

## A Slap from the Hindu Nation

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*A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved—*

Michel Foucault<sup>1</sup>

When Narendra Modi, the chief minister of the state of Gujarat comprehensively won the elections in December 2002, despite his involvement in orchestrating the massacre of Muslims in Gujarat earlier that year, he reportedly described his victory as 'a slap in the face for pseudo-secularists'.<sup>2</sup> The chat rooms of *Hindunet.org* were jammed with excited discussion about the meaning of Modi's victory. Lata Jagtiani, a regular columnist, and one of the many zealous middle-class supporters of the Sangh Parivar, celebrated the triumph of the BJP, and asked what made the 'BJP such a winner, time after time, in Gujarat?' In an article titled 'Gujarat: The Second Slap from the Nation', her answer was that there were lessons to be learnt from the events in Godhra.

Somebody out there has been slapped twice. The first slap was the violent retaliation that spread in other parts of Gujarat. The second, more powerful slap was delivered through non-violent means: through the ballot. Both ballot and bullet have had their say. If there were any anti-national forces out there that planned to destabilize India through sudden and sporadic terrorist attacks on civilians, they must be doing a serious re-think now. The Godhra attack not only set fire to the 59 passengers, mostly women and children, it also set fire to any successful strategies of violence. Violence has been

answered by violence and also, later, much later, by non-violence . . .

It is really so simple. Violence is counter-productive and every violent act will only trigger off greater unity and cohesiveness among the threatened population. When there is a great threat there is an even greater determination to stand up to the threat.

This second slap will result in an increased polarization of the Indian population everywhere. The more violent the terrorists get the greater the hardening of stands from the civilian population. A Gujarati friend aptly described this as *apni kabar khud khod rahen hain* [they are digging their own grave]. It's time for the violent ones to lay down their arms and come to the negotiating table, because that is the last way left . . .<sup>3</sup>

The Hindu nation's violence against Muslims—the 'someone out there'—is, Jagtiani suggests, a double lesson. The first lesson is that Hindus *will* answer violence with violence. This is the lesson of retaliation. But that is not enough. The violence, Jagtiani notes, is then followed by the non-violent embrace of the past violence through the ballot box. We may think of this as the lesson of vindication. Yet unlike the vision of democracy conjured by the ballot box, the barely hidden threat that lurks behind it is to be noted: 'the violent ones' (Muslims, again not mentioned by name because they do not need to be—they are the nation's Other) are digging their own graves (they are clearly Muslims since Hindus do not bury their dead, and the Urdu word *kabar* is explicitly used). It is Muslims who have been slapped twice. The first slap, the slap of retaliation, is physical. The second, the slap of vindication, is symbolic. In my use of the word symbolic, I do not mean to be read as saying it is 'merely' so.<sup>4</sup> The symbolic is rarely 'merely' so, and electoral victories have profound consequences for people's lives. I simply want to note here that the massacres and the electoral victories were both considered in the same way, even though in the second use of the word 'slap' literal physical violence was not implied. Muslims, the article suggests, must be slapped both physically/materially and metaphorically/politically. The imagery of a slap returns with astounding and chilling regularity in recent

Indian discussions of Muslims in India, and of what Muslims are doing to the national body of India. In this essay I ask why this should be. Whence does the slap derive such symbolic power that it can come to represent the relationship between the Hindu and Muslim communities?

I begin with four examples of the use of the word 'slap' to index the relationship between Hindu and Muslim communities (or India and Pakistan).<sup>5</sup> A weblog on *Sulekha.com* gleefully reports 'A Tight Slap to Pakistan by Bush' referring to a statement made by the US President praising Indian and other democracies in which Pakistan was not mentioned.<sup>6</sup> Here the writer and his over 500 respondents share in the joy that the US, Pakistan's powerful ally, has publicly shown that it does not consider Pakistan a democracy. By doing so, the US has embarrassed and humiliated Pakistan.

The word 'slap' is used to imply a weak and effeminate leadership which allows its borders to be penetrated. Thus also Vishnu Hari Dalmia of the VHP in the following quote:

REPORTER: What do you think of the reports saying there was a Bangladesh troop build-up on the other side of the border?

DALMIA: Of course, I am not surprised. When signals are being sent that anybody can enter India, slap its citizens in the face and spill its soldiers' blood, hostile external elements are naturally encouraged.<sup>7</sup>

The word 'slap' is loaded with gendered meanings of subservience, weakness, and effeminacy. The leadership of the nation is indicted for its failures of masculinity in allowing the nation under its protection to be slapped or slappable. Indeed, as Paola Bachhetta has argued, one of the planks of the Hindu Right has been its anxiety around queerness indicated by weakness and effeminacy.<sup>8</sup> In the context of the hypermasculinity assigned to Muslim men, this weakness is all the more problematic. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the ideological 'father' of the Hindu Right, historically associated the Congress party with the sort of effeminacy that would appease Muslims and allow such a penetration to take place.<sup>9</sup>

Even Hindus who are sympathetic to Muslims in India have adopted the metaphor of slaps. This from a chat room discussion on

'Muslims are the problem in India':

If u slap ur friend then the next moment u will get a slap that is the thing now happening. first we slapped them now they are slapping us. just take that slapping hand from the face to the heart. they will also give their hand to ur heart.<sup>10</sup>

Here however, the writer argues that it was the Hindus who first turned away from their 'friends'—the Indian Muslims. It was in retaliation for the hurt that Indian Muslims were ready to slap Hindus. It is the responsibility of Hindus to show friendship and this would be followed by a similar gesture by Muslims. Indeed, the metaphor of the slap is so powerfully resonant that the inability to slap is interpreted as a sign of inequality. Thus, Altaf Hussain Qadri writes:

Maulana Hifzur Rahman (1901-1962), a leader of Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind, once said that he would consider India a secular country only when it became possible for a Muslim to slap a Hindu in the street without it triggering a communal riot in the city.<sup>11</sup>

Here Rahman refers to a personal conflict—expressed through the medium of the slap—which should remain at the level of a personal confrontation between two equal individuals and not be construed in communal terms. That a Hindu can slap a Muslim with impunity and yet a Muslim cannot do the same reveals the inequality between the two communities.

There are several questions that arise as we think through the significance of the repeated references to slaps in these discussions — questions that have both to do with its usage in quotidian Indian life as well as its rhetorical impact. In what follows, I first reflect on the symbolic significance of the slap in contemporary Indian social and political life, and second, consider slaps and other forms of routinized daily violence that form part of the everyday lived practices in India, before returning to the case of Gujarat 2002, with which this paper began. In the bulk of this brief essay, then, I move the conversation away from the large scale episodic violence which has preoccupied scholars, but yet seek to retain a connection between everyday acts of violence and violence on a larger scale on the one hand, and between

physical and metaphorical violence on the other.<sup>12</sup> If, as Arthur Kleinman and others suggest, we must see violence as crucial to cultural processes, this applies not to just to grotesque large-scale acts of violence but to everyday acts of violence as well.<sup>13</sup>

There are two major ways of thinking about large scale violence, such as that which occurred in Gujarat. The first sees these episodic acts as eruptions, a breach of the normal, extraordinary in its excess.<sup>14</sup> Of this group, some scholars find mass violence almost untheorizable, as if there were no language with which to describe or analyse such events,<sup>15</sup> while others try to theorize it within the scope of categories such as collective violence or riots, or even as following the pattern of religious festivals.<sup>16</sup> The second sees all violence as part of the same continuum, and argues that both large- and small-scale violence may be attributed to the same underlying tensions and conflicts.<sup>17</sup>

It is the path between these two positions that I find most promising—one that understands routine violence as linked, but in complex ways, to non-routinized or episodic violence. With Kleinman I argue that '[v]iolence is what lends to culture its authoritativeness', and further, that the violence of everyday life must be understood 'as multiple, as normative (and normal)' (238). In this essay I attempt to understand some of the multiple meanings of a normative and routinized violence undertaken by individuals, not collectives (though the individuals who commit and those who are compelled to receive the act of violence are always seen as members and/or representatives of communities) and then to trace the discursive fields within which they may operate. I want to suggest that acts of violence circulate in both material and discursive realms, and thus seemingly small-scale and indeed individual acts of violence may serve as powerful discursive devices through which large-scale violence may be understood. Specifically I suggest that the slap, with its attendant connotations elaborated below serves as a powerful device through which the disciplining of populations can be understood.

#### THE SLAP

We may think of violence as a technique of governance, with a culturally specific repertoire open to extension and innovation. This technique

then, must include not just its extreme forms such as mutilation and torture but its banal forms—such as a slap—as well. In the contemporary Indian context, this repertoire includes a variety of individual and collective forms such as slapping, kicking, stripping women naked, and burning. Forms of large-scale collective violence, then, may be borrowed from multiple sources, but also build from an already known and practised repertoire.<sup>18</sup> It is within this context that I consider the slap, a particular technique of governance whose power is disguised by its mundaneness and banality.

The slap—*thappad* (Hindi) or *chor* (Bengali)—is a ubiquitous form of daily violence used by Indian parents on children, teachers on students, policemen on perpetrators of a certain class, upper caste on dalits, and husbands on wives. The slap has two features which distinguish it from other techniques of violence.

The slap comes with its own rules about who can slap whom and when. One might say, in fact, that the slap is embedded in a political field where actors are positioned very differently vis-a-vis their ability to deliver or receive a slap. For example, the trajectory of the routine slap is down a hierarchy (teacher slaps student), while the trajectory of a non-routine slap would be in the reverse order (student slaps teacher, or Muslim slaps Hindu), which violates or subverts an accepted hierarchy. A normal slap reinforces or reasserts inequality.

The slap differs from a punch or a kick. It is aimed usually at the face, and though it may be painful, the object of the slap is not pain per se, but *humiliation*. It is this aspect of the slap which gives it its symbolic and metaphorical power. It is also this aspect that lends itself to notions of emasculation and effeminacy.<sup>19</sup> To allow oneself to be slapped is to be put in a vulnerable, feminine and even penetrable position. Hence when Vishnu Hari Dalmia, Pravin Togadia and Narendra Modi use the language of a slap they intend to refer to the citizens of a country, or a group being humiliated, and thus placed in a powerless and feminine position.

Given these two elements of the slap, what work can we say the slap performs? Put simply, the slap creates good subjects by marking particular subjects as bad.<sup>20</sup> It is an act of subject formation through discipline. The subjects being formed here are dual. In other words,

by slapping someone who is not, distinctively, oneself, the deliverer of the slap creates his or her own self as different and superior to the person being slapped. The slap is thus a simultaneous recognition of inequality and the creator. It is, it may be argued, a distinctively South Asian technique of subjectification.

Through being slapped, a person or a group which has transgressed, or exceeded its bounds, is humiliated, abjected, and put back into his or her body. Such transgressions can be committed by individuals such as a particular woman, a student, a Dalit, or by an entire community. But how does it work? And whence does it derive its strength? In Althusserian terms, we could consider a slap an interpellative 'hail' not just by the state but by any authority, where we can think of a hail as a unilateral act, as Judith Butler puts it: 'as the power and force of law to compel fear at the same time that it offers recognition at an expense.'<sup>21</sup> While Althusser famously refers to a speech act—when a police officer calls out, 'Hey, you there!' the person being hailed is recognized as a suspect because s/he has been hailed as such by the state—the slap can just as easily fall within the realm of the interpellative hail. At the moment of being hailed, Althusser maintains, the individual recognizes his or herself and in that moment becomes a subject. While there is a temporal sequence in this example, Althusser also makes clear that 'in reality these things happen without succession . . . Individuals are always already subjects.'<sup>22</sup> Yet, if we are willing to put aside Althusser's 'always-already' formulation, he leads us directly to the question of the process by which subjects actually do get constituted. Thus, we can see that at the moment of a slap, the slapped one becomes a transgressor and the deliverer of the slap becomes the arbiter (the law). Indeed the slap recruits and then transforms the individual into a transgressive subject. A transgressor who has been slapped is thus reminded of his or her transgression, his or her appropriate position, and those around him are also reminded of the possible costs of transgression. The transgressor, once slapped, becomes simultaneously subjected to a higher law and a subject of it. The lesson of the slap is carried in the memory of the body.

Who gets to be the object of the slap? In other words, given that bodies exist in unequal fields of power, whose bodies are at risk of

being marked by the slap? Veena Das asks, '[d]o individual members of society carry the marks of pain as the price of belonging to a society?' in the context of the industrial disaster in Bhopal in 1984. 'Pain and suffering' she continues,

are not simply individual experiences which arise out of the contingency of life and threaten to disrupt a known world. They may also be experiences which are actively created and distributed by the social order itself. Located in individual bodies, they yet bear the stamp of the authority of society upon the docile bodies of its members.<sup>23</sup>

While these reflections take Das into a consideration of orientation to suffering, I proceed here by aggregating individual bodies into groups and exploring the implications of their exposure to slaps and other everyday forms of violence, and the effects of slaps in procuring docile bodies. Like a speech act or a hail, the slap confers different subject statuses to both the giver and the recipient. They serve the dual purpose of marking the social world and constituting it.

The slap does not however 'compel fear' but humiliation. In other words, it is through producing humiliation (thus it is precisely not carried out in secret but in public) that the slap achieves its goal of subjection. And it is through humiliation that the slap fulfils its disciplinary task of constituting the social order.<sup>24</sup> In the next section I consider four social relationships in which slaps are given, relationships which are central in many ways to the formation of Indian subjectivity and sensibility. In each case, a particular group is 'at risk' for the particular kind of social suffering that a slap imparts, while another is empowered to cause this suffering.

*The inter-generational slap (parents and teachers):* In the traditional relationship between student and teacher in India there is a long history of belief that students cannot or will not learn without being slapped by their teachers. Patanjali's—the 2nd century B.C. commentary on Panini's grammar—not only suggests that a student should be delivered a *chapeti* (a blow with five fingers of the hand spread out) but also that students cannot learn without the threat of a *chapeti*.<sup>25</sup> Since it is not the most painful punishment, the purpose of the slap here is

clearly to discipline. However, as we know, school teachers routinely use slaps and other forms of punishment precisely to humiliate and discipline students (the process is actually referred to in schools as 'disciplining students').

The Calcutta *Telegraph* carried a story in 2004 about a fifteen-year old student who was punished by her teacher, who made her 'perform 150 squats [while holding her ears] in the scorching sun on Friday afternoon as punishment for talking in the class' while her classmates were asked to keep count.<sup>26</sup> The student finally fainted, and when the report of this reached her parents, they informed the local police which resulted in the teacher's arrest. The newspaper article uses the word 'humiliate' at least three times. No one is left in doubt about the teacher's intent. And it appears that it was precisely her refusal to act as a good subject (she was talking in class and did not show remorse when her teacher scolded her) that led him to administer the punishment. Here then, it is the humiliation rather than the pain that is intended to discipline.<sup>27</sup> The suffering that is to produce the docile body is not so much the painful physical exercise in the hot sun, but rather the humiliation of it.

*The gendered slap:* That the slap is read in profoundly gendered ways, should come as no surprise, since within the gender hierarchy, in many societies, it is the husband who is enabled to slap his wife. The literature on domestic violence reveals that there is a considerable range of grievances for which men feel entitled to slap their wives. A study on judicial attitudes to women in India found that 48% of judges agreed that it was justifiable for a man to slap his wife on certain occasions,<sup>28</sup> while 40% of respondents in a 2000 INCLIN study of women in four Indian states report having been slapped by their husbands.<sup>29</sup> Recent studies indicate that men who slap their wives are often those who are unable for one reason or another to attain in other ways a culturally sanctioned or hegemonic masculinity.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Uta Klein found that in the first Gulf War in which Israeli men did not see combat, their levels of domestic violence shot up.<sup>31</sup> While the understanding of the authors of these studies is usually that men hit women in order to express their masculinity, I suggest that they do so in order to constitute it in a social order that seems a little shaky.

While I have been reading the literature on domestic violence in India for over two decades now, it seems to me that there is indeed a shift from beating a wife simply because one believes one has a right to do so—say because she forgets to put enough salt in the food—and beating her because that is the only way you can reassert your authority over her at a moment when she does not seem willing to accept it. In a recent study an agricultural labourer from Tamil Nadu explains:

Because she comes to work alongside me, and comes back with me, there won't be much respect. She will not bow to my wishes. So one has to beat, to make her tow the line.<sup>32</sup>

In New Delhi, India, a brilliant doctor tries to commit suicide after her husband slaps her for contradicting him in front of his friends.<sup>33</sup>

In these cases, the slap fulfils an order creating and maintaining function. It puts the female transgressor who might have acted as if she was more than a wife or equal in some way to her husband literally back in her body. It compels humiliation and creates the 'wife' as docile subject.

But women are not slapped only by their husbands. Because women are seen to represent the honour of their communities and more specifically the honour of the men in their communities, they may be slapped as punishment for the transgression of their communities as in Gujarat, or in countless cases of upper-caste violence inflicted upon Dalit women, or indeed threatened with a slap to prevent them from speaking out in public.<sup>34</sup>

Yet women too slap men. What is the meaning of such a slap? It would be Pollyanna-ish of me to suggest that when a woman slaps a man, hierarchies are reversed once and for all, and new hierarchies or equalities created (though, writing her new column for the BBC, Bollywood's Preity Zinta boasts the 'one tight slap' theory of dealing with men who harass women on the street!). Depending, of course, upon the context within which the slap has been administered, a woman's slap may remind a man to perform his manly duty, or humiliate him publicly on the street by identifying him as a harasser. I can only note here that the reversed gender slap promises the possibility of change, and a brief window in the construction of an alternative gendered order, however ephemeral.

*The cross class/caste slap:* Two years ago, I sat in a car being driven by a 'driver' in Calcutta, as we wended our way through the city's intense stop and go traffic. After one of the stops, the driver of my car started to move before the rather new looking Ford in front of it, and thus rear-ended the car. Such accidents happen often in Calcutta, and since the speed was barely five miles an hour, I did not at that moment think it would come to anything. I was fairly sure that the little Maruti I was in would be dented, though the Ford would be unscathed. However, the Ford was brand new, perhaps an important status symbol for the young man who was driving it. He leapt out of his car and came towards us, swearing at the driver, and then reached in and slapped the driver across his face. Not to be outdone, I leaped out of the car, faced him and challenged him to slap me instead. The young man swaggered and muttered and then left. He could not slap me, of course, since I was a woman of the same class, but he had not hesitated for a second to slap the uniformed driver.

In several cases documented in the press, young Dalit men have been punished by upper caste panchayats by being slapped in public. In one particular case, two men were made to slap each other with slippers for publicizing a case of caste injustice.<sup>35</sup> In these cases, the slaps are administered to adult men in public, in an understood gesture of denigration and humiliation. The use of the slipper is meant to add to the insult.

In our ongoing study of servants and cultures of servitude in Calcutta, Seemin Qayum and I have found that older employers often point to how things have changed by telling us that it simply wasn't done to slap a servant any more, and yet, in the past, servants did not mind being slapped as long as it was accompanied by love. One woman told us about a song her uncle used to sing as he slapped his male servant. Another employer told us that his mother did slap servants but also looked after them when they were sick and so they loved her as they would their own mother. In this last case, the acceptability of being slapped by one's parent validates the action. And in as much as lower castes or classes are considered by upper castes and classes to be children, developmentally behind the upper castes, they are at constant risk of being slapped.<sup>36</sup>

One domestic worker's clear-headed words make evident that even if this is how servants once were, it is not the same any more. 'You don't stay when your husband slaps you, why should you stay when your employer slaps you? They slap you because they have more money.' While this refusal to be slapped and assertion of rights is increasingly common, we have sufficient evidence of domestic servants, especially if they are children or young women being, at least occasionally, slapped.<sup>37</sup>

The inter-generational slap, the gendered slap and the cross class/caste slap are delivered to different and often overlapping groups of people. These are real slaps, administered perhaps in rage, or perhaps not, in order to physically transform, control or shape the embodied subject. Precisely because they are administered down a social hierarchy, from men to women, upper caste to lower caste and from parent to child, slaps index vulnerability, femininity, and subordination—in a word, inferiority.

*The nation's slap and slap as metaphor:* 'Times without number we have been made to gulp down humiliation and insult at their hands' says M.S. Golwalkar.<sup>38</sup> Given the contexts within which the slap features as a disciplining device, we can turn now to the issue of the body of the nation. It appears that on behalf of the nation, and in order to retaliate for the past, all sorts of citizens and elected officials are willing to slap Muslims and 'pseudo-secularists'. Pradeep Dalvi, author of a play defending Nathuram Godse proclaims when told that the artist M. F. Husain had painted pictures of a naked Sita: 'Now Husain will paint pictures of Sita. You paint pictures of Fatima, then talk about freedom of expression,' he said. 'I have not yet met Husain, but the moment I will meet him, the moment I will come directly face-to-face with him, I will slap him.'<sup>39</sup>

If the intent of a slap is inflict humiliation and through humiliation to maintain or restore hierarchy, then the power of its use as metaphor stems from this as well. While it is not entirely uncommon to see the phrase 'a slap on the face' to describe rejection coupled with humiliation, the phrase has acquired a particularly urgent resonance in Hindutva India. If the hypermasculine Muslim has in the past been

thought to have slapped, raped and penetrated the body of Hindu India, the same must now be done to him. In a historic moment when the nation is being urged to take a stand against centuries of foreign rulers (both British and Muslim), every moment of resistance or rejection is construed as a slap. Thus from the Indian Express News Service:

Apparently buoyed by the Gujarat poll results, VHP chief Ashok Singhal today asked the Maharashtra Government to reconsider its 'dictatorial' ban on Pravin Togadia and Sadhwi Ritambara. 'Else, they will get a slap on their face (*munha ki khayenge*),' he thundered.<sup>40</sup>

And when in early 2005, Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi was denied a visa to enter the US, the gesture was seen as a slap not only on the chief minister's face but on the face of every Indian.

There is rejoicing in our secular quarters that Modi has been slapped in his face. They do not realize that a slap on Modi's face is a slap on every Indian citizen's face and some day they may know the consequences if they care. Our intellectuals are good at bowing and scraping. Their ancestors did that to the British. In turn they are doing it before the Americans.<sup>41</sup>

A major part of the Right wing agenda is to show Hindu India as capable of strength, resistance and retaliation against foreigners who have in the past and continue today to control and dominate India. Unlike Pakistan, 'built on the predatory desire for Hindu property and Hindu women' India was seen as, by and large, peaceful and by and large gentle and meek.<sup>42</sup> Within this articulation, the bowing and scraping Hindu intellectuals are not men of honour but rather, traitors. These intellectuals, along with the nation's leadership, are weak and effeminate enough to allow the nation to be invaded, penetrated and slapped. William Miller argues that to have the capacity to be or to feel humiliated there must be in place certain notions of honour and self respect.<sup>43</sup> It is precisely this assertion of self respect and reclaiming of honour that the Hindu Right purports to do, and which they claim the nation's secular intellectual leadership failed to do, and thus the use of the metaphor of the slap. The metaphor is at its most

powerful when it refers to the Hindu nation's most significant Other, the Muslim man. The exaggerated attention paid to the slap in *public* discourse must be seen in this light. It indexes the shaking off of the tolerance and effeminacy attributed to the Hindu nation (and men), and the corresponding diminishing of the image of the hypermasculine Muslim nation (and men) by making it (and them) slappable.<sup>44</sup> Thus Hindu/Indian self respect and honour can only be reclaimed at the Muslim/Pakistan's expense.

Avishai Margalit argues that a decent society is one whose members do not humiliate one another.<sup>45</sup> I have suggested here that humiliation is possibly a major disciplinary principle of Indian society. The slap in both its literal and discursive formulations represents humiliation and through humiliation constitutes the social world. It is intended to create not just docile bodies but docile subjects. The violence that was inflicted on Muslims in Gujarat—whether we call it a riot or a pogrom—was seen by the Sangh Parivar and its many adherents in India *not* as a series of heinous acts upon individual Muslim bodies—rather the stabbing, cutting, burning and thousands of dead and mutilated bodies were seen as a giant slap in the face of the Muslim community, which Narendra Modi, in his capacity as the guardian of the state, was entitled to deliver. All of these actions together were intended to put Muslims back into their Muslim bodies, to remind them not to be too rights-bearing and demanding, to remind them that if they had to remain in India, they must be Muslims of a certain sort. Indeed the horror of individual deaths was all but forgotten in the post election conviction that the Muslim community<sup>46</sup> had been chastened and enlightened.

#### Notes

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1 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New

York: Vintage, reprint edition 1995), 156

2 Narendra Modi in *India Today*, 30 December 2002

3 Lata Jagtiani, *Hindunet.org*, 12/15/02 08:27 AM

4 The phrase 'merely cultural' was raised by Judith Butler (1997) in the by now famous exchange between her and Nancy Fraser (1998) over the place of culture in the analysis of gender and sexuality, where Butler accused Fraser of treating sexuality as a 'merely cultural' or epiphenomenal social force. See Judith Butler, 'Merely Cultural', *Social Text* 52-53 (Fall/Winter 1997,) 265-77; and Nancy Fraser, 'Heterosexism, Misrecognition, and Capitalism: A Response to Judith Butler', *New Left Review* 228 (March/April 1998), 140-49.

5 There is a heightened tendency to equate the Muslim with Pakistan and the Hindu with India thus making Hindu/Muslim and India/Pakistan almost interchangeable.

6 Guilegusto, *Sulekha.com*, 7 November 2003.

7 *Rediff.com*, 24 April 2001

8 Paola Bacchetta, 'When the (Hindu) Nation Exiles its Queers', *Social Text* 61 (Winter 1999), 141-65.

9 This version of aggressive and masculine Hinduism can be dated to the 1920s as Sumit Sarkar, Tanika Sarkar and others have shown. Sumit Sarkar, 'Indian Nationalism and the Politics of Hindutva' in David Ludden (ed.), *Making India Hindu: Religion, Community, and the Politics of Democracy in India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 162-84.

10 <http://www.reformindia.com/wwwboard/messages/1267.htm>

11 <http://www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Park/6443/India/priorities.html>

12 For an excellent anthology on violence, see Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das and Margaret Lock (eds.), *Social Suffering* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997).

13 Arthur Kleinman, 'The Violences of Everyday Life: the Multiple Forms and Dynamics of Social Violence' in Arthur Kleinman, Veena Das (eds.), *Violence and Subjectivity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 238.

14 Upendra Baxi, 'The Second Gujarat Catastrophe', 27 May, 2002. [http://www.sacw.net/Gujarat2002/27 May, 2002.](http://www.sacw.net/Gujarat2002/27%20May,%202002)

15 This has been particularly true around the Partition, marked as it has been by a 'zone of silence'. See Veena Das, *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 84.



- 16 See, for example, the work of Stanley J. Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South East Asia* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1997).
- 17 Paul Brass argues that riots are themselves routinized violence, and that violence is at the heart of political practice. See Paul Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2003).
- 18 As Amrita Basu and Srirupa Roy argue in their paper 'Democracy and Genocide: A Multi-Sited and Multi-Level Approach to Extreme Violence', 'the violence against Christians that took place in the Dangs region of the state in December 1998 established a precedent for majoritarian violence against religious minorities in Gujarat.'
- 19 The challenge offered by a slap on the face with a pair of gloves often ended in a duel in the many English novels of Victorian England.
- 20 The word slap is also used colloquially in both Bengali and Hindi in a playful manner, as in 'don't you dare do this unless you want a slap' as Gautam Bhadra reminded me, but I suggest that the playful use of the word works precisely because the serious and humiliating lurks just under the surface.
- 21 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York, Routledge, 1993), 121.
- 22 Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)' in *Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1993), 48-49.
- 23 Veena Das, *Critical Events*, 137-38.
- 24 While a slap can be used to punish or to discipline in the Foucauldian sense, I am more interested in the work performed by the disciplinary aspects of the slap.
- 25 I thank Pandit R. K. Shukla for locating this for me in his archives.
- 26 *The Telegraph*, Calcutta, 25 April 2004.
- 27 That this incident made the news and led to the teacher's arrest and much indignation has something to do with the form of the punishment (this 'murgi' form is perhaps seen as premodern) and the fact that it was a girl student.
- 28 Ammu Joseph, 'Intimate Enemy', *The Hindu*, 4 Aug 2002.
- 29 INCLEN, Domestic Violence in India 3: A Summary Report of Four Records Studies, 2000.
- 30 Henrietta Moore, 'The Problem of Explaining Violence in the Social Sciences' in Penelope Harvey and Peter Gow (eds.), *Sex and*

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- 31 Uta Klein, "Our Best Boys": The Gendered Nature of Civil-Military Relations in Israel", in *Men and Masculinities*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1999, pp. 47-65.
- 32 T. K. Sundari Ravindran, 'Female Autonomy in Tamil Nadu: Unravelling the Complexities', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 17-23/24-30 April (1999), WS34-44.
- 33 <http://www.womensenews.org/article.cfm/dyn/aid/1591>
- 34 T. K. Rajalakshmi, 'Caste Injustice', in *Frontline* 21: 23 (2004).
- 35 Ibid.
- 36 See Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983) for a brilliant typology of such classifications of Other societies by Western anthropologists.
- 37 I think we can extend the servant slap outward to situations in the public sphere where people who are judged to be in a more menial or subservient position also become slappable, as it were. Witness the case in 2004, when Bombay cinema's superstar, Amitabh Bachhan, was seated in the 14th row despite being an invited guest at the Zee Cinema awards. Offended, he got up to leave. In the mayhem that followed, Subhas Chandra of ZEE TV came down the aisle and slapped one of the organizers for not putting Amitabh in a VIP seat.
- 38 M. S. Golwalkar, *Bunch of Thoughts* (1980, 413), cited in Paola Bachhetta, 'When the (Hindu) Nation Exiles its Queers', *Social Text* 61, (Winter 1999), 152.
- 39 <http://www.rediff.com/news/1999/oct/05us2.htm>
- 40 *Indian Express*, 21 December 2002.
- 41 M. V. Kamath, *The Organiser*, 1 May 2005.
- 42 *The Organizer*, 1949, cited in Urvashi Butalia 'Muslims and Hindus, Men and Women: Communal Stereotypes and the Partition of India', in *Women and the Hindu Right* (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1995), 76.
- 43 William Miller, *Humiliation: And Other Essays on Honor, Social Discomfort, and Violence* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995).
- 44 See Amrita Basu, 'Feminism Inverted: The Real Women and Gendered Imagery of Hindu Nationalism', *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars* 25:4 (1993).
- 45 Avishai Margalit defines humiliation as any sort of behaviour or condition that constitutes a sound reason for a person to consider his or her self respect injured. By this definition, few societies are decent,

and yet I find this a curiously compelling goal—not as a claim about nations and societies as they exist, but as a reasonable goal for societies to try to achieve. Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

46 I refer here to the re-election of Narendra Modi and the BJP in Gujarat in 2002.

# Violence and Democracy in India

Edited by Amrita Basu and Srirupa Roy



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## CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i>	1
Beyond Exceptionalism: Violence and Democracy in India AMRITA BASU AND SRIRUPA ROY	
The Wagah Syndrome: Territorial Roots of Contemporary Violence in South Asia WILLEM VAN SCHENDEL	36
A Slap from the Hindu Nation RAKA RAY	83
Rape and Murder in Gujarat: Violence against Muslim Women in the Struggle for Hindu Supremacy MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM	101
Powers of the Weak: Fear and Violation in the Discourse of Communalism USHA ZACHARIAS AND J. DEVIKA	123
Once, in Rangdum: Formations of Violence and Peace in Ladakh RAVINA AGGARWAL	148
Media, Terror, and Islam: The Shifting Media Landscape and Culture Talk in India PAULA CHAKRAVARTTY AND SRINIVAS LANKALA	173
Mass Violence and the Wheels of Indian (In)Justice ZOYA HASAN	198
Communalizing the Criminal or Criminalizing the Communal? Locating Minority Politics in Bangladesh DINA M. SIDDIQI	223
<i>Notes on Contributors</i>	250
<i>Index</i>	254

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