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## Review: 'Hindu Muslim Riots'

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*Hindu-Muslim Riots*. By RICHARD D. LAMBERT. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2013. xii, 285 pp. Rs. 875 (cloth).

Communal violence in India, especially between Hindus and Muslims, have for long been the center of scholarly research. From the 1990s, historians, and anthropologists have innovatively analyzed colonial and Partition related riots to understand why and how they happened and the contextual development of communal identities. Political scientists have put forth thought-provoking paradigms of urban communal rioting in the wake of the Hindu Muslim riots of 1992 and 2002. All, it would seem, owe an intellectual debt to sociologist Richard Lambert's much-cited dissertation of 1951, now published six decades later. Given that the publication is mostly an unchanged version of the dissertation (including the title), and the fact that Lambert was an eyewitness, of sorts, to the Partition riots of 1946-7, makes *Hindu Muslim Riots* a primary source.

Lambert's main aim in the book is to provide us with historical patterns of violence, both within urban and rural contexts. He devotes five of the seven total chapters analyzing riots between 1851 to 1950 to make the argument that there was a shift in cause and nature of communal violence which in the nineteenth century occurred due to 'direct religious stimulation (p. 115), but from the 1920s became progressively political and economic coinciding with an increase in the frequency of rioting. Lambert identifies several reasons for this shift: decline in governmental control inversely related to the increase of communal tensions which themselves were influenced by increasing connections between the religious and

the political community, better organization of the more violent and lower elements of society into communal groups in identity formation from religious to the political community.

Lambert begins with the Muslim Parsi riot of 1851 in Bombay, as an example of an urban and religious inspired riot, which exhibited pre-existing patterns of communal violence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He quickly turns to Hindu Muslim riots across India between 1900 and 1936. In his analysis of the Mapilah Rebellion of 1921, Bombay Riots 1921, Kohat Riots 1924, Calcutta, 1926, Bombay 1929, Cawnpore 1931, Lambert argues that the ups and downs of the communal relations coincided with degree of unity between the Indian Congress and various Muslim organizations. Thus, he contends, "Although the Khilafat Movement was the first to adopt Gandhi's 'non-violent non-cooperation' movement, a great number of Muslims either did not accept the non-violence doctrine by thinking of it only as an essentially a 'Hindu' approach, or use it only as a temporary expedient." (p. 86). Lambert focuses in his fourth chapter on approximately 116 small-scale riots that occurred between 1936 and 1938, crucial years for the newly elected provincial governments, and generates patterns of rioting based on whether the cause was religious or non-religious. He defines religious as 'those aspects of the activity of communities which centre around theology, worship or ritual,' while non-religious as 'those which do not directly touch the religious sentiment, but somehow threaten or arouse the community as a group.' (p. 114). Ultimately, Lambert concludes that such riots continued to be caused by points of friction in the religious realm but then merged with contextual economic and political grievances.

By far the most interesting analyses lies within the fifth chapter that focuses on two riots in the city of Dacca in 1930 and 1941. Here, Lambert skillfully outlines the emerging links between urban and rural areas during riots and the actions of *goondas* (which he translates as professional criminals) in fomenting communal riots. Thus, rather than spontaneous outbursts, “The spread of the riot from Dacca to the rural countryside was rapid and was characterized by organized attacks upon wealthy and or prominent Hindus in the villages and towns and was promoted by emissaries dispatched from the cities. “(p. 160). The dénouement of communal tensions were the Partition riots, beginning in 1946 eastern India, Calcutta, Noakhali and Bihar and followed by Punjab in 1947. Lambert finds that the pattern of violence was ‘almost exclusively political in character’ (179) due to the shifts in political power.

Readers of this book will find many, now familiar, concepts related to standard analyses of Hindu Muslim riots in India. However, what the readers will also find is quaint descriptions [Mapilahs were a ‘fanatical Muslim sect (p. 71) or the Parsis were a’ peculiarly non-belligerent community (p. 58)], minimal footnotes and citations, typographical errors, dated terms of analysis and no effort to engage with the rich scholarship that emerged after the submission of the author’s thesis. The last would have greatly helped in assessing the directions of intellectual and methodological trajectory since Lambert wrote this thesis. Treated as primary source and all the necessary caveats that come with such sources, *Hindu-Muslim Riots* will be a useful primer to beginning scholars of communal violence and those interested in the politics of identity formation.

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