Sacred Symbol and Sacred Space in Rural India: Community Mobilization in the "Anti-Cow Killing" Riot of 1893

Author(s): Anand A. Yang

Source: *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Oct., 1980, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Oct., 1980), pp. 576-596

Published by: Cambridge University Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/178469

Sacred Symbol and Sacred Space in Rural India: Community Mobilization in the "Anti-Cow Killing" Riot of 1893

ANAND A. YANG

University of Utah

The course of events leading up to 1947, when independence and partition came to the Indian subcontinent, has colored retrospective assessments of Hindu-Muslim relations in many perceptible ways. Polarities in religion and culture receive inordinate attention as the harbingers of the great divide yet to come, as do political developments as turning points in the eventual separate destinies of many Hindus and Muslims in South Asia. Yet by assuming the direction of change to be inexorable, such purposive pursuit into time past overlooks the complex processes by "which objective differences between people acquire subjective and symbolic significance, are translated into group consciousness, and become the basis for political demand."[1]

Especially susceptible to this teleological perspective is the scholarship on Hindu-Muslim conflict. Because instead of careful and systematic scrutiny, there is a widespread tendency to dismiss Hindu-Muslim riots as "the more overt form of communalism."[2] But as two political scientists

An earlier version of this paper was presented to the American Historical Association, San Francisco, December 28–30, 1978.

[1] For further discussion of the relationships between group identities and the political process, see Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India* (Cambridge, 1974), 23–47. Also, Masoon Ghaznavi, "Recent Muslim Historiography in South Asia: The Problem of Perspective," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 11 (June–Sept, 1974), 183–215, for some of the recent literature on Hindu and Muslim relations.

[2] Francis Robinson, *Separatism Among Indian Muslims* (Cambridge, 1974), 6. For a more insightful approach to the study of religious conflict and violence, see Sybil E. Barker, "Orange and Green, Belfast, 1832–1912," in H. J. Dyos and M. Wolff, eds., *The Victorian City: Images and Realities*, (London, 1973), vol. 2, 789–814; Natalie Zemon Davis, "The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth Century France," *Past and Present* 59 (May 1973), 51–91; and Sandria B. Freitag, "Community and Competition in Religious Festivals: The North Indian Prelude," paper presented to the Social Science Research Council Conference on Intermediate Political Linkages, University of California, Berkeley, March 16–18, 1978.

0010-4175/80/4693-2357$2.00

have stated perceptively, "communal formation and conflict are not merely the reflection of cultural 'givens' and 'primordial sentiments' . . . (They are) an inherent aspect of social change in all culturally heterogenous societies."[3]

This study focuses on the late nineteenth century, often considered one of the major peaks in incidence of Hindu-Muslim disturbances.[4] To many contemporary British administrators, the rash of riots, particularly in the 1890s, was not only a threat to the public order, but to the very existence of their rule in India. This perception was shaped by the belief that the newly created Indian National Congress, composed largely of Western-educated, "midde class" Hindus, was recruiting religion to generate popular support. Other observers, however, claimed to see the hand of various Hindu orthodox and reformist organizations such as the *Sanatan Dharma* and the *Arya Samaj* behind the agitation. Still others blamed the upwardly mobile trading castes, especially the Marwaris. Having reaped the economic benefits of *Pax Britannica*, they were said to be bankrolling the cause of Hindu orthodoxy to also enhance their social status.[5]

Still another explanation is to view the long roots of the communal conflict of the late nineteenth century. Its beginnings lie in the early nineteenth-century efforts by orthodox Hindu and Muslim religious groups to develop a "community" identity in the face of the growing reformist movements within their respective religions. Subsequently, this emphasis on community identity entered the competitive arena of the British *Raj* ("rule") and linked up with the drive for preferment by Hindu and Muslim elites, to generate religious tensions and "the communalization of culture and politics."[6]

Such interpretations, however, render a complex picture in much too stark dichotomies. As Freitag's recent work on the late nineteenth century suggests, Hindu-Muslim conflict was not unprecedented. Although disputes may have increased in number and intensity toward the turn of the century, they were not originally intercommunal, but grew out of competition within the same religious community. Moreover, intra-communal conflict continued, as is evident from the history of Shi'ᶜah and

[3] Robert Melson and Howard Wolpe, "Modernization and Politics of Communalism: A Theoretical Perspective," *American Political Science Review* 64 (Dec. 1970), 1129.

[4] Richard D. Lambert, "Hindu-Muslim Riots" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1951), 226.

[5] For different official interpretations, see "Measure to be taken to control the agitation for the Protection of Kine" and enclosures, in India, Public and Judicial Papers, L/P&J/6/367, no. 257 of 1894. This file consists of the major reports from the various provinces that were effected by the anti-cow killing agitation.

[6] John R. McLane, *Indian Nationalism and the Early Congress* (Princeton, 1977), 271–331.

Sunni disputes.[7] Indeed, the 1890s were also characterized by competition between these two major groups of Muslims. In some areas, because they occurred contemporaneously with the Hindu-Muslim disturbances, they prompted British officials to fear the possibility of a coalition between Shi'ahs, who were in the minority among Muslims, with the Hindus.[8]

This investigation is of the Basantpur riot, one of the many ostensibly "communal" incidents which occurred in 1893. As with other disturbances which erupted that year in such disparate cities as Bombay and Rangoon, and in towns and villages of North India, the conflict at Basantpur, Saran district, Bihar, involved religious issues, in particular, the symbolic significance of the cow. On the one hand was the Hindu notion of the sanctity of the cow, on the other, the Muslim view that cows could be slaughtered and were even the preferable sacrificial animal on certain religious occasions. Moreover, the cow as a sacred symbol also threatened the authority of the British *Raj*.[9]

This examination of an individual riot will draw on the methodology of current studies of religious disturbances and collective violence to present a much wider framework of analysis than reductionism to mutually exclusive categories defined simply by religion, or even by political, social and economic identities would provide. Rather than assume such attributes as "givens" which automatically provide the basis for action or reaction, the intensive focus here seeks access to the structure and language of the riot by identifying the faces in the crowd, tracing their places of origin, and investigating the processes by which the crowd was mobilized. It also looks at the goals of the rioters and the ways in which they were sought. Such concerns will direct attention to the form and content of individual disturbances, to the ideology and ritual of religious incidents, and to those aspects which reveal riots to be much more than simple epiphenomena.[10]

[7] Freitag, "Changing Perceptions of Self-Identity: Religious Riots in North India," paper presented to the American Historical Association, San Francisco, December 28–30, 1978.

[8] A. P. MacDonnell, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, to A. Forbes, Commissioner of Patna, 24 June 1893, in MacDonnell Papers, See also Qeyamuddin Ahmad, "An Early Case of Constitutional Agitation in Bihar (1892–97)," *Indian Historical Records Commission Proceedings* 32 (Feb. 1956), 71–77, on background of Shi'ah-Sunni disputes.

[9] Anthony Parel, "The Political Symbolism of the Cow in India," *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies* 7 (Nov. 1969), 179–203. See also Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York, 1977), 90, for a definition of religion as "(1)'a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic." This definition has provided a useful line of inquiry for this study.

[10] See Robert J. Holton, "The Crowd in History: Some Problems of Theory and Method," *Social History*, 3 (May 1978), 219–33, for an excellent discussion of the literature and the shortcomings.

Additional characteristics of the incident will be delineated by studying it in its spatial context. By mapping the patterned behavior of the crowd, my intention is to show that mobilization of large numbers of people at Basantpur was achieved through the networks of local marketing systems. This organization, highly visible in spatial terms, will reveal the extent to which sentiment on a fundamental religious symbol generated a strong sense of community in one locality. The focus on the landscape of the disturbance is also concerned with understanding the meanings of the actions in and around Basantpur because space has significance in the realm of both social and religious identification.[11]

Finally, this study of the Basantpur riot will also raise some fundamental questions about the nature of control and conflict in rural India. As discussed elsewhere, the pattern of agrarian violence and collective action in Saran was a function of its "limited Raj" system, in which the landholders were the effective rulers and administrators. As "connections" or links to the local levels of society, they ensured the authority of the British rule, and in return their position as local controllers was sustained and nourished by the powers of the state. Furthermore, since they were the local bulwarks for government, official administration did not extend into village society. Instead, such key figures in village society as the *patwari* (accountant), the *jeth-raiyat* (headman), and the *chaukidar* (village watchman) were tied to the informal control networks of landholders' estates.[12]

Under such systems of local control, not surprisingly, there were no significant acts of collective action and violence which could be termed a peasant movement. Although as many as fifty disturbances per year were commonplace, they were highly localized, momentary outbursts involving a handful of people in conflict over rights and claims in relation to land and its produce. These clashes occurred primarily between men of important village standing, particularly the substantial *raiyats* (cultivators) and the petty *maliks* (proprietors) of the locality.[13]

[11] See Yi-Fu Tuan, "Sacred Space: Explorations of an Idea," in *Dimensions of Human Geography: Essays on Some Familiar and Neglected Themes*, ed. Karl W. Butzer, University of Chicago, Department of Geography, Research Paper no. 186, 1978, 84–99, and Mona Ozouf, "Space and Time in the Festivals of the French Revolution," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 17 (July 1975), 372–84, for useful discussions of "sacred geography." Also, Winston Hsieh, "Peasant Insurrection and the Marketing Hierarchy in the Canton Delta, 1911," in Mark Elvin and G. William Skinner, ed. *The Chinese City Between Two Worlds* (Stanford, 1974), 119–41, on mobilization and marketing systems.

[12] For additional details, see my "Control and Conflict in an Agrarian Society: A Study of Saran District, 1866–1920" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1976, 79–132.

[13] See my "The Agrarian Origins of Crime: A Study of Riots in Saran District, India, 1866–1920," *Journal of Social History* 13 (Winter 1979), 289–306.

I

Collective violence always has some structure. Even the most "spontaneous" clashes between Hindus and Muslims grew out of situations which provided the occasion for the disturbances. Disputes over sacred spaces and processions, for example, frequently prompted rioting. The latter especially were "ready targets for communal violence . . . (because its) members . . . are immediately identifiable, available, and particularly threatening members of a community."[14] Furthermore, processions were potentially explosive situations even as they performed an integrative function because "the very mobility of the sacred space surrounding a procession, while providing an element essential in fostering communitas, also posed some crucial problems. These occurred primarily when one religion's sacred space overlapped another."[15]

A similar complex interplay of sacred and profane space was generated by the agitation for cow protection (*gaurakshini*). As concern over this basic religious symbol heightened, many boundaries were redefined. The sacred became generalized in many daily routines and living space itself became ritualized. Moreover, the issue of the cow touched the religious sensibilities of many Hindus deeply because it centered on their fundamental symbol as well as their "sense of place." In short, it related to a community's self-definition.[16]

In 1893, a "procession" through Saran district of cattle intended for slaughter resulted in a series of disturbances, climaxing in the Basantpur riot. Basantpur in the late nineteenth century commanded numerous roads and the River Dhanai. On the east-west grid, it was linked by a major road to its subdivisional headquarters, Siwan, and to the important market "town" of Mashrak. It was also intersected by the "high" road which connected Champaran district in the north to Chapra, Saran's headquarter town in the south. It was this road which was used to

[14] Lambert, "Hindu-Muslim Riots," 115. Also, Charles Tilly, Louise Tilly and Richard Tilly, *The Rebellious Century, 1830–1930* (Cambridge, 1975), especially, 4–54, and Davis, "The Rites of Violence," 51–91, for general discussions of the structures of collective violence and religious disturbances.

[15] Freitag, "Community and Competition," 13. Also, Victor Turner, *Drama, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca, 1974), especially, 166–299, for a discussion of "communitas, a spontaneously generated relationship between leveled and equal total and individuated human beings, stipped of structured attributes . . ."

[16] David E. Sopher, "Toward a Rediscovery of India: Thoughts on Some Neglected Geography," in *Geographers Abroad: Essays on the Problems and Prospects of Research in Foreign Areas*, ed. Marvin W. Mikesell, University of Chicago, Department of Geography, Research Paper no. 152, 1973, 110–13. Also, Charles Pythian-Adams, "Ceremony and the Citizen: The Communal Year at Coventry, 1450–1700," in *Crisis and Order in English Towns, 1500–1700: Essays in Urban History*, eds. Peter Clark and Paul Slack (Toronto, 1972), for an excellent analysis of ritualized expressions in processes of identity and definition.

transport cattle purchased in Champaran for the Dinapore commissariat in the Patna district.[17]

The first overt sign of the sentiment against the periodic transit of cattle through Saran was manifested on August 29, when Muslim butchers tending a drove of cattle entered the district. They were immediately warned by travelers of imminent resistance to their further movement. Two days later, twenty-five Hindus attempted to stop the "trespass" of cattle at the village of Sidhalia Shampur. Under a volley of abuse, the butchers turned for sanctuary toward the village of Bala because it was the site of an indigo factory managed by European planters. But instead they encountered a "mob" of over two hundred people, headed by two men on horseback. Parmeshwar Singh and Ramnath Sahu.[18] However, before the "unlawful assembly" could liberate the cattle, the crowd was dispersed by the arrival of the local European indigo planter. The herd was then diverted off the main road to the predominately Muslim village of Khawaspur three miles away. Meanwhile, one of the butchers rushed to the nearby police station of Basantpur to seek assistance. On September 1, despite the presence of three policemen who had journeyed the six miles from Basantpur, over two hundred people congregated at the neighboring village of Basawan to defend their sacred landscape. Their plans to "rescue" the herd failed, however, because the river separating Khawaspur from Basawan was temporarily flooded. The next day the cattle were escorted to a mango grove near the Basantpur police station.[19]

No further incident occurred until September 6, when Parmeshwar Singh, Ramnath Sahu and Rajman Sahu arrived at the Basantpur police station. Having acted earlier at Bala as "guardians" against the profane commerce in sacred animals, they were at the station to post their bail bonds. According to Inspector Ghosal, who had been dispatched to Basantpur to maintain law and order:

(they) came to me and said 'the cows will not be allowed to leave. It would be better if you get the butchers to accept a price for the cattle. . . . The *sadhu logue* (sadhus) have not eaten for three days.' I tried to pacify them, and said that the *sahibs* (British officers) would come to-morrow morning, and if the *sahibs* agreed

[17] The district was overhwelmingly rural in the late nineteenth century. Less than 3 percent of its population was urban-based. And of the twelve localities designated towns in 1891, only Chapra (57,000), Siwan (17,000) and Revelganj (13,000) deserve the identification. See my "Control and Conflict," 16–17.

[18] Testimony of Nathuni the butcher in *Trial of the Basantpur Riot Case in the Court of the Sessions Judge of Saran, 1893* (Calcutta, 1894), 15. Crowd figures here and elsewhere represent the lowest estimations.

[19] Unless noted otherwise, the events leading up to Basantpur are reconstructed from the reports of the investigation by the magistrate; see G. E. Manisty to Commissioner, no. 2622, 10 Oct. 1893, in Bengal Judicial Proceedings, Police Dept., Nov. 1894, nos. 31 and 33, respectively (hereafter cited as Manisty Report I & II).

the butchers might be induced to give up the cattle. At this they were annoyed and went away, saying . . . all right, we are going.[20]

Shortly after 5:30 p.m., the police moved the cattle to the safety of their station compound because "a large and tumultuous assembly" had gathered nearby. Attempts were then made to remonstrate with the crowd but without success. In the words of the Inspector, Parmeshwar, Ramnath and Rajman responded to his entreaties by saying: "'Release the cows' . . . While all this conversation was going on . . . the rest of the mob were shouting and jumping about and brandishing their *lathis* (staffs). They were shouting *Pohari Baba ki jai, Mohabir jee ka jai, Kali jee ka jai, gye dey do* (Long live Pohari Baba, Long live Mohabir, Long live Kali, give us the cows)."[21] At 7:00 p.m. over two thousand people surged on the police station and dispersed only when an initial round of blank cartridge was followed up with buckshot. Two rioters were killed and several wounded. But as the crowd melted away, they left with the parting words: "To-day you have escaped, but to-morrow we will see how you will fare."[22]

Thus to the end the insistence was on demarcating the boundaries between "us" and "them." Whether ritualized gestures took the form of standardized chants or collective action, for the crowds in and around Basantpur the common experience of being incorporated in a "process of sanctification" defined group solidarity. In the face of such perceived common interests, government was able to restrain sentiments on the issue of the cow from assuming the proportions of overt agitation but not to dissolve it completely. Official attempts to penetrate the boundaries of the group were therefore met by a "conspiracy of silence." Even people who were at Basantpur on the day of the incident claimed to have no knowledge of the disturbance, let alone of the identities of its participants. In the area around Basantpur the officer investigating the "anti-cow killing" movement discovered that:

> not a single Hindu can be found to give any information either as to what has taken place in the past or what may be expected in the future. Riding from village to village—and I visited seven or eight in all—I could get no one to admit knowing anything at all of the transactions which led up to the riots.[23]

The events in and around Basantpur also set in motion a process by which Muslim butchers, European indigo planters and officials

[20] Testimony of Inspector Gyatri Prosunno Ghosal, in *Basantpur Trial*, 36.

[21] *Ibid.*, 25. Pohari Baba, ånd Mohabir jee were important preachers; Kali, wife of Shiva is a popular Goddess in Bihar.

[22] Cited in *ibid.*, 26.

[23] H. LeMesurier, Offg. Magistrate and Collector on special duty, to Cssner. of Patna, 3 Nov. 1893, in Bengal Judicial Proceedings, Police Dept., Nov. 1894, no. 36 (hereafter LeMesurier Report).

demonstrated their own sense of space. Khawaspur, Bala, and Basantpur were places of refuge not by accident, but by design. For in defending the right of procession of cattle through their district, planters and officials were also engaged in establishing their sense of territory. Indeed, from government's perspective the Basantpur riot was a violation of its sacred space:

> The incident . . . can only be described as a widespread and determined revolt against the constituted authorities. The extreme step taken of attacking the police-station, almost under the eyes of the Sub-Divisional officer and District Superintendent of Police, and while an enquiry was actually in progress by these officers into the disturbances of the preceeding week, is of quite phenomenal character. Such entire disregard of consequences, by whole communities I have never before met with.[24]

Thus sacred symbol and sacred space divided Hindus and Muslims, as well as the former from the British. From the first challenge to the movement of Commissariat cattle through the district to the showdown at Basantpur, the vocabulary of crowd behavior included distinct anti-British overtones. As the police inspector at the scene of the riot recalled, the crowd had warned him that if the herd was not released "it would be worse for the *Saheb log* [British]." And prior to the outbreak of violence, it was widely circulated in the locality that "a wind has come from the west, and Ram been (*sic*) born, and the Hindu Raj is at hand."[25]

Clearly, the issue of the cow erected fences not only between people with longstanding experience of one another, namely Hindus and Muslims, but also sharpened divisions between relative strangers, Hindus and the British. Moreover, the disruptions of law and order were far more serious threats in India than they were in other contexts. "In England the utmost length to which popular agitation can lead would be civil war and a change of dynasty or in the form of Government. In India a rebellion may mean not only bloodshed but the loss of India to England."[26]

Veteran administrators therefore confronted the anti-cow killing agitation with caution. As the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, Sir A. P. MacDonnell, urged, "we should keep outside it as much as we can . . . We should by all means keep the fanaticism of the Hindoos from being directed against the government."[27] Unlike many of his subordinate officers, who were eager to use repressive measures to deal with

[24] Manisty Report I.

[25] Cited in *Ibid.* The advent of the rule of Ram, an incarnation of Vishnu, indicates the return of a Golden Age.

[26] C. R. Marindin to GOB, 8 Aug. 1900, Bengal Judicial Proceedings, July 1900, 121. See also my "Control and Conflict," 80–132 and Bernard S. Cohn, "The British in Benares: A Nineteenth Century Colonial Society," *Comparative Studies in Society and History 4* (1961–1962), 169–99, for details on the enormous gulf that separated rulers and ruled.

[27] MacDonnell to A. Forbes, Commissioner of Patna, 13 Sept. 1893, in MacDonnell Papers.

dissidence, he championed a "conciliatory attitude." In the aftermath of the Basantpur riot, it meant rejecting a widely supported plan to impose a punitive police over an extensive area at the cost of local inhabitants, in favor of simply reinforcing the district's police force.[28]

MacDonnell's strategy was also to lean more heavily upon government's local allies by calling upon them to assume the responsibility for incidents on their estates. The Maharaja of Hathwa, the district's leading *zamindar* ("landholder"), for instance, was notified immediately by telegram to assist in restoring law and order. And on estates where official control was administered directly through the Court of Wards, more careful supervision was maintained.[29]

Earlier, MacDonnell had taken the unprecedented step of allowing two individuals other than the presiding officer to speak at a *darbar* (audience) held in Patna. He had directed these two men, a leading Hindu and Muslim notable, to "accept" his remarks on behalf of their communities: "Let the Muhammadan perform in peace his religious rites after the manner of his fathers, but in performing them let him not obtrude on the Hindu. . . . Let the Hindu on his part not wantonly obstruct the free exercise of the Muhammadan's religious rites."[30]

Undoubtedly, underlying the riots of 1893 was the fact that "the Hindu's reverence for the cow is one of the magazines of physical force."[31] But how was such veneration translated into rites of violence that categorized both the Muslims and the British as impure?

II

"The cloven hoof of the *Gorakshini Sabha* (Cow Protection Society) is visible throughout."[32] Thus concluded the Saran Magistrate from his investigation of the Basantpur riot. Following its inception in 1887, as is evident from government's annual reports, the *Sabha's* primary concern

[28] See A. Forbes to Inspector-General of Police, no. 585G, 14 Oct. 1893, and H. J. S. Cotton, Chief Secretary, GOB, to Commissioner of Patna, no. 4662, 11 Nov. 1893, in Bengal Judicial Proceedings, Police Dept., Nov. 1894, nos. 32, 33 & 37.

[29] Telegram from GOB to Majaraja of Hathwa, 7 Sept. 1893, in *ibid.*, and H. J. S. Cotton, Chief Secretary, GOB to H. LeMesurier, 19 Sept. 1893, no. 164J-D, in Patna Commissioner's (P.C.) General *Basta* (bundle) no. 307, 1893. LeMesurier, who was deputed with magisterial powers to investigate the anti-kine killing agitation in Bihar, was asked to pay "special attention to bringing home to landholders and others . . . their full responsibility for riots and similar offences committed in their villages and estates." See also my "An Institutional Shelter: The Court of Wards in Late Nineteenth Century Bihar." *Modern Asian Studies* 13 (1979), 227–44.

[30] "Bankipur Durbar Address of Lieutenant-Governor," n.d., in PC, General *Basta* no. 307. See also A. P. MacDonnell to Marquess of Lansdowne, no. 86, 4 Aug. 1893, in Lansdowne Papers, Correspondence with Persons In India, July to Dec. 1893, vol. 2.

[31] H. J. S. Cotton, Chief Secretary, GOB, to Secretary, Government of India, no. 849-D, 28 Oct. 1893, in L/P&J/6/367, no. 257 of 1894, enclosure 6.

[32] Manisty Report, I.

with the issue of the cow moved it increasingly in the direction of dissidence.

In 1889 the district officer reported that the *Sabha* in Saran had attracted "some attention." It was involved in establishing an asylum for old cattle (*gaushala*) and it had also been implicated in the burning down of a slaughter house. The following year attacks on some butchers took place. By 1891, however, a new note was present: "The Gaurakshini Sabha appears to be in itself harmless and restricted in its aims to lawful means; but it is to be feared that it tends to keep the tensions between Hindus and Mussulmans, which at times has serious results on the subject of cow-killing." And by 1892–1893, the Sabha was described to have "a distinctly disloyal character" as it had "assumed the form not merely of a threatened widespread uprising of one class of Her Majesty's subjects against another, but also of open revolt against the constituted authorities."[33]

Such developments were fostered by activities which aimed at projecting the sacred symbol of the cow into the lives of local inhabitants. So even though the *Sabha* lobbied for government support, its overriding concern was an issue that separated peoples into distinct categories. Moreover, in its drive to generalize participation, it used propaganda and rituals which reinforced these divisions.

From its beginnings in Punjab, where sentiment on cow protection was first organized, the issue of the cow rapidly gained an enormous audience. In part it attracted extensive support because the issue was a fundamental symbol. As Mary Douglas writes, "the more personal and intimate the source of ritual symbolism, the more telling its message. The more the symbol is drawn from the common fund of human experience, the more wide and certain its reception."[34] Hindus, "orthodox" and "reformist," therefore found the message of cow protection appealing. In Saran this shared belief in the sacredness of the cow was expressed by the 1887 meeting of the "orthodox" *Sanatan Dharma*, when its sharp attacks on the "reformist" *Arya Samaj* were punctuated only by references to mutual sentiments regarding cow protection.[35]

The rise of the cow protection movement also benefited from the

[33] Compiled from "Annual General Administration Report, Patna Division," for 1888–1889, 1889–1890, 1890–1891, 1891–1892, 1892–1893, in Bengal General (Misc.) Proceedings, Aug. 1889, 77; Dec. 1890, 352–53; Oct. 1891, 319: Dec. 1892, 538; and Dec. 1893, 681–83, respectively.

[34] *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London, 1966), 114.

[35] See Babu Mahadev Prasad, ed. *Sanatan Arya Dharma Pracharini, 4th session* (Patna, 1888). Also Kenneth Jones, *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in Nineteenth Punjab* (Berkeley, 1976), 108–12, on *Sanatan Dharma-Arya Samaj* differences; and McLane, *Indian Nationalism*, 276–94, on how "the cow became a basis for sentimental community for orthodox and reformist Hindus alike."

nineteenth-century advances in communications, which enabled the message to travel faster than the messenger (to paraphrase McLuhan). According to many British administrators, the railways, the telegraphs, and the press served as the contagion for the disturbance of 1893, because "a riot which occurs in any place even the most remote is speedily heard of all over India."[36]

Messengers also played a crucial role, especially in rural areas. Certainly the official agents tracking the *gau-swamis*—also called agitators, emissaries, lecturers, paid agents, penniless adventurers, preachers and propagandists—did not think they traveled slowly, as they utilized rapid transport to tour extensively and lecture frequently on the issue of the cow. Invariably, their role as instigators shows up in every investigation of communal disturbances in this period. Pohwari Baba, whose name was chanted by the crowd at Basantpur, was described by the Lieutenant-Governor as having done "more in a month to stir up disaffection than the whole native press had probably done in a year."[37]

In Saran, as elsewhere, the message and the messengers of cow protection linked up with "gentlemen of position and respectability," often identified more specifically as "professional and trading classes," to organize local concern for the cause of the cow. This connection was established at Chapra in 1887, when a *Sabha* was organized under the aegis of Thakur Prasad Kalwar, a *baniya* (trader), and Rudra Prasad, a pleader. In this case though the *Sabha* was built on an already existing organization, the local *Sanatan Dharma*, which had been founded seven years earlier by Rai Matadin Sing Bahadur, a Sub-Judge of Chapra.[38]

Subsequently, Trijadhan Upadhya and Oudh Bihari Saran Misir served as Presidents or Chief Managers (*Sabhapatis*). Other key members in the district included landholders such as Debi Prasad of Rusi, the *zamindars* of Mairwa, and the Rani of Majhauli, and commercial and professional men such as Mahabir Prasad, Durga Prasad, a government pleader, and the *Sheristadar* (head native officer) of Chapra.[39]

That such "service and professional people," to use Bayly's phrase, were the local organizers is not surprising, because they were generally the "neighbourhood leaders" in local-level politics. They were also ideally suited to take up the cause of cow protection because they were "a

[36] Lord Lansdowne to Secretary of State for India, 27 Dec. 1893, in Public and Judicial Papers, L/P&J/6/365, 1894.

[37] A. P. MacDonnell to A. Forbes, Commissioner of Patna, 9 Nov. 1893, in MacDonnell Papers. See also "Memorandum to Secretary of the 'Cow Memorial Fund' Society . . .," with Government of India to Secretary of State, 7 Jan. 1890, L/P&J/6/269, 1890, for the confidential files on the important propagandists of The Cow Protection Movement.

[38] A. Forbes, Commissioner of Patna, to Chief Secretary, GOB, 27 Oct. 1893, in L/P&J/6/365, no. 257, encl. 7 (hereafter Forbes Report).

[39] Other officers were designated *muharrirs* (clerks), *tahsildars* (revenue collectors), *jamadars* (military officers), and *piyadas* (peons). See *ibid.*

bridge between the more traditional section of Indian society and the European population."[40] Furthermore, they provided money and expertise. The latter was clearly in evidence in both the organizational structure of the *Sabhas*, which was patterned after that of government, and in the attention that was directed to the political process. The agenda for the first anniversary celebrations of Chapra's *Gaurakshini Sabha*, for instance, proposed not only to discuss the organization of a cow protection movement throughout Bihar, but also to telegraph England to convey thanks for a royal visit to India.[41]

In every locality, including Saran, continued interest in the issue of the cow was sustained by frequent visits from *gau-swamis*. Pandit Jagat Narain of Allahabad was known to have toured Saran in 1888 and every year thereafter. Kishori Lal, also of Allahabad, lectured in the district in 1890. And in 1893, prior to the Basantpur riot, there was a noticeably greater influx of messengers from the nearby districts of North-Western Provinces and Oudh: Ram Golam Pundit and Jagdeo Bahadur of Ballia, and Amar Path, Mahabir Upadhya and Govind Das, alias "Pohwari Baba," of Gorakhpur.[42]

Important stops in the itineraries of *gau-swamis* were markets and fairs. Both settings provided large, and often sympathetic, audiences. The latter were particularly significant occasions because they were generally located in sacred space and time. The district's largest fair, the Sonepore *Mela*, was an especially successful recruiting ground for the *Sabha* because it attracted over 200,000 people. Furthermore, this fair dramatized the immediacy of cow protection because it was also the venue of a major cattle trade market.[43]

The *Sabha* also extended itself into "ordinary" life very effectively by generalizing the sacred in the everyday activities of people. No space, no occasion, it seemed, was inappropriate to organize and direct attention toward the issue of the cow.

Gaushalas perhaps best epitomize the way in which the issue was projected into the lives of people. Intended as asylums for old and infirm cattle, as well as those saved from slaughter, this institution played an important role in attracting public attention. The building of such shelters

[40] C. A. Bayly, *The Local Roots of Indian Politics; Allahabad, 1880–1920* (Oxford, 1975), 57.

[41] "Anniversary of Chapra Gaurakshini Sabha," 26 Dec. 1889, with Forbes Report, Appendix E.

[42] Forbes Report.

[43] The annual fair at Sonepore convened for a fortnight when ritual bathing in the Ganges was considered to impart great holiness. In its legendary past, Sonepore was associated with both Hari (Vishnu) and Ram. See L. S. S. O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers: Saran* (Calcutta, 1908), 166–68, for further details. Also Forbes Report on Sonepore's importance in publicizing the issue of the cow, and "Annual General Report for Patna for 1888–89," which records that 250,000 people attended the fair.

offered an opportunity for people to become "the protectors of the cows (who) will remain in heaven . . . will be called gods . . . All should know that there can be no virtue without taking proper care of cows."[44] Yet at the same time, the need to create shelters for a sacred animal was a telling statement about the rule of the existing government. Thus they not only provided a focus for concern, but instilled a powerful vision of the urgency of the cause of cow protection.

Other activities, such as fund-raising, also served as a means to participate as well as to be informed. In collecting donations, tin boxes stamped with the image of the cow were set up in such locations as bazaars, post offices and shops. Local *Sabhas* also collected subscriptions from all Hindus. A common entreaty of the *Sabhas* was:

> For the protection of gaomata [Mother Cow] each household shall everyday contribute for its food supply 1 *chituki* [or pinch] equivalent to 1 *paisa*, per member. From the chituki fund a cow refuge [*gaoshala*] shall be built, and the expenses of its maintenance shall be met. And if any one is compelled to sell a cow at a fair, the cow shall be bought up and interned in the cow-refuge; and if anywhere money be needed for the protection of cows, it shall be paid at once. *The eating of food without setting apart the chituki shall be an offence equal to that of eating cow's flesh.*[45]

And traders were required to donate one percent of their earnings. The occasion of marriages, feasts and the successful contest of law suits was also expected to lead to donations.[46]

To publicize its cause, the *Sabha* relied on "village telegraph," a communication system in which shared commitment was crucial. Anonymous messages preaching the importance of cow protection were distributed as chain letters, and the recipients were charged with copying and relaying them to at least five other villages. Similarly, books, pamphlets and pictures circulated widely.[47]

Although initially at least the message of cow protection was phrased in eclectic terms, increasingly the issue was seen as defining people's relationships and activities. Under the *Sabha's* influence, many everyday routines took on a different order. In many villages, Muslims were refused access to wells. In some areas "the pots in which the village *Kandhu* ["grain-parcher"] had parched the corn both of Muhammadans and Hindus alike were now ordered to be broken. New and unpolluted pots were prepared . . . while individual Mussalmans were put to the somewhat new experience of parching their own corn."[48]

[44] "Translation of *Gari Benair* (prayer of the cow), Madhubani Gaurakshini Sabha, Darbhanga," with Forbes Report, Appendix E.

[45] See "Case for the consideration of the Honorable Advocate General," by C. J. Lyall, Secretary, GOI, Home Dept., in L/P&J/6/367, encl. 3.

[46] Forbes Report.

[47] *Ibid.*

[48] "Annual General Report of Patna Division for 1893–94."

This heightened sense of separation developed particularly in the area around Maharajganj and Basantpur. In May of 1893 several meetings were held in nearby Darauli *thana* in which Jagdeo Bahadur, a *gau-swami* from Ballia accompanied by a retinue of several hundred followers, enjoined his audience to rescue cattle at any cost. On several instances in June and July, meetings almost erupted into acts of collective violence but were restrained by the preventive measures of local authorities. In late July, just prior to Muharram, a meeting at Maharajganj urged Hindus not to join the forthcoming Muslim celebrations either by participating in processions or by assisting in the making of *taziahs*.[49]

Another meeting convened in Maharajganj on August 20th to discuss the organization of additional branches in the locality. Six days later, a "mass meeting" attended by over 800 people was held at Basantpur. Announcement of this meeting was made by beat of drum on Wednesday, a market day at Basantpur. According to eyewitnesses, among those present were several people who figured prominently in the ensuing violence, including Parmeshwar Singh, Ramnath and Rajman Sahu. Also in attendance were Mahabir Upadhya, a Pandit "from the west," and Pohwari Baba ("the drinker of milk"), "a Sadhu of enormous influence in the neighbourhood."[50]

Lectures on this occasion pleaded for small donations of grain for cow protection and of money to purchase the release of cows intended for slaughter, or for defending cases of cattle rescue. Rajman Sahu was to be responsible for these sums of money. The building of a cow shelter at a nearby village under the direction of a local resident, Parmeshwar Singh, was also discussed. In addition, there was some deliberation over the matter of cattle being driven along public roads, namely, the Salempur Ghat road. The tenor of this meeting was recalled by one eyewitness who reported that *Pandit* Mahabir Upadhya stated "cows should not be sold for slaughter, as cows were sacred (*lachmi*), and everybody should combine to give gram for the food, that they should surround and take away cattle and pay the money value."[51] According to another report, the audience was told:

> that the present Raj was passing away and the Hindu was in the ascendancy, and attention was called to the letters from Benares and Azimgarh and Gorakhpur, which were being circulated through the district, in which it was stated that the end of world was at hand, and that those who wished for reward must obey the teaching of the Brahman with reference to the preservation of the cow.[52]

[49] *Taziahs* (copies of the tomb of Husain) were taken out in procession during the important Muslim event of Muharram, a period of mourning for Husain and his followers. See also Forbes Report.

[50] Manisty Report, II.

[51] Testimony of Raj Roshun, chaukidar at Basantpur, *Basantpur Trial*, 10–11. See also testimony of Mahadeo Singh, chaukidar at Basantpur, 9–10.

[52] Manisty Report, II.

Yet while this pace of activities characterized Maharajganj and Basantpur, other parts of the district remained quiescent. Even an attempt to establish a cow shelter in Hathwa, in the north of the district, failed. No doubt the transit of cattle along the Salempur Ghat road was the occasion that stimulated the local *Sabha* into action, but what provided the structure for the collective violence in and around Basantpur? And who acted as the defenders of the sacred symbol and the sacred space?

III

"On the market days lots of people come to the market, and people are in the habit of coming to the market from all the neighbouring villages, two or three miles off."[53] This statement by a witness at the Basantpur Trial case not only explains his presence at the scene of the disturbance on September 6, but also the failure of local authorities to detect the mobilization of large numbers of people prior to the attack on the police station. That the incident occurred on a Wednesday, a market day, is therefore no accident. On the contrary, the market provided the temporal and spatial conjunction to organize the crowd at Basantpur.

Several eyewitnesses at the trial offered testimony which directly linked the market to the riot. Shortly after sunrise, people from villages as far as ten miles away began to move toward Basantpur. To continue in the words of Anjur Kurmi, a cultivator of Rampali, he encountered sixteen people at this early hour who told him: "We are going to Basantpur on some business."[54] These men were from the villages around Maharajganj. En route to Basantpur, they joined up with inhabitants of Bansuhi, Kora, Sipar and Karhi, villages immediately to the west of the market.[55]

Maharajganj, and villages in its vicinity, including Pasnowli, Siohatta, Mohan Bazaar, Kapia, Surbir, and Bangra, was an active center of *Gaurakshini Sabha* activities. It had been the site of several *Sabha* meetings prior to the outbreak of the Basantpur riot and was also the locality in which a strong sense of separation was manifested in many everyday activities. In some villages Hindus boycotted Muslims and denied them certain customary rights and services. An earlier incident of cattle riot had also occurred in this area. And as an important commercial center, it had many wealthy residents who contributed to the coffers of the *Sabha*, thus earning it in the eyes of local administrators the reputation of being the "sinews of war."[56]

[53] Testimony of Shaikh Rahmat Ally, carter for Bala indigo factory, in *Basantpur Trial*, 23.

[54] Testimony of Anjur Kurmi, a cultivator of Rampali, *Basantpur Trial*, 9.

[55] Manisty Report, II.

[56] *Ibid.*

Most of the crowd at Basantpur, however, either came from the village itself, or from nearby settlements. From the west and northwest, from the villages of Muhamda, Ageya, Sisai and Purandarpur, came large numbers, as they did also from villages to the north which were located alongside the Salempur Ghat road. These villages included Lakhnowrah, Nandpur-Khawaspur, Narharpur, Bala, Shampur, and Basawan, which had participated earlier in the harassment of the castle enroute to Basantpur. As Rahmat Ali, a carter for the indigo factory at Bala, stated at the trial, he saw fifty to sixty people from Basawan and Nandpur as he made his way home from the market at sunset.[57] The places of origin of the crowd at Basantpur is also pinpointed by Ramattar Pershad who lived in Basantpur. He recalled seeing about eighty men from his village running toward the police station "with their loins girded and *muretha* ["turbans"] on their heads." They made no effort to conceal their intentions because as they rushed by him they said, "come and snatch away the cows."[58]

Such a pattern of participation was summed up by a subsequent government investigation, which concluded that "nearly all the villages in the immediate neighbourhood of Basantpur took part,"[59] It is clear, however, from examining the spatial dynamics of this locality that "neighbourhood" represented the community focusing on Basantpur, which was "a standard market town":

> that type of rural market which met all the normal trade needs of peasant household: what the household produced but did not consume was normally sold there, and what it consumed but did not produce was normally brought there . . . [It] provided for the exchange of goods produced within the market's dependent area, but more importantly it was the starting point for the upward flow of agricultural products and crafts items into higher reaches of the marketing system, and also the termination of the downward flow of imported items destined for peasant consumption.[60]

Intersected by numerous roads, including the Salempur Ghat road, which had been in existence since the early nineteenth century, Basantpur represented a critical node in local networks of communication. Even in the early twentieth century, when the opening of the Chapra-Mashrak line had diverted some of its trade away, Basantpur was described as the "only market of any importance in this *elaka* ["locality"]."[61] Its 1600 inhabitants in 1893 were engaged primarily in

[57] See *Basantpur Trial*, 22. [58] *Ibid.*, 54. [59] LeMesurier Report.

[60] G. William Skinner, "Marketing and Social Structure in Rural China," Part I, *Journal of Asian Studies* 24 (Nov. 1964), 6. See also Carol A. Smith, "Economics of Marketing Systems: Models from Economic Geography," in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, ed. by Bernard J. Siegal *et al.*, vol. 3 (1974), 167–201.

[61] Village Basantpur, Basantpur thana no. 358, Saran district Village Notes (hereafter VN. See also James R. Hagen and Anand A. Yang, "Local Sources for the Study of Rural

commercial activities, or as one observer put it "trade principal occupation, and nominal cultivation."[62] Over 50 percent of its population—consisting of Madhesia Kandus (31 percent), Kalwars (11 percent), Telis (5 percent), Rauniars (4 percent), Rastogis (2 percent), Buruwars (1 percent), and Sonars (0.5 percent)—can be identified specifically as traders. In addition some nonresident Sonars also kept shops there. Of the remaining inhabitants many either had small shops or worked as artisans: Turhas (4 percent) were vegetable growers and sellers, Barais (2 percent) betel leaf growers and sellers, Lohars (1 percent) blacksmiths, Darzi (2 percent) tailors, and Jolahas (2 percent) cotton weavers.[63]

The Rastogis, Rauniars, Buruwars, Kalawars and Madhesia Kandus were "the principal trading class." Madhesia Kandus were traders in various agricultural goods, including grain and spices. The latter item was also the speciality of Buruwars. Rastogis were the major cloth merchants.[64]

The availability of such goods and services emphasize the centrality of Basantpur as a local collection and distribution point. Grains, spices, vegetables and other agricultural produce were brought to this market by many villages in the locality. Sujad Hossein, for example, came here every harvest to sell some of the ten to fifteen maunds of grain he produced.[65] Basantpur was also the distribution point for grain purchased outside of the district, which made its way here via higher level markets, such as Siwan, Mairwa and Maharajganj.[66]

The other major imported good was cloth, which many merchants purchased wholesale from Calcutta. To what extent Basantpur was able to serve the extraordinary needs of the local population is also reflected in the testimony of one witness who the defense accused of implicating Rajman Sahu in the riot because he had failed to receive a bribe of several items from the latter's shop in Basantpur. These articles, which included a tent and several silver items, were allegedly solicited for a marriage.[67]

Several service functions were also clustered in Basantpur. In 1871 it became the headquarters of a *thana* (an administrative subdistrict unit) which assumed its name. Its police station has already figured

India: The 'Village Notes' of Bihar," *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 13 (Jan.–Mar. 1976), 75–84, for further information regarding this source.

[62] Forbes Report and Basantpur village, VN.

[63] Figures taken from Basantpur village, VN, which refer to 1917. Other castes in Basantpur were Brahmins (0.5 percent), Rajputs (8 percent), Kaysaths (4 percent), Koeris (1.5 percent), Kurmis (1 percent), Sheiks (0.5 percent), Chamars (4 percent), Ahirs (3 percent), Kandus (1.5 percent), Gours (1.5 percent), Dusadhs (1.5 percent), Hajams (1 percent), Dhobis (0.5 percent), Doms (1 percent), and Rangrezs (1.5 percent).

[64] *Ibid.*

[65] See *Basantpur Trial*, 21.

[66] *Saran District Gazetteer*, 99.

[67] *Basantpur Trial*, 49.

significantly in this account. In addition, it had a dispensary and an inspection bungalow. The opening of a subregistry office in December 1892 lent it further administrative importance. Such services not only made Basantpur the focal point of many needs of the locality, but also of selective in-migration. Khub Narain, for instance, moved here to take up the profession of writing documents for people who wished to register them.[68]

These goods and services extended to a "standard marketing area" which covered at least 35 villages comprising a population of over 10,000 people. Actually a much larger territory than this lay within the reach of Basantpur's market. Since our sources only identify the market used most frequently, they do not distinguish levels of markets. Therefore many villages appear to be nested in marketing systems focusing on minor *hats* (periodic marketplaces). Or to use Skinner's terminology, "minor markets" in which exchange of goods were primarily "horizontal . . . Many necessities are not regularly available and virtually no services or imports are offered."[69] Therefore as the residents of Babhanauli were aware, although they frequented the *hat* of Khawaspur, they went to Basantpur for "larger purchases."[70]

The marketing hierarchy in the locality of Basantpur is also expressed by several other features. Many of the *hats* near it were neither comparable in size or range of goods offered. Bala, for example, provided vegetables and rice, but it was a "small bazaar . . . [and] cloth shops seldom opened here."[71] The periodicity of marketing also emphasizes this relationship. Nabiganj, also called Lakri, met on Monday and Friday, as opposed to Wednesday and Sunday for Basantpur, while Kishunpura convened on Thursday and Saturday.[72]

Three of the four clusters of villages which were considered "most guilty" in the riot fell within the standard marketing area of Basantpur. To the north were seven villages along the Salempur Ghat road whose inhabitants had participated in all the incidents beginning with the mass meeting of the *Gaurakshini Sabha* at Basantpur on August 26: Lakhnowrah, Narharpur, Bala, Shampur, Khawaspur, Basawan, and Madarpur. The principal ringleaders were from these villages. Parmeshwar Singh was from Narharpur, Ramnath and Rajman Sahu from Lakhnowra, and the remaining five from Shampur, Bala, and Madarpur.

The two other major areas which provided large numbers to the crowds were the villages immediately to the west and northwest of Basantpur.

[68] *Ibid.*, 60.
[69] Skinner, "Marketing and Social Structure," Part I, 6.
[70] Babhanuli village, Basantpur thana no. 319, VN.
[71] Bala village, Basantpur thana no. 59, VN.
[72] Nabiganj and Kishunpura village, Basantpur thana nos. 76 & 81, VN.

According to official classification one was a circle of villages in the immediate vicinity of the market. In addition to Basantpur, it consisted of Sipar, Moora, Karhi, Hussaypore, Bansuhi and Korah. The other circle comprised four villages, Mahamdah, Ageya, Sisai and Puraderpur, which were further away from Basantpur.[73]

A fourth circle of villages lay outside the marketing area of Basantpur and was lumped together under the category of Maharanjganj. It consisted of Surbir, Bungra, Pasnowli, Maharajganj, Siohatta, Mohan Bazaar and Kapia. Although nested in the marketing area of Maharanjganj, this circle was also connected with Basantpur. As a higher-order place in the local marketing hierarchy, Maharajganj served as a major conduit of grain and other goods for standard, and lesser, marketing places. Originally a saltpeter depot, it also had a flourishing iron industry. By 1893 its commercial importance had been further enhanced by the development of railways.[74]

The faces in the crowd also describe the focus of the disturbance as Basantpur and its immediate surrounding villages. Reference has previously been made to the seven principals accused in the riot case as residents of Lakhnowrah, Narharpur, Shampur, Bala and Madarpur. Moreover, these were "men of influence in the neighbourhood." Or as Inspector Ghosal stated to the three chief defendants, Parmeshwar Singh, Ramnath and Rajman Sahu, albeit with a touch of hyperbole: "You are the *raises* of the district, respectable men."[75]

Parmeshwar was a resident *zamindar* of Narharpur, while Ramnath and Rajman were both landholders of Laknowrah and cloth merchants in Basantpur. The latter two were also related by kinship ties, and all three were of the Teli caste. Other faces in the crowd similarly reveal men of local importance. Jawahir Lal, for instance, was a Kayasth and a *patwari*. Large numbers of Rajputs and Brahmins were also alleged to have participated. However, perhaps the most striking feature of the crowd was that entire villages were involved and not just Hindus of certain economic and social status. Numerous witnesses at the riot case trial recalled long lists of names of people they recognized rushing toward the police station. Invariably, these identifications suggest the entire range of Hindu inhabitants.[76]

While the facility with which witnesses identified members of the crowd is a testimony to its distinguished composition, it is also revealing of the extent to which the "neighbourhood" was defined by the marketing

[73] Forbes Report.
[74] *Saran District Gazetteer*, 99.
[75] Cited in testimony of Ali Hossein, constable, in *Basantpur Trial*, 51.
[76] See testimonies of Inspector Ghosal, Ramattar Pershad, Birda Singh, and Khub Narain, in *ibid.*, 29, 53, 53, and 58, respectively.

system of Basantpur. As in eighteenth-century Britain or France, this marketing system in 1893 was "a social as well as an economic nexus. It was the place where one-hundred-and-one social and personal transactions went on; where news was passed, rumour and gossip flew around . . . [it] was the place where people, because they were numerous felt for a moment they were strong."[77]

These social dimensions of Basantpur's marketing area were repeatedly alluded to by its residents who appeared as witnesses at the trial of the riot case. As they explained in their identifications of faces in the crowd, they knew so-and-so "by name as well as by their features."[78] Apparently both acquaintances and friendships were delimited by the marketing area of a locality. Or as Sujad Hossein explained, he and Rahmat Ali lived in the same village but were not good friends. Occasionally when they met they would walk together, as they did on the day of the Basantpur riot.[79] The latter put it more directly when he followed his non-friend's testimony: "There is no *dosti* ['friendship'] between me and the last witness . . . We never go to the bazaar together."[80] Similarly Bindeshri Prasad explained the dynamics of the marketing networks when he explained his identification of one of the accused:

> I came to know him in the ordinary way, having seen him coming and going about not in any particular manner . . . I came to know him well during the last eight or nine months. I have seen him going to and coming from the market, and that is how I came to know him. When a person comes to a place, he does not get acquainted with all the people there at once. I asked him his name, and he told me. We were going along the road when I asked him his name.[81]

In short, the locus of the Basantpur riot was the standard marketing community. And leadership, whether at the local *Gaurakshini Sabha* meeting or at the head of the crowd, was comprised of men who were the influential figures within this area. It was they, and not the large landholders of the locality who were also supporters of the *Sabha*,[82] that played the primary role in collective action and violence. Furthermore, their participation ensured that their vital role as links in the local systems of control was mobilized to serve the cause of the cow. No wonder official investigations of the riot were thwarted by a conspiracy of silence. As the police found in its inquiries, the primary source of information in village society, the *chaukidars*, were "as a class . . . useless."[83] Thus as observed in an earlier study, petty *maliks* ("landholders") and substantial *raiyats*

[77] E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present* 50 (Feb. 1971), 135. Also, Hsieh, "Peasant Insurrection and the Marketing Hierarchy," 124–41.

[78] For instance, see *Basantpur Trial*, 54.

[79] *Ibid.*, 21.

[80] *Ibid.*, 23.

[81] *Ibid.*, 57.

[82] Forbes Report

[83] Manisty Report, I.

("cultivators") operating at the level of village society were the key to control and conflict in agrarian society. To refine the finding in light of this analysis of the Basantpur riot: the fundamental arena of organization and action was at the level of villages, specifically, the standard marketing community, and its influential men were not only petty *maliks* and substantial *raiyats*, but also men with commercial connections.[84]

CONCLUSION

This discussion has indicated that "communal" conflict is complex and does not merely reflect polarized identities. As the close-up analysis of the Basantpur riot of 1893 shows, the issue of the cow divided not only Hindus and Muslims, but also the former from the British. In fact, the events which led up to the attack on the Basantpur police station was prompted by the procession of Commissariat cattle on a major public road in the district.

The incidents in and around Basantpur followed in the wake of considerable propagandizing by the local *Gaurakshini Sabha*. Solidarity was fostered by the fundamental symbol which the sacred cow represents in Hinduism. Yet the message of cow protection, and the techniques used for its spread, not only encouraged a sense of group identity among Hindus but also a sense of separation from both the Muslims and the British. Thus in the process of self-definition, boundaries were also redrawn in relation to other groups. And as in the case of the Basantpur riot, the targets were not only the Muslims but the British. Indeed, the anti-British overtones were striking in the repertory of crowd behavior in and around Basantpur. Thus sacred symbol and sacred space separated both groups with longstanding experience of one another, Hindus and Muslims, as well as relative strangers, the Hindus and the British.

While the transit of cattle through the district provided the occasion for the disturbances, the organization and mobilization of the crowds in and around Basantpur was structured by the standard marketing system of Basantpur. And the faces at the head of the crowd were the influential men of this standard marketing community. Thus the stage on which sacred symbol and sacred space was dramatically enacted unfolded on the structure of the standard marketing community of Basantpur. This was also the fundamental level of control and conflict in local society.

[84] For further details on control and conflict in the agrarian society of Saran see my "The Agrarian Origins of Crime."