of Race Relations to the legislative basis of the Reserve system, he does not demonstrate in any detail how the academic writings of anthropologists influenced thinking within the Institute by people such as Alfred Hoernle. The last point is, of course, a matter of vital concern if one wishes to argue that anthropology 'as a discipline' was closely tied to the apparatus of government. But Rich mentions, in passing, only three major monographs of the 1930s (*Land, labour and Diet*, *Reaction to Conquest*, and *The Realm of a Rain Queen*) and is seemingly unaware of their diversity.

It is easy to offer a glib and dismissive analysis of anthropology and anthropologists in South Africa, both in the past and the present. We have no desire at all to see the past whitewashed, but we do not believe that there has as yet been a sufficiently sensitive analysis of the role of anthropology prior to 1950. Furthermore, while the recent trend (as evidenced in Rich's book) has been to inflate the political significance of 'liberal' anthropology in that period, there is also a strong tendency to dismiss the significance of more progressive academic anthropology in contemporary South Africa.

This is not to say that the latter has any great political import. It is precisely because the authorities know this, indeed, that neo-Marxist analysis in the social sciences generally is permitted to flourish. But in the present context of turmoil amongst Afrikaans anthropologists, the participants in the Conference of South African Anthropologists - Black and White, liberal and radical - do have a modest opportunity for practical action.

What the Conference needs at the very least to do is, we suggest, to shake off its detached and dispassionate image. The Conference must not be a forum which can be used for equivocation, where people who elect to remain members of a racist Association can hedge their bets and retain contact with a wider anthropological community. The Conference needs, in other words, to present those anthropologists who are currently uncertain with a clear alternative to the Afrikaans Association. To this end it needs to consider a more formal organization, with criteria of membership and rules of conduct which prohibit affiliation to any racially-exclusive professional body and strictly determine the scope of permissible contact with government officials and members of the Defence Force. The permanent absence of those who cannot accept such criteria will not be a loss.

If, on the other hand, its participants find that they cannot contemplate such steps then, in our opinion, the demise of the Conference of South African Anthropologists would not be a loss either.

Rich,P.B. (1984) *White Power and the Liberal Conscience: Racial Segregation and South African Liberalism 1921-1960*. Johannesburg, Ravan Press.

Anthropological Knowledge and Collective Violence

The riots in Delhi, November 1984

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Many social scientists have made the observation that human nature is, perhaps, encountered in the raw in the midst of a riot. As a discipline, however, anthropology has not generated a collective body of knowledge which could help us in formulating problems of anthropological ethics when engaged in the understanding of collective violence, nor has it reflected on problems of theory and method pertaining to societies caught in the savage brutalities of mass murder, arson, looting, and rape. The following observations were formulated while I was engaged in the task of rehabilitating riot-victims. The issues have not been thought through, and if one is drawing attention to them at this stage, it is only in order that one may turn to the professional collectivity for enlightenment and for the fighting of personal despair.

Let me briefly describe the context within which the riots took place. Following the assassination of the Indian Prime-Minister, Indira Gandhi, in Delhi on 31 October 1984, there was widespread violence against the Sikhs for three days. The assassins were from the Sikh community and it was initially assumed by many that the riots were an expression of the spontaneous anger of crowds against a dastardly act. Initially it was thought that the number of people killed in Delhi would not exceed a hundred. Whereas many people were completely bewildered by the violence for the first two days, it was still assumed that the police would take charge and law and order would be restored.

By 3 November, it became clear to civil-rights groups, university teachers and students, retired bureaucrats, journalists, and other concerned citizens, that they had to take the major responsibility for establishing relief camps, procuring food and medicines, and collecting information about the number of people dead or missing. The police was either partisan or passive. Even the army, which was called in on 3 November, and which did a commendable job in restoring confidence, was not expected to take any responsibility for the running of camps or bringing criminals to book. Although the administration and the police became much more co-operative later, the entire burden of collecting and collating information about the crimes, of which the evidence was disappearing everyday, as well as the organization of camps, fell entirely on the voluntary efforts of citizens.[1]

It is in this context that my colleagues and I decided to enquire into the pattern of riots by going into the affected localities rather than restricting ourselves to relief camps.[2] Other voluntary organizations and some journalists had been rendering help as well as collecting information earlier. The locality that seemed to be in

need of immediate help was Sultanpuri, the scene of one of the worst carnages in the city. We have already described elsewhere the sequence of events, the connivance of the police and criminal elements in perpetrating violence, and the conditions in which the lower caste Sikhs from Rajasthan became the targets of brutal violence by other members of lower castes.[3] In contrast, the upper castes and the affluent Sikhs escaped with loss of property and were mostly helped by their upper caste Hindu or Muslim neighbours. My purpose now is to draw attention to those kinds of problems which invite sustained research of an anthropological nature and are important for the profession as well as the wider society.

The first issue that we encountered on 8 November, when we visited the locality, related to our responsibility as social scientists to the urgent request of the victims that the truth about their suffering be recorded and made public.

In the locality as a whole, the number of people killed exceeded 200. The S.H.O. at the Police Station assured us that not more than twenty people had been killed. Clearly it was important to collect the names of the people killed if official figures were to be challenged. However, when we went into the locality we expected that providing for the physical needs of the victims would take priority over all other matters. The people were, indeed, hungry. But more than their need for food, we discovered, was the need to tell us all that had happened to them. In fact, as soon as they discovered that we were university teachers, they impatiently brushed aside all other questions and took us from house to house insisting that we immediately record the names of the dead, the sequence of events during those two days of violent outrage, and the names of the criminals and the police officials involved. One man, whose two sons had been killed, offered to raise fifty rupees later if we could have an account of their suffering published in a newspaper. We discovered thus that being subjected to brutal violence for two consecutive days had not been successful in stripping men of their cognitive needs, nor could it blunt their desperate need to have the truth recorded and communicated.

Our report on the Sultanpuri carnage was published in the *Indian Express* on 16 November. It recorded the events, our estimates of the number of people killed and the manner of their killings and also gave a list of all the names of police officials, criminals, and politicians who were seen in various roles during the carnage by the victims. Immediately, it raised a controversy about whether the publication of such a report was ethical during such a turbulent period. A senior professor of history of the Jawaharlal Nehru University stated during a seminar that he was shocked by the irresponsible behaviour of some academics who had published a blow-by-blow account of the violence. Others expressed the concern privately that such reports may fan passion and lead to vengeance. In a recent court- hearing, two judges of the Delhi High Court described the authors of the report as 'worse than wretched' and stated that such gory details did not add anything to that which was generally known.

To my mind, all this raises a general question: which standards of descriptions shall we evolve in recounting events of this nature? To the victims, the horror of the violence consisted in the details. They wanted their suffering to become known as if the reality of it could only be reclaimed after it had become part of a public discourse. On the other hand, the intellectual community wanted to stop at the process of labelling it as 'communal violence' or 'state violence'. I suspect that there was a need here to suppress detail, for that would bring us face to face with the necessity of explaining why men use certain styles of violence, a fact that we in Indian society have not been prepared to face since the days of the communal holocaust of 1947.

From the point of view of anthropological understanding, it seemed to me that we need to listen to the ethnographic voice, rather than dismiss it as either 'gory' or even 'trivial'. Let us take two examples. As the events of the riots were recounted in detail, it impressed upon me that the murder and looting had not been done in silence and that the speech of the perpetrators of violence had provided important signs to the victims who were in a continuous process of interpreting it. One man explained to me why he had run away, even as he was being beaten by sticks, leaving his wife behind, and how he had since used his wife as a messenger between the different relatives. 'As we came out of our house', he said, 'a crowd attacked us. My wife fell on me to protect me from the blows of the *lathis* (staves). Some men addressed her as *bahenji* (sister) and asked her courteously to move away. So, I thought, they are not going to harm her and I then ran. My interpretation was correct and she has, since, moved quite freely, collected rations, information, and even gone to the police station to report the death of my brother'. In another locality a woman was ravaged by guilt because she felt that she had read the signs wrongly and condemned her son to death. 'I should have taken my son out with me. I learnt only later that they were only killing men. I had hid my sons in a neighbour's house and locked it. They burnt that house'. Attention to detail is necessary if we are to understand the spatial picture of the body as an object of violence, the prevalence of black humour when collective death is treated as a macabre spectacle, the manner in which survivors internalize guilt and begin to blame themselves as responsible for the carnage; and finally, the intense need of survivors to make their experience part of collective knowledge. Perhaps the dismissal of detail by the intellectual community of historians, political scientists and legal scholars is a mechanism by which we hide the truth of our society from ourselves. Anthropological research should help us in understanding how the very constitution of knowledge in these disciplines performs a hiding rather than revealing function. The unconscious censorship which is so typical of folklore is not necessarily absent from scholarly discourse.

Most accounts of the conditions of fieldwork rest on the assumption of reasonable normality. If one is working among victims of a collective tragedy, one's movements are naturally determined by the sole criterion of the needs of the people. Procuring rations, arranging for medical help, filling forms and establishing liaison with police officers and administrators - these are the activities that define the trajectory of one's existence. Yet one feels that space, time, and relationships have become so compressed that what would take months to unravel in ordinary circumstances suddenly lies exposed. Since fieldwork depends so heavily upon the empathy that one is able to establish, we need to produce more accounts of fieldwork under such conditions and the manner in which the normal barriers between insiders and outsiders are suddenly overcome. Obviously, the rhythms of society have a good deal to do with what aspects of social life will be revealed to the researcher. Perhaps, along with describing the methods of fieldwork in which the researcher has complete control over his field, we should also draw attention to the opposite pole: when society seems to take control of the researcher, who simply has to lend himself or herself to become the

anonymous space on which the hitherto suppressed knowledge of society inscribes itself.

A related area in which we need to generate comparative description as well as to evolve analytical tools is in relation to the language of the victims. Police investigations as well as court-hearings depend a good deal upon eye-witness accounts and upon assumptions of logical consistency. As far as we can tell, the capacity to relate incidents in a connected manner can get impaired in survivors. If we had enough research on the nature of this impairment, anthropology could have provided expert knowledge on the relation between the event and its representation. For instance, we found that many accounts tended to place equal importance on a brutal event such as a murder and a trivial but contiguous event such as the theft of a particularly nice garment. In other cases the fear of an attack became a recurring theme, and people could hallucinate about voices of mobs that they claimed to have heard. In still other cases, there was a propensity to use theatrical expressions and a profusion of metaphors (e.g. rivers of blood were flowing), as the only means through which the inner horror could be given expression. None of these modes of representation and expressions meant that the people were not capable of providing witness. What it did mean was that standards of interpretation needed to be flexible enough to take into account the circumstances of the events and their recall.

Lastly, we would like to know how general is the tendency to infantilize victims. The assumption of relief-agencies, including well-meaning ones, is that victims are unable to take control of their lives.[4] As a young historian, Radha Kumar, noted, even the language at the disposal of relief-workers distances them from the victims. Everyone referred to those staying in relief-camps as inmates, thus making prison-wardens out of the relief- workers. The tendency of survivors of collective disasters to either complete stasis of exaggerated movement provided difficulties of comprehension to many. For instance, it was assumed that the constant running after rations, sewing-machines, work-kits and bicycles, by people after they had returned to their localities, was a sign of their inability or refusal to return to normal work. In contrast, I found that when we provided knitting-machines and a skilled tutor in one of the streets, the women abandoned their constant search for new sources of 'relief' and began to concentrate upon development of knitting-skills.

A discussion between some of the iron-smiths, and a relief agency that had done otherwise commendable work, highlighted this tension and also provided comic relief. The agency wanted to distribute work-kits to the iron-smiths whereas they thought that it would be better if they were provided with money. The point made by the iron-smiths was that they were themselves *lohars* and they saw no reason why they could not buy iron and forge their own tools. The relief agency was, perhaps, a little suspicious of their intentions. This was brought out into the open when one of the men said 'you are afraid, we will spend the money by getting drunk. Maybe one or two will; but ultimately you either have to trust us or leave us'. There was shrewd economic sense here for while the relief agency was engaged in discussions, forging of tools, distributions, at least thirty working-days were lost. The economic loss was greater than if some of them had, indeed, made a celebration of the money and blown it up in a drunken evening.

In the last few years research on disasters has grown and was ably summarized by D'Souza in the February 1985 issue of ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY.[5] However, in the case of collective destruction brought about by one set of human beings upon another, the issues become more complex than if people were facing disasters brought about by nature. The greatest difficulty of studying a situation such as this is that the anthropologist cannot remain uninvolved, for his or her own anxieties about death, evil, and suffering are constantly aroused. The temptation to either flee from the situation or become completely submerged in it, abdicating in both cases the responsibility to provide an intellectual understanding of it, are overwhelming. In such a situation, we found great intellectual support in the writings of Bruno Bettleheim on survival in a concentration camp[6], and Lifton on the survivors of Hiroshima[7], for their sensitivity to language and the narrative enterprise of human life. Perhaps the modern world calls for a far greater collaboration between anthropologists, linguists, and psychologists towards an understanding of human behaviour (including linguistic behaviour) under crises rather than normality, for unlike D'Souza, I feel that development will bring in its wake more rather than less of these crises.

1. Excellent documentation on the riots was produced in the form of reports by *Indian Express*, *The Statesman*, *Illustrated Weekly of India*, *Manushi*, *Economic and Political Weekly*, and *Lokayan*. The report produced jointly by the People's Union for Civil Liberties and People's Union for Democratic Liberties was the first comprehensive account of the riots and was followed by the reports of People's Commission, Citizens for Democracy, and Nagrik Ekta Manch.

2. These colleagues were Professors Ranendra Kumar Das, Manoranjan Mohanty and Ashis Nandy. Subsequently, consistent help has been provided by teachers and students of whom I would like to make special mention of Dr Mita Bose and Sanjiv Dutta Chowdhary.

3. See Das, Veena et al, 'Only widows and orphans left' in *Indian Express*, 16 November 1984 and 'A new kind of riot' in *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 23-29 December 1984.

4. I would like to acknowledge here the great support we received from the Indian Express Relief Fund. The enlightened attitude of the Steering Committee of this fund and their empathy with the suffering victims will be long remembered by all who had the privilege to be associated with them.

5. D'Souza, Frances. 'Anthropology and Disaster Relief', *Anthropology Today*, 1985,Vol.1, No.1.

6. Bettleheim, Bruno. *Informed Hearts*, New York, 1966.

7. Lifton, Robert J. *Death in Life: The Survivors of Hiroshima*, New York, 1976.