is not at least this. Nationalism is greater than sectarianism. And in that sense we are Indians first and Hindus and Musalmans, Parsis and Christians after.<sup>35</sup>

Gandhi hoped to broach what he viewed as a hierarchy between national identity and religious identity. His comments called upon his readership to put aside religious differences in favor of building a national (meaning, all-inclusive) body politic. In his 1936 autobiography, Nehru elaborated on Gandhi’s distinction over the primacy of Indian identity over religious identity. He used the subordinate position of religion in comparison to politics to make a critique about the nationalist movement. In a chapter entitled “Communalism Rampant,” Nehru argued, “the want of clear ideals and objectives in our struggle for freedom undoubtedly helped the spread of communalism. The masses saw no clear connection between their day-to-day suffering and the

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<sup>33</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 238.

<sup>34</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 238.

<sup>35</sup> M.K. Gandhi, “Hindus and Moplahs.” *Young India* IV, no. 4 (1922): 14.

fight for swaraj.”<sup>36</sup> Nehru maintained that the growth of Hindu-Muslim tension was due to a failure in the political process aimed at achieving independence and corrections needed to be made. That nationalism had been subordinated to religious communities was a problem and nationalist leaders such as Nehru and Gandhi hoped to rectify this issue. Commenting on the results of Nehru and Gandhi’s efforts, Pandey wrote, “sometime around the 1920s... India came to be seen very much more as a collection of individuals, of Indian ‘citizens’ rather than as a collection of communities.”<sup>37</sup> However, even while some of the foremost members of the Congress Party began to conceptualize Indians possessing some innate sense of “Indian-ness,” episodes of religious strife continued to occur across the country.

In the aftermath of the Mappilla Uprising, riots in Multan and Ajmer broke out, the former in 1921 and the latter one year later. The year 1923 saw eight riots break out in Sahranpur, Multan, Amritsar, Multan (again), Sindh, Jubbulpur, Agra and Rae-Bareilly.<sup>38</sup> In his book, *Communalism in Modern India*, Bipan Chandra calculated that “during 1923-26, the four year period of maximum communal tension before 1946, there were 72 major communal riots, which gives an average figure of one riot every 20 days for the vast continent-sized and heavily populated country.”<sup>39</sup> The primacy of religion over nationalism appeared to be complete during this decade. In his autobiography, Nehru recounted:

Far more important [than his illness] was the progressive deterioration of Hindu-Muslim relations, in North India especially. In the bigger cities a number of riots took place, brutal and callous in the extreme. The atmosphere of distrust and anger bred new causes of dispute which most of us had never heard of before. Previously a fruitful source of discord had been the question of cow sacrifice, especially on Bakr-id-day... But now a fresh cause friction arose, something that was ever present, ever recurring. This was the

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<sup>36</sup> Jawaharlal Nehru, *An Autobiography* (London: Lowe & Brydone Printers, Ltd., 1936), 137.

<sup>37</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 10.

<sup>38</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 228.

<sup>39</sup> Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, 4.

question of music before mosques. Objection was taken by the Muslims to music or any noise which interfered with their prayer in their mosques.<sup>40</sup>

The “fresh cause” Nehru cited would become a generalized reason for the outbreak of religious strife. Acts of individual religious violence from 1923-1927 would lose their individual significance as they were recounted en masse as the period “marking the worst years of communal violence” before the 1947 partition.<sup>41</sup> It was at this time when religious riots were becoming so common that acts of religious strife were seen as linked to one another.

To counteract this problem, Gandhi sought to defuse Hindu-Muslim strife across the country through fasts, visits, and public exhortations to end the violence. In February of 1924, he spent three months in Bombay discussing sectarian strife with other leaders and drafting Congress proposals to better Hindu-Muslim relations. A few months later, he “commenced a fast in Mahomed Ali’s house in Delhi on September 17, [1924], creating the atmosphere for a Unity Conference, which passed, on September 27, a resolution deploring the strife which was spreading, condemning the riots as barbarous and contrary to religion and appointing a board of arbitrators who would decide disputes between the two communities...”<sup>42</sup> Five months later, Gandhi traveled to Rawalpindi to persuade Hindus and Muslims to live peacefully in February of 1925. Although less than a month later, on March 7, he declared, “for the time being I have put away in my cupboard this Hindu-Muslim tangle,” the Congress’ response to the increasing violence had already been formulated.<sup>43</sup> The Congress Party’s reaction to the increasing violence was to host Unity Conferences, gatherings engaging both Hindus and Muslims to resolve contentious issues. In Nehru’s words, “during the middle ‘twenties many attempts were

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<sup>40</sup> Nehru, *An Autobiography*, 135.

<sup>41</sup> Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, 282.

<sup>42</sup> M.K. Gandhi. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. Edited by R.P Dhasmana, M.K Rao, V.G Mathur, Lalitha Zackariah, Usha Kiran Goel, Anjani Bhusan, Sneh Rai et. all. (New Delhi: Publications Division of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1956-1994), C: 107.

<sup>43</sup> M.K. Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. XXVI, 244.



made to settle the communal problem by mutual talks and discussions-‘Unity Conferences’ they were called.”<sup>44</sup> He recollected:

The most notable of these was the conference convened by M. Mohamad Ali, the Congress President for the year, in 1924, and held in Delhi under the shadow of Gandhiji’s twenty-one day fast. There were many earnest and well-meaning people at these conferences, and they tried hard to come to an agreement. Some pious and good resolutions were passed, but the basic problem remained unsolved. It could not be solved by those conferences, for a solution could not be reached by a majority of votes but by virtual unanimity, and there was always extremists of various groups present whose idea of a solution was a complete submission of all others to their views.<sup>45</sup>

Nehru’s appraisal was accurate. Although the 1920s saw well-intentioned efforts to end Hindu-Muslim strife, oftentimes, riots would follow on the heels of these conferences, negating any long-term influences they might have had. Referring to the 1924 conference, Nehru wrote in his autobiography:

The Delhi Unity Conference of 1924 was hardly over when a Hindu-Muslim riot broke out in Allahabad. It was not a big riot. As such riots go, insofar as casualties were concerned, but it was painful to have these troubles in one’s hometown. I rushed back with others from Delhi to find that the actual rioting was over; but the aftermath, in the shape of bad blood and court cases, lasted a long time. I forget why the riot begun. That year, or perhaps later, there was also some trouble over Ram Lila celebrations at Allahabad.” Probably because of restrictions about music before mosques...<sup>46</sup>

Nehru’s comments illustrated two important facets of sectarian strife. First, Unity Conferences did not have a lasting impact across the nation, and second, by 1924, music playing before mosques had already become a generic cause for conflict. This cause had been generalized to the extent that the reasons for violence had become superfluous to understand the event itself.

The 1920s continued to see a number of Hindu-Muslim clashes. Documenting the examples of sectarian strife in the decade, Chandra charted how actions connected with the

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<sup>44</sup> Nehru, *An Autobiography*, 140.

<sup>45</sup> Nehru, *An Autobiography*, 140.

<sup>46</sup> Nehru, *An Autobiography*, 141.

Congress led nationalist movement brought about bloodshed for both Hindus and Muslims. He wrote:

The end of each of the three waves of nationalist struggle-1920-22,1930-34,1942-43-added a feeling of political frustration and helplessness to the already frustrated existence of the people, especially of the petty bourgeoisie. The communalists and other reactionaries were able to use the real-life insecurity, anxiety, frustration and fears of the petty bourgeoisie and other social strata to attack other Indian groups, who were held responsible for their deprivation, etc.<sup>47</sup>

In Chandra's view, the "petty bourgeoisie" could be manipulated to cause violence. They were responsible for communalism. Beginning in the 1920s, clashes between Muslims and Hindus continued to escalate although religious reasons may not have accounted for the fighting.

Chandra explained, "repeatedly as in 1915 and 1922 in Multan division, in 1926 in Rawalpindi district and in 1930 in Ferozepur and Multan districts, the Muslim peasants arose under the communal banner, directing their anger against the moneylender and his *bahis* (account books, where the evidence of their indebtedness was recorded)."<sup>48</sup> Although economic grievances may have accounted for causes of conflict, the riots were recorded in the literature of the time as being part of a religious problem. Nehru, in his autobiography, provided a neat summation of riots. He explained:

One is apt to exaggerate the significance of these riots in a few northern cities. Most of the towns and cities and the whole of rural India carried on peacefully, little affected by these happenings, but the newspapers naturally gave great prominence to every petty communal disturbance. *It is perfectly true, however that communal tension and bitterness increased in the city masses.*<sup>49</sup>

Because the riots became famous as conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, they became important because of their connection with religious strife. As clashes continued in the 1920s, this perception of conflicts revolving around religious differences became increasingly acute.

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<sup>47</sup> Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, 133.

<sup>48</sup> Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, 58.

<sup>49</sup> Nehru, *An Autobiography*, 135.

Riots in the last years of the 1920s and early 1930s continued in the same vein. Chandra noted, “the Bombay City communal riot of 1929 had features of a class war by proxy, a conflict between strikers and blacklegs. To break a strike in oil companies, the owners brought in Pathan strike breakers, leading to a fight between blacklegs and the strikers and their workers supporters.”<sup>50</sup> In his book, *The Construction of Colonialism in North India*, Pandey remarked, “certain Hindu-Muslim riots in 1930-31 were isolated instances of class struggle fought in communal guise or fundamentally agrarian jacqueries or the fury of the urban poor.”<sup>51</sup> Hindu-Muslim tensions had become a cloak for any disturbance. Regardless of the cause of violence, what was clear by 1931 was that a series of clashes fought between Hindus and Muslims were deriving their political significance from the religious affiliation of the participants. Pandey wrote, “towards the end of the 1920s the Government of India drew up elaborate lists of Hindu-Muslim riots that had occurred in the country in the recent past. From one of these, we learn that there were 112 serious ‘disturbances’ between 1923 and 1927, which left approximately 450 dead and 5000 more wounded. The year 1929 produced a carnage in Bombay....Official [British] statistics put the number of casualties in Bombay at 184 and 948 wounded.”<sup>52</sup> These statistics were alarming and evidenced the growing number of clashes affecting the country.

The 1920s had become famous for the outpouring of violence that engulfed the country. In his survey of modern Indian history, Sumit Sarkar listed a number of riots that had been instigated by “the recurrent ostensible issue [of the] Muslim demand for stopping mosques, and Hindu pressures for ban on cow-slaughter.”<sup>53</sup> Included in his tally were:

The violent anti-Hindu outburst at Kohat in the N.W. Frontier province in September 1924, with 155 killed. Three waves of riots in Calcutta between April and July 1926,

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<sup>50</sup> Chandra, *Communalism in Modern India*, 59.

<sup>51</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 18.

<sup>52</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 24.

<sup>53</sup> Sumit Sarkar *Modern India* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), 233.

[with a casualty count] of 138...[ there were] disturbances the same year in Dacca, Patna, Rawalpindi, and Delhi; and no less than 91 communal outbreaks in Uttar Pradesh, the worst affected province, between 1923 and 1927.<sup>54</sup>

The opening of a new decade did little to evoke a positive image of Hindu-Muslim relations in India. Prior to the 1931 Kanpur riots, outbreaks of violence occurred in Benares, Mirzapur and Agra in the early part of that year. While the causes of the three riots differed, what was common to all were explanations that drew upon the commonly held reasons for strife, namely music before mosques and cow-slaughter.<sup>55</sup> Generalized sources of conflict had become recurrent reasons for violence and when the Kanpur riots occurred in 1931, the authors of the *British Commission Report* noted, “all these things had their echoes in Cawnpore [Kanpur] as over the rest of the province and beyond it, [and] in Cawnpore [Kanpur] careful and impartial observers had by now concluded that feelings had reached such a stage of bitterness and tension that an outbreak awaited only the occasion and time.”<sup>56</sup> In short, the authors of the *British Commission Report*, to some extent, inferred the riots were inevitable.

While the inevitability of the Kanpur riots cannot be proven, what can be said is that at the outset of the riots, a series of clashes between Muslims and Hindus had broken out across the country. Though the causes of conflict may have been outside the realm of religious differences, they were publicized as such and their significance became entangled in questions of the compatibility of Hindus and Muslims. Although Gandhi and Nehru decried the primacy of religious identity over a national Indian identity, by the early 1930s, it appeared as though the issue of religious strife was not going to be resolved soon. It was in this atmosphere that the Kanpur riots broke out on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1931 and when the violence had finally ceased six days later, the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report took it upon themselves to address the

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<sup>54</sup> Sarkar, *Modern India*, 233.

<sup>55</sup> Sarkar, *Modern India*, 233.

<sup>56</sup> British Commission Report, 9.

issue of increasing religion strife and explain Hindu-Muslim relations in a way that questioned colonial formulations.

*Part II: Conceptualizing Hindu-Muslim Relations*

In the foreword to the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, Bhagwan Das, the principal author, noted that the expanded scope of the Report “arose from an observation that we feel that unless people begin to see the past in a truer perspective it will be very difficult or well-nigh impossible to restore mutual confidence and to arrive at a real and permanent solution of the present differences.”<sup>57</sup> Das was justifying the inclusion of a 293 page-history of Hindu-Muslim relations, which he described as “an attempt to remove historical misconceptions [which was] the most indispensable step in the real solution of the Hindu-Muslim problem.”<sup>58</sup> The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report were fully cognizant of the atmosphere preceding the violence and their objective was to overturn colonial formulations about Hindu-Muslim relations. In doing so, they embarked upon a massive reconstruction of the history of Hindu-Muslim relations, and created a framework that continues to be invoked today. This section will document the major conclusions drawn by the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report.

The authors began questioning the colonial interpretation of Hindu-Muslim relations by discussing “The Muslim Period,” an era characterized by Islam’s peaceful spread in India and its subsequent peaceful coexistence with Hinduism. The authors of the *Kanpur Riot Commission Report* recorded, “Islam spread peacefully practically in all her provinces...and the followers of the two religions lived in perfect harmony.”<sup>59</sup> Hindu-Muslim amity was further enhanced by Muslims’ full integration into India. “Almost in every province Islam preceded the establishment of Muslim political power by centuries and the Muslim colonists [were] found to live and

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<sup>57</sup> Foreword, Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 43.

<sup>58</sup> Foreword, Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 43.

<sup>59</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 53.

participate in every sphere of Indian life.”<sup>60</sup> These statements served two purposes. First, they refuted a contentious belief that Islam had spread through forced conversions “by sword,” and second, they showed that Muslims in India could be identified as Indians as early as 630 A.D when “the Arab colonies in India automatically became Muslim colonies, and the profound moral and economic impulse that Islam gave to the life of the Arabs had its immediate reactions in India by increasing the number and the importance of these colonies.”<sup>61</sup> Muslims could not be regarded as foreigners because of their early arrival and integration into “every sphere of Indian life.”

As evidenced above, Hindu-Muslim relations in this era were marked by friendliness and cooperation. The authors of the Kanpur Enquiry Commission Report noted, “it is obvious that before the establishment of Muslim rule, Islam had already secured a firm footing in India, and Muslims and Hindus were living side by side and in perfect amity practically all over the country.”<sup>62</sup> They supported their claims with examples of economic and political partnerships “from Cape Comorin to Hindu Kush,” noting that merchants and preachers had dispersed between these two respectively southernmost and northernmost parts of India.<sup>63</sup> This evidence was further used to justify the postulation:

If the antagonism and intolerance we find today had been inherent in the two systems, this was evidently the period when they would have found their fullest expression. ... The outline of social conditions above indicates that Hinduism even in its most orthodox form, if left to itself, was incapable of generating forces of social bitterness towards communities outside its own social organization... If we find such forces existing now, they must necessarily be of later growth and foreign importation.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 57.

<sup>61</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 52.

<sup>62</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 60. The authors later cite 711 A.D when “the first Muslim invader Muhamad bin Qasim crossed the sea, defeated Dahir, and laid the foundation of the Muslim Kingdom in Sindh” as the beginning of Muslim rule in India. His reign, as depicted by the authors, also featured Hindu-Muslim amity, 63.

<sup>63</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 59.

<sup>64</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 61.

The amity characterizing Hindu-Muslim relations before the arrival of the British is used to highlight a thinly veiled attack on the role of the British in propagating sectarian strife. This tactic would become a hallmark feature of nationalist histories featuring discussions of Hindu-Muslim relations.

In the final section concluding the first chapter of the history, the authors of the Report contrasted perceptions of Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Their objective was to overturn colonial formulations regarding the tenets and spread of all three religions. What this amounted to was a recital of the horrors of the Crusades in the Middle Ages and an explicit denunciation of the supposed bigotry associated with Islam. They wrote: “of the many wrong impressions prevailing at the present, one which is the most fruitful source of bitterness and ill-will is the impression that Islam is inherently bigoted and intolerant...History does not seem to justify us in giving a major share of it to Islam.”<sup>65</sup> The two key messages of the chapter are first that Islam and Hinduism have no inherent characteristics that set them in opposition to each other and second, “foreign importation” plays a major role in instigating strife. These themes largely sum up the message of the next two chapters in which the authors ground their discussions in the “social and religious condition of India in the eighth century” and political developments during this era.<sup>66</sup>

According to the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, the next phase of Hindu-Muslim relations involved a shift from coexisting peacefully in India to increased interaction between the two religions. They recounted, “the two communities found it possible

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<sup>65</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 69.

<sup>66</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 77. Because the second and third chapters comprise of brief informal accounts of numerous Muslim rulers and Hindu kings who treat subjects of different religious faiths fairly, their anecdotes are not included. I have chosen not to delve into these accounts because of the familiarity required in knowing medieval Indian history before being able to appreciate the examples given. They are not the subjects of this study and do not need to be examined closely for the message of Hindu-Muslim amity to be clear.

not only to tolerate each other but to live and grow together with the utmost cordiality and co-operation.”<sup>67</sup> Hinduism and Islam benefited from the closer relationship. “Hindus and Musalmans were constantly influencing each other, affecting and changing each other’s ways in every walk of life.”<sup>68</sup> The social synthesis benefited both parties involved. Though mentioning discrepancies that lay between elites and masses of both religions, the authors of the Kanpur Riot glossed over socio-economic differences that may have separated different communities and instead broadly highlighted tendencies to co-exist peacefully. They personified India as a mother for whom “the Hindu and Muslim communities cooperated whole-heartedly in her political and economic advancement.”<sup>69</sup> Indians, as seen through this description, were tolerant people whose commitment to religious tolerance had endured for centuries.

The idea that Hindus and Muslims peacefully co-existed hurriedly ends in 1815 when the “British period” commenced. No longer do the authors of the Report focus on the “amalgamation of two cultures” but rather stress how both Hindus and Muslims became pawns in the British policy of “divide and rule.”<sup>70</sup> They use the words of former British leaders to articulate the policy of “divide and rule” as it is devised by them. Quoting the minutes of Lord Elphinstone, Governor of Bombay in 1858, they cite, “Divide et impera’ was the old Roman motto and it should be ours.”<sup>71</sup> The authors go on to quote Lieutenant John Coke who states, “our endeavor should be to uphold in full force the (for us fortunate) separation which exists between the different religions and races; not to endeavor to amalgamate them. ‘Divide et impera’ should be the principle of the Indian Government.”<sup>72</sup> The words are damning and serve to bolster the

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<sup>67</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 126.

<sup>68</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 137.

<sup>69</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 132.

<sup>70</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 166.

<sup>71</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 168.

<sup>72</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 167.



authors' claim of British culpability in promulgating religious violence. The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report recounted a litany of British actions that forced Hindu-Muslim relations to deteriorate. Among the actions was the "abolition of Persian as the Court language" which had the effect of causing the education of Muslims and Hindus to diverge with Hindus receiving a more Anglicized education and consequently more opportunities in the civil service.<sup>73</sup> The most harmful policy, however, according to the authors was the implementation of separate electorates for Hindus and Muslims.<sup>74</sup> This system "was the crowning measure of the divide-and-rule policy. The wedge thus devised was by its very nature calculated to obstruct the growth of Nationalism and could at will, by well-directed blows, be made to sink deeper and deeper into the body politic."<sup>75</sup> How the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report viewed the impact of separate electorates is best described in their own words:

After this nothing could be done but to let things work. The religious tension was already there; the political sections had been successfully divided; the civic and economic life were too effectively in hand; all that remained was, when [divide-and-rule] policy demanded, to pull a wire here and a wire there at psychological moments to produce the desired explosion. In fact, so dependable were the batters and so charged remained the atmosphere with destructive energy that, as we shall see, huge explosions, were suddenly created at moments, when politically and even in their religious moods the communities were most united. And through these explosions, well-managed and well-timed, the rising tides of the national movement as they rolled against the Government one after the other, were successfully attacked, weakened and even broken.<sup>76</sup>

The effect of separate electorates was multifold. Blaming the British authorities for allowing civic, political, religious and social lines to be drawn between Muslims and Hindus, the authors

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<sup>73</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 172.

<sup>74</sup> Separate electorates was a system introduced by the Government of India Act of 1909 whereby a certain percentage of seats in the electorate were reserved for Muslims and only Muslims could vote for the office-holders who would take them. Basically, the system set aside seats for Muslims and prevented Hindus from either voting for those seats or being elected to them.

<sup>75</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 204.

<sup>76</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 205.

of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report depicted the British Government as morally corrupt for not only failing to safeguard peoples' liberties but even provoking "explosions" among them.

While documenting actions that drove a wedge between Hindus and Muslims, the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report portrayed the two groups as one victimized population. "Muslims began to realize to their great sorrow and discomfiture that the British Government, whom they supported in India and considered their saviour against the Hindus, was merely using them as its tool to secure its position in India..."<sup>77</sup> British policy had undermined and betrayed Indian interests. It was the imposition of British policy that had resulted in religious intolerance. As depicted in the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, Hindu-Muslim relations were based on three tenets. First, Hindus and Muslims did not bear any grudges toward members of the opposite community until the establishment of British rule. Second, they were part of a population that had been collectively wronged by the British and third, their ability for self-rule was only constrained by British policies. These three facets of Hindu-Muslim relations overturned and cast away the justification for the British Raj, namely that British authority was necessary to prevent sectarian strife.

### *Part III: Examining the Relevance of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report*

The Kanpur Riot Commission Report had undermined colonial formulations about Hindu-Muslim relations through a historical survey of India's past. The authors of the *Report* offered an alternative framework to view Hindu-Muslim relations that maintained Hindus and Muslims could live peaceably and that sectarian strife was a result of British efforts. What the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report did was address the emergence of communalism as a threat to the National Movement. "Communalism" is one of the most highly charged words in works discussing India and this section will examine the development of the term and its

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<sup>77</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 208.

continued use in nationalist historiographies. My argument is that the Kanpur Riot Commission Report remains relevant today because its conclusions, offering a nationalist response to colonial charges of inherent religious tensions between Islam and Hinduism, continue to be cited in discussions of Hindu-Muslim relations.

“Communalism” was a term coined by the British to describe religious relations exclusively in India. As Pandey noted, the term was “never applied to feudal Europe or to other pre-capitalist societies where religiosity was no narrower and strife between members of religious persuasions nor rare... But was reserved for the analysis of social and political conflicts in the “backward” part of the colonial and post-colonial world.”<sup>78</sup> Communalism, then, was a derogatory term. For colonialists, communalism captured a “basic feature of Indian society,” one that belittlingly portrayed Indians as irrational, violent and religiously intolerant.<sup>79</sup> From the British perspective, all violent disturbances could be simplified as religious riots with the contextual motives becoming unimportant, as the root cause was already known. In the preface to his book, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, Pandey described communalism as “a product of a colonial interpretation of history in which religious assemblages (especially “Hindus” and “Muslims”) existed as sharply differentiated and always already constituted and antagonistic communities whose history consisted of period bouts of bloodletting.”<sup>80</sup> British authority was necessary insomuch as Indians could not be trusted to rule themselves. Communalism provided certain stereotypes and typecasts which colonial histories implemented. The impact on colonial histories was that the colonialist interpretation of communalism became the template to view and write about Indian history.

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<sup>78</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 7.

<sup>79</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 10.

<sup>80</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 8.

Without questioning the framework of communalism, nationalists plied it into the “Other form of nationalism.”<sup>81</sup> Communalism consisted of “separatism, antagonism, and violence.”<sup>82</sup> It was an obstacle that needed to be surmounted. From the nationalist perspective, the colonialists and a small group of native Indians were responsible for these divisive elements. Communalism was a result of “the machinations of the colonial power” and its development in the 1920s was characterized by the efforts of Indian nationalists to contrast it with the legitimate form of nationalism that would give way to Lala Rajput Rai’s vision of India as “the Indian nation, such as it is or such as we intend to build it, nether is nor will be Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, or Christian. *It will be each and all.*”<sup>83</sup> The nationalists agreed with the colonialists to the extent that they defined communalism as a problem facing Hindus and Muslims but they disagreed on the causes for the phenomenon. Whereas the colonialists attributed communalism to an innate characteristic of Indians that made Hindu-Muslim tensions an age-long phenomenon, nationalists interpreted communalism “as a problem of recent origins, as the outcome basically of economic and political inequality and conflict and as the handiwork of a handful of self-interested elite groups (colonial and native).”<sup>84</sup> This disagreement between the causes of communalism would be a prominent feature in nationalist histories that explored Hindu-Muslim relations.

The Kanpur Riot Commission Report figures into this argument on communalism because the history within its pages was a nationalist interpretation of this phenomenon. The authors of the Report questioned colonial formulations of Hindu-Muslim relations and offered an alternative way to view Hindu-Muslim relations. Their efforts were unprecedented and the result, the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, was the first comprehensive statement by nationalists to

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<sup>81</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 9.

<sup>82</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 9.

<sup>83</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 213.

<sup>84</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 213

explain Hindu-Muslim relations in a way that pointed to colonialists, rather than Indians, as responsible for sectarian strife. Tracing the ideological genealogy of this schema, what stands out is how this framework continues to be invoked today.

*Decade-by-Decade: Following the Intellectual Genealogy of the Report*

In 1936, Nehru published his autobiography. In reference to its publication, V.K. Krishna Menon, the editor of *The Unity of India*, a collection of Nehru's writing from 1937-1940 declared in his foreword, "the *Autobiography* of Jawaharlal Nehru is still the best book on modern India, up to 1935. The objectivity and restraint that characterize Jawaharlal Nehru's thought and writing make the *Autobiography* history and not merely memoir."<sup>85</sup> Tracing his life through the political developments of India, Nehru provided a glimpse of Indian history that invoked the framework set forth by the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report only three years after its publication. His account featured the British policy of Divide-and-Rule, drew upon the essentialities versus non-essentialities of religious practices and rejected the purported incompatibility of Hindus and Muslims. Nehru maintained:

Of course, the British governments in the past and the present have based their policy on creating divisions in our ranks. Divide and rule has always been the way of empires, and the measure of their success in this policy has also been the measure of their superiority over those whom they exploit. We cannot complain of this or, at any rate, we ought not be surprised at it."<sup>86</sup>

This theme figures prominently in Nehru's account, most visibly when he discusses conflicts between Hindus and Muslims. Nehru wrote:

It seems amazing that a question which could be settled with mutual consideration for each other's feelings and a little adjustment should give rise to great bitterness and rioting. But religious passions have little to do with reason or consideration or

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<sup>85</sup> V.L. Menon, introduction to *The Unity of India Collected Writings, 1937-1940* by Jawaharlal Nehru (New York: The John Day Company, 1948) v.

<sup>86</sup> Nehru, *An Autobiography*, 136.

adjustments, and they are easy to fan when a third party in control can play off one group against another.<sup>87</sup>

His comments echoed Lajpat Rai's earlier statements regarding religious customs that could offend either Hindus or Muslims, a facet of Hindu-Muslim relations the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report also draw upon. By putting forth this argument, Nehru advanced a central message of the Report.

The final way Nehru framed his history of Hindu-Muslim relations was to cast away the idea that strife is an inherent feature of Hindu-Muslim relations. In one of the final sections of his autobiography, he contended, "stress has been laid on the 'Muslim nation in India,' on 'Muslim culture' on the utter incompatibility of Hindu and Muslim 'cultures.' The inevitable deduction from this (though it is not put baldly) is that the British must remain in India forever and ever to hold the scales and mediate between the two 'cultures.'<sup>88</sup> Nehru's reflections on India mirror those of the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report. The way he framed history is identical to the way the authors of the Report document Hindu-Muslim relations. Only three years after its publication, the conclusions of the Report can be found in one of the famous Indian nationalist's memoirs.

In 1946, Beni Prasad, in his work, *India's Hindu-Muslim Questions* adopted the framework laid out by the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report in his extensive survey of Indian history from the "arrival of the Musalmans" to his discourse on the problems affecting India in the 1940s.<sup>89</sup> His opening chapter documenting how "Hinduism and Islam Stand Face to Face," the "Reciprocal Influences" each share as Islam takes root in India and the "Religious Reapprochement" mirrored the opening section titles of the Kanpur Riot

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<sup>87</sup> Nehru, *An Autobiography*, 135.

<sup>88</sup> Nehru, *An Autobiography*, 469.

<sup>89</sup> Beni Prasad, *India's Hindu-Muslim Questions* (Lahore: Book Traders, 1944), 14.

Commission Report.<sup>90</sup> The early sections of the history describing the same era as Prasad's section titles are: "Attempts at Early Synthesis," "The Meeting of Islam and Hinduism," and "India Wanted a New Synthesis."<sup>91</sup> The titles are similar to the extent that they are interchangeable. While the examples they cite are dissimilar, the conclusion is the same: Islam and Hinduism coexisted peacefully. Prasad, like the authors of the *Report*, described the "fusion" between Hindu and Muslim manners, customs and art, as evidence of a broader national identity linking all Indians.<sup>92</sup> "In all these spheres," Prasad wrote, "there emerged by the eighteenth century a solid and permanent achievement, basically Indian, strictly speaking, neither Hindu nor Muslim in technique."<sup>93</sup> Prasad's interpretation of early Hindu-Muslim relations and the resulting affiliation between the two communities speaks to nationalist goal of showing how India was an integrated socio-political entity before the British arrived. Both Prasad and the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report "portended the existence of a common will, a common objective, and a united resistive power."<sup>94</sup>

The similarities between the Kanpur Riot Commission Report and Prasad's *India's Hindu-Muslim Questions* carry through to the arrival of the British. As Nehru did in his work, Prasad held the British responsible to some extent for the "the broader problem" of Hindu-Muslim that revolves around "the communal problem."<sup>95</sup> Prasad elaborated:

The British acquiesced in policies and actions calculated to sustain and accentuate the differences between the communities-the omission to eradicate illiteracy and poverty,

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<sup>90</sup> Prasad, *India's Hindu-Muslim Questions*, 14-17.

<sup>91</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 68, 126-127. Because the history included in the Report is much more detailed than Prasad's brief description of Hindu-Muslim relations, the dates and locations of the history recounted by each section titles do not correspond exactly. While covering the same era, the respective authors use different examples to evidence their arguments.

<sup>92</sup> Prasad, *India's Hindu-Muslim Questions*, 19.

<sup>93</sup> Prasad, *India's Hindu-Muslim Questions*, 17.

<sup>94</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 177.

<sup>95</sup> Prasad, *India's Hindu-Muslim Questions*, 144.

differential treatment, separate electorates, extraordinary delays in political settlement...<sup>96</sup>

Although Prasad's censure of the British is more muted than the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report's condemnation, both blame the British Government, to some extent, for the creation of communalism. Though Prasad never uses the specific term, "communalism," in his discourse, he alludes to it as the "communal problem" or "differences between communities."<sup>97</sup> Prasad's discourse fits with and advances the framework established in the *Report* because of its complete acceptance of the nationalists' version of early Indian history and its censure of the British in propagating strife.

In 1950, K.A Nikalanta Sastri, a professor of Indian history at the University of Madras published his three-volume *History of India*. He declared in the preface of his third volume that "this part deals with more live issues than its predecessors. The embers of controversy are still warm over several questions; as far as possible I have tried to take account of all the rival points of view, but have not hesitated to indicate my own opinions."<sup>98</sup> Sastri's opinions match the beliefs of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report. His discussion on communalism highlighted the culpability of the British in promoting sectarian strife. In a section entitled, "Communalism Fomented," Sastri wrote, "meanwhile Anglo-Indian officials and non-officials had got busy setting up the Muslims and other minorities to obstruct the smooth passage of political reform...and British Indian officialdom rejoiced at the success that had attended their wicked intrigue."<sup>99</sup> Sastri evidenced the 1906 creation of the Muslim League, a reaction to the heavily Hindu Congress Party, as an example of the "wicked intrigue." His description resonated with

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<sup>96</sup> Prasad, *India's Hindu-Muslim Questions*, 144.

<sup>97</sup> Prasad, *India's Hindu-Muslim Questions*, 144.

<sup>98</sup> K. A. Nikalanta Sastri, preface to *History of India*, vol. 3. (Madras: Central Art Press, 1952), i.

<sup>99</sup> Sastri, *History of India*, 3:317.



the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report's portrayal of the League's founding. They maintained:

Not content with the deadly antagonism it had thus created, the Government now conceived a still more disastrous scheme for perpetuating it. About this time it whispered into the ears of some responsible Muslim leaders (many of whom have since made repentant confessions) that they should demand separate electorates... This created new hope and a new upheaval... and an organization under the name All-India Muslim League came into existence.<sup>100</sup>

The British Government, as characterized by both accounts, was sly and manipulative. The similarity between *History of India* and the *Report*, however, goes further than both accounts censuring the British for the creation of the Muslim League. The way Sastri and the authors of the *Report* phrase their findings mirror each other. To a certain degree, the two accounts are interchangeable. Sastri describes the British policy of Divide and Rule in the same manner as the authors of the *Report*, evidenced by his description of the founding the Muslim League.

In 1969, Romila Thapar, Harbans Mukhia, and Bipan Chandra published a collection of essays entitled, *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History*. The anthology, spanning from ancient to modern India, discussed the development of communalism in opposition to nationalism. The conclusions they drew evidenced Pandey's claims about communalism and showed how historians in the late 1960s continued to be influenced by the Kanpur Riot Commission Report. In particular, Chandra's essay, "Historians of Modern India and Communalism" drew upon the framework created by the authors of the *Report*.<sup>101</sup> His critiques reflected recognition that certain assumptions regarding the nationalist account needed to be questioned and accentuated the significance of the framework in nationalist historiography. He

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<sup>100</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 201.

<sup>101</sup> Bipan Chandra, "Historians of Modern India and Communalism," in *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History* by Romila Thapar, Harbans Mukhia, and Bipan Chandra, 36-57 (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1969). While all three essays address the nationalist framework in historiography, I have chosen to focus on Chandra's essay because it relates to modern histories of India.

wrote, “the British use of Indian history to denigrate Indian national character and to ‘prove’ India’s unfitness for independence and democracy produced another distortion in Indian historiography and politics. The Indians countered this unscientific and unhistorical approach with an unhistorical approach of their own.”<sup>102</sup> The connection between Chandra’s remark and the purpose of the history included in the Kanpur Riot Commission Report was stated in Bhagwan Das’ own words in the foreword. He explained that the motivation for including the history revolved around the “part which British policy has placed in [increasing tensions] and bringing matters to the present crisis.”<sup>103</sup> Chandra’s point directly addressed Das’ assertion. He speaks to the importance of addressing the underlying motivations of nationalist writing. By doing so, he continues to make the Kanpur Riot Commission Report relevant more than thirty years after its release.

In 1979, S.N Sen published the *History of Modern India*. Focusing on Bengal, Sen traced the history of the region from 1765 to 1950 remarking in his preface that “the interplay of events... [makes] it the most fascinating period in Indian history.”<sup>104</sup> Because of the similarities between his conclusions and the findings of the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, of note is Sen’s discussion of the “British Policy of Divide and Rule.” Describing the creation of the Muslim League in 1908, Sen recounted “with the foundation of the Muslim League, the cleavage between the Hindus and Muslims deepened....The result was the outbreak of communal riots between the Hindus and the Muslims which continued to mar the relations of the two communities.”<sup>105</sup> Sen’s comments correspond with the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report’s findings that the League’s founding “sowed discord between the Hindu

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<sup>102</sup> Chandra, “Historians of Modern India and Communalism,” 45.

<sup>103</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 45.

<sup>104</sup> S.N Sen, *History of Modern India*, (New Delhi: Wiley Eastern Limited, 1979), i.

<sup>105</sup> Sen, *History of Modern India*, 199.

and Mohemmedan communities by showing the Mohemmedans special favor.”<sup>106</sup> Sen makes the same argument the authors of the *Report* formulated more than forty years earlier.

In his book, *Communal Riots in India* (1987), S.K Ghosh exemplified the type of nationalist story telling in the Kanpur Riot Commission Report. The purpose of his book was to “meet the challenge unitedly,” a reference to the need for Hindu-Muslim unity to combat religious tensions, or as termed in his tract, communalism.<sup>107</sup> What is notable about Ghosh’s work are the similarities between his conclusions and what the authors of the Congress Report surmise. Beginning his narrative in pre-medieval India, Ghosh spent much of his first chapter commenting on “the fusion of Hindu and Muslim concepts, values, customs, art, literature, music and architecture during the past one thousand years.”<sup>108</sup> This fusion, in his words, “is a living objective reality. Hinduism and Islam which command the loyalty of millions of sensible and peace-loving persons are not in conflict.”<sup>109</sup> His words directly echo the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Reports’ description of medieval India. In the Report, the section entitled “The Muslim Period” is replete with references to the way in which “the two religions lived together in perfect harmony.”<sup>110</sup> Both Ghosh and the Congress authors express an interest in showing that before the British arrived, Hinduism and Islam were not in conflict.

While the subject of Ghosh’s work were the religious riots of the 1980s, the first half of his book was dedicated to explaining Hindu-Muslim tensions in the context of communalism. He remarked in a section entitled, “Anatomy of Hindu-Muslim Riots:”

The very heterogeneous character of Hinduism made the Hindus less communal minded. Though often non-communal themselves, the Hindus fell prey to religiosity and religious

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<sup>106</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 202.

<sup>107</sup> S.K. Ghosh, *Communal Riots in India: Meet the Challenge Unitedly* (Ashish Publishing House: New Delhi, 1987), i.

<sup>108</sup> Ghosh, *Communal Riots in India: Meet the Challenge Unitedly*, 59.

<sup>109</sup> Ghosh, *Communal Riots in India: Meet the Challenge Unitedly*, 59.

<sup>110</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 53.

passions to oppose Muslim communalism as, for example, the Hindu Mahasabha, Jan Sangh and Arya Samaj came into existence to oppose the communalism preached by the Muslim League and Jamaat-e-Islami.”<sup>111</sup>

Ghosh’s words mirrored the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report’s findings that “even in its most orthodox form, [Hinduism] if left to itself, was incapable of generating forces of social bitterness towards communities outside its own social organization.”<sup>112</sup> Ghosh, almost word for word, replicates the findings of the Kanpur Riot Commission more than a half a century earlier. What is readily apparent in Ghosh’s account is the ease in which he places communalism at the heart of the problem. Communalism is not a foreign concept; rather as Ghosh used the concept, it was a natural way to discuss Hindu-Muslim relations. Writing in the 1980s, he maintained, “the trouble [religious tensions] arises when extremists try to convert this personal belief into communal antagonism in an effort to achieve power.” Communalism, a word codified by the nationalists in the 1920s and concretely defined in the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, had come to be regarded as the natural framework to tackle religious strife between Hindus and Muslims.

In 1990, S.R Bhat wrote *The Problem of Hindu Muslim Conflicts*. Viewed as highly relevant for the future of India’s development, the publishers noted, “this book gives the historical background of Hindu-Muslim conflicts in India which is threatening the very unity and integrity of this country.”<sup>113</sup> Bhat’s short volume documented different facets of religious strife. What is striking about his history is the similarities it shares with the history included in the Kanpur Riot Commission Report. In a section entitled, “A Ruse of the Britishers,” Bhat writes, “[the British] gave a communal color to our history.” Bhat blamed British historians for

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<sup>111</sup> Ghosh, *Communal Riots in India: Meet the Challenge Unitedly*, 28.

<sup>112</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 61.

<sup>113</sup> Publishers, Acknowledgment to *The Problem of Hindu-Muslim Conflicts*, by S. R Bhat. trans. K. Badrinath (Bangalore: Navakarnataka Publications, 1990), i.

“depict[ing] Hindus as saints and Muslims as sadists... The atrocities and oppressions of one or two Sultans were generalized and the entire Muslim community was accused. The destruction of Hindu temples, vandalism, poll-tax, etc., were grossly exaggerated.... They propagated that Hindus were forcefully converted.”<sup>114</sup> Bhat addressed a key point-that Islam spread by sword- as a popular misconception that needs to be overcome. The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report agreed and in a nearly identical passage they wrote, “acts of intolerance and persecution perpetuated through bigotry and pride of power or policy by some Muslim rulers and exaggerated accounts of them in our histories have raised strong feelings and created the impression that Islam has spread by compulsion or other unfair means.”<sup>115</sup> Both the authors of the Report and Bhat view colonial histories as a source of misconceptions that have resulted in sectarian strife. In 1990, more than fifty years after the Kanpur riots, the findings of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report continue to gain credence as nationalist writers discuss Hindu-Muslim relations in the same terms as the Report’s authors.

In the latest edition of *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, published in 2006, Pandey illustrated how the Kanpur Riot Commission Report continues to be remembered in modern historiography: as an event that spawned the clearest example of how Indian nationalists viewed Hindu-Muslim relations. What is striking about Pandey’s conclusions is that he used the Kanpur Riot Commission Report to evidence his suppositions. He wrote, “reconstructed histories in the 1920s were to emphasize not only ‘tolerance’ and synthesizing capacities that had gone into the making of Indian civilization but also the automatic commitment of India’s inhabitants –older and newer to the soil of the land and the Indian

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<sup>114</sup> Bhat, *The Problem of Hindu-Muslim Conflicts*, 21.

<sup>115</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 84.

nation.”<sup>116</sup> This description is a summary of the major findings of the Report and Pandey used these types of histories to document how communalism developed in opposition to nationalism. He additionally evidenced how the Kanpur Riot Commission Report could be seen as a comprehensive statement of nationalist voices in the 1920s. After quoting a 1925 speech by Lajpat Rai, a prominent Congress Party leader, Pandey, in a footnote, remarked how “The Congress Kanpur Riots Enquiry [Kanpur Riot Commission Report] made the *same point*.”<sup>117</sup>

Pandey quoted at length:

The real ultimate cause of all communal tension is the exaggeration of non-essentials in the religions. If there is any way whereby in the present conditions of life, the religious, moral and political practice of the people can be reformed, it is the inculcation far and wide of the fundamental truth that true self-government is Government by the higher self in all departments of life.<sup>118</sup>

As Pandey claimed, the words almost resonate exactly with the content and phrasing of Rai’s speech, “if we really and honestly want a United India, we, i.e., the different religious communities in this country, shall have to make a clear distinction between the essentials and the non-essentials in religion...”<sup>119</sup> There is a continuation of thought from 1925 until 1931. The Kanpur Riot Commission Report, in 2006, is used to prove a link between the communalism voiced in the 1920s and its discussion in the Report in 1931. To put it briefly, the Kanpur Riot Commission Report remains relevant for contemporary historians as it was upon its initial publication in 1933.

### *Communalism Revisited*

In *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, Pandey defined communalism as “a form of colonialist knowledge. The concept stands for the puerile and the primitive—all that

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<sup>116</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 247.

<sup>117</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 237.

<sup>118</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 237.

<sup>119</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 236. To be as concise as possible, I have not reproduced the entire passage Pandey cites.

colonialism, in its own reckoning, was not.”<sup>120</sup> Communalism was a term developed by the British to articulate Hindu-Muslim relations as they understood it in India. Pandey termed communalism “colonial knowledge” because he was referring to the fact that the British packed their imperialistic notions into its definition. Communalism, then, was a lens developed by the British to view Hindu-Muslim relations and its formulation was a way for colonialists to understand Indians. It was a schema that had an underlying negative context. What was ironic was how nationalists adopted the term and used it to describe religious tensions among a number of religions in India. Pandey’s argument puts forth this paradox and his study, concluding that “communalism” is an inadequate term, is the best examination of the term to date.

Pandey’s case study of Benares showcased how the colonial version of communalism was enacted in historiography. The colonial histories describing the nineteenth century Benares riots accentuated the importance of religious “sites and the ‘irrational attachment’ of natives to them.”<sup>121</sup> Even though Hindu-Muslim discord had not preceded the incident that it was the cause of the conflict was taken for granted. The rioters were reduced to religious fanatics and the riots were depicted as part of a long history of religious turmoil. The colonial narratives became “a master narrative...acting as a sort of model for all descriptions.”<sup>122</sup> Certain assumptions regarding native behavior were established and a pattern of “evil clashes with evil; good intervenes; order is restored” was put into practice.<sup>123</sup> The Kanpur Riots fit into this discussion because they could be substituted in for the Benares riot without much inconvenience:

Throughout the nineteenth century and for long afterwards, the colonial narrative on communal strife tends to proceed by identifying the “first” major riot, that is, usually the first recorded after the establishment of British rule, and then tracing a straight line through the “last”- which of course keeps changing with the date of the writing (1904 in

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<sup>120</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 6.

<sup>121</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 37.

<sup>122</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 32.

<sup>123</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 39.

the case on Mubarakpur in the Azamgarch Gazetteer of 1909; Kanpur in 1931 in the Government of India file on “Communal Disorders” prepared in the 1930s).<sup>124</sup>

The Kanpur riots were, in essence, indistinguishable from a number of other conflicts between Hindus and Muslims. They were oversimplified to the extent that every other factor besides religious strife was omitted in describing the reasons for conflict. This method of ‘riot writing’ influenced the way Indian nationalists would describe Hindu-Muslim clashes.

In Pandey’s words, “communalism and nationalism as we know them today picked up their significance in the 1920s...to a large extent in opposition of each other.”<sup>125</sup> This idea gains credence in the number of nationalist writings and speeches Pandey evidences depicting nationalist leaders exhorting their countrymen to build a nation home for both Hindus and Muslims. He quotes Madan Mohan Malaviya; “just as Hindustan is the beloved birthplace of the Hindus, so it is of the Muslims too...”<sup>126</sup> Communalism threatened this vision and in the 1920s, when the goals and methods of nationalism were being articulated by Nehru and Gandhi, communalism became the “flogging horse of nationalism...the product of a policy of Divide and Rule.”<sup>127</sup> Pandey’s argument, in short, was that communalism developed side by side with nationalism in the 1920s and during the course of its articulation, it became the enemy of nationalism.

Yet, the term is not adequate. Communalism is a term specific to India to describe religious relations. By nature of its colonial formulation, the word still possesses a negative context that disparages Hindu-Muslim relations in India. When the nationalists adopted the term, they failed to “fully appreciate its force, tentativeness or complexity.”<sup>128</sup> Communalism was not a

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<sup>124</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 63.

<sup>125</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 210.

<sup>126</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 212.

<sup>127</sup> Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, 235.

<sup>128</sup> Pandey, Preface to *The Construction of Communalism in North India*, ix.



natural way to discuss Hindu-Muslim relations and when nationalists failed to recognize this fact, they shaped the term in opposition to nationalism. What we have today is a number of books, among them, *Communalism: Handled with a Difference* (2000), *On Communalism and Globalization: Offenses of the Far Right* (2002), and *Communalism in Secular India : A Minority Perspective* (2007), devoted to solving communalism, a problem of religious relations seemingly unique to India.<sup>129</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The religious riots of the 1920s paved the way for the Kanpur Riot Commission Report. The Report was written in reaction to the number of clashes nationwide and the authors sought to explain Hindu-Muslim strife in terms that did not characterize sectarian relations as being permanently rancorous. Their efforts amounted to a rejection of colonial formulations about Hindu-Muslim relations and the creation of an alternative framework that would be invoked by nationalist historians. The connection linking nationalist histories with the Kanpur Riot Commission Report is readily apparent. The history included in the Kanpur Riot Commission Report became a model for how nationalist historians interpreted the past as seen through every decade since its creation. The *Report* was unprecedented to the extent that it offered a comprehensive statement of nationalist ideas expressed in the 1920s. In that sense, the Report was a historical triumph and that it continues to be cited and drawn upon as recently as 2006 evidences its significance and influence in Indian nationalist historiography.

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<sup>129</sup> A.P Maheshwari, *Communalism : Handled with a Difference* (New Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 2000); Aijaz Ahmad, *On Communalism and Globalization: Offenses of the Far Right* (New Delhi : Three Essays Press, 2002) ; Asghar Ali Engineer, *Communalism in Secular India : A Minority Perspective* (New Delhi: Hope India Publication, 2007);

## CHAPTER TWO

### A NARRATIVE OF THE 1931 KANPUR RIOTS

“The underlying and predisposing causes were *of course*:

- 1) The spirit of lawlessness engendered by the Civil Disobedience Movement;
- 2) The general ill-feeling and mistrust between the two communities which followed on the Civil Disobedience Movement (just as they followed on the Non cooperation Movement of 1921...”<sup>130</sup>

District Magistrate J.F Sale in his testimony to the  
Official Commission of Enquiry

#### *Introduction*

To date, no published secondary narrative of the Kanpur Riots exists. Despite the numerous references to Part II of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, an account of Hindu-Muslim relations from the medieval era to the 1930s, the actual events of the riot have held little import to historians. In his work, *Communalism in North India*, Gyan Pandey used the authors of the Kanpur Riots Commission Report’s reinterpretation of history as evidence for his argument on communalism without delving into the context in which it was written. Sumit Sarkar, in his magisterial survey of *Modern India*, discussed the Kanpur Riots in a different way though still subsuming the actual events of the disturbance. He described the riots as a part of a string of religious riots that characterized Hindu-Muslim relations in the 1930s. In neither work are the riot participants, citizens of Kanpur unaffiliated with either the British Government or the Congress Party, the central focus.

This chapter will attempt to remedy this lack of focus by reconstructing a narrative of the Kanpur Riots based on the British Commission Report, the Kanpur Riot Commission Report and the private papers of British officials involved. Because the two Reports only overlap at certain

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<sup>130</sup> Sale Testimony, 1931, 13.

points- particularly heinous atrocities committed and the death of Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi- this narrative will focus on bridging points of disagreements, namely, the immediate cause of the riot and the number of casualties in the aftermath. By themselves, the British Commission Report and the Kanpur Riot Commission Report are not reliable sources. Displaying obvious biases, each tends to promote its respective party-affiliated interests. The British seek to show the Kanpur Riots as the natural outcome of a state of religious intolerance while the authors of the Congress Report seek to show that the British are culpable for perpetuating the riots. In what follows, Part I will describe the city of Kanpur, its population and economy, Part II will delve into the causes of the riots and Part III will chart the course of the Riots from their onset to their close. The goal of this chapter is to provide a context to understand the Kanpur Riots as it was documented by the respective authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, the British Commission Report, and the British officials involved.

*Part I: A Profile of Kanpur*

*Geography*

The city of Kanpur is located in as the state of Uttar Pradesh, known under colonial rule as the United Provinces.<sup>131</sup> Situated in north India, Kanpur rests on the west bank of the Ganges River, approximately 120 miles from Allahabad and 42 miles from Lucknow.<sup>132</sup> The city is shaped like an “irregular quadrilateral” with its shape defined by four right-handed angles to the north, east, west and south.<sup>133</sup> Bordered by the Ganges River to the north and a major thoroughfare, Mall Road, to the east, the city proper of Kanpur is clearly defined. Two roads, the Meston Road, running north to south and Halsey Road stretching from the northwest corner of

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<sup>132</sup> H.R Nevill, *District Gazetteer of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh: Cawnpore, 1929*, vol. XIX, South Asia Collection, University of Pennsylvania Van Pelt Library (hereafter cited as the *District Gazetteer of the United Provinces: Cawnpore*), 261.

<sup>133</sup> H.R Nevill, *District Gazetteer of the United Provinces: Cawnpore, 1929*, 1.

the city to the southeast corner crisscross the city proper. Their intersection in the central portion of the city is called Moulganj.<sup>134</sup> Because most of the rioting occurred within the bounds of the city proper, a detailed understanding of the topography of Kanpur is needed. The following description begins at the central portion of the city and makes a clockwise survey of the city, covering all the important points of conflict as pertaining to the riot.<sup>135</sup>

Slightly north of Moulganj on Meston Road is Teli's temple and to the immediate west is the Macchli Bazaar Mosque. To the east of Teli's Temple is Colonelganj, located half a mile away from the Civil Lines and Police Lines. Directionally, the Colonelganj is set a half a mile southeast of Gwaltoli, an outlying area near the Civil Lines. Directly south of Colonelganj is "the main populated area of the city consisting of an "oblong block running east to west and about a mile and a half deep."<sup>136</sup> South of this area is the Kotwali (police station) and the Collectorganj in the southeast corner of the city. Traversing the southern border from the Kotwali is the Municipal Office and further west in the southeast corner is Anwarganj. To the north, following the perimeter of the western side of the quadrilateral is a narrow road whose southern portion is called Thathrai and whose northern portion is named Chauk Sarrafa.<sup>137</sup> Next to the Chauk Sarrafa is the Chauk Sarrafa Mosque. Crossing Mall Road, southwest of the aforementioned mosque is the Chauk Bazaza, a narrow road, and within its proximity is the Chauk Bazaza Mosque. It is here the riots began.

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<sup>134</sup> The suffix, "ganj" is a Hindi term meaning "market." The first part of words using this term are names of locations.

<sup>135</sup> This description is largely based on the *British Commission Report* and the 1929 District Gazetteer. Because points of conflict are not in dispute between the Kanpur Riot Commission Report and the British Commission Report and the latter includes a detailed topography of the city, I have primarily relied upon the British Commission Report to frame this description. See Appendix II for a detailed map.

<sup>136</sup> British Commission Report, 11.

<sup>137</sup> British Commission Report, 11.

## *Demography*

As early as 1908, Kanpur had been regarded as an industrial and commercial center. Situated within close proximity of the rail system, “it [had] an unequalled means of communication with other parts of India.”<sup>138</sup> Its rapid expansion and development saw the creation of numerous mills and factories for which it became famous for in the early twentieth century. In 1931, Kanpur’s mills employed over 20,000 people, approximately 10% of the total number of residents.<sup>139</sup> The population was largely transitory with the mills’ need for workers determining the number of Kanpur’s inhabitants. Because the majority of Kanpur’s terrain was unsuitable for cultivation, industrial workers vastly outnumbered agriculturists. H.R Nevill, editor of the 1922 *Gazetteer*, stated that a “striking feature of the district is the proportion compared to other areas of the United Provinces of waste and barren land.”<sup>140</sup> In 1922, 34.65% of laborers were industrial workers compared to 17.35% who were employed as agriculturists. This trend persisted in the 1930s with both the respective authors of the *British Commission Report* and the *Kanpur Riots Commission Report* referring to the mills as a central feature of Kanpur’s local economy.

In 1931, Kanpur’s population was 242,356 with Hindus comprising more than two-thirds of the total number of people.<sup>141</sup> Hindus generally lived to the northeast of Meston Road while Muslims resided in the southwestern portion of the area outlying Meston Road. In every *thana* (precinct), however, Hindus outnumbered Muslims.<sup>142</sup> Both Reports concur that because Kanpur

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<sup>138</sup> H.R Nevill, *District Gazetteer of the United Provinces: Cawnpore*, 1929, 261.

<sup>139</sup> *British Commission Report*, 8

<sup>140</sup> H.R Nevill, *District Gazetteer of the United Provinces: Cawnpore*, 1929, 12.

<sup>141</sup> *British Commission Report*, 12.

<sup>142</sup> *District Gazetteers of the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh: Cawnpore District; Supplementary Notes and Statistics up to 1931-2*, vol. XIX(d), South Asia Collection, University of Pennsylvania Van Pelt Library (hereafter cited as *District Gazetteer: Cawnpore District; Supplementary Notes and Statistics up to 1931-2*), ii. Although no author is credited, this addendum is presumably a government publication released by the Government of the United

appealed to a migratory population who came to work in the city's numerous mills, the criminal element in the city was pervasive. In his testimony to the Official Commission of Enquiry, Joint Magistrate Barron noted, "there [was] always a large floating population seeking work in the mills, which forms a perfect screen for the activities of undesirables."<sup>143</sup> The Official Commission of Enquiry was the committee drawn up by the local British government in Kanpur to determine the causes and course of the riot.<sup>144</sup> Statistics from the 1931 Gazetteer evidence the increasing rate of crime in the Kanpur district. Between 1922 and 1931, the "number of cases investigated by police" jumped from 3,404 to 5,643 per annum.<sup>145</sup> The number of persons convicted on account of robbery or delinquency more than doubled from 30 in 1922 to 78 in 1931. Though some crimes such as "bad livelihood" or "criminal trespass" decreased over the nine years, overall, crime had become a serious problem in Kanpur according to the Congress Commission and the authors of the British Report. The situation had drastically changed from when H.R Nevill, compiling the 1922 Gazetteer, wrote "...it may be considered from the police point of view [that Kanpur] is one of the least troublesome of the large cities in the provinces."<sup>146</sup> Kanpur had become a home to numerous *goonda* (gangster) organizations and a major drug trafficking center in North India.

### *Local British Government*

The local Kanpur government was a part of the Allahabad division. The bureaucratic system consisted of a commissioner under whose jurisdiction were the magistrate and collector.

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Provinces. Evidence for this conclusion comes from the fact that the publication information indicates it was printed by the Superintendent of Printing and Stationary in the United Provinces.

<sup>143</sup> Written Testimony of Joint Magistrate Barron to the Official Commission of Enquiry, 1931, file 65, Purushottam Das Papers, National Archives of India (hereafter cited as Barron Testimony), 3.

<sup>144</sup> The Official Commission of Enquiry's stated purpose was to "hold a departmental inquiry into certain allegations which were made by certain witnesses against some of the subordinate ranks of the police during the course of their evidence." Kunwar Jagdish Prasad to the Secretary to the Government of India, Home Department, August 8, 1931, file 65, Purushottam Das Tandon Papers, National Archives of India, no. 842/S.

<sup>145</sup> District Gazetteer: Cawnpore District; Supplementary Notes and Statistics up to 1931-2, xiv.

<sup>146</sup> H.R Nevill, District Gazetteer of the United Provinces: Cawnpore, 1929, 166.

The magistrate and collector were in charge of what would now be considered mayorial tasks. They were responsible for the maintenance of “a covenanted assistant, three deputy collectors, and a treasury officer.”<sup>147</sup> The District Magistrate in Kanpur was J.F. Sale. Beneath him were the Joint Magistrate, Barron and two Deputy Magistrates, Rameshwar Dayal and Islam Nabi Khan. Also under his jurisdiction was the police department, headed by Superintendent of Police, R. M. Rogers, and his Deputy Superintendent of Police, Khan Bahadur Saiyid Ghulam Hasnnain.<sup>148</sup> Kanpur had three police stations, one located in the southeastern corner of the city at the Kotwali, one located directly opposite in the southwestern corner in Anwarganj and the third located to the northeast near Colonelganj.

The number of police forces in Kanpur differed from the official account and the number actually patrolling in the streets of the city. On paper, the armed police consisted of 4 Sub-Inspectors, 32 Head Constables, 53 Naiks (corporals) and 500 Constables.<sup>149</sup> In reality, on March 24<sup>th</sup>, the first day of the riots, the “actual strength” was 4 Sub-Inspectors, 11 Head Constables, 19 Naiks and 50 Constables.<sup>150</sup> These figures, while approximately equal to Sales’ calculation of the number of troops in Kanpur, did not exactly correspond to his exact figures. Testifying in front of the Official Commission of Enquiry, Sale claimed that on the first day of the riots, “the following police were on duty in the city thana and on Mall Road, viz., 9 sub-inspectors, 39 NCS and 242 constables, while the following were present in the Police Lines ready for duty viz. 3 sub-inspectors, 18 NCS and 66 constables of Armed Police, 2 NCSs and 50 Constables of Civil

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<sup>147</sup> H.R Nevill, *District Gazetteer of the United Provinces: Cawnpore*, 1929, 143.

<sup>148</sup> My perusal of 1931 correspondences between British authorities, the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, the British Commission Report, and numerous secondary sources did not reveal Joint Magistrate Barron’s given name. The author apologizes for this omission.

<sup>149</sup> British Commission Report, 33.

<sup>150</sup> British Commission Report, 33.

Police; and 2 NCS and 28 Constables of Mounted Police.<sup>151</sup> The number of available officials fell short of the official count and the authors of the British Commission Report cite these statistics as a significant reason for the spread of rioting.

It was these government officials and officers who held the responsibility of restoring order to the city and, when they failed to do so, were censured by the Kanpur Riots Commission Report and to a certain extent, by the British Commission Report.

*Part II: Foreshadowing the Riot*

The riots of 1931 were not an extraordinary occurrence. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, Hindu-Muslim relations had been deteriorating. Although the authors of the Kanpur Riots Commission Report maintained that 1922 was the pivotal year when relations soured, communal incidents preceding that date had given rise to feelings of religious bitterness.<sup>152</sup> A paramount factor in this increasing gulf between Hindus and Muslims was the rise of the Nationalist Movement in Kanpur.

In the early twentieth century, as a major industrial city, Kanpur was attuned to the goings-on of the national political scene. Though the respective authors of both the British Commission Report and the Kanpur Riot Commission Report maintained that business interests were a higher priority than political affiliations to the city's residents, each Report noted the growing politicization of Kanpur. The British Commission Report documented the fact that "Mr. Gandhi's movement... [has] attracted itself, for various reasons, the active support of more businessmen than has been the case with previous political movements in India."<sup>153</sup> The attention the Nationalist Movement was garnering affected both Hindus and Muslims, albeit in

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<sup>151</sup> J.F Sale, Report on the Cawnpore Communal Riots, 1931, file 67, Purushottam Das Tandon Papers, National Archives of India (hereafter cited as Sale Testimony), 13.

<sup>152</sup> Kanpur Riots Commission Report, 234.

<sup>153</sup> British Commission Report, 4.



different ways. Testifying in front of the Commission of Enquiry, Barron commented, “there can be no doubt that the Civil Disobedience Movement of the Congress Party ---- so has embittered communal relations. Mohemmedans being the numerical minority feel that they must have very definite safeguards for their own interests before Swaraj (political independence) is obtained. As Congress is a body almost entirely Hindu [and] has always been.<sup>154</sup> When the Movement was called off by Mahatma Gandhi in 1922, “Kanpur...acted like the rest of India” with the former members of the Non-Cooperation Movement joining religious- what the Kanpur Riots Commission Report terms “communal,”- organizations.<sup>155</sup> Fiery religious rhetoric could be heard in Muslim shops and religious festivals that had once been celebrated by both communities now began to be exclusively Hindu or Muslim. “Muslim boys were lectured not to buy Kheel or Batass at Diwali, and Hindu boys were asked not to buy or play with crackers at the Shab Barat.”<sup>156</sup> This environment of religious exclusion gradually worsened during the 1920s, escalating in 1927 with Kanpur’s first ever religious riot.

Though the riot was quickly settled, its occurrence highlighted a major rift between Hindus and Muslims in Kanpur. While the British Commission Report is inaccurate in claiming, “the Muslims from the first had refused to join the [National] movement,” by 1927 it was clear that the number of Muslims within the Congress Committee was steadily declining.<sup>157</sup> Reasons cited by both Reports were perceptions that the Congress Party had become a Hindu platform, Muslim interests were being ignored, and separate electorates were necessary to ensure equal representation. Though national overtures were made to persuade Muslims to join Congress and

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<sup>154</sup> Barron Testimony, 1931, 1.

<sup>155</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 238.

<sup>156</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 239.

<sup>157</sup> British Commission Report, 7.

some Muslims did join, overall, the efforts were not successful.<sup>158</sup> The resumption of the Nationalist Movement in 1930 did little to alleviate religious tensions, instead exacerbating the problem with the increased implementation of *hartals*, pickets of stores intended to disrupt the local economy.

By 1930, *hartals* had become a mainstay of the Congress Party and both the British and Kanpur Riots Commission Reports devote significant time to explaining how the picketing angered Muslim shopkeepers who had chosen not to join the Movement. Barron remarked, “frequent hartals, proclaimed and enforced by Congress, and picketing of shops which dealt in goods of which Congress disapproved, inflicted pecuniary loss and hardship on all concerned.”<sup>159</sup> Although *hartals* were supposed to be peaceful, overzealous Congress volunteers would “openly and deliberately...permit obstruction [of shops] by lying down before shops, etc. by forming cordons or standing close together and thus obstructing the passage.”<sup>160</sup> Congress workers, as acknowledged by both Reports, forced shop closures and in response, the Governor-General issued an ordinance in the May of 1930 declaring, “when resort is made to such methods it becomes necessary for Government to protect the freedom of action of those who may wish to sell and those who may wish to buy.”<sup>161</sup> Going hand in hand with forced shop closures was the practice of disrupting vehicular traffic and forcing occupants to travel on foot. Though the origin of the practice remains in dispute, with both Hindus and Muslims claiming the other side initiated the custom, its harmful effects were apparent.

It was during this atmosphere of religious tension that the Tanzim Movement arose. Barron recalled that the “Tanzim Movement sprang up in response to the successes of the

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<sup>158</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 249

<sup>159</sup> Barron Testimony, 1931, 2.

<sup>160</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 249.

<sup>161</sup> United Provinces Government, Resolution No. 2800/VIII-1263, Police Department, June 9, 1931, file 215, Purushottam Das Tandon Papers, National Archives of India, 5.

Congress party. It was primarily and outwardly religious but rapidly developed local political tendencies.”<sup>162</sup> Ostensibly created for the purpose of reminding and ensuring Muslims performed their daily five *Namaz*, the Movement became progressively more militant and expanded to include the majority of Muslim residents in Kanpur.<sup>163</sup> The activities of its followers comprised of armed processions in Kanpur and until January 16, 1931 when the Government banned the carrying of weapons, frequently included “ballams (spears), Kauralis (daggers), Khantas (axes) and even, drawn swords.”<sup>164</sup> Anti-Hindu songs were sung by processors and accounts from both the Congress and British Reports describe how the movement was a Muslim reaction to what Muslims saw as a growing disparity between the two communities. A witness describing the Tanzim Movement to the authors of the Kanpur Riots Commission Report stated, “the unifying force of [Tanzim] was the fear which pervaded the Muslim community that the Hindu community wished to trample all the sentiments and the interests of the Musalmans.”<sup>165</sup> The Tanzim movement introduced militancy in Muslim calls for recognition of their separate interests and both Reports recognized the movement as a contributing factor in the outbreak of the 1931 Kanpur Riots.

By March of 1931, Hindus and Muslims had diverged politically and economically. The National Civil Disobedience Movement had caused the initial fracture and subsequent religious developments ensured that both religious groups would see their interests as conflicting rather than as collaborative. In the span of eight years, from 1922-1930, when the Nationalist Movement was inactive, religious organizations proliferated to the extent that they divided Hindus and Muslims into two camps. The Congress Movement came to be regarded as a Hindu party, advancing

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<sup>162</sup> Barron Testimony, 1931, 1.

<sup>163</sup> British Commission Report, 8.

<sup>164</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 256.

<sup>165</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 256.

exclusively Hindu interests while the Tanzim Movement gained ground as a platform for Muslims. Though speculations in the Kanpur Riots Commission Report maintained that the British Government orchestrated the voracity of the Tanzim Movement, their own admittance that “no legal proof exists” makes it very difficult to substantiate their claims.<sup>166</sup> A reading of the two accounts makes clear that numerous incidents, teasing out political and economic pressure points, had worsened the situation.

Baghat Singh’s execution, according to both sources, was “the spark that was needed” to set off the riot.<sup>167</sup> Similar to the Tanzim Movement, both Reports find it necessary to recount the illustrious, if short-lived, career of Baghat Singh and his subsequent hanging. Baghat Singh was a young revolutionary who had risen to fame at the age of 21 after killing J.P. Saunders, a Deputy Superintendent for Police. One year later, he and a fellow revolutionary, Batukeshwar Dutt, threw a bomb into the National Assembly as a form of protest against the Defence of India Act, which was currently being debated on the floor. Shortly after detonating the bomb, Singh and Dutt turned themselves in. Though it was proven that the bomb was not intended to kill anyone (Singh and Dutt threw it *away* from the legislators), nor did it, both were tried and convicted. Another revolutionary, Shivaram Rajguru, was also arrested in the aftermath of the bombing after his participation in Saunders’ death was discovered. During his jail term, Baghat Singh along with his co-conspirators, “by various devices-hunger striking was only one of them...succeeded in bringing the usual procedure of law to a standstill.”<sup>168</sup> Baghat Singh became a national hero and as efforts to secure his clemency failed, he became an inspiration for young revolutionaries. “His execution excited strong feelings among parties covering a wide range of

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<sup>166</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 259.

<sup>167</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 259.

<sup>168</sup> British Commission Report, 1.

political thought” and though not to the extent the British Report claims, the Muslims did to a lesser degree “stand aloof.”<sup>169</sup>

In Kanpur, the day after the execution became known, hurried preparations were put in place for a *hartal* (boycott) to commemorate Baghat Singh’s execution in a nationwide campaign. Because British officials believed that the *hartal* “might be considered to be rather of the nature of pleas for mercy than of defiance,” in District Magistrate Sale’s words, they “were informed [by telephone] that they might permit the procession.”<sup>170</sup> The Congress Party in Kanpur had “chalked out a programme for the observance of Bhagat Singh Day” which included a citywide “*hartal*, bare-footed and bare-headed, silent procession, [and a] meeting in the evening.”<sup>171</sup> Although Congress leaders headed preparations to inform shopkeepers, “boys and young men would see that a *hartal* in honour of their own hero, Bhagat Singh, would be a strict and complete.”<sup>172</sup> The strict enforcement of the *hartal* gave way to increasing resentment of Muslim shopkeepers and small clashes erupted across the city the morning of March 24<sup>th</sup> as occupants of vehicles were forced to dismount. Sale recounted, “during the course of the morning there was considerable amount of rowdyism in the city by the promoters of the Hartal. They stopped the trams by blocking the lines with paving stones; people passing in *ekkas* (small vehicles) and *tongas* (rickshaws) were ---persuaded to get down. Stones were thrown at the Kotwali (police station) and at the Europeans passing in cars.”<sup>173</sup> Both the British Report and the Kanpur Riots Commission Report reference the same two occurrences that occurred early that morning; the first, involving a Muslim woman who was forced to alight from her *tonga* and the second, an English woman who was compelled to get down from her car. Congressmen

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<sup>169</sup> British Commission Report, 1.

<sup>170</sup> Sale Testimony, 1931, 2.

<sup>171</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 260.

<sup>172</sup> British Commission Report, 10.

<sup>173</sup> Sale Testimony, 1931, 3.

countered the threat of violence by walking around the city and quelling minor tiffs. Thus, the morning, while seeing minor clashes break out, remained under control and authors of both Reports note how the turn toward communal violence only happened later.

Until this point, the British Commission Report and Kanpur Riots Commission Report are largely in agreement. The predisposing causes cited by both sets of authors concur and though the emphasis differs in which causes were more influential than others, the two accounts do not directly contradict each other. The afternoon of the 24<sup>th</sup> marked a change in both Reports. What the Kanpur Riots Commission Report accepted as “universal fact,” the authors of the British Report “have no hesitance in rejecting.”<sup>174</sup> That the course of the riot differs in each account can be explained by the fact the narratives were intended to fulfill two conflicting political goals. In telling the story of the riots, both sides hoped to mitigate the blame on their side and charge the other side with more responsibility for the bloodshed.

*Part III: A Daily Narrative*

*March 24<sup>th</sup>*

By noon on March 24<sup>th</sup>, the small skirmishes that had led to prominent members of the Congress Party traversing Kanpur on foot and quelling the small clashes had evolved into larger acts of violence. Gangs of young men shattered shop windows and threatened shopkeepers with further acts of vandalism if the shops remained open. “In Meston Road [one of the major roads of the city] the interference with Muslim shop-keepers continued, and at about 1:30 pm, it is said that Hindus had started throwing brickbats at a Muslim shop.”<sup>175</sup> As both accounts noted, however, the violence had not turned communal. It would take two events, both unsubstantiated

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<sup>174</sup> British Commission Report, 10; Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 272.

<sup>175</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 266.

by outside sources and rejected by the authors of the British Commission Report, to turn the violence into a religious riot.

Although the two incidents are uncorroborated by other sources, their inclusion in this narrative is justified because it is a lack of evidence and not counterevidence that makes their claims weak. The first incident was recounted by three sets of witnesses. Though there is some variation in the anecdotes, at its core, the three statements can be simplified into the fact that exclamations of Hindu-Muslim strife preempted any such violence. According to witnesses in the Kanpur Riots Commission Report, “At about 12 o’clock,” three tongas each carrying two passengers passed by with the occupants “crying all the way with their hands outstretched ‘Hindus and Musalmans have begun fighting!’”<sup>176</sup> The tongas were riding through the city with the occupants making the same exclamatory announcement. Another witness reported, “several people simultaneously proclaimed in various parts of the city that Hindus were assaulting Muslims and vice versa.”<sup>177</sup> A third set of witnesses maintained that a policeman had instigated the violence by beating a “Hindu passer-by and to shout that the Hindus were murdering the Muslims on all sides...”<sup>178</sup> Though not enough evidence exists to confirm any of these cases, what can be taken away is the common denominator that early in the afternoon, violence was provoked by shouts that sectarian violence were occurring even though circumstances up to that point had given no indication of religious strife.

The second incident occurred shortly after and involved a Committee of Imperial Defence (C.I.D) agent who had affronted the crowd gathered by the Badshahi Naka.<sup>179</sup> The curious episode was explained by numerous witnesses who maintained:

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<sup>177</sup> *Kanpur Riots Commission Report*, 271.

<sup>178</sup> *Kanpur Riots Commission Report*, 272.

<sup>179</sup> The C.I.D is the British Secret Service in India.

That this man deliberately provoked the crowd. He first passed through them carrying a bicycle on hand, and then having gone a few hundred feet, rode back and tried to pass through that same crowd. Not being permitted to do so, he tried the ekk (a small footpath), and after a final scuffle ran through the Moolganj crossing chased by the younger elements of the crowd.<sup>180</sup>

In what ensued, Muslims claimed the man had been Muslim and had been “beaten by Hindus, and so the Muslims at that place beat them in return.”<sup>181</sup> The authors of the Congress

Commission Report maintained that it was this confrontation that “is universally believed to have given a communal turn to the affair and started the rioting.”<sup>182</sup> What is prevalent in the Congress explanation of the riots are various conspiracy theories involving the C.I.D, British Secret Service, involvement. For obvious reasons, not the least the lack of evidence highlighting Indian voices, their claims difficult to prove. For the purpose of this narrative, it will suffice to say that British involvement remains suspect but unproven.

By 1 p.m., the riots had broken out in full force. Sale recounted that: “at about 1 p.m. a crowd of students and youths of the Vanar Sena suddenly rushed along the Mall breaking windows of Government offices, such as the Telegraph Office and of a good many commercial firms and shops eg. Mesaro Valerios and Sons, Confectioners, Hope Bros. Outfitters, the imperial Chemical Industries Ltd.”<sup>183</sup> A witness cited in the Kanpur Riots Commission Report, Rai Sahib Rup Chand Jain, a banker and an Honorary Magistrate, corroborated Sale’s testimony. Declaring “a large number of rowdy Muslims were seen scattered on Halsey and Moolganj roads armed with lathis (clubs), ballams (spears), khantas (axes), etc.,” Jain confirmed Sale’s account

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<sup>180</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 273.

<sup>181</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 275.

<sup>182</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 272.

<sup>183</sup> Sale Testimony, 1931, 3. Vanar Sena, to which Sale refers to, was the “Monkey Army,” an organization created by Indira Gandhi and comprised of Indian youth, both girls and boys, as a semi-official arm of the Indian National Congress. Its name alluded to the monkey army in the *Ramayana*, an ancient Hindu scripture, who helped Lord Rama defeat the demon Ravana.



of violence in the city proper.<sup>184</sup> Mounted police dispatched to quell the violence at 3 p.m. were unsuccessful when “they failed to catch anyone” according to Sale’s testimony.<sup>185</sup>

At Moolganj Crossing, in the center of the city, two groups of Hindus and Muslims, numbering 100-200, were throwing stones at one another. As reported to a Congressman, the immediate cause of the clash was a reaction to news that Hindus had been attacking Muslims at Badshahi Nak.<sup>186</sup> British policemen headed by the Kotwal, Khan Bahadur Syed Ghulam Hasnain, emerged on the scene to restore calm. Hearing that G.G Jog, a prominent Congressman, had been killed, the Kotwal went to investigate, delegating the task of restoring peace to the “Station Officer, Kotwali, and the armed guard.”<sup>187</sup> He found that Jog had only a slight injury and meeting Ganesh Vidyarthi on his way back to Moolganj Crossing, he enlisted the latter to publicize the fact that Sri Jog had only been injured. The Kotwali set about dispersing the crowd at the crossing and then proceeded to Shera Babu’s Park where he found a number of Muslims wrecking religious emblems of different faiths that had decorated the park. By this point, around 4 p.m., numerous clashes had broken out across the city. The Ban Bazaar Mosque had been partially destroyed by Hindus and at Badshahi Nak, fighting had restarted. Rioters had set the Chauk Bazaza Mosque on fire and in Saraffa, agitators looted shops. In his testimony, Joint Magistrate Barron Reported, “the telephone bell rang constantly [at the District Magistrate’s residence] and I received many messages from excited people begging for assistance as there was great disturbance in the city.”<sup>188</sup> District Magistrate, J.F Sale, had been summoned. But in a brief conference at Shera Babu’s house, “it was decided that the police could still deal with the

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<sup>184</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report,,273.

<sup>185</sup> Sale Testimony, 1931, 4.

<sup>186</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 279.

<sup>187</sup> British Commission Report, 12.

<sup>188</sup> Barron Testimony, 1931, 6.

situation without military aid.”<sup>189</sup> In making his decision, Sale ignored the advice of Rameshwar Dayal, the Deputy Superintendent of Police, who was present at the meeting. According to his own testimony, Sale had already dispatched troops to the Queen’s Park at 3 p.m.<sup>190</sup> Barron supported Sale’s claims of addressing the violence by citing that “at about 5:50 pm. At Moolganj there was a Police picket of about 20 or 25 men.”<sup>191</sup> Yet, these measures were insufficient to quell the citywide rioting that was consuming the city.

Personal anecdotes from the Kanpur Riots Commission Report evidence the growing hysteria affecting Kanpur. Sale remarked that throughout the course of the day, “various parties of Hindus and Mohemmedans came up in rather an excited manner complaining of each others attacks and they were assured that every possible protection would be given, if they kept quiet.”<sup>192</sup> Despite his assurances, rioters set the Meston Road temple on fire. Sale sent two magistrates, Anand Swarup and Gauri Prasad, to help the police and fire brigade to douse the flames. Swarup arrested two looters and in doing so observed that the Misri Bazaar, located in close proximity, was being looted.<sup>193</sup> He “stopped the men from looting and drove them away.”<sup>194</sup> Swarup then phoned Sale, informing him the situation was rapidly getting out of hand and reinforcements would be necessary. Supporting Swarup’s calls for extra help was the looting of the Etawah Bazaar that evening around 7 p.m. The police company, responding to Swarup’s calls, sent a force of “two officers and 66 British other ranks...to Meston Road.”<sup>195</sup> The situation worsened from the late afternoon through the evening when Sale decided to call for additional military reinforcements at 8 p.m. Through the night, as military reinforcements consisting of the

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<sup>189</sup> British Commission Report, 13.

<sup>190</sup> Sale Testimony, 1931, 4.

<sup>191</sup> Barron testimony, 1931, 7.

<sup>192</sup> Sale Testimony, 1931, 4.

<sup>193</sup> British Commission Report, 14.

<sup>194</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 291.

<sup>195</sup> British Commission Report, 14.

second company of Highland Light Infantry arrived on Meston Road, acts of arson and pillaging continued to wreak havoc upon the city

*March 25<sup>th</sup>*

Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, described in the Kanpur Riots Commission Report as “the only person who even in this crisis could command some moral authority and exercise some restraining influence,” sought to single-handedly end the riots and his endeavors form the bulk of the Kanpur Riots Commission Report’s narrative of the events of March 25<sup>th</sup>.<sup>196</sup> A letter reprinted in the Kanpur Riots Commission Report and later in the *The Leader*, a newspaper based in Allahabad, captured many of the sentiments and events of the 25<sup>th</sup>. Writing to a close friend who had offered her services to help quell the riots, Vidyarthi responded, “at present I cannot ask you to come out....The police stands by watching unconcerned while mosques and temples are burnt, people are beaten and shops are looted.”<sup>197</sup> Police inaction was a common thread in the different narratives that comprised the Kanpur Riots Commission Report’s retelling of the riots and Vidyarthi’s letter serves as verifiable proof of British culpability during the days of the riot.

Returning to Kanpur, throughout the morning, violence escalated as arson and fighting spread to outlying areas of Kanpur . “By 6 a.m., Mr. Seward found arson and fighting in progress in Sabzimandi, Coolie Bazaar, and Cooperganj, and between 8 and 9 a.m, fighting was going on to the south of Sisamau, an area outlying the city proper.”<sup>198</sup> Sale reported that “just about then [9 a.m.] alarms from outlying mohallas (neighborhoods) began to be received and parties were at once sent out from Meston Road as on the previous day.”<sup>199</sup> Yet, the number of complaints

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<sup>196</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 299.

<sup>197</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 301.

<sup>198</sup> British Commission Report, 16.

<sup>199</sup> Sale Testimony, 1931, 7.

revolving around police inaction continued to increase and the authors of the Kanpur Riots Commission Report noted that “almost every witness who came before us had seen instances in which murder, loot and arson had been committed in the presence of policemen who had refused to take any notice of them.”<sup>200</sup> Etawah Bazaar also became a site of rioting when a “huge gang ...burnt several shops [and] killed several Musalmans.”<sup>201</sup> Vidyarthi hastened to quell the violence and recruited Shri Kanhaya Lal to use his lorry as a taxi service for transporting injured persons to the hospital. In a meeting held in the Congress Office the day before, rescue work had been designated the Congress Party’s recourse to dealing with the riots. Vidyarthi continued to “the Muslim lane near Girdhar Das’ house” where a number of Hindus were hiding.<sup>202</sup> Accompanying him were Hindu and Muslim volunteers who successfully deflected attacks upon Ganeshji by informing his would-be assailants that “Ganeshji had already rescued thirty or thirty-five Musalmans.”<sup>203</sup> Dispatching the thirty Hindus who had been hiding with Lal, Vidyarthi proceeded to the Bengali Mohal where both the authors of the British and Kanpur Riots Commission Reports asserted that rioters “perpetuated the most horrible atrocities.”<sup>204</sup>

In one instance described by both accounts, a gang of Hindus, after setting a house on fire, searched for any surviving occupants, dragging them out to butcher them “before the very eyes of the witness and her daughter-in-law and child, who were the sole survivors thanks to their feigning death by throwing themselves on the heap of corpses. Even so they did not escape injury...as the assailants set fire” to the pile of bodies.<sup>205</sup> The authors of the British Report noted Vidyarthi’s efforts to stop the violence; “Mr. Vidyarthi reached this mohalla and successfully

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<sup>200</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 349.

<sup>201</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 303.

<sup>202</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 306.

<sup>203</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 306.

<sup>204</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 307.

<sup>205</sup> British Commission Report, 16.

assisted in the rescue of a number of other Muslim families in the vicinity.”<sup>206</sup> As the fervor of the violence continued to increase, Vidyarthi continued to “engage in rescue work” according to both the British and Kanpur Riots Commission Reports until his death at the hands of a Muslim mob.<sup>207</sup>

Vidyarthi, after leaving the Bengali Mohalla, had hastened to Karin ki Chakki, a side street in the city proper. There after seeing the successful rescue of a Hindu family, Vidyarthi came between two hostile and armed Muslim mobs. A witness with Vidyarthi narrated: “one of the Musalmans there whom I recognize cried out:

This is Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi. Let us kill him, let him not escape... Some Musalmans then ran towards Ganeshji. Ganeshji bent his head before them, and said something I could not hear. A man stabbed him in the back. Another attacked him with a khanta. Ganeshji fell down.<sup>208</sup>

Rumors of his death spurred other Congress Party leaders to search for him and the authors of the Kanpur Riots Commission Report documented the efforts of Iqbal Krishna Kapoor and Jog to find his body that afternoon. In the midst of this tragedy, rioters continued to devastate the city and clashes broke out in Gwaltoli, Sadar Bazaar, Shutarkhana, Parmat, and Baconganj, different areas of Kanpur.

The British response was to post military pickets and dispatch patrols. A picket was placed at Kunji Lal’s temple and “two military parties were patrolling all day on either side of Meston Road.”<sup>209</sup> The number of military personnel increased in the afternoon as an Auxillary

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<sup>206</sup> British Commission Report, 17.

<sup>207</sup> British Commission Report, 17.

<sup>208</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 323.

<sup>209</sup> British Commission Report, 16. Because the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report center their narrative on the circumstances surrounding Vidyarthi’s death on March 25<sup>th</sup>, the following description of military action in Kanpur is exclusively based on the British Commission Report. Because testimonies of the military commander, Lieutenant-Colonel McCallum, address problems with the way the pickets were designed, and indeed part of the British Report refutes those accusatory claims, the information can be treated as reliable. McCallum’s claims are rebutted and elaborated upon in Superintendent R.M. Rogers’ testimony. Written Statement of Mr. R.M. Rogers, May 21, 1931, file 64, Purushottam Das Tandon Papers, National Archives of India, 4-13.

Force was deployed to Mall Road to avoid the violence from spreading to the Civil Lines. Other reinforcements arrived later that afternoon, and by 4:30 the existing pickets were strengthened and new pickets set up throughout the city. The effect on the rioters, however, of this increased martial force was limited. S. Bhasin, Secretary of the United Provinces Kerana Seva Samiti, a Hindu organization, reported that, “houses were being looted in the very presence of the police in Bengali Mohal as well as Butcherkhanna...at about 4:30 p.m., I told these constables to arrest the robbers but they pleaded want of orders. I told them that these were cognizable offences and no order was necessary, but to no effect.”<sup>210</sup> Describing his own actions during the riot, Sale maintained in his testimony:

I received a number of appeals for aid by letters and telephone. I kept as close liaison as possible by telephone and I believe that every possible effort was made to give help to private applicants but in view of the widespread nature of the trouble and the scanty forces at our disposal it was not possible to satisfy every applicant.”<sup>211</sup>

Barron also commented on the numerous calls for help:

During the whole day rumors or reports were coming in from different quarters of the city of rioting, looting and arson. If first they were accepted at their face value and parties of police were dispatched by lorry to more distant parts or on foot to the nearer ones...the parties returned to report that the rumors were entirely unfounded and that all was quiet in the locality in which they had been sent.”<sup>212</sup>

That evening saw Barron patrol the city and describe an area that had allegedly been the scene of rioting as a deserted street where “we could see no signs of burning houses or of rioting... all was perfectly quiet. No shouting could be heard.”<sup>213</sup> Sale refused to institute Martial Law yet

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<sup>210</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 348.

<sup>211</sup> Sale Testimony, 1931, 7.

<sup>212</sup> Barron Testimony, 1931, 11.

<sup>213</sup> Barron Testimony, 1931, 13.

“on the morning of the 26<sup>th</sup> riots were still continuing in full force, especially in the more outlying areas” according to the British Report.<sup>214</sup>

*March 26<sup>th</sup>*

The 26<sup>th</sup> proved to be just as calamitous as the 25<sup>th</sup>.<sup>215</sup> During the early morning, Sisamau, an area outlying the city proper, once more came under attack by both Muslims and Hindus. By 8 a.m., Gwaltoli Bazar was in flames and rioters renewed attacks on Parmat. Around 9 a.m., the Annapura temple at Patkapur was demolished by a fire, a number of houses destroyed, and the Juma Mosque damaged.<sup>216</sup> Baconganj and Colonelganj remained beleaguered and the looting of shops, destruction of homes, and murders continued throughout the city. Despite the arrival of higher police officials from Lucknow, the situation remained dire. Sale commented, “around 10 a.m., a large number of alarm reports continued to be received during the day both by me, the Superintendent of Police and the Office Commanding Station, many of them were on enquiry found to be false.”<sup>217</sup> Yet, as the authors of the British Report noted, at times, Sale was too quick to dismiss claims of rioting as baseless. The case of Mr. S.M Basheer, Barrister-at-Law, exemplified this oversight:

Early on the 26<sup>th</sup>, Mr. Basheer went to the District Magistrate and then to the Superintendent of Police and to the Kotwal for help but unluckily his request fell on deaf ears as owing to the previous reports of all being quiet in Parmat [Barron, the Deputy Inspector-General of Police and Superintendent of Police had patrolled the main bazaar in Parmat and had “found all quiet”] thus no reliance was placed on his statement. By midday on the 26<sup>th</sup>, about 19 Muslims had been murdered and a number of houses looted and burnt.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> British Commission Report, 18.

<sup>215</sup> At this point, the Kanpur Riot Commission Report ceases to record a daily narrative of the events despite the fact that the violence was not quelled until the 30<sup>th</sup>. The narrative that follows are is comprised of largely the British Commission Report substantiated by personal testimonies recorded in the Kanpur Riot Commission Report.

<sup>216</sup> British Commission Report, 19.

<sup>217</sup> Sale Testimony, 1931, 9.

<sup>218</sup> British Commission Report, 19.

Attacks continued in the city proper and outlying areas. Renewed attacks on Sabzimandi from the previous day resulted in “a number of murders...committed and several persons severely injured.”<sup>219</sup> In Sadar Bazaar, fighting had resumed and “looting was in progress in Lathi Mohal.”<sup>220</sup> In his testimony, Sale described how:

Rescue parties were organized under the charge of magistrates or police officers and a good many people were taken out from houses and hiding places where they had been since the riots began. Only then was it fully realized that a ghastly set of murders had occurred of people of both communities who were living in groups or singly in the middle of people of the other community.<sup>221</sup>

Rescue efforts comprised of implementing more pickets, dividing the city into two circles with a Deputy Superintendent of Police patrolling each area and assuming responsibility for the “supervision of police arrangements.”<sup>222</sup> That evening, Barron reported around 5 p.m., “the situation appeared much easier. A good number of men were moving about in a moral manner and a few shops had opened in the main streets.”<sup>223</sup>

*March 27<sup>th</sup>–30<sup>th</sup>*

As noted by the British Report, March 27<sup>th</sup> saw “marked signs of improvement.”<sup>224</sup> The number of areas under attack diminished and rescue workers were largely unmolested as they traversed the city, aiding the wounded and preparing bodies for funerary arrangements. Solitary acts of violence, however, continued to affect parts of the city. In an attempt to depict how grisly the violence had been, the authors of the Kanpur Riots Commission Report included three tragedies to “illustrate the horrors that were raging.”<sup>225</sup> The second of their documented tragedies occurred on March 27<sup>th</sup>. Pandit Kanhaiya Lal of Phoolganj recounted how his Muslim neighbors

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<sup>219</sup> British Commission Report, 19.

<sup>220</sup> British Commission Report, 20.

<sup>221</sup> Sale Testimony, 1931, 9.

<sup>222</sup> British Commission Report, 20.

<sup>223</sup> Barron Testimony, 1931, 15.

<sup>224</sup> British Commission Report, 20.

<sup>225</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 325.



tortured his relative, Batashi, by cutting off the flesh of her heels to take her silver anklets, “weighing 120 tolas.”<sup>226</sup> After throwing her in a well, the rioters murdered the narrator’s wife and assaulted him and his father with until they became unconscious. Crimes like these continued and the authors of the British Report support these claims though maintaining that the frequency and number of such crimes diminished.

On March 28<sup>th</sup>, “the situation continued to show a definite improvement with only a few murders being reported.”<sup>227</sup> The authors of both the Congress and British Report recognized the efforts of Kirana Seva Samiti, a Hindu organization, as contributing to the restoration of peace. According to a report cited in the Kanpur Riots Commission Report, the “Kirana Sewa Samiti between the 24<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> of March sent 102 dead bodies to the Prince of Wales Hospital, burnt 60 on the spot under orders of the authorities, sent 140 wounded men, women and children to the Prince of Wales Hospital, and rescued 187 families and 86 persons from affected areas.”<sup>228</sup> The efforts of the Congress Party coupled with official endeavors served to end much of the violence. By this point, however, Kanpur had been devastated. “Whole mohallas (neighborhoods) lay desolate with debris of burn and smouldering houses interspersed....Inside the houses, in the lanes, and on public roads, lay dead bodies of human beings in advance stages of decomposition.”<sup>229</sup> It was against this backdrop that volunteers and officials assisted victims and evaluated the wreckage. Neighborhoods that had previously been comprised of both Muslim and Hindu populations “had practically ceased to exist for the time being” and “whole masses of population had shifted their quarters.”<sup>230</sup> By one estimate, 80,000 people had fled by railway

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<sup>226</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 329.

<sup>227</sup> British Commission Report, 20.

<sup>228</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 377.

<sup>229</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 367.

<sup>230</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 267.

alone in the opening days of the riot.<sup>231</sup> Yet, shops began to open and both the Congress and British Report maintain that Kanpur began to return to normalcy.

The 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> saw further improvements. The arrangements on the 29<sup>th</sup> for two Deputy Magistrates, one Muslim and the other Hindu, to go around in designated areas of the city was a measure noted by both Reports as very successful since it resulted in the “cessation of the constant shouting at night which had tended to keep up a state of panic.”<sup>232</sup> British officials removed the military pickets and mills began to resume normal hours of operation. Reporting to the British Commission, however, Hoon, a British lawyer, dampened the impact of official action to end the riots by commenting, “I am convinced that if the combatants had not exhausted themselves by fighting, the results would have been even more disastrous.”<sup>233</sup> Though solitary acts of violence continued to affect some parts of the city, by the 30<sup>th</sup>, calm had been restored. It is here where the British Report maintains a daily log of events is unnecessary because “the situation had been brought fully under control.”<sup>234</sup>

### *The Aftermath*

The Kanpur Riots had resulted in major loss of life and property damage. By the end of the riot, the official estimate of the number of casualties was 294, 155 Hindu victims and 119 Muslims.<sup>235</sup> However, as N. Gerald Barrier notes in his introduction to *Roots of Communal Politics*, the casualty count was much higher, approximately 400, and the authors of the British Report concede that figures may have been higher than the official count. The number wounded similarly was underestimated in the British Report. Compared to Barrier’s estimate of 1200 the

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<sup>231</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 267.

<sup>232</sup> British Report, 21.

<sup>233</sup> Kanpur Riots Commission Report, 368. Although Hoon is mentioned in both the Kanpur Riot Commission Report and the British Commission Report, neither state his given name. My perusal of official testimonies and secondary literature, similarly, did not reveal his first name. The author apologizes for this omission.

<sup>234</sup> British Commission Report, 21.

<sup>235</sup> British Commission Report, 37.

authors of the British Report only counted 401 injured persons throughout the week-long riot.<sup>236</sup> In addition to the human loss was the complete devastation of the city. According to official estimates, eighteen mosques, forty-two temples, 248 Hindu houses and 101 Muslim houses were burnt or damaged.<sup>237</sup> In a statement “showing crimes reported mohalla-wise (neighborhood-wise)...for the first four days of the riot, over 1,500 crimes were reported in the 28 mohallas.”<sup>238</sup> While the number of crimes per mohalla ranged from less than ten per day in some mohallas to over a hundred per day in other mohallas, the number of arrests made in each neighborhood was proportionally much less. Hundreds of crimes were reported yet the most arrests made in any single day was 66 on the 23<sup>rd</sup> in the Colonelganj mohalla.<sup>239</sup> The discrepancy between criminal action and police action drew “search-lights from all over India...falling upon Kanpur and scrutinizing in a most uncomfortable way the doings of the local officials and the Government policy.”<sup>240</sup> Police inaction became the watchword for the Congress Party and confronting the legitimacy of the British government to safeguard the interests of Kanpur citizens, the authors of the Kanpur Riots Commission Report called upon riot victims to question its authority.

### *Conclusion*

In their daily log of the events of the riots, both the respective authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report and the British Commission Report used personal anecdotes to describe the events of the riots. Yet, both subsumed the narratives of riot participants in their efforts to promote their respective officials. The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report followed the leaders of the Congress Party in Kanpur as they attempted to quell the riots. The authors reported their efforts in detail, calling attention to the individual contributions of each member.

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<sup>236</sup> British Commission Report, 36.

<sup>237</sup> British Commission Report, 35.

<sup>238</sup> British Commission Report, 36-40.

<sup>239</sup> British Commission Report, 41.

<sup>240</sup> British Commission Report, 368.

Similarly, the British Commission Report described the actions of British officials, focusing on preventive measures taken by the District Magistrate and the collaborative efforts of the local British Government in Kanpur and the military to put down the riots. In reading the narratives, there is a sense of isolation among the people involved. The British Government officials were caught up in the too-important business of rearranging troops and pickets to most effectively quell the riots without personally being present. The policemen, jointly presented by the Kanpur Riots Commission Report and the British Commission Report, as culpable for much of the bloodshed because of their inaction, stand aside dispassionately watching atrocity after atrocity. The result is a disjointed view both of how the riot took place and of the involvement of the riot participants, the unstudied population in both accounts.

## CHAPTER THREE

### IDENTIFYING THE VOICES OF RIOT PARTICIPANTS

“I am sure that is just when the riots began, those innumerable self-sacrificing Congress volunteers who in Congress processions stood with their bended necks ready to receive lathi blows from the police, faced the guns of white soldiers with their chests uncovered, and who took pride in ending their lives by lying down before the horses of mounted police, had taken their lives in their hands and began Satyagraha in every mohalla against people who were busy fighting each other then after the martyrdom of ten or twenty such volunteers the disturbance would have ended.”<sup>241</sup>

Syed Aminuddin Haidar, witness to the Kanpur Riots<sup>242</sup>

#### *Introduction*

In his memorandum preceding the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, Bhagwan Das explained that the Kanpur riots could be seen “as merely an aggravated symptom of the disease.”<sup>243</sup> Happening within weeks after the Benares and Agra riots, the Kanpur riots were part of an increasingly violent trend of religious strife. Viewing the Kanpur riots within this context, the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report sought to show how the 1931 Kanpur riots were a typical example of Hindu-Muslim relations under the British Raj. According to them, the British policy of “divide and rule,” was the major factor motivating religious riots. To this effect, they presented the events of the Kanpur Riots as a continuation of the 293-page history prefacing their account of the outbreak of violence. The Kanpur Riots, the authors of the Congress Report argued could not be understood as an isolated incident but instead needed to be documented as an example of Hindu-Muslim relations as written in the

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<sup>241</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 365.

<sup>242</sup> British Commission Report, 10.

<sup>243</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 42.

history included in the Report. Understanding the Kanpur Riots required understanding how British rule in India was responsible for setting up the causes of conflict. The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report set out to prove that Hindu-Muslim strife was not built into Hindu-Muslim relations but rather the result of official (British) manipulation.

The British Report was formally titled “Findings of the Committee appointed to hold a departmental enquiry into the conduct of the subordinate police during the Kanpur riots.” Written for the purpose of investigating claims of police inaction, the British Report was the official statement of the British Government. It was intended for senior British officials to evaluate the effectiveness of the official response to the riots and respond to the numerous allegations of police inactivity by Kanpur’s citizens, both European and Indian. Though its scope was more limited than the Congress Report, the authors of the British Report used the Kanpur Riots to make a statement about Indians and British rule in India. The British authors invoked riot participants, citizens of Kanpur unaffiliated with the Congress Party or the British Government, to perpetuate two themes common to colonial historiography: that Hindu-Muslim relations were primarily characterized by strife and that Indians as a whole were incapable of governing themselves. Both private testimonies of British officials in Kanpur and the British Commission Report refer to these facets when calling upon riot participants. These assumptions are built into the text and their significance lies in the fact that they affect the way in which the events of the Kanpur Riots are described.

In this chapter, I will examine the role of riot participants in both the Congress and British Commission Reports. My objective is to show how the stories and voices of riot observers became entangled with the ideological agendas of the nationalists in the Kanpur Riot Commission Report and the colonialists in the British Commission Report. While the authors of

the British Report used witness testimonies to a lesser extent than the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, both incorporated riot participants to make a political statement. The British, in private testimonies in addition to the British Commission Report, called upon riot participants to legitimize the necessity for British rule, while the Congress Party authors used the voices of riot participants to show how the Congress Party functioned as a mouthpiece for the public. In other words, the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report saw their account of the Kanpur riots as the public's story. Their role was simplified to a conveyor of the public's truth. What they failed to consider, however, was how the public's voice would undermine some of their own claims. The voices included in the Kanpur Riot Commission Report had the unintended effect of casting doubt on the Congress Party's claims. The very words the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report used to show how they were the people's representatives helped substantiate claims that conflicted with the Congress Party's agenda.

### *The British Portrayal of Riot Participants*

The aftermath of the Kanpur riots saw not only the creation of a formal British Commission Report but also the submission of official testimonies of British officials involved in the riots. In a city where "extreme nervousness [continued to] exist on both the [Hindu and Muslim] sides and may easily result in panic and a fresh outbreak," British officials were called upon to submit their personal accounts of the Kanpur riots.<sup>244</sup> District Magistrate J.F Sale, Joint District Magistrate Barron, and Superintendent Rogers documented the actions they had taken to suppress the violence. The testimonies they produced became part of the official literature of the Kanpur riots. They were incorporated into the British Commission Report and recounted in detail in local newspapers such as *The Leader* and *The Statesman*. On April 21, 1931 the editors of *The Statesman* printed an article entitled "Cawnpore Riots Inquiry: Magistrate's Story; Why Martial

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<sup>244</sup> British Commission Report, 31.

Law was refused.” Two days later, they published extensive coverage of the “Official Inquiry into Cawnpore Riots” documenting “charges against the police.”<sup>245</sup> Coverage in *The Leader* was more extensive. Beginning on April 2<sup>nd</sup>, the editors printed a series of articles detailing the findings of the Official Cawnpore Riots Inquiry and quoting verbatim the testimonies of British officials involved.<sup>246</sup> Writing about the challenges they faced individually and the measures they took, the three British officials sought to show how they had attempted to quell the riots to the best of their capabilities at the time. What stands out, however, is their description of the rioters and riot victims. This section will highlight colonial beliefs about Indians while documenting how British officials viewed Indian citizens of Kanpur.

The British officials involved in the Kanpur riots and the authors of the British Commission Report sought to show that the Hindu-Muslim strife was an enduring problem in India. In the words of Joint Magistrate Barron, “friction between the two communities is unfortunately an ever present problem in India.”<sup>247</sup> Hindu-Muslim relations had worsened since the 1920s and the authors of the British Commission Report illustrate one instance of this trend. Quoting Mr. Chatterji, Principal of Christ Church College, Kanpur, they cite his experience as representative of increased Hindu-Muslim tension. Chatterji recounted:

In my own College, which was made a target of virulent attacks, sometimes accompanied by violence, the seventy or eighty Muslim students remain solidly loyal to their institution, and most of them showed great pluck in attending College in the face of obstruction and intimidation. On one occasion when the mob that... accompanied the Congress picketers assaulted students, the majority of those who received injuries

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<sup>245</sup> “Cawnpore Riots Inquiry: Magistrate’s Story; Why Martial Law was refused,” *The Statesman*, no. 18061, XCVII (1931): 19; “Official Inquiry into Cawnpore Riots/Witnesses/ Charges Against the Police/Hooliganism Unchecked/ ‘No Attempt to Deal with Outbreak’” *The Statesman* XCVII, no. 18063 (1931): 9.

<sup>246</sup> Examples of articles include: “Cawnpore Riots and After Inaccurate Official Facts and Figures. Need for Searching Public Inquiry,” *The Leader* LXXVIII, no. 6590 (1931): 10; “Cawnpore Settling Down/Response to Congress Appeal/Deputation’s Statement/Allegations of Official Callousness,” *The Leader* LXXVIII, no. 6597 (1931): 10; “Cawnpore District Officer’s Disclaimer,” *The Leader* LXXVIII, no. 6599 (1931): 10.

<sup>247</sup> Barron Testimony, 1931, 6.



happened to be Muslims. The incident roused much feeling among Muslims in the town.<sup>248</sup>

Chatterji's statement points to the Congress' culpability in fueling religious tensions. His comments are used as part of the explanation for the predisposing causes of the riots and they can be used to view how British officials viewed ordinary citizens of Kanpur. The British held ordinary citizens of Kanpur responsible, to a limited extent, for the outbreak of violence on March 24<sup>th</sup> 1931 because some were involved in Congress activities.

The authors of the British Commission Report make the connection between the Congress Party and the deterioration of Hindu-Muslim relations stronger in their next usage of a riot observer's remarks. While clarifying that the Congress Party is "discharged of any culpable responsibility for the immediate outbreak," they insinuate, through the words of an Indian citizen of Kanpur, that the Congress Party may share some responsibility for the violence, if not "culpable responsibility."<sup>249</sup> They recount how "Lala Dewan Chand, Principal of the Dayand Anglo-Vedic College, told us that when he heard in Basti of the riot he returned at once to Kanpur fearful that there might be trouble in Kanpur any day on account of "sympathetic contagion."<sup>250</sup> Chand feared communal reprisal for violence occurring in nearby areas. Because the Congress Party continued with their plan to hold a *hartal*, the British present the Congress Party as out of touch with the concerns of some of Kanpur's citizens. The authors of the British Report maintain that Congress Party leaders should "have been aware of the tense feelings in Kanpur as others were."<sup>251</sup> This barb serves to undermine confidence in the competence of the Congress Party and by extension the people they claim to represent, the citizens of Kanpur. The authors of the British Commission Report further accentuate this point, contending, "it must have

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<sup>248</sup> British Commission Report, 6.

<sup>249</sup> British Commission Report, 10.

<sup>250</sup> British Commission Report, 10.

<sup>251</sup> British Commission Report 10.

been present to the mind of the Committee that a *hartal* to the memory of Bhagat Singh would particularly stir the imagination of their younger people and it was through the younger people that hartals were accomplished, and if need be, enforced.”<sup>252</sup> Lala Dewan’s words are used to castigate the Congress Party and their volunteers without the British authors being completely accountable for launching the attack.

In his testimony, Barron explicitly faults riot participants for the challenges they faced in quelling the violence. Hindus and Muslims, as depicted, are not fit to govern themselves. Barron portrays riot observers as a panic-stricken population who hinder official efforts to quell the riots. In three instances, Barron makes reference to his supposition that “it appeared to be the ambition of every resident of Kanpur to have an armed guard at his door step during the days of the riot, irrespective of whether any rioting had taken place in the locality or not.”<sup>253</sup> Barron describes the citizens of Kanpur as interfering with official procedures without contributing to efforts to quell the riots. The citizens of Kanpur are helpless and do not possess the know-how to take charge of the situation. Responding to criticisms that he had been uncivil to riot victims, Barron replied:

To all and sundry [who made requests for aid] I explained with great patience that we had not sufficient men to deal with reports of actual rioting, so none could be spared for rescue work in which there was no immediate danger or for protection from fear of attack. To such as accepted this answer I was quite civil. To those who made a nuisance of themselves by repeatedly asking for quite unnecessary help I had to speak brusquely in order to get rid of them and get on with my work.<sup>254</sup>

The riot observers annoy Barron and frustrate his efforts on their behalf. His portrayal of the people he deals with is unflattering and this impression is further compounded by the way he describe what riot observes do during the riots.

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<sup>252</sup> British Commission Report, 10.

<sup>253</sup> Barron Testimony, 1931, 7.

<sup>254</sup> Barron Testimony, 1931, 17-18.

In Barron's testimony, riot observers not only make incessant demands for help but they make false statements. In his most detailed example of this type of event, Barron recalled:

“[On March 28<sup>th</sup>] After returning to the District Magistrate's bungalow about 5 p.m. a leading Kanpur business man arrived in a state of great panic and informed us that his house was on fire and his women-folk were being murdered. I went with him to Kallam-Ka Street and found all quiet and his house untouched. He called his servants and demanded to be told where the rioters had gone. The servant asked, “what rioters?” On being told “the man who set fire to the house” the servant merely looked bewildered and replied “I do not know.” No one has been here since the riots started. The man who led me on this errand had previously reported at least half a dozen times that his house was in flames. He is B. Krishna Lal Gupta, who gave evidence before this commission, a few days ago. I do not quote this as any reflections on Mr. Gupta.”<sup>255</sup>

Barron further explains that he “merely gives [this incident] as an instance of the type of information which was being given to us at all hours of the day and night by telephone...or in person.”<sup>256</sup> What is notable about Barron's account is that he recalls exactly what everyone said, signified by his use of direct quotes, and his characterization of both the servant and B. Krishna Gupta in stock terms. In other words, the servant and B. Krishna Gupta fulfill their roles: the former as a “bewildered” bystander and the latter as an example of the panic-stricken population. While this is the most thoroughly described individual example of riot observers purportedly misrepresenting their situation, it is only one of three examples Barron cites. More characteristic of how Barron presents the actions of riot observers is reflected in his description of an incident that occurred on March 25<sup>th</sup>:

About 11:30 p.m., a telephone message was received that arson and rioting were in progress at Parmat...Mr. Bell, Mr. Rogers, and I left by car. We stopped at the police guard to follow us. We then went to Parmat and drove the whole way... We could see no signs of burning houses or of rioting. The street was deserted and all was perfectly quiet. No shouting could be heard. A patrol of U.P. Light Horse was just leaving the locality when we arrived at the Police out post. They too had nothing to report... So we concluded that this report was merely another false rumor and we left for the city.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> Barron Testimony, 1931, 16.

<sup>256</sup> Barron Testimony, 1931, 16.

<sup>257</sup> Barron Testimony, 1931, 13.

Here, the riot observers are neither seen nor heard. They are an inconvenience that British officials have to cope with. This view of riot participants is evidenced in Barron and Sale's testimony with the latter taking the characterization one step further by speculating what riot participants would have done in certain conjectural situations.

Justifying their actions during the Kanpur riots, both Barron and Sale make assumptions of what the reactions of riot participants would have been to hypothetical scenarios. Their motive is to show how no matter what actions could have been taken during the riots, the consequences would have been the same. Sale observes, "I think some of the persons who at the time clamored for Martial Law would in a few days have begun to complain bitterly about it."<sup>258</sup> The effect of Sale's statement is to show how riot participants will have the same complaints regardless of what official action is taken. In the same way that Sale purports to predict the behavior of riot observers, Barron uses the same technique to ward off criticism. He states, "it is alleged that for the first three or four days the authorities did absolutely nothing to quell the riots. In reply to this I can only suggest that if the persons who have made these allegations had found occasions to appear in the city during these four days they might have told a very different story."<sup>259</sup> Though his construction is not as strong, "might have" compared to Sale's utterance of "would have," the effect is the same. Barron suggests that under a hypothetical set of circumstances, riot observers would have acted in a certain way, told a "very different story." While Barron's remarks are not as disparaging as Sale's, both purport to draw conclusions on riot observers' behavior based on their own biases. The portrayal of riot observers that emerges is neither provable—Sale and Barron are conjecturing—nor contributory to an understanding of the events of the riots.

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<sup>258</sup> Sale Testimony, 1931, 17.

<sup>259</sup> Barron Testimony, 1931, 22.

The final way Barron and Sale invoke riot observers is to show that they do not understand the feasible ways of quelling a riot. Both the District Magistrate and the Joint Magistrate blame riot observers for failing to grasp why certain measures would not help during the course of the riot. Specifically, they address complaints of lack of firing by police and claims of ineffective pickets. Throughout their testimonies, Barron and Sale maintain that very limited opportunities existed to fire upon rioters and that pickets were indispensable in quelling the violence. Barron recounted:

About 8:30 or 9 a.m. [on March 25<sup>th</sup>], a report was received that crowds were gathering on both sides of the Moulganj. The [superintendent] and I rushed to the spot by car... Although we had no more than 4 or 5 men with us the crowd just...melted away and we were utterly unable to catch a single one of them. This is typical of what happened throughout the riot. On the appearance of the police or the military, the rioters fled as fast as their legs would carry them. One witness M. Marvin Prasad Nigars has cited this incident as an instance of police inaction where a mob could have been and should have been dispersed by force.<sup>260</sup>

Elaborating on his comment, Barron stated, “I am unable to understand his meaning. Mr. Rogers and I were on the spot. Within two or three minutes and on our arrival the mobs fled. If Marvin Prasad means we should have fired on the crowd I am unable to agree with him. I know of no order, which justifies us in on firing on a fleeing crowd.”<sup>261</sup> Barron censures Marvin Nigars for complaining about the lack of an action Barron considers inappropriate. Barron finds his criticism incomprehensible and the impact of his statement is to suggest that riot observers had no understanding of what feasible measures could be taken. Sale echoes Barron’s sentiments in his statement on the “Alleged Lack of Strictness by the Military and the Police.” He maintains, “neither I nor any of the Magistrates or Police Officers were reluctant to order firing in any case where it was justified under the rules...I do not think that the critics were fully acquainted with

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<sup>260</sup> Barron Testimony, 1931, 10.

<sup>261</sup> Barron Testimony, 1931, 11.

the exact circumstances of the riots or the rules bearing on the subject.”<sup>262</sup> From Sale’s testimony, the riot participants appear ignorant in common law. Their criticisms are irrational because they put forth unreasonable expectations of what the police and Magistrates could have done. Barron and Sale’s testimony show that even when riot participants attempted to take a more active stance in discussing the riots-by criticizing police inaction and suggesting other steps-they were unable to suggest feasible measures.

Without negating any of their earlier statements regarding Hindu-Muslim strife in India, the authors of the British Commission Report weaken Barron and Sale’s depiction of riot observers. While bearing in mind that the “civil disobedience movement accentuated the estrangement between the two communities,” the authors of the British Commission Report call into question the professional competence of the District Magistrate to end the riots. They support claims of police inaction during the course of the violence. Remarking:

Every class of witness before us who gave expression otherwise to widely different points of view agreed in this one respect, that the police showed indifference and inactivity in dealing with the various incidents in the riot. These witnesses include European businessmen, Muslims and Hindus of all shades of opinion, military officers, the Secretary of the Upper India Chamber of Commerce, representatives of the Indian Christian community, and even Indian officials,<sup>263</sup>

they contend, “it is impossible to ignore such unanimity of evidence.”<sup>264</sup> They further highlight the ineffectiveness of pickets and with regard to lathi (club) charges, saying, “we think these charges might have been pressed home more.”<sup>265</sup> Their words substantiate the claims of witnesses that Barron and Sale both decry. While castigating Barron and Sale, however, the authors of the British Commission Report do not overturn their assumptions about Indians. Hindu-Muslim strife still characterizes Hindu-Muslim relations.

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<sup>262</sup> Sale Testimony, 1931, 15.

<sup>263</sup> British Commission Report, 26.

<sup>264</sup> British Commission Report, 26.

<sup>265</sup> British Commission Report, 25.

What is apparent in British official documents is the specific way in which they invoke riot participants. Both private testimonies and the British Commission Report use riot participants to underscore traits of Indians that had been previously used to justify British rule in India. Riot participants are called upon to evidence British claims rather than document the events of the riots. The effect is that riot participants become superfluous to understanding the events of the Kanpur Riots and instead become important in understanding how British officials view Indians.

*Appropriating the Voices of Rioters*

In the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, the anecdotes of riot participants form the bulk of the narrative of the events of the Kanpur riots. In comparison to the British Commission Report in which the authors quote only three Indian witnesses, the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report quote sixty-seven different people in their narrative of the riots.<sup>266</sup> The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report name and use the words of more than twenty-two times the number of Indian witnesses that the authors of the British Report employ. The difference is stark. The dissimilar ways in which the two Reports are written evince the different ways in which they are intended to be read. While the British Report was meant for higher British officials, the Kanpur Riot Commission Report was written to educate the public. Their efforts to do so took the form of using the public's voice to narrate the violence of the riots. By presenting the events of the riots in the words of riot participants, the Congress Party became the intermediaries, acting as the mouthpiece for the public. The public's words were the Congress Party's words and the Congress Party's words were the words of the people.

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<sup>266</sup> After transcribing the quotations of riot observers verbatim, I calculated the number sixty-seven by counting the number of different people the quotations were attributed to. This count applies exclusively to Part II of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report.

The most obvious way riot participants are used is to provide a context for the events of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report. As the authors of the Report recount the incidents of the riots, the Kanpur Riots emerge as a series of efforts by Congress Party officials to quell the riots. Riot participants are invoked to the extent that Congress leaders are not operating within a vacuum. The narratives of riot participants are used to document the actions of Congress Party leaders. The beginning pages see Congress Party leaders rushing around the city attempting to minimize the disturbance caused by the *hartal*. G.G Jog “successfully dissuades the Mohammedans from throwing stones... and successfully pacifies Hindu and Muslim crowds.”<sup>267</sup> Later that day, Shri Iqbal Kapoor and Vidyarthi are successful in their endeavor to force a Hindu crowd gathered near Babu Mangli Prasad’s gate to cease “throwing stones at a Musalman crowd.”<sup>268</sup> Congress leaders appeal to the Kotwali In-Charge (superintendent of police) and are dismayed when he ignores their requests to address the violence and instead, “smiling, turns his face to the reverse side of the speaker at every appeal.”<sup>269</sup> The riot participants are incorporated in this story only as the population on behalf of whom these actions are taking place. Their statements throw light upon the actions of Congress Party leaders and depict them collectively as the public’s saviors.

As the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report document the increasing violence of the Kanpur Riots, riot participants become hapless victims. Their place in the narrative reinforces the perception of Congress Party leaders as heroes and their rescue efforts as a testament to the courage of Congress Party workers. Prefacing their narrative of the events of the second and remaining days of the riots, the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report editorialize how “the terrific outburst on the 24<sup>th</sup> had altogether stunned responsible sections of

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<sup>267</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 276.

<sup>268</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 283.

<sup>269</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 290.



the residents of Kanpur, and the open and deliberate inaction of the Police still more increased their feelings of helplessness.”<sup>270</sup> The personal anecdotes of riot participants and the involvement of Congress Party officials showcase the Congress Party as the protector and defender of the people. Munshi Abdul Haq, owner of the biggest hosiery shop in Kanpur, recounts how the police did not interfere with the rioters looting his shop and instead, the duty falls to Ganesh Vidyarthi:

Mr. Ram Karan Sinha, Officer-in-Charge of the Kotwali, with a Deputy Collector, who was putting on a hat and knickers and twenty to twenty-five head constables and constables together with eight or ten mounted police were present at the crossing and were seeing all that was happening at my shop. I told Mr. Ram Kiran Sinha that the doors and locks of my shop were being broken, and requested him to save my shop. He replied that he could not do anything. In the meantime, my shops was actually broken into and, and goods inside began to be looted. I continued to do my utmost to draw the attention of Mr. Ram Karan Sinha and the Deputy Collector towards, it but each time, they invariably replied, “We cannot do anything.” After about half an hour or three-quarters of an hour, the loot suddenly stopped. On enquiry, I learnt that Ganeshji had reached my shop and had driven away from there people who were looting it.<sup>271</sup>

The intervention of a prominent Congress Party leader, Vidyarthi, saves Haq’s store. Officials standing by “cannot do anything” while Vidyarthi single-handedly stops the looting. Though it is Sinha’s job to act and he has enough constables to perform his duty, he does not. Officials associated with the British Government, “the police officer in charge, the Deputy Collector, the policemen, and the mounted sowars were all standing and seeing the fun.”<sup>272</sup> Haq castigates the officials for their inaction. His statement exemplifies a trend in the Kanpur Riot Commission Report: while Congress workers work tirelessly to aid riot victims, officials stand idly by. S. Bhasin, Advocate Secretary, UP Kerana Seva Samiti relates, “the houses were being looted in the very presence of the police in Bengali Mohal as well as Butcherkhanna. The constables were

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<sup>270</sup>Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 297.

<sup>271</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 290-291.

<sup>272</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 291.

merely watching....”<sup>273</sup> Discussing an incident of looting he had witnessed, Sri Bari Nath

Kapoor declares that:

This was being done before the very eyes of two Deputy Collectors, who were standing at a distance of about 60 yards from the shops, with the City Kotwal. Although a strong police force was at their disposal, they did nothing to stop the loot....The constables, instead of protecting the shop, were eating English sweetmeats and using vegetable oil which they took from the shop.”<sup>274</sup>

In all three accounts, riot participants criticize the police for not fulfilling their duty. In the final case, the officers take part in the crime. This facet of officers engaging in criminal activity figures heavily in the following set of quotations the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report include.

From being inactive during the riots, the police discredit themselves further when they collude with rioters. Witness statements in the Kanpur Riot Commission Report document how constables commit crimes against riot victims. The inclusion of this set of quotations is notable for two reasons. First, the authors of the Congress Party insert themselves into the situation when they describe how constables abuse riot victims using Congress Party rhetoric and second, they use this rhetoric to turn the violence into an act of the British Government against the Civil Disobedience Movement. The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report employ witness statements to make this point. Pandit Mathura Prasad Bajpei, a “well-known citizen of Kanpur” recounts how:

The police, in addition to the observance of non-intervention policy, sometimes helped themselves in filling their pockets and sometimes in taking men seeking their help and protection to the quarters where the Badmashes were stationed, and asking them to give that person Swaraj, meaning thereby that they were to be belabored, which they did freely and to their heart’s content.”<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 347-348.

<sup>274</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 350.

<sup>275</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 351.

Swaraj, one of the cornerstones of the Civil Disobedience Movement, literally meaning “self-rule,” functions as a word for abuse. In his statement, Shri Ram Bharose of Baconganj corroborates Bajpei’s statement. He relates how, “two of the policemen with us, one belonging to the armed police and the other to the civil police, said to the crowd, ‘these men want Swaraj.’ Some people from the crowd asked the police, it is your order we give them Swaraj? Then the two policemen said, ‘Yes, give them Swaraj.’ Then some people from the crowd began striking us with lathis (clubs), ballams (spears), khantas (axes), etc.”<sup>276</sup> Two witnesses condemn the police. The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report only function as the medium by which these witnesses are able to make their statement.

While vilifying officials, the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report use witness statements to contrast their behavior with the actions of the most prominent Congress member in Kanpur, Ganesh Vidyarthi, President of the United Provinces Provincial Congress Committee. Revered as the only man who would be able to restore peace, Ganesh Vidyarthi becomes a model for all Congress Party workers. His efforts to rescue inhabitants of violence stricken neighborhoods are recorded in great detail and in describing his various endeavors, the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report call upon an eyewitness to describe “Ganeshji’s Last Sacrifice.” He writes:

On the 25<sup>th</sup> March, when Ganeshji reached Patkapur he was bareheaded and barefooted. There he appealed to both Hindus and Musalmans to live amicably....As soon as they entered [a house near Bengali Mohal] they saw a head separated from the trunk, and the dead body of a child which had been pierced together with a spear. Seeing this Ganeshji wept loudly, and said, “Oh God! Destroy these evil doers.” Chhotey Khan who heard him crying like this was so much affected by Ganeshji’s words that he also began to weep. Others began to weep. Ganeshji clung to Chhotey Khan and both of them wept.<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 351.

<sup>277</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 318.

The witness uses emotionally laden terms to describe Vidyarthi's reaction to the violence. In contrast to the devil-may-care, criminal behavior of the police, Vidyarthi and his followers demonstrate real grief toward the victims of riot atrocities. Vidyarthi, through the words of an eyewitness, emerges as a beloved hero whose reaction to the violence is shared by the people who accompany him. Their grief affects him and his horror at the violence stirs them.

Juxtaposing testimonies of witnesses who recall Vidyarthi's commitment to ending the riots with statements decrying the inaction of the police, the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report emphasize the stark differences between the two groups.

Going hand-in-hand with the riot participants' role in extolling Ganeshji is their role in demonstrating that Hindu-Muslim relations have not been permanently rancorous. Shri Kanshaya Lal recounts, "Ganeshji came to my house with these volunteers and five or six others. Ganeshji insisted that unless I first fed the Musalmans and gave them water to drink with my own utensils, he [Ganeshji] would not take water at my place. At this I gave the Musalmans with us water in my own tumbler and then took Ganeshji to the pipe inside."<sup>278</sup> The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report call upon riot participants to show that the British conception of longstanding enmity is false. By token of his position, Vidyarthi is able to enjoin Hindus and Muslims to disregard societal strictures pertaining to religion. The words of witnesses are used to recount Vidyarthi's influence and while in this particular incident, he is the main character, Vidyarthi is not the architect behind every moment of Hindu-Muslim unity. Riot participants, themselves, broach the issue of sectarian strife and the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report call upon them to overturn assumptions that religious antagonism is built into Hindu-Muslim relations.

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<sup>278</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 310.

The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report use riot participants to evidence ideological claims they set forth in opposition to the British. In a section entitled, “The Silver Lining,” the authors of the Report include “typical cases” of Hindu-Muslim partnership. These cases are divided into three categories: first, when influential leaders intervened to stop communal violence; second, when members of a neighborhood collaborated to protect both Hindus and Muslims from attacks; and third, when individuals took it upon themselves to rescue riot victims at risk of personal injury.<sup>279</sup> As seen through the words of riot participants, the duty or motivation to conciliate Hindus and Muslims was not limited to any particular part of the population. Riot participants, across all strata of society, contribute to efforts to end sectarian strife. The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report relate the account of Abid Husain, a Muslim resident of Colonelganj who “gave shelter to a number of Hindu families.” They report: “at great personal risk, he often went out of his house and remonstrated with both Hindus and Musalmans not to fight. Sometimes he succeeded, and sometimes, he got beaten in reply. On several occasions, *we are told*, Hindus and Musalmans, who had come to fight, parted after embracing each other on account of Abid Husain’s touching appeals (my emphasis).<sup>280</sup> Husain becomes a hero through the course of the riots and his story is conveyed to the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, not formulated by the latter. His anecdote is a case example of riot participants assuming responsibility to end the riots.

The number of individual cases cited in the Congress Report demonstrates the limits of sectarian violence. The authors “casually quote” the incidents they record, noting that “we mean no injustice to the larger number of cases known and unknown to us, many of which may be

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<sup>279</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 382.

<sup>280</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 392-393.

deserving of much greater credit.”<sup>281</sup> What is common to many of the accounts is how the testimonies of other witnesses are used to support the claims. The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report distance themselves from substantiating claims, instead relying upon riot participants to do so. Relating an example of the first category, the Congress Party authors write, “Syed Ahmad Husain, an old man and an owner of many houses in Anwarganj, protected the life and property of his fifty-five Hindu tenants including men, women and children, and also provided them with food at his own cost, during the days of the riot. *His tenants acknowledge his generosity*” (my emphasis).<sup>282</sup> Similarly, they recount how “Shri Ram Ratan Gupta testifies that in Sadar Bazar, about 50 Musalman families were bottled up amidst a population of about 25,000 Hindus, and that “not a single Musalman was injured in that area.” *He says that the credit for this is also due to Shri Ratan Singh*” (my emphasis).<sup>283</sup> Finally, “A Musalman named Mirzapur Ayub, in Farrashkhana, together with some other Musalman friends of the Mohalla, gave shelter to and protected the lives of 283 Hindu men, women and children. *The list is in possession of Mirza Ayub and was confirmed by Hindu witnesses present on the spot...*”<sup>284</sup> (my emphasis) In all three anecdotes, riot participants present and evidence examples of Hindu-Muslim unity. Their accounts are self-sufficient in the sense that the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report do not see a need to editorialize their remarks. The anecdotes, as they are presented in the text, are numbered sequentially and there is no space for editorial comments. After presenting over twenty-seven anecdotes, however, the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report include themselves in their narrative.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 387.

<sup>282</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 383.

<sup>283</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 383

<sup>284</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 386.

<sup>285</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 395.

Describing the atmosphere of the city in the aftermath of the violence, the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report call upon riot participants to openly disavow two assumptions justifying British rule. They write:

During our local inspections and enquiries, small crowds of Hindus and Muslims used to naturally gather around us. While we questioned, their heads would grow hot and recriminations would begin. Then we used to ask them, do you really hate each other? At this, they would become silent, hang their heads, and after a while sigh and say, “The CID have caused the fighting.”<sup>286</sup>

Both Hindus and Muslims maintain that the British Secret Service is accountable for the religious violence. Their statement overturns two reasons given for the necessity of British rule in India. The CID’s purported involvement makes the state morally illegitimate while additionally undermining the argument that Hindu-Muslim relations have always been characterized by strife. The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report first present the words of riot participants before surmising that, “their [the people’s] faith in the Government had been shaken greatly. Their faith in the Congress remained.”<sup>287</sup> Their conclusion comes after the point has already been established by the people’s words. The people have made this discovery about the Government and the Congress Party authors are conveying their finding.

The final way riot participants are incorporated into the Kanpur Riot Commission Report is to substantiate claims that are otherwise unverified. Most notably, riot participants discuss the British Government’s failure to quell the riots and their encouragement of the violence. In a section entitled, “The Official at Work,” the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report present the testimony of an unnamed witness who recounts how British officials knew of the riots and did not act. “On the 20<sup>th</sup> of March at about 8pm, when I went to Chandoo-khana, a Muslim quarter, a woman from inside came to open the door. She opened the door and at once

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<sup>286</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 395.

<sup>287</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 396.

told me not to come there for 4 or 5 days as there was soon going to be a quarrel between Hindus and Moheemmadans.”<sup>288</sup> Her information came from a subordinate official, “B” who purportedly was setting Hindus and Muslims against each other and had given orders to a non-official who informed the woman that “whatever happens, we have to carry out what we are asked to” despite “that the quarrel may increase, many may be killed and we may have to grieve.”<sup>289</sup> In addition to anecdotal evidence, the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report present witness testimonies that blame the British for the long-term causes of the riot. Mausalana Hasrat Mohanj, a “prominent communal leader,” states, “I do not believe in the Tanzim Programme, because this movement has been started at the instance of the Government and some of its leading spirits are connected with the CID.”<sup>290</sup> His assertion is supported by the testimony of “a gentleman, who was one of the early organizers of the Tanzim movement in Kanpur”<sup>291</sup> The unnamed witness “tells us [the authors of the Report] that “this Tanzim Movement was given money simply with this object, that the Muslims may not join the Congress.”<sup>292</sup> Both witnesses contend the government has an interest in embittering Hindu-Muslim relations. The two statements call into question the legitimacy of the state by insinuating the Government had a role in promoting strife. Together the two assertions allow the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report to write, “if we could have detailed information as to how the Secret Service Funds of the Government are spent, much light would be thrown on matters.”<sup>293</sup> The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report ask for governmental accountability and they back their request with evidence from two witnesses.

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<sup>288</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 342.

<sup>289</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 342.

<sup>290</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 252.

<sup>291</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 252.

<sup>292</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 252,

<sup>293</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 252,



The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report move away from using witness testimonies to questioning the British Government's involvement in the Tanzim Movement to ascertaining their culpability. They write, "we questioned one of the prominent witnesses who, according to the general belief and also according to his own admission, was one of the principal organizers of the [Tanzeem] movement in Kanpur, whether the Government was helping the movement financially either directly or through third parties. His reply was, 'I cannot deny it.'<sup>294</sup> What is interesting about the witnesses' statement is that he simply affirms a positive response to the question without using any of his own words. From using the words of a witness to confirm suspicions that the Government helped engineer the Tanzim Movement, the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report make the same inference about the immediate cause of the riots. They use the words of Shiakh Ghazi Khizr Muhammad Sahib to claim that the instigators of the riots were "secret agents of the CID."<sup>295</sup> In his own words, Shiakh Ghazi Muhammad is "morally sure," that the Government had a role in the immediate breakout of violence.<sup>296</sup> Both witness statements gradually build up a case against the Government and British officials' culpability becomes increasingly evident through the words of the witnesses cited. Hoon, another witness quoted in the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, castigates British officials for their inadequate response to the violence. He declares:

If it is suggested that the communal riots on the 24<sup>th</sup> took the authorities by surprise, I would submit that proposition is wholly untenable. That communal tension was on the rise, that Mohemmadans had inadvertently got themselves mixed up with aggressive propaganda against the Hindus, that the Mohemmadans had in their possession a large number of weapons, .....are facts fully known to the Collector and the district authorities before the riot broke out. ...His want [the District Magistrate's] of preparation to meet the contingency was simply inexcusable.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 255.

<sup>295</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 270.

<sup>296</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 270.

<sup>297</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 343-344.

Deploring the official efforts to quell the riots, Hoon, a European resident of Kanpur, fortifies the authors' case against the British authorities. His observation coupled with the two previous witness statements showcase the British Government in Kanpur as morally illegitimate. The mounting evidence the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report level against British officials shows riot participants making these claims and highlights the Congress' role as an intermediary between their words and the larger public.

The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report invoke the words of riot participants to describe the riots. By doing so, they become the mouthpiece for the public. Every claim the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report make is corroborated by anecdotes and impressions of riot participants. The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report are involved to the extent that they are formatting how the rioters' stories reach the public. The question, then, remains to what extent do the authors of the Report accurately interpret the voices of riot participants?

### *Sifting through Words and Voices*

What is apparent in the Kanpur Riot Commission Report is that the way the authors phrased their questions influenced the responses they received from riot observers. The authors failed to consider, however, that the public's voice could weaken some of their own political claims. Some riot participants pointed to sectarian mobilization as a predisposing cause for conflict and because their testimonies, to some extent, held the Congress Party culpable, they had their comments qualified by the authors of the Report or omitted completely.

The Kanpur Riot Commission Report was appended by three notes. The first, authored by Das and Sunderlal, was largely a discourse on majority and minority rights as they related to Hindus and Muslims. The second, by Sunderlal alone, added a discussion of Christianity and its

teachings to the history included in the Report, and the third was a note of dissent by Maulana Zafarul-Mulk. The final note was the most problematic and in a memorandum to Sirdar

Vallabhbhai Patel, President of the All-India Congress Committee, New Delhi, Das wrote:

It is with very great reluctance that I add here a few words of explanation on one point, regarding procedure, which my esteemed colleague Maulana Zafarul-Mulk has raised in his Note. He says that certain passages, which he reproduced in his Note “were deleted after that had once been discussed and passed by the whole Committee, and adds, “When I received the fair copy of the Report I protested against this extraordinary procedure and am constrained to say neither satisfactory reasons were given nor the deleted passages were restored, even on my request.”<sup>298</sup>

Das explains that after Zafarul-Mulk had left Benares, “practically the whole Report was revised and re-arranged,” noting, however, that he did not anticipate any controversy with the final version of the Report.<sup>299</sup> Zafarul-Mulk’s complaints revolved around the interviews of thirty Congress members whose statements were later omitted in the final draft of the Report. Zafarul-Mulk produces excerpts from nine of the witnesses in his Note, all of which decry the ‘communalist’ outlook affecting members of the Congress Party. He cites, “one gentlemen says: ‘men who are absolutely above Hindu-Muslim feeling are a microscopic minority-in the Congress organization here. Not more than two or three-the rest are all defensive communalists and not offensive communalists...’<sup>300</sup> By “defensive communalists,” Zafarul-Mulk refers to Hindus who believe that Hindus need to be organized in defensive organizations against Muslims. “Offensive communalists” are those Hindus who actively seek confrontation with Muslims. A third witness quoted by Zafarul-Mulk stresses this distinction. He testifies:

Out of the thirty prominent Congressmen in the town, there are all grades of people with regard to communal feeling. I think two or three of these can be said to be absolutely

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<sup>298</sup> Letter from Bhagwan Das to Vallabhbhai Patel, October 26, 1931, reprinted in N. Gerald Barrier, ed., *Roots of Communal Politics* (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1976), 432.

<sup>299</sup> Letter from Bhagwan Das to Vallabhbhai Patel, October 26, 1931, 432. The reason for Zafarul-Mulk’s early departure is not discussed in Das’ memorandum or letter.

<sup>300</sup> Maulana Zafarul-Mulk, Note of Dissent, 1931, reprinted in N. Gerald Barrier, ed., *Roots of Communal Politics* (New Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1976), 462. Both Das and Zafarul-Mulk note that the interviews were done *in camera*, with the intention of maintaining the anonymity of the witnesses.

above Hindu-Muslim feeling. About ten to fifteen have some slight Hindu tinge in them... Two or three are aggressive communalists, and the rest ten or twelve are communalists of defensive character. They do not mean any harm to the other community, but they do believe in Hindus organizing themselves for defence.<sup>301</sup>

Witnesses cited by Zaraful-Mulk corroborate each others' statements. While the figures they cite do not exactly correlate, there is a general consensus between the witnesses cited that members of the Congress Party share some sort of defensive communalism. "An eighth says: 'of thirty prominent Congressmen in Cawnpore, I believe roughly about 5 per cent are absolutely above communal feeling. A similar number are aggressive communalists, and the remaining 90 per cent are of various shades, but are mostly defensive communalists.'<sup>302</sup> The witnesses depict Congress Party members as drastically different than the accepting, religious tolerant heroes of the Kanpur riots the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report showcase them to be.

Congress Party members blame other members in their organization for contributing to Hindu-Muslim tensions. Recognizing that the witness testimonies would weaken the credibility of the Congress, Das justified its exclusion on the grounds that:

Besides the consideration that they were likely to produce a wrong impression, outside their setting, and without much further explanation, what finally influenced the members, who remained behind in Benares to revise and arrange the Report as a whole in the month of September, to drop them, was the consideration that the deposition were taken *in camera*, that the witnesses left it to the discretion of the Committee whether the evidence should not be used or should be used and in what way.<sup>303</sup>

Das' statement is forthright. His open disclosure that the jurisdiction of whether to use the testimonies of riot participants remained with the Committee highlights his recognition of the potential threat the words of riot participants can cause. While recognizing the significance of the statements, however, Das dismissed it, saying:

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<sup>301</sup> Maulana Zaraful-Mulk, Note of Dissent, 1931, 464.

<sup>302</sup> Maulana Zaraful-Mulk, Note of Dissent, 1931, 465.

<sup>303</sup> Letter from Bhagwan Das to Vallabhbhai Patel, October 26, 1931, 433.

The question [of whether to include the testimonies] was one of what might be called technical propriety. They signify only this that many of the Cawnpore Congress workers were not able to rise to that high level of being superior to all orthodoxy, and of loving all mankind irrespective of creed, which was attained by Ganesh Vidyarthi...<sup>304</sup>

Yet, the testimonies cast doubt upon the claims of the Congress Party to be the party of perfect diversity. That is, the party that represents all Indians regardless of caste or creed. The voices of riot participants make this point and Das' efforts to undermine their importance falls short when the content of Zараful-Mulk's note is considered.

Zараful-Mulk's note speaks to why sectarian mobilization was dangerous to the Congress Party. Highlighting discrepancies between the authors' of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report claims and the statements of its party members, Zараful-Mulk made the words of these Congress Party men a liability. By answering the question, "out of the thirty prominent Congressmen in Cawnpore, how many do you think are absolutely above communal feeling, etc.?" the witnesses defamed the people to whom the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report attributed the end of the riots.<sup>305</sup> They presented a muddled view of the Kanpur riots where British guilt could not be assigned easily because of possible Congress culpability. The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report had pointed to their party members as being free from religious intolerance yet the effect of these witnesses' statements was to present a contradiction. The testimonies, in the older version of the Report, reflected even more negatively on the Congress Party because they were used to illustrate how the Nationalist Movement had worsened religious relations. In the older version of the report, the witness statements preceded the later omitted comment, "in such an atmosphere, and with such men at the helm, was the C.D. Movement started in

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<sup>304</sup> Letter from Bhagwan Das to Vallabhbai Patel, October 26, 1931, 434.

<sup>305</sup> Maulana Zараful-Mulk, Note of Dissent, 1931, 462.

Cawnpore.”<sup>306</sup> The implication was clear; the Civil Disobedience Movement bred sectarian strife according to the Movement’s own followers.

While Zarakul-Mulk’s note openly questioned Congress Party members’ participation in sectarian activities, witnesses whose statements remained in the final version of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report did not make such strong claims. Rather, their testimonies did not resonate completely with the authors’ of the Kanpur Riot Commission Reports views. Their accounts are notable for two reasons. First, the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report mention or include references to the process of interviewing and second, because two out of the three upcoming testimonies are qualified by editorial comments. All three testimonies, in varying degrees, however, point to sectarian strife, and in the final testimony, to the potential culpability of the Congress Party as contributing to religious tension.

While discussing predisposing causes of the riots, two witnesses described sectarian strife as a factor. Senior Vice-Chairman Hafiz Muhammad Siddiq noted that the introduction of separate electorates in the Kanpur Municipality, whereby Hindus and Muslims cast ballots exclusively for candidates of their faith, was a cause of anxiety. Although recommending a joint electorate, Siddiq highlighted one concern: “the one thing that I am anxious to be sure through these reservations or safeguards is that no man who is either of narrow communalistic mentality or who is a sycophant of the other community should get a chance of being elected.”<sup>307</sup> Siddiq’s comments were innocuous; his statement suggested only that people with a religiously intolerant bent could be elected and this result would be problematic. Yet the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report chose to qualify his testimony with the remark, “closely questioned he

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<sup>306</sup> Maulana Zarakul-Mulk, Note of Dissent, 1931, 466. The abbreviation “C.D Movement” signifies the Civil Disobedience Movement, which was the second major movement launched by the Congress in 1930. The Congress Party launched three major all-India movements and a significant feature of this movement was its nationwide appeal that saw mass people’s participation.

<sup>307</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 247.

[Siddiq] said that ultimately the ‘Hukumat’ i.e. the Government was responsible for all these communal troubles.”<sup>308</sup> Though Siddiq’s assertions were inoffensive, that they did not point to the British Government as playing a role in worsening religious tensions was troublesome for the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report. They deemed it necessary to draw attention away from the fact that Siddiq was wary of “men of narrow communalistic mentality” and instead ensure that he explicitly blamed the British Government. Siddiq’s testimony, however, revealed his fear of sectarian mobilization despite the authors’ attempt to overshadow this part of his statement.

In a similar manner, the testimony of Fida Ahmad Khan Sahib Sherwani called attention to sectarian strife. He stated, “I add significant experiences of mine during the riots which have not been covered by answers to these questions. My impression is that the riots started on the basis of strained communal feelings; but soon they developed into hooliganism and goonda (gangster) rule...”<sup>309</sup> Noting that the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report omitted questions whose answers could have revolved around sectarian mobilization, Sherwani put forth his view that “strained communal feelings” played a role in the outbreak of violence. What his comment does is cast light upon a cause of the riot considered by riot participants as important but not delved into in the Kanpur Riot Commission Report.

While qualifying statements that reference sectarian strife as a cause of the riots, the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report do include one direct attack upon the Congress Party by a witness. Noor-i-Ilahi’s testimony castigates the Congress Party for their organization of a *hartal*. “In his written statement in English,” Noor-i-Ilahi recounted:

[On March 24<sup>th</sup>] I went to the adjoining shop for consultation, and there the news was re-confirmed that the Congress Hindus were bent upon using extreme force today if the

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<sup>308</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 247.

<sup>309</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 299.

Muslims are not going to surrender.... All of us agreed to upon the seriousness of the situation created by the Congress and decided to close down the shops having in view the safety of our shops and of our lives.<sup>310</sup>

Although his comment is not followed by any editorial remarks, the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report convey their doubts of the authenticity of Noor-i-Illahi's claims by characterizing him "as an example of extreme Muslim sensitiveness."<sup>311</sup> This depiction of Noor-i-Illahi serves to discount his claims as being biased. What is notable about Noor-i-Illahi's comment, however, is his association of the Congress Party with Hindus and their alliance against Muslims. Noor-i-Illahi directly addresses the issue of sectarian mobilization and his comments reveal, along with the other two testimonies recounted, two conclusions. First, the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report strove to minimize the importance of sectarian mobilization as a cause of the riot, and second, that it was a widely shared sentiment unable to be articulated through the responses demanded by the authors.

What was omitted and editorialized in the Kanpur Riot Commission Report revealed what riot participants thought. The voices of riot participants, which the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report strove to cast as part of their own platform, pointed to sectarian mobilization as an important cause of the riots and one in which the participation of the Congress Party was muddy. While the authors of the Report dealt with these incriminations by either completely excluding the evidence or attacking the proponent of the claim, they could not nullify their damaging effect. Although the comments, for the most part, did not directly refute the conclusions of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, they did call into question the ability of the Congress Party to be unequivocally viewed as the heroes of the Kanpur riots. That, in itself, was a conclusion the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report would not recognize.

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<sup>310</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 266.

<sup>311</sup> Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 266.



*Conclusion*

The respective authors of the British Commission Report and the Kanpur Riot Commission Report intersected in their usage of riot participants. Both deemed riot participants a necessary component of their retelling of the Kanpur Riots. By invoking them in the text, each set of authors hoped to promote their respective ideological aims to the detriment of the other. For their part, the British laid out certain assumptions they held that they believed governed Hindu-Muslim relations in colonial India. The authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report used the voices of riot participants to refute these assumptions and in doing so, strove to show how the people, and not the authors of the Report, were making the argument. While the riot participants did overturn the assumptions, they also impugned the Congress Party to a certain extent. The Congress Party, as depicted through the words of witnesses cited in the “Note of Dissent,” was not wholly free from religious antagonism. Witnesses whose testimonies were included in the Report supported these allegations, pointing to sectarian mobilization as a contributing cause of the Kanpur Riots. Together, these two sets of witness statements called into question the portrayal of Congress Party members during the Kanpur Riots.

## CONCLUSION

The paradox between the Kanpur Riots and the Congress Report has two sides: the significance of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report and the apparent insignificance of the Kanpur Riots. What I have argued is that because the riot participants were the subject and audience for the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, understanding the Kanpur Riots is central to understanding the Congress Report. The Report's creation in 1931 came at a time when a number of religious riots were affecting India. The authors sought to explain the violence in terms that did not call upon colonial formulations about Indians but rather extended the blame to the colonial state. To that end, they crafted a framework explaining Hindu-Muslim relations in terms that overturned British justifications for imperial rule. Their intent to "expose the methods by which our [Indian] history has been deliberately misinterpreted and misrepresented" evolved into the creation of a framework that would be invoked in nationalist histories from the time the report was published in the 1930s until as recently as 2006.<sup>312</sup>

Because the Report has become increasingly famous-evidenced by the number of secondary sources that call upon its findings- I chose to resolve the paradox by focusing on riot observers. Chapter Two and Three brought the Kanpur Riots to the forefront of the controversy surrounding the Report. I have argued that the Kanpur Riots were important to an understanding of the Report because they allowed the authors to evidence and put forth their claims in the words of riot participants. The voices of ordinary citizens of Kanpur, unaffiliated with either the Congress Party or the British Government, provided an in-depth look at an instance of Hindu-

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<sup>312</sup> Bhagwan Das, Memorandum of Work, Kanpur Riot Commission Report, 41.

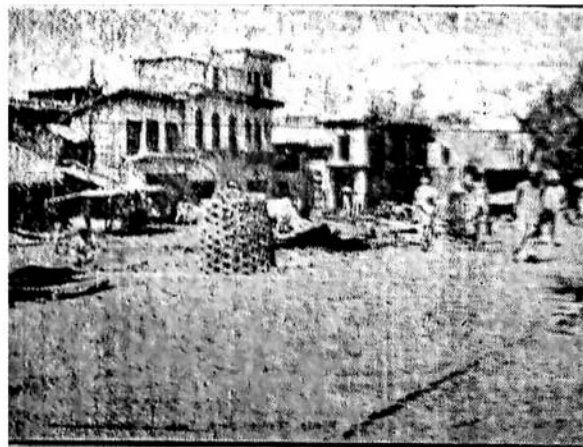
Muslim strife from the perspective of those involved. While fascinating in themselves, two facets of witness testimonies were particularly striking. First, some citizens disagreed with the claims of the Congress Party and second, their testimonies were qualified with editorial remarks that attempted to minimize the impact of the witness' statement. The witnesses cited in the Report pointed to sectarian mobilization as a cause for strife while the Congress Party members quoted in Maulana Zaraful-Mulk's "Note of Dissent" openly contested the depiction of Congress workers presented in the text of the Report. While not wholly refuting the claims of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report, they did mar the reputation of the Congress Party. Riot participants' voices revealed an inconsistency between the claims made by the authors of the Report and the actions of Congress Party members during the riots.

One final note needs to be added. My thesis revolved around the Kanpur Riot Commission Report; specifically, the way the authors of the Report used the words of riot participants. What is important to note is that the Report allows for the type of criticisms I have charged it with precisely because they included the voices of the riot observers. Crafting an equitable narrative is an impossible task and the authors of the Kanpur Riot Commission Report did attempt to represent the people, a task the colonial state did not bother to undertake in their analysis of the Kanpur Riots. The fact that the authors of the Report did assume this monumental task is as enriching today as it was in 1931. It showed how nationalists viewed their past and the Congress Party's role in the mid-twentieth century. Their contribution to nationalist historiography was monumental and their writings about riot participants give way to more varied perceptions of the Congress Party. The Kanpur Riot Commission Report illuminates the state of Hindu-Muslim relations as the authors viewed it in 1931 and today, can be viewed as a lens for understanding how a central framework of nationalist historiography was formulated.

**APPENDIX I: IMAGES OF THE KANPUR RIOTS**



Refugees at the Mall Road Power House



Gwaltoli



Houses on Halsey Road

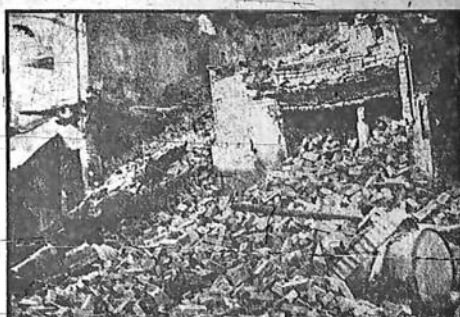
**Photographs from *The Leader*, April 7, 1931**

Photographs from *The Leader*, April 11, 1931

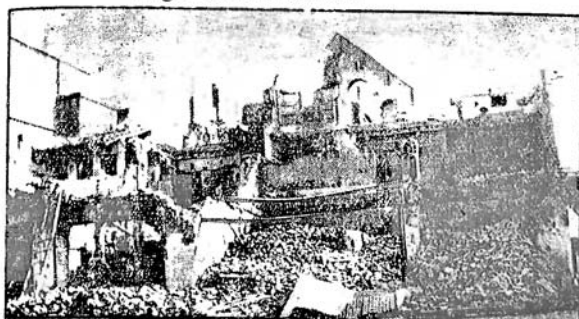


A tobacco seller's shop in Nayaganj, which belonged to a Mahomedan

SCENES  
OF  
DEVASTATION  
IN CAWNPORE



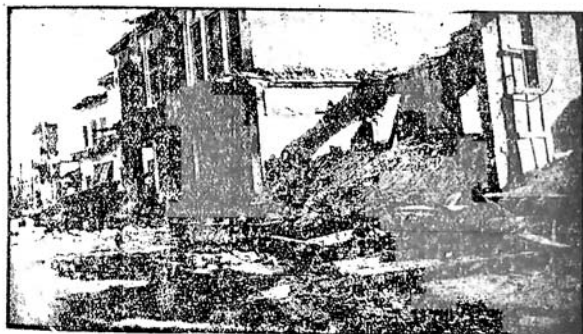
Mr. Balak Rasm's House at Baconganj Corner



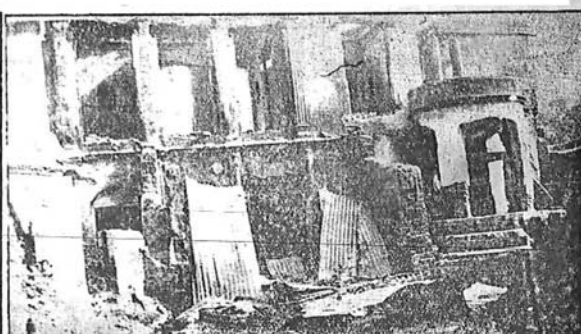
Dwarika Sharaf's House



Gur-Parshad ka Ahata in Gadarla Mohal



A Hindu house in ruins



The Bengali-Mohal Mosque, which was set on fire

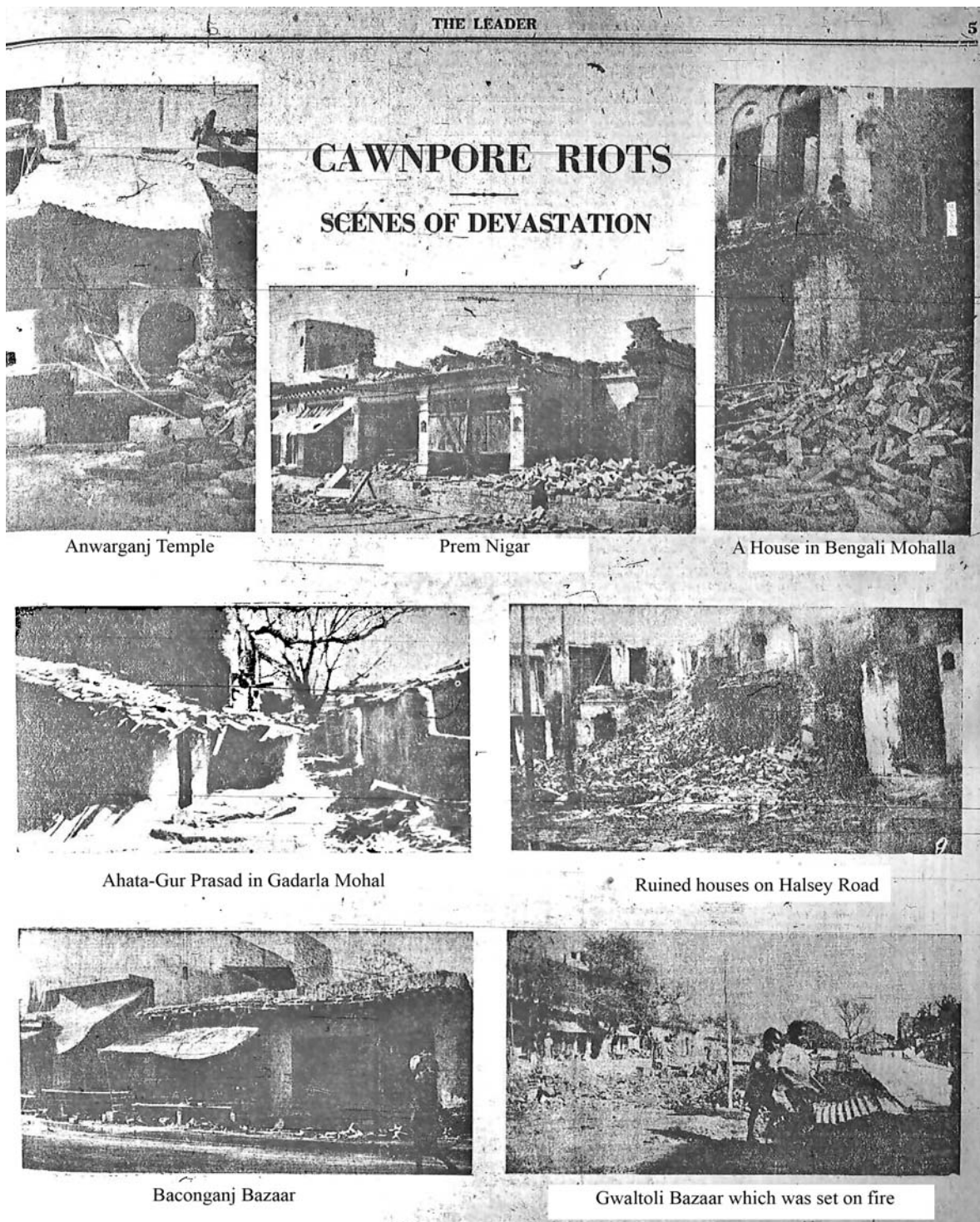


A Temple on Meston Road, which was attacked by Muslims and set on fire



A burnt and plundered Mahomedan shop in Nayaganj

Photographs from *The Leader*, April 19, 1931



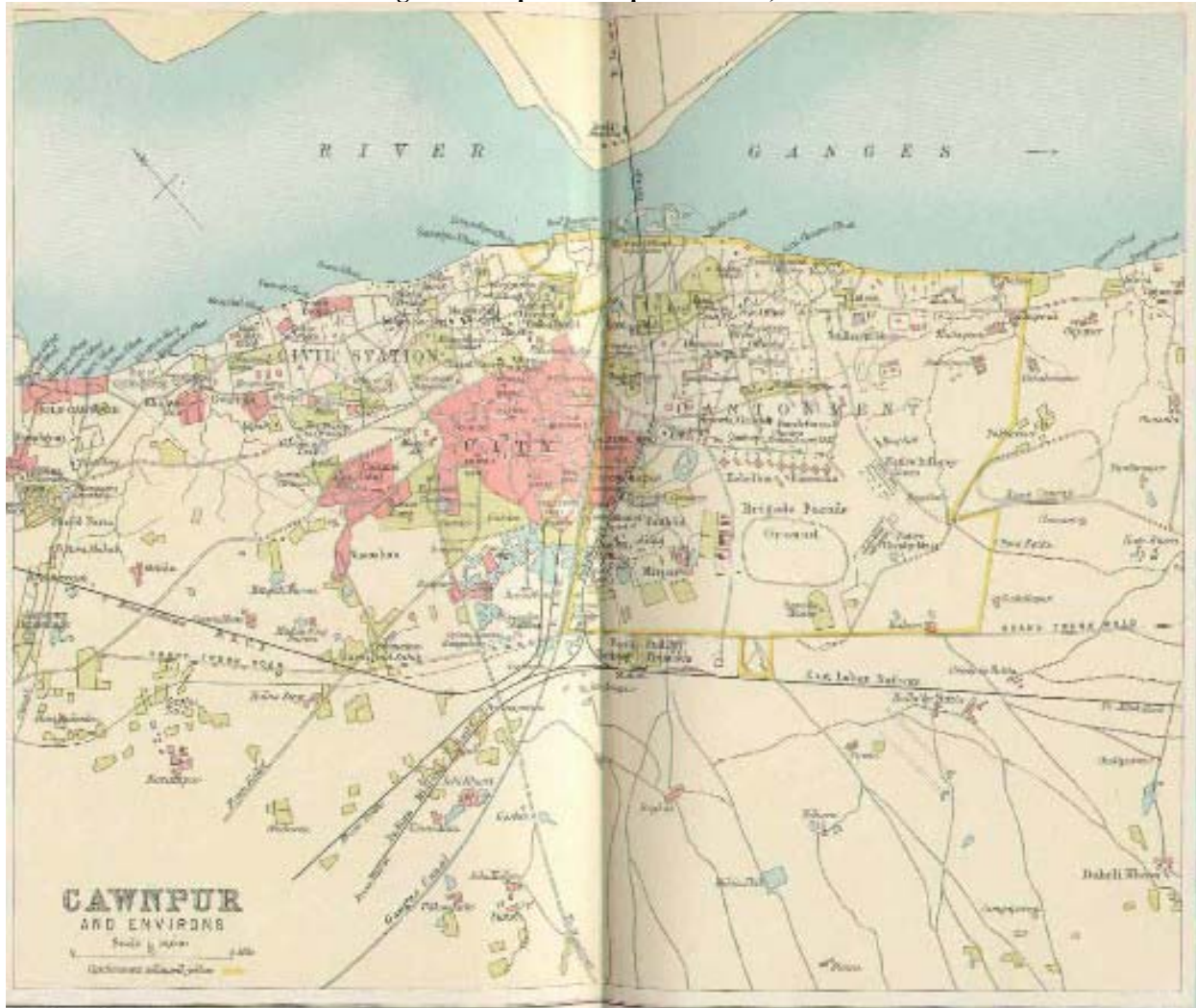
## APPENDIX II: MAPS

Figure 1: Location of Kanpur, India



Source: <http://wwp.greenwichmeantime.com/time-zone/asia/india/kanpur/map.htm>

Figure 2: Map of Cawnpore District, 1893



Source: *Constable's 1893 Hand Atlas to India: A new series of sixty maps and plans prepared from ordinances and other surveys.* Westminster, Constable, 1893.



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