

# Communal Riots of Muzaffarnagar-Shamli, 2013: Institutionalised Riots System, Majoritarian Politics and Human Insecurity of the ‘Minority’ Community in the region.

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Submitted by: **Surbhi Khyati**

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## Introduction

Communal identities and their violent manifestations are an on-going socio-political problem in South Asia for over seven decades now. In South Asian lexicon, the word 'communal' delineates a very different analogy than the general meaning of the term as used in other parts of the world. Communalism, in this context, pertains to a condition of suspicion, fear and hostility between members of different religious communities (Pandey, 1990, p. 6). Communal violence or communal riot, similarly, means violent conflicts between these religious groups, "analogous to violent racial or ethnic conflicts, [which] involve collective and/or individual acts of violence – murder, looting, arson and the destruction of property." (Patel, 1995, p.370). Communal identity is religion-based identity, like Hindu or Muslim identity, invoked particularly against other religious identities. Communalism is thus invoked in binary, one against the other, in most of the circumstances, almost always as group identity based on homogenized religious markers. As Pandey suggests, "In academic investigations, more often than not, the term is applied to organized political movements based on the proclaimed interest of the religious community, usually in response to a real or imagined threat from another religious community (or communities)" (Pandey, 1990, p. 6). Communal politics is the manipulation or use of these group identities in direct political instigations and workings.

The politics of communalism and its resultant violence has been present in the annals of Indian history even before independence. Communal politics remained pivotal in the partition of British India into India and Pakistan and is blamed for the violence and bloodshed following the partition and migration of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims across the border on both sides in 1947. Communal violence has graduated from being sporadic incidences of violence into being an unceasing recurring feature of Indian politics. One of the watershed moments in Indian communal history after partition, which changed the political and social conversation about and around religious communities, was the demolition of Babri Mosque in Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh) in 1992. The most recent large-scale communal violence in India were the riots of Muzaffarnagar and Shamli in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, which left around 50,000 people internally displaced, the largest such displacement after partition.

### *Institutionalised Riot System*

In this paper, I will present the findings of research and interviews conducted in the violence-hit region of Muzaffarnagar and Shamli in 2015, to bring forth the interests of certain political groups and the role of 'Institutionalised Riots System' (IRS) (Brass, 2004) in communal violence witnessed by this region in 2013. In his paper 'Development of an Institutionalised Riot System in Meerut City, 1961 to 1982' (2004), Brass challenged the idea that riots are spontaneous occurrences, where the anger of a community against another leads to violence. Brass said - Far from being spontaneous occurrences, the production of such riots involves calculated and deliberate actions by key individuals, the conveying of messages, recruitment of participants, and other specific types of activities, especially provocative ones, that are part of a performative repertoire. Moreover, all these actions may require frequent rehearsals until the time is ripe, the context is felicitous, and there are no serious obstructions in carrying out the performance. (2004, p. 4839).

He also stressed even where there is existence of interreligious association or interpersonal relation amongst members of different communities, “elements of civic engagement cannot withstand the power of political movements and forces that seek to create intercommunal violence” (ibid.). In my research of Muzaffarnagar and Shamli riots of 2013, I found elements of calculated and deliberate actions before the riots, various provocative activities and rehearsals of riots before the actual riot of September 2013.

## The Politics of Categorisation and Human (In)Security of the ‘Minority’ Community

Historically, security debates have largely revolved around the understanding of State being the referent object of securitization from threat, where threat was perceived to be external. (Commission of Human Security [CHS], 2003, p. 2). However, with the end of Cold War and the rise of a presumably ‘unipolar’ world, most of the ‘threats’ now are within state’s own territorial boundary. Source of conflict and aggression are mostly internal rather than external. Hence, a need was felt to broaden the horizon of security paradigm and redefine the understanding of security. In this context, the Human Development Report of 1994 published by UNDP brought the idea of Human Security on the global stage as an alternative approaches to Security, claiming that it is time for humanity to restore its perspective and redesign its agenda (UNDP, 1994, p.1).

While the advocates of Human Security are unanimous on the idea of Human Being, and not the state, being “the only irreducible focus for discourse on security” (Macfarlane and Khong, as cited in Shani, 2007, p. 4), there is a lack of consensus about what the individuals should be securitized against. Proponents of what is termed the ‘narrow view’ conceive human security negatively, in terms of absence of threats to physical security of individuals, while those of ‘broad view’ advocate for freedom from fear and freedom from want (CHS, 2003, p. 4). The Narrow Approach to Human Security conceives the threat as ‘physical harm’ to individuals. Proponents of the ‘narrow’ concept of human security focus on violent threats to individuals or, as UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan puts it, ‘the protection of communities and individuals from internal violence’ (Human Security Centre, 2005). The broad definition of human security, on the other hand, is not necessarily exclusive of the narrow definition of ‘negative security’, but adds much more to it. The Final Report of the Commission on Human Security (CHS), headed by Amartya Sen and Sadako Ogata, published in 2003, takes the broad approach, defining Human Security in terms of protection of the ‘Vital Core’ of all human lives to enhance human freedom and fulfilment. As per this report, human security means

“protecting people from critical (severe) and pervasive (widespread) threats and situations. It means using processes that build on people’s strengths and aspirations. It means creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that together give people the building blocks of survival, livelihood and dignity” (CHS, 2003, p.4).

### *Post-Secular Human Security*

A third perspective that has emerged in the Human Security paradigm is that of post-secular approach, which argues against the western-liberal stand of viewing human beings as an individual unencumbered by community and culture. The problem with

this dominant western-liberal understanding, as Giorgio Shani argues, is that it fails to grant different faith-based groups the right to live in accordance with their beliefs – enjoying a life endowed with meaning and dignity from their world view and understanding – and forces them to assimilate to the hegemonic values of western secular modernity as enshrined in the modern nation-state system (2007, 2014a, 2014b). Unless this cultural difference of various faith-based groups is recognised and included in the discourse of human security, the ideals of human security, freedom from fear, freedom from want and especially freedom to live in dignity, will remain a distant dream.

This essay will argue that the continuum of religious-based violence in India incites human insecurities at all three levels of human security paradigm, that is, narrow approach, broad approach as well as post secular approach.

## **Muzaffarnagar and Shamli – A new case of IRS?**

There are three important characteristics of Muzaffarnagar, which makes it interesting as a case study. The first is the presence of Jats who are Hindus as well as Jats who are Muslims – commonly known as Mula-Jats in the region. Mula Jats occupy a significant position in social relationships here, mainly because of landownership.

The second interesting feature of Muzaffarnagar is the strong presence of farmers' politics here, till right before the riots. Muzaffarnagar is one of the highest producers of sugarcane in the country, because of which it has highest GDP in the state. The farmers of Muzaffarnagar, both Hindus and Muslims, were part of a very strong farmers' movement in 1990s and 2000s and even after the movement became less effective, the farmers of the region had a strong say in the policies of agriculture set by the state and the agro-industry sector.

The third point that makes Muzaffarnagar unique, even in the western Uttar Pradesh region, is the fact that this district had never witnessed a riot, in spite of large Muslim presence. While the first two characteristics mentioned above can be found in some other districts of western Uttar Pradesh, most of the districts like Meerut and Bulandshahr have faced violent communal tensions in the past, significantly during the 1992 Babri mosque demolition and the riots that followed it. Hence, IRS is arguably established in these districts. However, such a system was non-existent, as was communal violence, in Muzaffarnagar-Shamli.

All these three points will be discussed in greater details below, with an attempt to shed some more light on the socio-political as well as economic atmosphere of Muzaffarnagar.

### **Demography of Muzaffarnagar-Shamli**

Muzaffarnagar is a northwestern district of Uttar Pradesh, which shares borders with the neighbouring states of Haryana and National Capital Region of Delhi. Shamli was carved out of Muzaffarnagar in 2011. Since Shamli is still a newly formed district, and the last Census conducted in India was in the year 2011, most of the data of the region is still available under Muzaffarnagar district.

Saddled between two rivers Ganga and Yamuna, Muzaffarnagar-Shamli are primarily agriculture based region, with over 71 percent of the population living in rural agrarian

area. These are also two of the largest sugarcane-producing districts of the country, with highest GDP in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

The district has an area of 4008 square kilometers and has 27 towns and 1019 villages. According to Census of India, 2011, the twin districts of Muzaffarnagar-Shamli have a population of about 4 million people. Out of this, only 1.2 million live in urban areas, whereas around 3 million live in rural areas. Religion wise, 1.7 million people follow Islam in the district, while 2.8 million are Hindus. The 57.51% Hindu population of the district is dominated by lower caste Hindus (Jatavs and Chamars) and Jats (an agrarian community). Muslims constitute more than 40% of the population, which is much higher than their population percentage at an all-India level (13%) .

Statistics of Muzaffarnagar-Shamli as per Census 2011.

	In Numbers	In Percentage
<b>Total Population</b>	4,143,512	
<b>Population in Urban Areas</b>	1,191,312	28.75 %
<b>Population in Rural Areas</b>	2,952,200	71.25%
<b>Hindus</b>	2,832,914	57.51%
<b>Muslims</b>	1,711,453	41.30%

### Political Sketch –

There are four major political parties in Uttar Pradesh - the Indian National Congress (called Congress or INC hereafter); the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is the Hindu nationalist party of India; the Samajwadi Party (SP) which emerged as the champion of backward classes like Yadavs (a caste group with significant population in Uttar Pradesh) and Muslims; and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which emerged as the defender of the Scheduled Caste groups. While the first two are national parties, SP and BSP are regional parties with political significance in Uttar Pradesh (though BSP got the status of a national party technically as it has candidates in other states as well). Samajwadi Party rules the state now and the Chief Minister is Akhilesh Yadav. The SP government came in power in 2012 and was in power during the Muzaffarnagar riots. The next state legislative elections are due in 2017.

Politically, the entire region of Western Uttar Pradesh has a large presence of Muslims and Jats, two important communities with sufficient strength to change the political fortunes of parties. Muslims have significance presence in around 13 parliamentary constituencies whereas Jats, with 6 percent population in Western UP, can swing political fortunes in at least 10 constituencies (Pai, 2013a, 2013b, 2014). The region is dominated by OBC-Muslim population, on one hand, wooed by Samajwadi Party and the Dalit castes, on the other, targeted by Bahujan Samaj Party. The BJP won the constituency between 1991 and 1999, the period, which saw the rise of Hindutva across the country. Since 1999, however, BJP was unable to win this seat until the last elections of 2014. In the past, however, western Uttar Pradesh was the strong hold of another regional party called Lok Dal, whose leader Chaudhary Charan Singh was a very popular farmers' leader amongst both Jats and Muslims. The party divided later on and now, Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD), run by Charan Singh's son Ajit Singh and grandson Jayant Chaudhary, still has some base in the area. RLD still presents itself as a farmers' party and tries to woo both Muslims and Jats, who have traditionally been its voters.

### Social Makeup –

As is clear from the point mentioned above, in order to understand the social makeup of the region, it is very important to understand three factors –(1) Jats; (2) Khap Panchayat and (3) Farmers' politics of the region.

### **(1) Jats**

Jats are present in large numbers in western Uttar Pradesh and in Muzaffarnagar. They comprise nearly 40% of the population in Meerut, Muzaffarnagar, Saharanpur and Bijnor districts of western UP. Because of their numerical preponderance as well as their control over sizeable proportion of land, Jats dominate both the politics and economy of the region. The violence that ensued in 2013 was a result of direct clash between Jats and Muslims in some villages of Muzaffarnagar-Shamli.

Jats are a Hindu community mainly settled in the northern and north-western regions of India. The Jats populate Haryana, some parts of Punjab and Rajasthan as well as Western Uttar Pradesh. They are mostly agrarian community, with large landholdings in both Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. Jats of some region (mainly Rajasthan) are included in the list of Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in India, which means that they are given reservation in government employment. Jats of Uttar Pradesh are not given the benefit of reservation, which has proved to be the cause of major agitations and protests from this community. According to Suraj Bhan Bharadwaj (2012), the social position of Jats strengthened after 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Jats of Western Uttar Pradesh are divided into 92 *Gotras* or clans (2012, p. 62).

### **(2) Khap Panchayat**

In order to understand the social relationships between Jats and other communities in Muzaffarnagar, it is important to understand a social setup unique to Jat-dominated areas in India called Khap Panchayat. Khap Panchayat can be best understood a local, informal system of dispute resolution and social control, primarily dominant in regions of India with higher population of Jats. The main regions where Khap is prevalent today in the country includes the states of Haryana, some region of Punjab and Rajasthan and Western districts of Uttar Pradesh. While Khap Panchayat is mostly associated with Jats, other communities in Uttar Pradesh, like Gujjars and Rajputs are also a part of this social institution. While the institution itself is considered very old, it is still popular and has a lot of legitimacy amongst the communities participating in it in modern India. Scholars trace the origins of Khap to the tribal times, even as information available about Khaps is few and far between (Kumar, 2012). Khaps are known to have played a significant role during the Mughal period (16<sup>th</sup> century) in India (Bharadwaj, 2012; Sangwan, 2008; Kumar, 2012). As per Sangwan (2008), Khaps were an important source of dispute resolution in Northern India during this period. As the British East India Company took over the rights to collect land revenue from the Mughal emperor in 1803 in Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, the colonial rule also maintained the recognition of the Khap system (Kumar, 2012). Even after the independence of India in 1947, the hold of big landlords did not change much despite attempts of land reforms in northern states of Haryana, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh. Since the institution of Khap is intrinsically linked to land holdings in rural areas, even though Khaps became informal as formal State took over the administration, the legitimacy and popularity of Khap remained unaltered in the region (Kumar, 2012), to the extent that local administration normally does not interfere with the functionings of the Khap Panchayat and avoid confrontation with them (Sagwan, 2008).

In its basic structure, Khap comprises of a certain number of villages organised into a council. However, over the period of time, and depending on the socio-economic makeup of the region, Khaps today are of different types. While some are dominated and united together by a particular clan (*Gotra*), there are others organised on the basis of dominant castes and some others on the basis of both *gotra* and caste. There are also

some Khaps, which are multi-gotra and multi-caste. The basic parameter for the organisation, however, remains gotra, caste and land holdings in the village. Each Khap has other gotras and caste groups living in the village, but since they are fewer in number or hold far less land, they do not dominate the Khap.

Khap system believes in the concept of *Bhaichara* or brotherhood amongst the village members. The idea of *bhaichara* means that members of the same generation are classificatory siblings (brother-sister) and cannot intermarry. This idea of *bhaichara* starts from village level and continues up to the Khap level (Sangwan, 2008, p. 341). As Bharadwaj rightly points out, while the Jats are Hindus, their socio-cultural practices did not conform to the traditional rigid cultures of the Hindu caste system. Jats did not have restrictions and taboos about customs and traditions regarding marriages during their early phases.

That is why there is popular saying that *Jat ka kya Hindu aur Meo ka kya Musalman* [What's Hindu about the Jats or Muslim about the Meos]. This conveys that it is difficult to clearly equate the religion of Jats as Hindu or the religion of the Meo as Muslims. Jats did not rigidly observe Hindu traditions, nor did Meos cosely observe Muslim traditions. This saying thus captures the fluidilty of these modern day categories like Jats being Hindus and Meos being Muslims. One can safely say that the Jat community stood apart from the rigid boundaries of Brahmanical Hindu order . . . from the Mughal period to the present, Jat communities have developed in strikingly different ways from other groups. (2012, p. 64)

Similar to the Meos of Rajasthan are the community of Muslim Jats or Mula Jats in Muzaffarnagar and Shamli. Mula-Jats are landowning Muslims who belong to the community of Jats and hence are called Mula-Jats. They are considered to be converts from the Jat community into Islam at some point in history. There is significant cultural similarity between Jats and Mula-Jats. Because of the caste correspondence and landownership, Mula Jats and Jats shared a very close relationship with one another in the region. Mula-Jats have been known to be a part of the Khap Panchayat for a very long time. As Mange Khan of Kharad village in Muzaffarnagar (Personal Interview, September 10, 2015) points out: "Both Hindus and Muslims are a part of the Khap system... When Khap Panchayat were called in the past, Muslims were also called to participate in it." Farmer leader Rakesh Singh Tikait of Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) also explained this feature of Khap. "Khap is not of Jats alone; it's of every *jati* in the region...People from all community come (in Khap panchayats). Khap was a social system before the government. Panchayati system was taken from Khap Panchayat. Its 1200-1400 years old" (Personal Interview, October 11, 2015).

The example of Khap Panchayat and participation of Mula-Jats in this panchayat until recently shows that categories of Hindu and Muslim, pitted against each other in communal politics, are too oversimplified and homogeneous, and does not recognise pluralities of identities like those of Jats and Mula-Jats.

### (3) Farmers' Politics of the Region -

Muzaffarnagar and Shamli, and by extension, the entire western Uttar Pradesh has a very strong agrarian community. Apart from Jats and Mula-Jats, Gujjars, Tyagis and Rajputs have significant landholding in the area. Thus, the region has been a hot bed for farmers' politics for over four decades now. Jats being the largest landholding community, dominate farmers' politics. As Zoya Hasan (1994) points out, the decade of the 1980s witnessed the emergence of two interrelated changes in Uttar Pradesh, the first being agricultural transformations that increased productivity by many folds, and the secong being the transformation of farmers themselves, as a result of the first transformation, into a major political force. Both these development crystallized into a powerful farmers movement in the state during the 1980s, when the farmers succeeded

in demanding and negotiating for better prices for agricultural produce and influence other issues of trade between agricultural and industrial sector, thus impacting the economic policies concerning agriculture in Uttar Pradesh and at a national level (1994, p. 165).

Amongst the first farmers' political leader from the region was Chaudhary Charan Singh, who had been instrumental in lending a political voice to farmers of Uttar Pradesh, specifically of the western Uttar Pradesh from where he belonged. Singh was an influential leader of the Janata Dal government that challenged the hegemony of Congress Party under former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. He used his political influence to bring about a shift in the economic power from cities to rural areas and challenged the supremacy of Congress by constructing an alliance of middle and backward castes, and succeeded in marginalising the Congress in western Uttar Pradesh during the 1970s (Hasan, 1994, p. 168). As the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, the Minister of Finance under the Janata Dal government from 1977 to 1979 and as the Prime Minister of India from 1979 to 1980, Singh became the leading protagonists of farmers in Uttar Pradesh and in India. However, after his death in 1987, and in Lok Dal's failure to extract any major concession for farmers from the consecutive Congress governments, there was a political vacuum created regarding farmers' voice in politics.

Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), which was formed in 1978, rose to prominence in 1987 to fill this gap and become the champion of farmers in state as well as national politics for the next decade. Its leader, Chaudhary Mahendra Singh Tikait, was a charismatic farmer leader from Muzaffarnagar's Sisauli village, chose to remain out of the electoral politics and work as a pressure group for farmers by creating farmers' movement in the state that successfully influenced the economic and trade policies for farmers of Uttar Pradesh on a number of occasions in the next ten years. BKU captured national attention in the winter of 1988, when its supporters laid siege to Meerut, demanding higher sugarcane prices, loan waivers and higher rural investment with lowering of electricity and water rates in rural areas. In October 1988, massive farmers' rally captured Delhi. The agitation was militant in nature and gained widespread support, with farmers blocking roads, closing villages for administration and continuing protest for several days (Hasan, 1994, p. 166). Farmers' movement under BKU had struck a chord in rural Uttar Pradesh and soon became a movement with which all political parties wanted to associate themselves with. While the success of the campaign was in terms of concession for the farmers, its long-term impact was the emergence of Tikait as a powerful leader "with formidable ability to mobilise the peasantry of western Uttar Pradesh" (Hasan, 1994, p. 168). Even though the movement did not achieve its major demand of higher prices of sugarcane, Tikait succeeded in maintaining the momentum of the farmers' movement and in transforming BKU as a pressure group for farmers' interest.

The success of farmers' politics in the region is very significant in the history of communal relationships of Muzaffarnagar, to understand this homogenisation of categories that did not exist in past.

BKU was definitely dominated by Jats, and followed the structures of Khap Panchayat for its own meetings. But BKU also had a very strong support base amongst Muslims of the region. As Hasan points out, "The political significance and durability of the farmers' movement was dependent on its ability to forge a network of support by transcending the short-term interests ... so that a spectrum of rural producers believed they shared economic interests and political outlooks" (1994, p. 181). This cross-communal network was successfully forged by BKU by use of plural religious symbols, and taking care of the interests of Muslim farmers. BKU invested special efforts in promoting communal

harmony in Western Uttar Pradesh, and as a result, gained plenty of support from Muslims.

The Muslim farmers that I interviewed, including Mange Khan of village Kharad and Shaif Ali Siddiqui from village Bawadi (Personal Interview, September 9, 2015), claimed that they always participated in the BKU rallies. "During farmers' protests, BKU called Khaps and gave calls for protests, we used to participate in such Khaps. In 2011-12, we participated in BKU Khap that led to rail block and a huge farmers' protest," said Mange Khan (Personal Interview, September 10, 2015).

A significant example of this network was the BKU's campaign against the abduction and murder of a Muslim girl, Naiyma, in Muzaffarnagar district in 1989. Rakesh Tikait, in his interview, pointed to the incident as an example of Hindu-Muslim unity in the region.

About the Naiyma case, Hasan writes:

This incident snowballed into a major agitation as Tikait marched with thousands of farmers to the banks of the Ganga Canal, and demanded that the government recover Naiyma. Following the recovery of Naiyma's body, hundreds of thousands of farmers gathered near the canal to protest against her murder. As the *Times of India* observed: The mere act of thousands of Hindus squatting on the banks of a canal at Bhopa to seek redressal of a Muslim grievance is remarkable in itself. While this does not necessarily mean that communal prejudices are being consciously combated, it does powerfully demonstrate that there is a common code of social morality that guides rural society – a reality that urban politicians are unable to grasp (*Times of India*, 9 August 1988). (Hasan, 1994, p. 182).

*Times of India* made a very important point about the common code of social morality in rural society, where the community awareness of being Jat and Muslim was overshadowed by the awareness of belonging to a farmers' community. This awareness of belonging to a farmers' community with common economic and social interests, however, has diminished over the years and now, the identity is no longer of the farmer, but of the categories engrained in the Constitution, those of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim'.

For instance, when the farmers of Muzaffarnagar were together under BKU politics, negotiating for better sugarcane prices, the identity 'we' constituted of all the farmers, Hindus and Muslims, and the sugar mill owners constituted the 'they'. This affected the policy-making for agriculture for several years to come, as farmers became members of the committee in Uttar Pradesh that decided the sugarcane price. Now, however, this identity of farmer is lost as the identity of homogenised 'Muslim' and 'Hindu' community has taken over. Mange Khan, the farmer who participated in rail blocks in 2011-12 under BKU, said about the situation during the riots –

All Mula Jats have land in these villages. Some Hindu Jats have more farmland than us but most don't. But our numerical strength is less in the village. The total vote in our village is 7400, out of which Muslims have a vote of 250 and they (Hindus) are the rest. So what could we have done during the violence? If we had stayed, our situation would have been like Lisad. That is why we left the village. (Personal Interview, September 10, 2015).

Lisad is a village in Shamli, where maximum number of deaths amongst Muslim community was reported during the riots. As will be elaborated later, none but one Muslim family has returned to that village two years after the riots.

This category of 'we' and 'they' is significantly different from the 'we' and 'they' of farmers' movement or of protest against Naiyma's abduction. This is not to say that the community of Hindu and Muslim did not exist early, but a political category of 'Hindu'

and 'Muslim' might not have existed, which now exists. These homogenised categories include any and all 'Muslims' - from landowner Mula-Jats to lower castes like washermen and landlabourers. And a direct result of these categorisation and realisation of community identity is that, whereas in a democracy, the economic interests of farmers should have been the cohesive force for common deliberation – and it was for a significantly long period – the community identities make such cohesion, which is still in favour of both the Hindu and the Muslim farmers – more difficult (and even impossible in a riot-torn area like Muzaffarnagar).

### The 2013 Riots

In spite of such socio-cultural and political bonds between the two communities of Hindus and Muslims, the region of Muzaffarnagar and Shamli, for the first time in its history, witnessed large-scale communal violence in 2013, which displaced around 50,000 people just after the riots.

While many of the interviewees confirmed that tension between Hindus and Muslims and incidents of harassment of Muslims had been going on for a year before the riots, the actual incident that led to the riots was that of alleged eve-teasing of a Jat girl by a Muslim man named Shahnawaz. Shahnawaz was allegedly killed on August 27, 2013, in his village Kawaal – a Muslim majority village in Muzaffarnagar – by two Jat men, Sachin Mallik and Gaurav Mallik (of the nearby Mallikpur village), who were the brother and cousin of the girl allegedly teased. The two men, in turn, were attacked by the mob in Kawaal village as a reaction to Shahnawaz's death, and were killed in Kawaal as well.

As per the report of the National Commission for Minorities (NCM report, September 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013), Shahnawaz's father denied the allegations of teasing and reported that there was a scuffle between the Mallik brothers and Shahnawaz regarding a minor motorcycle accident that escalated into a fight leading to the three murders. The next day, says the report, people returning after the cremation of the Jat men, set fire to a hutment and a hut in a brick kiln, and damaged 27 houses in village Kawaal. As tension grew, a Muslim gathering took place in Muzaffarnagar town area, which, as per the report, was to appeal for calm on August 28. But the tension did not halt. After the condolence meeting of the Mallik brothers in a nearby village called Nangla Mandaur on August 31, a car with Muslims was attacked and the people in car were beaten as the car was burnt. Some more incidents of attack on Muslims were reported from Muzaffarnagar as well. As the tension continued, a panchayat was called in the village Lisad on September 5, where the Mahapanchayat of September 5 was announced (NCM report, September 19, 2013).

Rakesh Tikait, the farmers' leader of BKU, said in the interview (Personal Interview, October 11, 2015) –

When the panchayat was called, tension was high. I gave a call for assembly and said on August 28<sup>th</sup> that on August 31<sup>st</sup>, we will all assemble and will pay homage to Sachin and Gaurav (*shradhanjali sabha*). I did not expect that there would be so much anger amongst the public. When we assessed that a huge crowd may turn up for the condolence meeting, and there was a lot of anger and reaction amongst the people, I cancelled it.. People said I was wrong in cancelling the meeting. In spite of canceling the meeting, some people still assembled and said that there will be a meeting on September 7. There was neither any leader nor any plan for the meeting on September 7.

On September 7, a *mahapanchayat* (grand assembly) was called in Nangla Mandaur, where more than 40,000 men (mostly Jats) gathered. As per the NCM report, participants en route to the *mahapanchayat* were assaulted in the Muslim majority

village of Bassi Kalan, and tension rose further. At the mahapanchayat, inflammatory speeches were given and a Muslim bus driver was beaten to death (NCM report Sept. 9, 2013). Jats returning from the *mahapanchayat* were waylaid by a Muslim crowd at a local canal bridge and four other places. Six deaths were reported in these incidents, that included 2 Muslims. The tension led to a curfew being imposed in Muzaffarnagar. It's important to note here that the version of what happened during the *mahapanchayat* differs amongst Muslims and Jats I interviewed, with each claiming the other started the violence and was hostile for the other. On the same day, a journalist was killed in Muzaffarnagar during the violence and the state government called in the Indian Army for controlling the situation. However, violence spread in villages with several cases of arson and murder reported from villages of Kutba, Kutbi, Lank, Lisad, Baawadi, Phugana, Mohammadpur Rai Singh, Kakra, Kharad, Mohammadpur Modern and Atali.

Meanwhile, the district magistrate (DM) and superintendent of police (SP) were changed by the state government thrice in the wake of the riots. Soon after the incidents of August 27, the District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police of Muzaffarnagar were transferred. The next team was also transferred within days, says the NCM report. Tikait accuses the government and district administration for the disruption and violence that started from the mahapanchayat and continued for the next three days, spreading in villages of Muzaffarnagar and Shamli. He claims -

It was a mahapanchayat. It was a reaction from the public. It went wherever anyone called. It was a crowd. There was no leader or no aim of this crowd. People were ready to follow anyone who would lead. There were some 500-600,000 people whereas there were only 7-8 men from the administration to control the crowd. Administration and government had a role in orchestrating the riots. (Personal Interview, October 11, 2015).

As per the NCM reports (19 September 2013, 3 October 2013, 26 December 2013, 28 January 2014, 28 June, 2014), 65 people were murdered during the riots and around 51,000 people fled their homes during the riots. After the riots, the state government set up relief camps for riot victims. Later on, as the riot victims refused to return to their respective villages, the state government granted a relocation package of Rs 500,000 per family. Some facts of the violence is as follows:

Total relief camps – 58 (41 in Muzaffarnagar and 17 in Shamli)

Total number of people living in these camps – 51,000

Six months later, number of people left in camps – 2500

Total number of people killed in Muzaffarnagar – 29 (9 Hindus and 20 Muslims)

Total murders during the riots – 65

Total cases registered – 566

Lisad in Shamli was the worst affected village. It has a population of 19000, including 15,500 Jat Hindus, 2200 Muslims and 1500 Scheduled Caste. As per the report of NCM dated October 3, 112 of total 250 buildings belonging to Muslims in Lisad were burnt down during the riots.

Kutuba-Kutubi village of Muzaffarnagar were the second worst riot-hit village. There were no Jat deaths reported from this twin village, but 8 Muslims were killed in Kutba and 48 houses of Muslims were burnt down in Kutuba-Kutubi (NCM report, September 19).

The first point I will make here is that till the people of Muzaffarnagar identified as farmers, both the communities voted in similar patterns to make sure that leaders who care about farmers were sent as representative to legislative assembly and parliament. However, in the events preceding the riots, the identities of the people underwent

certain changes. While there can be several reasons contributing to these identity changes, one reason that was highlighted by several interviewees was the so-called benefit that Muslim community is getting from the government because they are 'minority,' which became a bone of contention between Jats/Hindus and Muslims in the region.

Again, it is pertinent here to note that such arguments that the government is only working for 'minorities' are very misplaced because of two reasons – one, there is ample evidence to suggest that 'minorities,' especially Muslims, are socio-economically backward and deserve social welfare by the government. However, such schemes being termed as being for 'minorities' creates divisive sentiments. And two, to be fair to any government scheme, when people focus on schemes only brought for minorities, they stop taking into account all the other benefits and schemes granted to all the other sections of the society. But a more important point to be made here is that such sentiments are open to or even created by politicians for electoral benefits by instigating communal rage through what Paul Brass (2004) calls Institutionalised Riot System (discussed later).

The Samajwadi Party government in Uttar Pradesh came up with a series of social welfare schemes for minorities in the state between 2012-13. One such scheme was providing funding for daughters of the minority community for 'education or marriage'; another government policy was for constructing boundary walls in graveyards for Muslims. At the same time, the government also came up with several other flagship schemes like distributing free laptops to meritorious class X and class XII students, which was for all community, including 20% for minorities and 21% for Scheduled Caste and Tribe. Similarly, the government also came up with unemployment allowance for all unemployed youth between the age of 25 and 40, which was also for everyone irrespective of community membership. The reaction of these schemes, however, was that Samajwadi Party government was seen favouring only Muslims in the state. For example, Om Prakash Mallik, a former forest officer and farmer from village Phugana in Shamli said in the interview that Muslims in the region had become "arrogant" since the Samajwadi Party government came to power. "They were more arrogant and stubborn in the last six-seven months, especially since Samajwadi Party government," said Mallik. "Like now, everything is for their benefit. Policies are made in the name of minorities. Even schemes for the poor have around 20-30% benefit allotted for minorities. Minority means Muslims over here. Reports by Muslims are lodged very easily in the police station while we have to face a lot of delay" (Personal Interview, October 12, 2015).

Mallik pointed out that Jats in the region were already arrogant and stubborn. But since the SP government came into power, Muslims "started feeling that they are superior to the Hindus as this is their government" and this became a reason for tension between the two communities, that led to clashes between them in his village as well. Mallik said

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One reason for the tension between the community is the role that BJP played. BJP has always sided with Hindus. BJP said this very openly that in this period (of SP government), only one community is benefitting from the government. This was also supported by non BJP people, that this government is benefitting only for Muslims, and doing nothing for Hindus. (If Hindus are the victims, then they will take some one's support right. It came from BJP). For instance in schools, 100 % of the scholarship for minorities was distributed, some scholarship for Yadavs was also distributed, but the rest of the scholarship never came. In all recruitment procedures for government, Mulayam Singh (President of Samajwadi party) filled his men (Yadavs and Muslims) and no one else got recruited. (ibid.)

Similar sentiments were echoed by several other Jat members I interviewed. Kapil Deo Agarwal, who was a member of BJP and later went on to be voted as member of the state legislative assembly from Muzaffarnagar, said-

[A]fter coming to power, Mulayam Singh Yadav has played the role of dividing the society on religious lines. They spent 1000 crore rupees for boundary wall of (Muslim) cemetery. First, there is no necessity for a boundary wall in a cemetery. Secondly, if they want it, they should do it through village head, block heads because there is money at block and village head level. But the government, just to provide protection and to appease Islamic people, does this kind of thing in a systematic manner, and in religious places, only boundaries will be erected for Muslim cemetery and not for Hindu crematorium, then there will be outrage in public. The matter is not the boundary, but favouring one community. Third, when money came for daughters, it was only for minority daughters. Irrespective of however poor a Hindu girl may be, the money only came for minority girls, whether it be for daughters or scholarship for students. Even the laptops that were distributed were distributed to Muslim girls and when there was outrage about it, some were distributed amongst others as well. So just to appease some sections, Akhilesh government has done the job of dividing the society. (Personal Interview, October 11, 2015).

It is important to point out here that these sentiments about the prejudiced behaviour of the government were witnessed very strongly amongst the Jats alone. In fact, the narratives provided in the interviews were very similar to one another and raised doubt about whether they were independent thoughts of the interviewees or were part of propaganda by a particular political party. Hasan (1994) called it demonisation of the state, a method used by BJP and other Hindu nationalist groups in 1992 communal riots as well.

This divisiveness drastically changed the voting trends in the region. Mange Khan explains that earlier, Hindus and Muslims voted together in the region. "This area has voted for BJP, SP, BSP, etc. and even Rashtriya Lok Dal... [we even voted for BJP, in spite of being a Muslim] We knew that BJP was an anti-Muslim party. But we had the confidence that our friend is winning so he will help us. Now that confidence is not there," he said (Personal Interview, September 10, 2015), claiming that now, all Mula-Jats will vote for a Muslim candidate.

Ghulam Mohammad Jaula, from village Jaula, who was a senior member of BKU but separated from the organisation after the riots, said that they all voted for SP in 2014 elections.

At least one trend has changed in the area. In this area, Jats vote for their caste member (candidate) whichever party they might be from. This is how Muslims are also thinking now. Muslims, after this riot, will not vote for Jats, no matter which political party they are from, even if it is SP. Right now, there are talks of my son getting a ticket for next elections from RLD, but the Muslims are not ready for this. They are suggesting it is better my son takes a ticket from BSP rather than Lok Dal. The pain and betrayal is quite fresh right now, Muslims will not vote for any Jat this time. (Personal Interview, September 10, 2015).

Hence, these interviews prove that vote bank politics has increased and is divided on religious lines in the region. Muslims are not ready to trust any representative from Jat community and want to send their own representatives to the parliament. Not granted any safeguard in the Constitution to counter Hindu majoritarianism, Muslims will thus have to vote en bloc to claim a share of political power.

## Manufactured Violence – Fractured Community

At several instances, the interviewees referred to the “recruitment of participants”, “provocative activities” and of other activities in villages by certain Hindu nationalist elements directly or indirectly related to the BJP, in the days preceding the riots.

For instance, Sajeev Kumar, village head of village Dulehra in Muzaffarnagar, next to the twin-village of Kutba-Kutbi that witnessed extensive violence, says that the general trend in villages is that the office of a political party is opened a few months before the elections for the electoral campaign in the region. However, while the national elections were due in 2014, the BJP party office in Muzaffarnagar rural areas was already open and running in early 2013 (Personal Interview, October 12, 2015). A similar narrative was provided by Ghulam Mohammad Jaula (Personal Interview, September 10, 2015). Further, Mohammad Islam of Lisad village, who was the only Muslim to return to the village after the riots, says that for the first time in his memory, the Shiv Sena, an ultranationalist Hindu group with its base in the state of Maharashtra, was seen campaigning and distributing swords in his village a few months before the riots. Islam said-

Some 6-7 months before the riots, Shiv Sena had a ceremony here. They were using inflammatory speech against Muslims on the loudspeaker. This was the first time that we heard such a gathering or such hatred on loudspeaker against us. We complained to our Village Pradhan [village head], and he agreed that what happened was not correct. They distributed swords as well. (Personal Interview, October 13, 2015).

Mohammad Khalid, who was a fruit vendor in Lisad but had to move to the nearby town of Kandhla after his house and shop were burnt down during the riots, also confirmed the account of Shiv Sena distributing swords in the village (Personal Interview, September 8, 2015).

Mange Khan of Kharad accused the Hindu nationalist groups of distributing alcohol and money in the area to win over and recruit the Jat youths for the riots. “Alcohol was distributed just before the riots. Alcohols were distributed in our village as well. BJP also distributed money,” said Khan (Personal Interview, September 10, 2015). He maintained that only the rogue elements of the village, thus recruited, were involved in the violence and most of the elderly Jat men were not. Narrating similar incidences of activities by Shiv Sena, Ghulam Mohammad Jaula said – “The youths of Jat have gone in favour of BJP. Amit Shah (a BJP leader) has distributed money amongst them. Jat elders are very worried by their own sons and the violence because it caused a lot of wastage” (Personal Interview, September 10, 2015).

Although these are hearsay narratives and cannot be fully confirmed or denied, the presence of such narratives makes it clear that even if there was no institutionalised riot system in Muzaffarnagar before, because there were no riots before 2013, there is a strong probability that Hindu nationalist forces attempted to establish such a system in the region just before the riots.

Brass says that provocative activities are planned before the riots, and such activities require frequent rehearsals until the time is ripe for the main event (2004, p. 4839). Several such provocative incidents were reported in the region, which consequently increased the tension between the two communities, for over six months before the actual riot. One such major incident was the protest led by BJP Member of Parliament Hukum Singh in Shamli. The incident happened in June 2013 when Singh was a member of Uttar Pradesh legislative assembly. The media, by and large, reported the incident as that of a protest by BJP leaders against the gangrape of a. As per the report by *The Indian*

*Express* dated June 18, 2013, a girl was gang raped while travelling from Uttarakhand to Haryana. The BJP leaders were protesting against the incident when SP Abdul Hameed ordered lathi-charge (use of baton) on them. The protest took place when curfew, "prohibiting the assembly of people, had been imposed in Shamli city since afternoon after "minor clashes" with a "communal tinge" were reported." Different interviewees gave different accounts of this protest. For instance, Vikrant Burman, a local BSP activist in Shamli district said that the BJP tried to blow the issue of Dalit community into a Hindu-Muslim incident (Personal Interview, September 9, 2015). Mange Khan, on the other hand, called it an incident where BJP tried to stoke communal tension. "BJP leaders Sangeet Som and Hukum Singh tried to stoke violence in Shamli just before 2013 riots. SP Abdul Hameed stopped it. There was lathi-charge, and BJP leaders got hurt. After that, on 5th September, there was the *maha panchayat* . . . BJP candidates and people were visible in Muzaffarnagar for a year or so," said Khan (Personal Interview, September 10, 2015).

A completely different account is presented by Rajesh Mallik, son of Baba Harkishan of Lisad village. Baba Harkishan is the head of Gathwala Khap in the region and was accused of violence in Lisad and other areas during the riot. A very old man, he is respected amongst the Jats of Gathwala Khap and was an active voice during the riots, along with his son. They are also accused in cases of violence registered in Lisad village. Mallik, and another member of Jat community from Lisad, Surpal were present during the interview. Surpal said –

SP Abdul Hameed was posted in our district. Our younger brothers are Valmikis (it's a lower caste) as defined by Hindu hierarchy. Hameed made a public statement about his religion and said that first, he is a Muslim and then he is a Superintendent of Police. He made comments about his community. When calamity hit our younger brothers (Valmikis), they were put in jail, and their FIRs were also not lodged, all Hindus, including Rajputs and other castes, neither through BJP nor Shiv Sena, but by their free will, came together to fight for their brothers, the Valmikis. Muslims had attacked Valmikis and had beaten them up and set their homes on fire. (Personal Interview, October 13, 2015).

Rajendra Mallik supported this account by claiming that the Muslims set the houses on fire in front of Hameed.

As is clear from the above elaboration, while the accounts of the incidents differ, it is clear how incidents of communal tension were taking place much before the actual riot of September 2013, confirming with Brass's theory of IRS.

## Effects of the Riots on Hindus and Muslims

### Relationship Between Hindus and Muslims before Riots

Several of the interviewees, when asked about relationships between Hindus and Muslims before the riots, claimed that the relations were very good. Mange Khan, for instance, said that they used to do joint farming of sugarcane, where one part of the field was cultivated by a Muslim farmer and another by a Hindu farmer (Personal Interview, September 10, 2015). Zahid Hussain, who lives in Shamli, also confirmed that the two communities shared very close relationship. "We remember that as children, we used to go see Ram Leela (a play of Ramayana commonly staged during the festival of Dashehra). Festivals were celebrated together," said Hussain. He further said - I have moved to town but my parents still live in the village. Jats in my village kept my parents in their house for protection (during violence), took good care of them, gave them food, washed their clothes. The situation was such that we wanted to bring our

parents to the town to live with us, but the Jat women of our village wouldn't let my parents leave the village, because they called them the charm of the village. They would say that we will take care of your parents, cook and wash for them, but won't let them leave. (Personal Interview, September 9, 2015).

Shaif Ali Siddiqui of Bawadi, Shamli, says that he shared close relationship with several Hindus of his village. "There were Hindu friends in village, who could not eat meat at home as meat was not cooked in their homes. So, they would come to my house to eat meat," said Siddiqui. He remembered that during the Babri mosque demolition in 1992, there was fear of attack on Muslims and he wanted to guard the mosque in his village, lest someone attacks and demolishes it. "Two elder Jat men of my village came and sent us home, saying that they will guard the mosque for us all night. And they did. Such was our relationship," said Siddiqui. (Personal Interview, September 9, 2015).

Hindus and Muslims used to participate in common panchayats as well. Abdul Sattar, who is now a resident of MLA Camp in Kairana, Shamli, a colony established for people who were living in relief camps after fleeing from their village, said -

We used to participate in panchayats. Whoever needed to call a panchayat, they could call, be it Muslim or Hindu. I never saw such a level of violence and tension between the two communities. Even for fights between Jats, Muslims were invited. If, say, a matter was not resolved by the panchayat, then a larger panchayat of 36 biradari (community) was called to resolve the matter, for Muslims and for other communities. (Personal Interview, September 9, 2015).

Hindus and Muslims shared a financial relationship in villages as well. In villages where Hindu Jats were landowners, they used to give loan to Muslims for all social purposes.

Surpal, from Lisad village, said -

There are two types of employment in these areas. The first is sugarcane agriculture. The second is of brick kiln. Labourers work in both kilns and our farms. Our agriculture depends on labourers (who are mostly Muslims). When they (Muslims) needed money, we gave them loan. Then we used to keep deducting some amount from their payment for farm labour. This is how the system worked. . . . We are dependent on each other. They depended on us for money. We were the people responsible for running the social system in the villages, so we were responsible for their welfare as well. That is why we lent them money whenever needed. (Personal Interview, October 13, 2015).

Hussain said -

I have seen in my childhood that if there was drought in a particular year, the Hindus used to do some Bhandaras and Yagyas (worshipping for rain), and my father and other Muslims would donate money and contribute in the Yagya for rain. Even Jats would send money for Muslims in Mosque. (Personal Interview, September 9, 2015).

### Change in Relationship after the Riots

Even after almost two years of the riots, several Muslim families who left the villages are not ready to return to their village. With the relocation grants from the government (Rs 500,000 per family), they have built houses in nearest town area, or near their camps. As a result, several villages like Lisad and Baawadi in Shamli and Kutba-Kutbi in Muzaffarnagar, have become all-Hindu villages, with no Muslim families living in them any more. Even the Muslims who returned to their village, are ready to sell of their land and property in these villages and settle somewhere else.

For instance, Mohammad Islam from Lisad, who is the only Muslim to return to his village after the riots, said -

I returned because my father was keen on returning. He did not like live anywhere else. He talks to people here. He would not go anywhere even before the riots, even for family visits. He just likes being here. [But] If riots happen again, we have made arrangements, like I have constructed a house in Kairana. I cannot live here all alone forever. There

were around 300 houses of Muslims here and now I am the only one left here. We will live here as long as possible, and then I might sell my property and leave. I have 12-13 bighas of land here, and some other properties, which I could not sell immediately after the riots. My elder brother settled near Delhi now.

Mula Jats in Kharad, who have significant property in their village, are also not feeling safe to live in their villages for long. Dr. Sharif of Kharad said that Muslims in their region are afraid after the violence of 2013 and want to live together, in ghetoes, separated from the Hindus. He said -

We think that there will be an automatic partition between Hindus and Muslims because of the fear and these events. Bawadi, Lisad, Lankh, Phugana have no Muslims left in the villages. And BJP will gain from this partition. Because of these riots, Muslims have gone back at least 20 years in development in this region. No one will benefit from the partition apart from BJP but what can we do? Should we die? Some say we should have left for Pakistan when there was partition. (Personal Interview, September 10, 2015). Tension amongst Hindus and Muslims is perceivable in these areas. Ghettoisation of Muslim homes is further aggravating the process of alienation amongst Muslims. For instance, the people interviewed in Kharad claim that they no longer talk to Hindus in their village, or participate in the village panchayats.

Ghulam Mohammad Jaula gave several accounts of hostility amongst the two communities even after the riots ended-

We are hearing a lot of cases like eve teasing of Muslim women, teasing of a Mullah by pulling his beard on a bus. So while the situation is calm, relations have not improved (between Hindus and Muslims). Recently, in a RLD rally addressed by Chaudhary Ajit Singh, there was very low turn out of Muslims in the rally. . . . The elders were never interested in this kind of tension and violence. It's the youth who are more involved in the riots. The cases that were filed were due to the pressure of the court, in which innocent people were sent to jail from both their (Hindu) side as well as our side. Many who were at fault escaped from both sides. . . . Both communities have to live in the same country, its better they live in peace. Because this violence is harming everyone. Farmers have faced worse loss. . . . Muslims have a fear today that they (the rioters) are not even considering Muslims as Indians. Muslims need support right now..." (Personal Interview, September 10, 2015).

Hindus also do not trust the Muslims any more. Surpal and Rajendra Singh of Lisad now fear that the Muslims are not going to return their loans. "In our village, the total loan on Muslims which is not paid yet is around 3.5 crore rupees. Similar situation is there in every other village where Muslims have left. That money will not return now. If they lived in village, they could have returned. But now it does not seem so," said Singh, adding that a total of 102 FIR and some 400 people are named in Lisad alone and that most of these FIRs were false and the Muslims were using these FIRs to blackmail the Hindus and are ready to settle these cases if the Hindus give money as settlement (Personal Interview, October 13, 2015).

### Political Outcomes

As is clearly evident from the case study of Muzaffarnagar and Shamli, relationships between Hindus and Muslims changed over the period of time. Identities changed from active farmers to religious community member like Hindus and Muslims and the political exploitation of such division led to the riots, with one particular political party, the BJP, benefitting extensively from such polarisation. As Ghulam Mohammad Jaula pointed out quite correctly in his interview,

To break the western Uttar Pradesh, BJP really needed to take Jats under its wing because Jats influence the votes of Jhimars, Chamars, Rajputs etc of the village. They

created the atmosphere of tension for the last one year, where Muslims were targeted. This was all in reaction to Mulayam Singh Yadav's government policies for Muslims. The BJP started saying that this government is only for Muslims to instigate division. (Personal Interview, September 10, 2015).

After the riots, in the parliamentary elections of 2014, BJP won a clear majority of 281 seats in the parliament. In Uttar Pradesh, the party won 71 of the 80 parliamentary seats, giving its best performance in the state ever.

Hence, to answer the final subsidiary research question - 'Does the interaction between the 'secular' and 'post-secular' feature of the Constitution result in politicised identity formation leading to communal clash?' – the case study of Muzaffarnagar and Shamli present a clear example of how policies for minority communities by the government becomes a factor in transforming 'secular' identity like that of farmers into religious political identity of Hindu and Muslim. It needs to be clarified here that there are various factors that lead to communalism in India, and such post-secular features of the Indian Constitution become one of those many factors that lead to communal clash.

## Conclusion

The politics of reducing people to pre-assigned categories or markers, like their religious affiliation or their gender, aggravates the threats to human security. Such categories are easily transcended into becoming modern identities. From the case study presented here, it can be deduced that, in spite of sharing a healthy social and cultural space and being interdependent on each other for economic well being, the residents of Muzaffarnagar-Shamli district were reduced to the political category of Hindus and Muslims in 2013 riots. The victims of these riots were predominantly Muslims, targeted for their religious affiliation in spite of the fact that they had nothing to do with the clash between the youths in Kawal village of Muzaffarnagar. Muslims is the category that is considered 'minority' in political language of India, owing to their numerical strength being less as compared to the 'Hindus' in India. The category of 'Muslim' thus ceases to denote only religious affiliations and ends up becoming a marker for identity based on lowest common denomination of a religion. It also ends up becoming a political marker and a source of human insecurity for the people following a particular religion. The right wing BJP – which bases its politics on Hindu majoritarianism – won the 2014 parliamentary elections with flying colours immediately after the riots of 2013, which proves that polarisation of such politicised identities has leverage in the race for political power. In an ideal model of majoritarian democracy, 'majority', in principle, is expected to be random and pro tem, ready to change at the next vote. However, the majority associated with the enumeration of the ethnoreligious categories, have a permanency and in the modern political democracy, such 'majority' formations can prove hazardous not only for the society but also for the very survival of ideal political democracy. Such categorisation of 'majority' and 'minority' becomes a severe threat to human security of the group or category that is marginalised, as in case of Muslims in India, who lose their lives, source of livelihood as well as face constant challenge to their right to dignity.

The case of Muslims in Muzaffarnagar and Shamli is not very different from the condition of Muslims across India, who have been subjected to violence across the country on various counts of communal violence. Plethora of evidence is available on socio-economic backwardness of Muslims in India, and their exposure to periodic

violence not only threatens their right to live in “freedom from fear” but also aggravates the challenges to their “freedom from want”. Harassment in social spaces because of prevalent prejudices ensuing from incidents where the crime of one Muslim is extended to become the onus of all who belong to the religion also challenges their right to live with dignity.

Thus, the politics of categories, the identity formation it ensues and the politicisation of such identities can be a cause of grave human insecurities, challenging the paradigm of Human Security at all three levels – the freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity.

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