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978-0-521-86513-5 - Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism: The Violence in Gujarat

Ornit Shani

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Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism

Belligerent Hindu nationalism, accompanied by recurring communal violence between Hindus and Muslims, has become a compelling force in Indian politics over the last two decades of the twentieth century. Ornit Shani's book, which examines the rise of communalism, asks why distinct groups of Hindus, deeply divided by caste, mobilised on the basis of unitary Hindu nationalism? And why was the Hindu nationalist rhetoric about the threat from the essentially impoverished Muslim minority so persuasive to the Hindu majority? Shani uses evidence from communal violence in Ahmedabad, the largest and most prosperous city in Gujarat, long considered the 'laboratory' of Hindu nationalism, as the basis for her investigations. She argues that the growth of communalism did not lie in Hindu–Muslim antagonisms alone. It was rather an expression of intensifying tensions among Hindus, nurtured by changes in the caste regime and associated state policies. The causes for the resulting uncertainties among Hindus were frequently displaced onto Muslims, thus enabling caste tensions to develop and deepen communal rivalries. The book offers a significant and persuasive challenge to previous scholarship on the rise of communalism, which will be welcomed by students and readers with a professional interest in the region.

Ornit Shani is Lecturer in Asian Studies at Haifa University.

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To my father and the memory of my mother

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Glossary

<i>adivasis</i>	(the ‘original inhabitants’) used to describe the scheduled tribes
<i>akhada</i>	gymnasium
<i>avarna</i>	a generic term for lower-caste Hindus
<i>badli</i>	temporary worker
<i>banakhata</i>	an agreement prior to the sale of land wherein some money is given to the owner but the property is not transferred
<i>bandh</i>	shutting down of businesses, shops and offices
<i>caste panchayat</i>	caste council – decides over matters that arise within the caste
<i>chawl</i>	a form of neighbourhood: a row of rooms with either no sanitary conveniences or with community facilities built around the textile mills for the labour; tenement
<i>dada</i>	used to describe a neighbourhood tough
<i>dalit</i>	(oppressed) former untouchables
<i>galla</i>	small shop
<i>goonda</i>	thug
<i>hapta</i>	bribery, an instalment
<i>harijans</i>	(children of God) term coined by Gandhi for the former untouchables
<i>Hindu rashtra</i>	Hindu nation
<i>Hindutva</i>	Hinduness, the quality of being a Hindu
<i>kakada</i>	lit rags
<i>karsevaks</i>	religious volunteers
<i>kuccha housing</i>	dwellings made of provisional building materials
<i>lakh</i>	100,000
<i>lari</i>	four-wheel cart
<i>lathi</i>	stick, truncheon
<i>Lok Sabha</i>	Indian Parliament
<i>majdoor</i>	labourer

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<i>moholla</i>	neighbourhood; usually in reference to a Muslim neighbourhood
<i>otla</i>	platform in front of the main entrance to a house
<i>paan</i>	a type of snack served in a betel leaf
<i>panchayati raj</i>	official local self-government institutions
<i>pol (pole)</i>	traditional neighbourhoods in the walled city of Ahmedabad – narrow streets lined with buildings
<i>pucca housing</i>	cement housing
<i>savarna</i>	a generic term for upper-caste Hindus (also referred to as twice-born or Caste Hindus)
<i>Sangh Parivar</i>	the family (network) of Hindu organisations
<i>taluka</i>	administrative unit taluka below level of the district
<i>varna order</i>	caste hierarchy among Hindus

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Abbreviations

ABVP	Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (student wing of the BJP)
AGERAC	All-Gujarat Educational Reform Action Committee
AIBCF	All-India Backward Class Federation
AJGAR	Ahir (Yadav), Jat Gujar and Rajput alliance
AMC	Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation
AUDA	Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority
BIDA	Bombay Industrial Dispute Act
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BKD	Bharatiya Kranti Dal Party
BSP	Bahujan Samaj Party
COI	<i>Commission of Inquiry</i>
CPI (ML)	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)
GHB	Gujarat Housing Board
GPCC	Gujarat Pradesh Congress Committee
GW	Government Worker
JD	Janata Dal
KHAM	Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis, Muslims
KMLP	Kisan Mazdoor Lok Paksha Party
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
NSA	National Security Act
OBCs	Other Backward Classes/Castes
PDS	Public Distribution System
PSI	Police Sub-Inspector
PW	Public Witness
RJP	Rashtriya Janata Party
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SC	Scheduled Caste (Dalits, Harijans)
SEBC	Socially and Educationally Backward Classes/Castes
SETU	Centre for Social Knowledge and Action, Ahmedabad
SEWA	Self-Employed Women's Association

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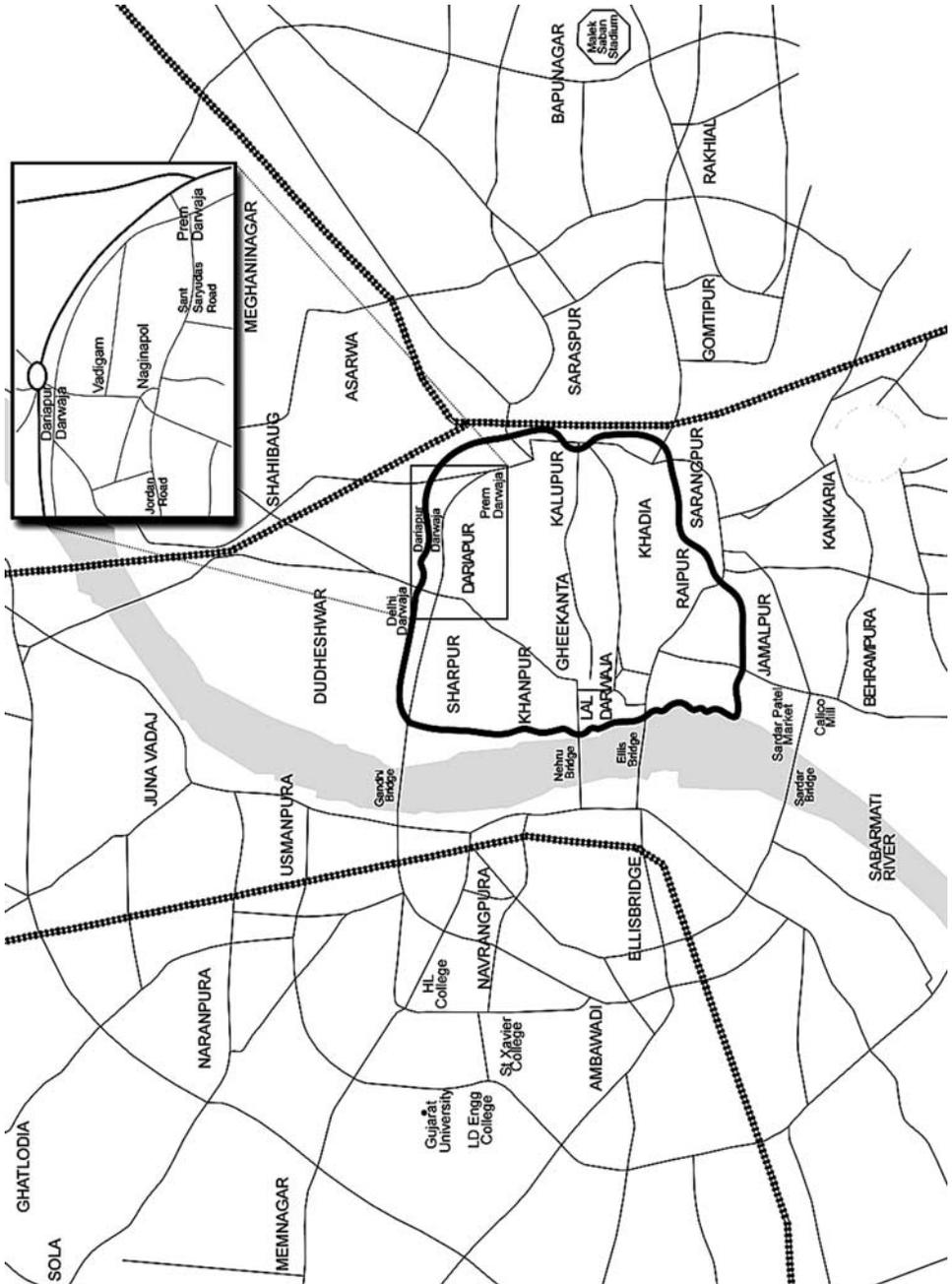
SRP	State Reserve Police
ST	Scheduled Tribe
TLA	Textile Labour Association (Majoor Mahajan)
<i>TOI</i>	<i>Times of India</i>
ULCRA	Urban Land (Ceiling and Regulation) Act, 1976
UP	Uttar Pradesh
VHP	Vishva Hindu Parishad

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Map of Ahmedabad