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Transcending the Communal Paradigm:

Interfaith Relations across Multiple Dimensions in Hyderabad (India)

The social space of interfaith relations in India is commonly represented in the academia, the media and the everyday discourse through the paradigm of communalism. This thesis considers it an analytical and socio-political discursive space, grounded on reified religious communities and their mutual relations. Thus, similar to ethnicity and ethnic conflict, communalism tends to reproduce the discourse of Hindu vs. Muslim as a given of social relations, configuring the very conflict narrative it attempts to explain.

This study proposes a shift in perspective, trying to situate the paradigm of communalism in the social space and processes in which it is articulated and that it contributes to reproduce. By relying on existing critical literature on Indian nationalism, secularism, caste and communalism and on feminist perspectives on power, conflict and identity this thesis focuses on the interconnectedness of gender and socio-economic dimensions in narratives of interfaith relations. It elaborates an argument of communalism as a discourse of domination and social polarisation, reproducing social boundaries of a majoritarian, patriarchal and socio-economically asymmetric order and veiling social tensions over the positioning of different sections of society and relations of super/subordination among them. The conflict narrative of communalism is located within the discursive landscape of Indian colonial and post-colonial society, structuring and naturalising forms of domination and social polarisation across gender and socio-economic dimensions.

By exploring the urban space of Hyderabad (Deccan), this research deconstructs the conflict narrative of communalism in its different themes and articulations, conceiving of gender and socio-economic differentials as organising principles for social relations, participating in the configuration of social boundaries but also of the possibilities for transcending them. In fact, while providing a perspective on the naturalisation of relations of super/subordination through the narrative of Hindu-Muslim conflict/harmony, this study points at possibilities to imagine alternatives to the dominant paradigm. Multiple tensions over forms of domination and social polarisation find expression in the discourses and practices of interfaith relations, questioning the relative positionings assigned to different sections of society within and between religious communities' boundaries. In that sense, they expose and challenge the dominant language, meaning and practice of social relations.

This study aims at reflecting on conflicts as socio-political and analytical paradigms reproducing discourses of and about power. It then proposes to look within and beyond dominant conflict narratives, at the social tensions articulating possibilities for a change in the discourse and practice of social relations and their representation.

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List of Acronyms

(AI)MIM	All India Majlis-i-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (All India Council of United Muslims)
BJP	*Bharatyia Janata Party* (Indian People's Party)
CLMC	Civil Liberties Monitoring Committee
COVA	Confederation of Voluntary Organisations
HMI	Henry Martyn Institute
POTA	Prevention of Terrorism Act
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Association)
TRS	*Telangana Rashtra Samiti* (Telangana National Association)
UCC	Uniform Civil Code
VHP	*Vishva Hindu Parishad* (World Hindu Council)

Glossary

A list of non-English words used, with the general meaning attributed to each of them in the text.

Adivasi	Aboriginal/Indigenous people of India
Alam	Religious symbolic banner that designates a Shia Muslim shrine
Aman	Urdu word for peace
Ashura	Tenth day of Muharram, when Shia Muslims mourn the martyrdom of Husayn ibn Ali
Ashurkhana	Place of worship and of gathering for Muslims of Shia faith
Azadari	Mourning practices during the Muharram celebrations
Bhangi	One of the Dalit caste group
Bharat	Lit. 'India'
Brahmin	Lit. 'One who posses Brahma', the priestly castes, ranking highest in the *Varna* system
Burqa	Garment worn by women to cover their body, head and face in public places
Chamars	Lit. 'Tanner', Dalit caste group associated with treating leather
Dalit	Word identifying different caste groups located in the category of 'Untouchables'
Dargah	Sufi shrine
Devadasi	Lit. 'Servant of God'. Young woman who takes care of the temple and perform certain rituals. Practice often associated with prostitution and exploitation of lower caste women
Diwanship	Advisory Council to the Nizam
Goonda	Thug, usually hired for settling disputes through violence
Hijab	Head covering
Hindutva	Ideology of the Hindu Right
Iftar	Breaking of fast during the month of Ramadan
Jati	Sub-caste group
Kamma	Caste group of landed gentry during the Nizam rule of Hyderabad state
Lathi	Stick used by Indian police to control crowds
Madrasa	Islamic school
Masjid	Mosque
Mata	Lit. 'Mother'
Millat	Creed, belief sometimes used to identify the "Muslim community"
Muharram	New Year in Islamic calendar and sacred month
Mulki	Native of the former Hyderabad State
Pehlwan	Indian Wrestler
Pitribhu	Lit. 'Fatherland'
Prasad	Lit. 'Gracious gift', offering to the God, then gifted to devotees

Puja	Devotional ritual
Qaum	Nation
Ramadan	Ninth and sacred month of the Islamic calendar, connected with fasting and renunciation
Rashtra	Lit. 'Nation'
Razakar	Lit. 'Volunteer'
Reddi	South Indian diversified social group, but used with reference to a caste of landed gentry
Sadhu	Lit. 'Holy man', who renounces the worldly life and attachments
Sanskriti	Lit. 'Culture'
Sanyasini	Woman ascetic, who dedicates her life to spirituality within the Sannyasa (renouncer) order
Saptasindhu	Lit. 'Seven rivers', playing a prominent role in the Rig-Veda (collection of Sanskrit texts) mythology
Sarva Dharma Sambhava	Lit. 'Let all religions prosper'
Sati	Funeral practice in which the widow is immolated in the pyre of the dead husband
Satyagraha	Non-violent resistance
Savarna/Avarna	Belonging to a *Varna* (caste)/ Out-caste
Shakha	Lit. 'Branch', associated with theological schools of Hinduism or to the gathering of RSS supporters
Shanti	Hindi word for peace
Sufi	Follower of the mystical path in Islam
Swaraj	Independence
Swayamsevak	Lit. 'Volunteer'
Ulama	Muslim legal scholar
Varna	Lit. 'Colour', meaning caste
Varnavyavastha	The caste system
Velma	Caste group of landed gentry during the Nizam rule of Hyderabad state
Vetti	Enslaved labour of lower caste peasants
Zenana	Part of the house reserved for the women in the family

Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 PROLOGUE: THE RESEARCH AND ITS CONTEXT

This study stems from a reflection on various works produced in India which, through different disciplinary angles, offer insights and perspectives on the issue of interfaith relations and "communalism". It can be situated in the field of conflict studies, as it approaches "communalism" as a discourse of conflict, whereby the dichotomy of Hindu vs. Muslim is represented as the dominant paradigm of interfaith relations. In that sense, its main purpose is to propose a perspective on the way conflict narratives, as socio-political and analytical paradigms, participate in the reproduction of a social order of domination and social polarisation and multiple forms of violence. Simultaneously, it integrates insights from feminist studies of power, violence and identity, trying to explore the multiple dimensions of conflict and the social relations that are articulated in, through and despite it. Such approaches offer a framework that, on the one hand, allows for a deconstruction of conflict discourses and social practices reproducing paradigms of super/subordination and on the other accounts for the tensions between forms of domination and social polarisation and the potential for transcending them.

Most importantly, the perspective presented in this work has been inspired by conversations with scholars, practitioners, feminists and social activists and several other people during my visits to Hyderabad and New Delhi in August-September 2009, November 2009, July-September 2010 and May-June 2011. Conceived of as trips to the field, the research experiences in India have opened new and broader views on less visible dimensions and tensions articulated in the social space of interfaith relations. The engagement with people, situations and contexts during fieldwork has been crucial for the elaboration of my representation of interfaith relations. It has also enhanced my interest in the possibility to transcend approaches treating conflict narratives as existing somewhat statically and independently of a social order in which they are defined and that they contribute to configure.

By combining different disciplinary perspectives, this thesis tries to shift from a rather static view of "communalism" as conflict and identity, to a perspective involving power dynamics in which multiple social tensions unfold as social relations, beyond the

Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm. The subject of analysis is the discursive landscape of interfaith relations, understood as a social space informed by and constitutive of multiple and interconnected dimensions, encompassing a variety of interrelated structures and dynamics of power, which configure the positioning of various sections of society. In that sense, this research seeks to understand how power is produced, legitimised and transformed in the interplay among different dimensions of interfaith relations (in particular, gender and socio-economic positioning) and to account for a potential for social change in the same social space.

This work is contextualised in the city of Hyderabad, capital of Andhra Pradesh, a Southern Indian state bordering with Tamil Nadu in the South, Maharashtra Chhattisgarh and Orissa in the North, Karnataka in the West, and the Bay of Bengal in the East. Hyderabad's population is officially numbered around 6/7 million (including Secunderabad, Hyderabad's "twin city"). The choice of Hyderabad as the focus of this research was driven by the intention to offer insights on the dynamics and processes that contribute to identify an urban space as the site of a dominant discourse of conflict and violence, and how this is reflected in practices of social relations. In fact, Hyderabad is, among other Indian cities, regarded as "riot-prone" or "communally-sensitive"[1].

Focusing on the social space of interfaith relations in Hyderabad, this research attempts to look into the tensions that are not addressed and the narratives that are veiled in the politics of communalism. Starting from the observation that multiple interconnected dimensions continuously unfold as discourse and practice of interfaith relations behind the dominant dichotomous narrative of "communalism" , the methods used for this study start from a critique of the communal paradigm as the privileged perspective for the analysis of interfaith relations in India. The point of departure is the recognition that the assumptions contained in the idea of communalism tend to reproduce binary distinctions configuring not only hostility between "religious communities", but also the unequal relative positionings of different sections of society. Communalism thus expresses a particular politics of interfaith relation that reifies the religious dimension and the conflict narrative, drawing boundaries between naturalised Hindu and Muslim "religious communities". Moreover, since these dichotomous categorisations are grounded on relations of super/subordination among different sections of society, "communalism" also participates in the reproduction of a social

1 More about the motivation for the choice of Hyderabad as the context for this research is shared in Section 3.2.

order of domination and social polarisation. Hence, it is more deceptive than revealing as a tool for analysis as it does not grasp the multiplicity and the interplay of dimensions beyond religion, contextual to interfaith relations in specific times and circumstances. By focusing on the intersection of gender and socio-economic differentials in the discursive space of interfaith relations as a framework for analysis of social boundaries and relations, this work seeks to understand how power is produced, legitimised and transformed, through and beyond the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm. In that sense, it is important to underline that the socio-economic dimension does not refer strictly to a location in the material/productive system. It is, like gender, a concept embracing also the symbolic/discursive dynamic spaces through which different social positionings are negotiated and assigned in the wider web of social relations.

As mentioned earlier, in the process of exploring discourses and practices of interfaith relations, this work also proposes a perspective on the labels "riot-prone" or "communally-sensitive" often attached to sites (mainly cities) where violence has broken out repeatedly, including the case chosen for this study: Hyderabad (India)[2]. That is, in fact, the point from which this research process started, stemming from a fundamental interest in exploring the implications of applying a "communal paradigm" to physical and symbolic spaces, relations and categories. Its development into a process of deconstruction of the discourse of communalism by analysing the diversity of themes enclosed in narratives of Hindu-Muslim conflict has grown while acknowledging the interconnectedness of the visible conflict narrative (Hindu-Muslim conflict) with a multiplicity of dimensions like gender, caste, class, etc. Such dimensions are crucial to the constant reproduction of a hegemonic paradigm, but also to continuously generate the potential for change. Dissecting the Hindu-Muslim dichotomy and focussing on the interconnectedness of gender and socio-economic positioning within the sphere of interfaith relations, the approach adopted in this study allows for the understanding of conflict and social change as situated in a continuum of fluid narratives and practices which configure relations among and the relative positioning of different sections of society. The gaze at the multiplicity of interconnected dimensions as axes of power along which relations of

2 See for example, "In Hyderabad: 'Old City' and 'communally sensitive' are conjoined" Prem Panicker, Rediff News, www. rediff.com, My 18, 2007; "The communal divide cleaves Charminar country", Sushi Rao, Rediff News, www.rediff.com, Feb, 19, 1998; "Sitting perpetually on a powder leg", J. S. Ifthekhar, The Hindu, Feb, 19, 2009. For a scholarly perspective see also Varshney (2002) who classifies Hyderabad as a riot-prone city.

super/subordination are reproduced in society allows for a deconstruction and re-construction of the discursive space of interfaith relations through and beyond the communal paradigm.

The practices that reproduce visible and hidden forms of super/subordination are constitutive of a social order whose patriarchal and inherently unequal socio-economic structure is identified throughout this work as "Brahminical". As a result, by participating in the transforming forms of domination and social polarisation of a Brahminical social order and by concealing the very processes of its configuration, the communal paradigm also contributes to hide and inhibit the potential for social change transcending narratives of conflict and violence.

In that sense, the angle adopted in this research looks at interfaith relations as a social space, in which domination, exclusion and social polarisation are reproduced through discourse and practices that continuously transform, together with the resources to possibly transcend them. It aims at exploring the processes of configuration of the communal paradigm and the centrality of gender and socio-economic dimensions. Hence, it proposes a perspective on the malleability of forms and processes of domination and social polarisation, articulated through and at the same time concealed by conflict narratives. This research is thus also a reflection on conflicts as reproductive of and reproduced by power relations unfolding within, between and beyond the social categories of the main conflict narrative itself, namely here "religious communities". From an analytical angle, this study points to the possibility of transcending the communal paradigm as explanatory of a conflict "reality", beyond the assumptions at the core of the Hindu vs. Muslim discourse.

Thus, in order to overcome the Manichean distinctions that trap many analyses of conflict within the boundaries of identity politics, this work starts by reflecting on the language normally attached to the social space of interfaith relations in India. By articulating this criticism and deconstructing communalism as constitutive of forms of violence, reproducing social boundaries and a hegemonic social order, this research claims that an alternative gaze at interfaith relations can shed light on the multiple dimensions, their interconnectedness and the forms of power that unfold and find expression through them.

This work pays particular attention to the processes of reconfiguration of social boundaries through narratives and practices of communalism. It argues that the

implications of such paradigm, both an analytically and socio-politically, cannot be reduced to the oversimplified and essentialised categories of Hindu and Muslim. Accordingly, this thesis focuses on the multidimensionality of interfaith relations and the configuration of unequal relations among different sections of society through discourses and practices of communalism. At the same time, the very focus on processes and multiple dimensions makes this work essentially a perspective on interfaith relations as a continuously transforming social space, with an inherent potential for transcending the paradigm of communalism.

1.2 THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

While exploring and deconstructing communalism and unveiling the multidimensionality of interfaith relations, this work aims at giving a representation of the contextual transformation and adaptability of forms of domination and social polarisation through the language of communalism.

This study is fundamentally a process of deconstruction and re-construction of the social space of interfaith relations that lifts the veil on the dynamics of power constantly reconfigured through the rhetoric of the Hindu-Muslim divide, but also on narratives and practices that transcend the dominant conflict paradigm. While focusing on the city of Hyderabad and drawing extensively on the fieldwork conducted there, this thesis is not sharply divided into a theoretical and an empirical part. Theory, methodology, the empirical materials and the field are mutually constitutive and unfold as a nexus throughout this work. In a way, each chapter can be seen as developing a specific perspective and at the same time dialoguing with the others in the articulation of a more comprehensive argument on conflict narratives, "communalism" and interfaith relations in India. On the one hand, each chapter draws both from the general framework elaborated in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 and from a more specific perspective, which helps build a sub-framework for the situated analysis. On the other, the theoretical and methodological approach, while grounded on the existing literature, builds on the exploration of empirical materials from archival and field research.

Chapter 2 offers an overview of the main approaches to "identity conflicts" and to "communalism". It provides a foundation for the framework of this thesis by grounding it in the existing literature and drawing from the field of ethnicity and more general conflict studies, works on Indian nationalism, secularism and communalism and

various feminist perspectives on such issues. The integration of a feminist angle, allows for the exploration of the multiple dimensions of interfaith relations as interconnected and constitutive of discourses and practices of and about power. The chapter engages critically with the language normally attached to interfaith relations and conflict in India. By articulating this criticism and deconstructing narratives and practices of communalism as constitutive of a social order of domination and social polarisation, the chapter contends that the label "communal conflict" tends to conceal the multiplicity and interconnectedness of social dimensions contextual to interfaith relations in specific times and circumstances. As a result, this language also contributes to hide the power dynamics that inform relations of domination and forms of violence in the wider social context. In particular, the chapter identifies gender and socio-economic positioning as crucial dimensions in the discursive landscape of a Brahminical social order of which "communalism" is a constitutive paradigm. It thus locates this work at the intersection of different disciplinary fields, in the process of building a conceptual framework for deconstructing a dominant conflict narrative as a socio-political and analytical paradigm and reconstructing that social space as inherently transformative.

Chapter 3 is conceived as a continuation of Chapter 2, discussing the research methodologies and attempting to establish a nexus between theory, ethics and practice of research. It draws from feminist perspectives on social science methodologies, which stress the relevance of a researcher's responsibility vis-à-vis the various research processes in which s/he is involved. In so doing, such approaches also help find a connection between the various stages and activities in the research and to acknowledge the role of feelings and emotions in shaping perspectives, and different possibilities of seeing and narrating academic knowledge. This chapter discusses the relevance of configuring fieldwork as part of the process of representation and of explicitly accounting for the relational dynamics in the research activities, both in the field and in the academic environment. Thus, Chapter 3 also narrates the process of choosing Hyderabad as the focus of this work and the dynamics of selecting, adapting and using specific methods in the relation with other research participants and with the various contexts and circumstances. It also offers a framework constituted of themes, which has guided the development of the fieldwork activities, the process of interpretation, representation and writing and the structuring of this thesis. Themes are regarded as the lines along which social boundaries are constituted, as discursive sub-spaces for the

configuration and attribution of different social positionings at the intersection of multiple dimensions and as the various articulations of a social order of domination and conflict. Finally, Chapter 3 proposes a perspective on research of conflict as a process of growing awareness of the interconnectedness of forms of domination and social polarisation from the academia to the field, with respect to which the researcher occupies specific locations.

Chapter 4 introduces an approach to communalism as politics of difference, inscribed in a Brahminical social order and thus grounded on a patriarchal and socio-economically asymmetric structure of social relations. It traces its origins in the colonial and its continuation in the post-colonial society intended, in a broad sense, beyond the coloniser-colonised dichotomy, as the text and context for the reconfiguration of relations of power among different social categories and for the institutionalisation of the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm. In that context, the notion of "tradition" is crucial for the identification of what should be regarded as authentically "Hindu/Muslim" and thus for the definition of opposing "Hindu/Muslim orthodoxies" and their mutual relations, but also for the redressing of multiple social tensions over relations of power in society into a paradigm of Hindu-Muslim relations.

By drawing on fieldwork material, the argument developed in Chapter 4 shows how the communal politics of difference participates in the reproduction of domination and social polarisation across religious, gender and socio-economic lines and beyond the Hindu-Muslim dichotomy. The chapter also glimpses at practices that challenge the stativity of the communal paradigm, articulating gender and socio-economic positionings outside its boundaries and configuring spaces and possibilities for social change. Chapter 4 also explores space as a category of difference and draws from fieldwork experiences to show how "communal" spatial strategies articulated as "religious" configure multiple boundaries within, between and across "religious communities". Finally, it offers a perspective on spatial practices which transcend the stativity of "communal" dichotomies in the city of Hyderabad, offering at the same time a reflection on the tension between practices trespassing social boundaries and the persistence of forms of domination in the space of interfaith relations.

Drawing on the previous analysis of categories of difference articulated as "tradition" in the colonial and post-colonial society, Chapter 5 deals with representations of the past and proposes a shift in the historical gaze at interfaith

relations. It focuses on the growth of the "communal paradigm" during the final years of Hyderabad as a princely state, its articulation across gender and socio-economic dimensions and its implications for the re-configuration of relations among different sections of society. Moreover, it explores readings of history across gender and socio-economic lines swinging between narratives of "communal harmony" and "communal conflict", in which the "religious community" remains the fundamental category for social relations. In that sense, it aims at situating this paradigm in the context of tensions over socio-political relations, reconfiguring the language of domination and social polarisation against pushes for social change coming from different sections of society. Thus, Chapter 5 offers a perspective on history as a fundamental theme for discourses of and about power in the social space of interfaith relations, and on the implications of representations of the past for the configuration of today's social relations.

Chapter 6 analyzes the paradigm of communalism in the political and legal discourses. It shows how the "religious community" as the unit for political representation and legal reform is configured around a secular-majoritarian principle based on fundamental oppositions, Hindu/Muslim, secular/fundamentalist, developed/backward. The argument presented in Chapter 6 shows that such dichotomies are articulated at the intersection of gender and socio-economic dimensions in a way that conceals the processes of configuration of the secular-majoritarian principle as an expression of a Brahminical (patriarchal, caste-based) social order. The chapter shows that the communal paradigm in the context of politics and law participates in this process of vertical homogenisation (within Hindu/Muslim "religious communities"), veiling multiple social tensions over social positioning through a rhetoric of Hindu-Muslim relations. In that sense, the chapter also uses examples from fieldwork to present certain perspectives articulated in the context of social movements and in the debate over legal reforms that question the communal paradigm as the fundamental discourse of interfaith relations.

Further developing the arguments of the previous sections, Chapter 7 shows how the discourse and practice of communal violence freezes spaces of social relations into a dichotomy of conflict between "religious communities". It reflects on the different ways in which violence is constitutive of the "communal paradigm" and of the broader social order, contributing to reproduce forms of domination and social polarisation across religious, gender and socio-economic dimensions. It analyses the attribution of the

labels "riot-prone" and "communally sensitive" to certain areas of Hyderabad city as part of the configuration of social inequalities and conflict in the everyday narratives of interfaith relations. In so doing, it also looks into the transformation of practices of religious festivals in Hyderabad, in the light of the conflict narrative of communalism. Moreover, it explores the introduction of the language of "terrorism" as a continuation of the paradigm of communalism, perpetuating narratives of religious difference as a fundamental social distinction, in which other social tensions are absorbed. Finally, it provides an angle for understanding how violence as discourse and practice, and conflict as the fundamental narrative of interfaith relations are constitutive of a social order of domination and social polarisation, across "religious communities".

The chapters presented thus try to expose the processes through which a paradigm of Hindu-Muslim relations participates in the reproduction of relations of super/subordination in society by focusing on specific themes (religious difference, space, tradition, history, politics and law, violence) as constitutive of narratives of interfaith relations. Such processes take place across gender and socio-economic dimensions, meaning that they are configured by and contribute to define a social order of domination and social polarisation beyond religion. In that sense, the communal paradigm conceals the social tensions that question the reproduction of a social order of domination and social polarisation across political and ideological affiliations. In fact, while reference to specific movements, social categories and organisations is made for purposes of clarity, the fundamental digits of a Brahminical social order are considered part of the way forms of domination and social polarisation are articulated in discourses and practices transversal to various political locations. The exploration of such discourses and practices unveils the continuity and adaptability of forms of super/subordination in society through narratives of Hindu-Muslim conflict and violence and the invisibility of a potential for transcending them.

Drawing on the analyses proposed throughout the thesis, Chapter 8 concludes the circle of representation by articulating, situating and exemplifying the notions of conflict and social change recurring in this work. It provides a reflection on how conflict narratives can conceal the complexity of power relations in society and their multiple dimensions, perpetuating forms of domination and social polarisation, beyond the most visible social categories and their mutual relations. At the same time, it argues that the indisputability of the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm is actually a question of

perspective related to the way social positionings are assigned and relations articulated in the social order across multiple dimensions. Thus, the final chapter elaborates on what is referred to as the "politics of everyday life" (Tharu & Niranjana, 1994, p. 21), defined by a consciousness of the processes of configuration of "communalism" as a static conflict narrative and of the possibility to transcend it. In so doing, it rearticulates the process of research, the progressive engagement with the topic and the conclusive perspective on the possibility to transcend communalism as an analytical and socio-political paradigm. Moreover, it offers an angle for approaching conflict narratives as carrying and concealing multiple meanings and as fundamentally implicated in the reproduction of a social order. It then proposes to refuse their stativity as a given, and to lift the veil behind which social tensions, power relations and possibilities for social change unfold at the intersection of multiple dimensions.

1.2.1 On Terminology and Concepts

A short note about terminology and concepts used in this work might help clarify certain choices and render them consistent with the overall perspective of this thesis.

First of all, the words "communalism", "communal" as well as "religious community" are widely used in the literature as descriptive tools for explaining situations of conflict, violence, antagonism, social belonging and identity. Instead, they are explored here as paradigms, politics, discourses and narratives of and about power. When the perspective of this thesis is not inferable from the context, these terms appear between quotation marks, to avoid being equated with descriptive concepts. In all other instances, they are integrated in the main text without marks.

As a more general expression for representing a social space beyond the Hindu-Muslim discourse I use here "interfaith" relations. Though not really indicative of the multiple dimensions and social locations it encompasses, due to its reference to "faith" as the main conceptual category, I use it here to indicate a discursive landscape that contains and transcends the communal paradigm.

Another important remark must be made with reference to the caste-related categories and specifically to terms like "lower/upper caste". In fact, a debate runs across activist and academic circles regarding the implications of the language related to caste stratification in India. For example, the distinction between lower and upper castes

might suggest a reproduction of the subordination of the former to the latter. In a way, the lack of access to a less controversial terminology puts me in the necessity of clarifying a very specific positioning vis-à-vis those concepts. I situate myself with respect to such debate by using the term lower caste throughout the text with reference to a multiplicity of sections of society, including the category of the Dalit[3], and despite the many differences and tensions among them, precisely to underline that, within a Brahminical social order, they are subordinated in discourses and social practices. These terms therefore designate categories and positionings attributed in a social order of domination and polarisation through processes of homogenisation and differentiation, instead of unitary, self-standing social groups.

1.3 LOOKING WITHIN, THROUGH AND BEYOND CONFLICT

The exploration of interfaith relations and the intersection of their multiple dimensions and manifestations stems from a process of progressive harmonisation and integration of the ethics, theory and practice of this research. In that sense, the perspective offered in this thesis proposes an angle for exploring conflict narratives as both socio-political and analytical paradigms, thus engaging with discourses and practices of interfaith relations, "in the field" and in the academia, as constitutive of a social space. Thus, this work has been guided by and seeks to fundamentally answer two closely interrelated questions:

- How does the communal paradigm contribute to reproduce a social order of domination and social polarisation?
- How do pushes for social change unfold in the discursive space of interfaith relations?

The two questions lead the research through a process of deconstruction and re-configuration of narratives and practices of interfaith relations, to offer a representation of the dominant paradigm and, simultaneously, of the potential for transcending it.

The choice of gender and socio-economic positioning as fundamental dimensions intersecting in the social space of interfaith relations does not imply that they are the only relevant axes of power along which social distinctions are articulated. In fact, other dimensions such as age for example, play a role in structuring social

[3] See (Ilaiah, 1996b) for a brief explanation of the origin of the term Dalit and for a perspective on the caste-related terminology in India (p. vii-ix).

relations. Moreover, even the two main dimensions for which I chose to account are explored in a partial way, which does not include many tensions and contradictions like for example the implications of gender and socio-economic norms for the multiple "queer" sexualities[4], or categories such as Christians and Sikhs, also at times associated with a "communal paradigm". While aware of the partial perspective offered, the choices made reflect mostly the engagement with the narratives to which I have been exposed and the accessibility of spaces and contexts which could offer the possibility to generalise discourses of interfaith relations vis-à-vis the dominant paradigm. In that sense, this thesis attempts to offer a perspective which might serve in the exploration of other, relevant dimensions and implications of the politics of interfaith relations in India.

This research tries to bring together different disciplinary fields from which "communalism" has been explored in order to situate conflict narratives within the discursive spaces that contribute to define and reproduce them. In that sense, it addresses both the academic and the socio-political discourse of conflict as pertaining to power and its articulations in a social order. In so doing, it tries to provide an angle from which to reconsider the stativity of many conflict narratives as both hindering and indicating their unfolding at the intersection of multiple dimensions. Such an approach is meant to expose the processes through which unequal power relations in society and practices of domination and social polarisation are reproduced together with their tendency to persist through and despite continuous transformations in the official discourses of social relations.

The look at the city of Hyderabad is in that sense both narrow and broad. Defined as a "riot-prone city", the configuration of Hyderabad as the centre for my narrative of interfaith relations has offered a possibility to focus on the peculiarities of an urban setting and the general implications of certain paradigms of domination and conflict on its web of social relations. Moreover, it has allowed for an intense and engaging exchange with its spaces, with some of its inhabitants in different contexts, and with the discourses that contribute to define Hyderabad as a "communally-sensitive", but also as a complex urban space, with its multiple tensions and contradictions. In fact, the exploration of the different themes around which discourses of interfaith relations are configured across multiple and interconnected dimensions in

[4] See for example the various works on "Hijras" (Nanda, 1985; Bacchetta, 1999; Lal, 1999).

the case of Hyderabad emerges from the research as fundamental for understanding the dynamics and processes that shape boundaries between social categories and groupings. It also shows that within the same social space less visible but equally dynamic practices contain the potential to transcend the dominant conflict narratives and the practices that reproduce an unequal social order.

From my experience of and in Hyderabad I have developed a perspective for reflecting on academic approaches to identity, conflicts, violence and also "peace", intended by many researchers and conflict resolution practitioners as the desirable state of social relations. I prefer here to speak about "social change" because I wish to stress the importance of understanding conflicts as expressions of a social order and not as happening outside, independently of it. This approach has compelled me to include works from many Indian scholars who, from sociological, feminist and post-colonial perspectives, have tried to contextualise "communalism" within the text and context of Indian society, its configuration in the colonial, nationalist and secularist discourses and the way power is exercised and distributed across the web of relations that unfold in it. In so doing, I have also reflected upon my positioning, my responsibility as a researcher to include myself in the process of creating and adopting concepts and paradigms which contribute to (re)produce representations of the social space of interfaith relations, forms of domination, conflict and social change. This is not simply an exercise of reflexivity, but also an attempt to locate my research in the wider field of academic studies and social activists' perspectives of conflict, to offer an angle for questioning conflict narratives, look through them and possibly locate them in the processes of (re)configuring a social order and its nexus of power relations. In that sense, our representations can contribute to reproduce forms of domination and social polarisation but can also provide a perspective that embraces social relations beyond the static dichotomies of conflict, thus expanding the possibilities of envisioning and narrating social change.

Chapter 2
A Perspective for Exploring Narratives of Conflict

2.1 INTRODUCTION: QUESTIONING THE "COMMUNAL"

In India, the question of interfaith relations informs the political and social spaces, mainly along the different articulations of the terminology of "communalism". This concept has been largely employed to qualify certain identities, politics, groups, and organisations as religious and sectarian[5]. Accordingly, the term "communal conflict" is used to describe unrest, antagonism, violence and competition at the political, social and cultural levels between two or more "religious communities"[6]. This work starts from a critique of this terminology, arguing that communalism is produced in the context of politics of domination and social polarisation and productive of specific narratives and practices of hostile interfaith relations and forms of super/subordination in society.

Bipin Chandra suggests that "inherent in communalism is the idea that the social, cultural, economic and political interests of Hindus and Muslims and Christians and Sikhs are dissimilar and divergent because of the fact that they follow different religions" (Chandra, 1984, p. 4). In this passage Chandra argues against a simplistic assimilation of a particular religion with "social, cultural, economic and political interests". He also in a way points to possible implications that such a narrative might have for configuring practices of interfaith relations[7]. While part of the literature leaves unquestioned the connotations and implications of such language, I argue here that communalism is not an aseptic tool for description, but a meaningful discourse which implies a process of reification of both religious identity and an alleged antagonism between pre-existing "religious communities". By assuming that religious difference places people into internally homogeneous and reciprocally antagonistic communities,

[5] However, in the literature of conflict, communalism is often considered a synonym of ethnicity. See for example (Wilkinson, 2004), (Varshney, 2002), (Horowitz, 2001).

[6] From a perspective that looks at the multidimensionality and fluidity of identity narratives I contest such naturalisation of religious community as essentialist and politically charged. Other authors have rejected the assimilation of faith with political communities. See for example (Gottschalk, 2000), for an insightful critique of the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm from an anthropological perspective.

[7] With respect to this, Chandra again argues that "many scholar writers today, following in the footsteps of many of the earlier nationalist leaders, adopt or adapt the basic communal digits and assumptions and then proceed to reject the communal argument. This is to analyze communalism in terms of its own political practice and to fight it on its own terrain, to be its hostage". (Chandra, 1984, p. 12).

the language of communalism configures and accepts the very binary opposition that it seeks to explain, i.e. Hindu-Muslim divide[8]. More importantly, the communal paradigm leaves unexplored some fundamental dimensions of the social space of interfaith relations. In its assumption that religious difference lies at the heart of what has been referred to as a Hindu-Muslim antagonism, communalism overlooks some underlying questions regarding Indian political and social scenarios from both a historical and sociological perspective.

In that sense, religious difference can entail a variety of meanings. In a more culturalist approach, a given religious identity is the main level at which interfaith relations are articulated, expressed and possibly explored. From a constructivist perspective, instead, religious difference is produced and reproduced around changing economic, political and social interests. Both angles however, tend to essentialise Hindu and Muslim "religious communities" as homogeneous and pre-existent and as entailing some form of collective identification leading to hostility and conflict (Shani, 2007, p. 5-8).

The first section of this chapter offers an overview of the main debates in the study of ethnicity and ethnic conflict, including some perspectives shifting the focus from identity to the processes of configuration of power relations in society. In so doing, it concentrates on the notion of social boundaries and their symbolic construction, embracing certain contributions offered by feminist studies. This section also explores some of the major works on communalism, drawing from reflections proposed with respect to the ethnicity paradigm. It exposes communalism as a boundary-drawing narrative, by investigating it origins in the discourses and practices of the colonial society. Inspired by the work of G. Aloysius on nationalism in India (Aloysius G. , 1997), this section places the configuration of a communal paradigm in the context of unfolding social tensions, stemming from contestations articulated by a multiplicity of socio-political struggles during the independence movement, over the power relations expressed within the interlocking caste and colonial orders. It shows how the communal paradigm emerged as a narrative of hostile interfaith relations, implicated in the process of reconfiguring relations of super/subordination among different sections of society. Thus, the argument questioning the communal paradigm as

[8] Ayesha Jalal notes that "such an overarching and loaded term as communalism ends up essentialising the very religiously informed identities, politics and conflicts it purportedly aims at explaining and combating" (Jalal, 1996, p. 3).

a conceptual framework and a descriptive analytical tool unfolds in an exploration of narratives and practices demarcating and naturalising social boundaries and asymmetric social relations. In that sense, this section proposes a reflection on the role the terminology used in academic and non academic circles plays in contributing to perpetuate dynamics of dominance and conflict, showing how the communal paradigm contributes to the reproduction of social polarisation and relations of super/subordination at the intersection of different dimensions of the social order.

The second section situates this thesis on "communalism" within the research of the colonial and postcolonial Indian state, and at the crossroad of conflict and feminist studies. It proposes an alternative framework for the study of interfaith relations that focuses on the multiple dimensions (in particular gender and socio-economic) intersecting in this social space and the way they contribute to configure social boundaries and unequal power relations among different sections of society. Their intersection is proposed as a framework for understanding the construction of hierarchical power relations upon specific representations of religion based of binary oppositions, domination and antagonism.

Combining feminist perspectives on power and violence with Johan Galtung's tools for conflict analysis, this section explains why communalism can be regarded as structural, cultural and direct violence and explores the interconnectedness between these forms and practices. Based on the earlier arguments regarding the implications of communalism as a narrative of social polarisation and on the explorations of a feminist approach to interfaith relations, the final part of this section presents the angle adopted in this research, looking at the tension between communalism as a discursive space of unequal power relations among different categories in the social order, and the different pushes for social change. It explores social practices that continuously negotiate multiple positionalities and perspectives and question the assumptions at the core of the communal paradigm. In that sense, such practices are considered in their social and political significance, transcending communalism as a narrative of conflict. Their potentially transformative meaning is mentioned in this chapter, explored throughout this thesis and conceptualised in the last chapter as the conclusive reflection, offering at the same time a possible angle for future interdisciplinary research and a perspective for practitioners in the field of conflict and social change.

2.2 COMMUNALISM AS A CONFLICT NARRATIVE: SITUATING THE GAZE

In India, the terminology of communalism pervades political, academic, media discourses and everyday social interactions. At the same time, it appears to be a controversial discursive landscape, referring to a variety of phenomena and situations and entailing several assumptions. The objective of this section is to provide an approach to such terminology which highlights a number of problematic points contained in it and to take a stand with respect to its usage. In that sense, the argument unfolding in the following pages aims at introducing the perspective of this research, at situating the gaze by exploring different existing approaches to "identity conflicts" as the container in which "communalism" is usually placed. At the same time, this section is also an attempt to locate the communal paradigm within a socio-political context, participating in the configuration and reproduction of power relations among different sections of society.

In order to render the claim clearer, I will draw from some perspectives elaborated with respect to the "ethnicity" paradigm, focusing on the way it is employed in the field of conflict studies and especially in its "ethnic group/conflict" declensions. The analysis then continues with the exploration of Fredrik Barth's and Anthony Cohen's approaches to the study of communities, the processes though which social boundaries are configured and their symbolic dimension. In the elaboration of that part, I integrate insights from feminist perspectives contributing to a focus on the significance of social distinctions for structuring relations of power in society. The analysis will try to unveil how totalising categories used in the study of ethnicity, like for example "group membership", tend to ignore the processes and the dynamics of power implicated in configuring communities and their boundaries as meaningful social categories and to simplify the complexity of phenomena commonly named under the label "ethnic", such as conflict, violence, politics etc.

The argument regarding communalism, exploring its origins as a "colonial discourse", further outlines the perspective adopted. It broadens the gaze onto the communal paradigm, situating it at the intersection of discourses of Indian nationalism and secularism and the reproduction of a social order of domination and social polarisation. In so doing, this section also points to the implications embedded in the unquestioned use of the terminology of communalism, linking the risk of reifying the

object of analysis with a reflection on the extent to which, as ideological discourses, concepts become part of the phenomena they are meant to describe.

2.2.1 Exploring Perspectives on Ethnicity and Conflict

The concepts of "ethnicity" and "ethnic conflict" have been largely used in the academic field, especially in the study of intrastate conflicts. Different approaches to ethnicity concentrate on specific aspects and possible implications of this phenomenon, offering however quite a vague conceptual framework both in terms of definition and of its analytical validity.

Two main lines of argument have given birth to a variety of approaches, broadly divided into the strands of "essentialism" and "constructivism".

The former conceives of ethnicity as the result of the attachment of individuals to a set of cultural and biological givens they share with the members of a group[9]. According to this view, affiliation to an ethnic group stems from the individual identification with a comprehensive and totalising set of pre-existing identity markers that define the sense of belonging to a collectivity. Accordingly, conflict derives from the clash of cultural differences, perceived as incommensurable, between two or more ethnic groups. Though very few observers and scholars deliberately and fully subscribe to an "essentialist" framework (Horowitz, 2001, p. 44), this perspective tends to inform several approaches and worldviews (in politics, the media, everyday life, but also scholarship) that dwell into assumptions regarding existing cultural traits of groups and on fundamental divides and hostility between them (Shani, 2007, p. 10)[10].

The "constructivist" line of argument regroups a variety of different approaches, sharing the core idea that ethnic identities are socially constructed and subject to change according to social, economic and political factors, including, in its "instrumentalist" version, manipulation by elites. Mobilisation along ethnic lines happens "in the context of social, economic and political conflict and serves as an instrument of political mobilization within that conflict" (Shani, 2007, p. 269). For example, Paul Brass maintains that awareness of ethnic affiliation arises when a group becomes a self-

[9] Geertz uses the expression "primordial attachments" based on the 'givens' – or, more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed 'givens' – of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly but, beyond these, the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices (Geertz, 1995).

[10] For an analysis of the primordialist tendencies of "ethnic actors" see (Gil-White, 1999).

conscious *community*. This process is fostered by the elites who seek to mobilise the people for political reasons, by selecting and manipulating particular cultural aspects and symbols among a set of possibilities. According to this view, "ethnic identity formation is [...] a process created in the dynamics of elite competition within the boundaries determined by political and economic realities". (Brass, 1991, p. 16)[11]

Despite the insights this perspective offers on the role of elites and the forms of mobilisation, it does not however provide a convincing explanation of why people choose to mobilise and engage in violence only in the pursuit of elites' interests. While the aspect of manipulation is certainly relevant, the instrumentalist approach tends to deprive social collectivities of autonomous agency (Fearon & Laitin, 2000a). Moreover, in some cases, the argument that elites mobilise the masses on the ground of existing cultural aspects and symbols does not seem to provide a convincing alternative to the primordialist perspective (Shani, 2007, p. 7-8).

Fearon and Latin argue that the notion of ethnic group, like other social science concepts, should be defined in relation to the way ordinary people conceive of it, in that it influences people's actions and choices. However, they identify general parameters for the definition of ethnic identities: rules of membership (descent, *conceptual autonomy*, and interpretation of the past) - used to recognise those belonging to the group - and contents, involving both characteristics and roles attributed to them (Fearon & Laiting, 2000b)[12].

In a perspective attempting to bridge the gap between the essentialist and the constructivist arguments, D.L. Horowitz explains group affiliation as the result of the need of individuals to identify with a collectivity (Horowitz, 2001, p. 43-56). This leads groups to divide and create boundaries, by emphasising internal similarities and their differences with others. The sense of in-group similarity stems from familistic ties, which unite the members of a group upon putative commonalities and as descendant from original, shared roots. Moreover, the development of a group's identity requires an exchange with the social context, to which other communities belong. Consequently,

[11] Varshney argues that in order to explain people's mobilisation around ethnic claims, it is necessary to consider the distinction between "value-rationality" and "instrumental rationality". Ethnicity is thus "a focal point for mobilization" (Varshney, 2003, p. 88) in that "for something to be manipulated by a leader when death, injury, or incarceration is a clear possibility, it must be valued as a good by a critical mass of people, if not by all" (Varshney, 2003, p. 89). Thus, whether politicians use ethnicity for instrumental purposes, the response of the people will be proportional to the value they attribute to the claims.

[12] "Ethnic identities are understood to be defined mainly by descent rules of group membership and content typically composed of cultural attributes, such as religion, language, customs, and shared historical myths". (Fearon & Laiting, 2000b, p. 848).

political elites and leaders can play a major role in enhancing and steering the sense of affiliation, even if they are not responsible for the generation of ethnic attachment, which exists independently of the socio-political circumstances.

Another attempt to connect the two approaches is provided by Collier et al. who argue that ethnicity is determined by two main aspects, one concerning culture and the other applying to politics (Collier, Honohan, & Moene, 2001, p. 129-166). Ethnicity serves as the grounding aspect of group identity, and is characterised by highly persistent attributes. However, it exists also in the form of political representation, which is both broader and more fluid with respect to its cultural aspect. The reason for this is that political parties, organisations and associations are larger and more comprehensive than the kin group, developing through the construction of an "*imagined* shared identity" (p. 131) to pursue economic interests.

Despite their different points of departure, all these perspectives have been criticised, especially in terms of the conceptual frameworks they articulate.

Fenton argues that the term "ethnic group suggests a concreteness of 'membership' in which ethnicity is summative *and* totalizing, and this is a condition which is rarely met" (Fenton, 2004, p. 180-181). Using the "ethnic" model implies that ethnic groups are culturally homogenous and that a single stock of cultural aspects determines a common attachment to the community. According to Fenton, the main weakness of these conceptual frameworks stems from the fact that awareness of ethnic or religious identity happens under specific circumstances. Thus, Fenton suggests an alternative approach, aimed at identifying the contexts and processes in which a consciousness of ethnic homogenisation and differentiation emerges. So, instead of focussing on ethnic aspects, he proposes to identify the conditions in which these internal commonalities and external differences are configured as a coherent and homogeneous Self in opposition to other outside entities, in the process of rising ethnic awareness (Fenton, 2004).

One of the problems with the notion of ethnic group, therefore, seems to arise from the assumption that ethnicity corresponds to boundaries of internal solidarity and external antagonism. For example, Telugu people in the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh would be regarded as belonging to an unambiguous ethnic group with shared interests and boundaries based on their common language and territory. At the same time, however, I argue in Sections 5.4.2 and 6.2.1 that the mobilisation in the name of a

separate Telangana state reveals a multiplicity of dimensions and dynamics which define its shifting boundaries and the internal relations of power.

According to Gagnon, ethnicity is a "fluid and complex relational process of identification, rather than a static attribute or interest", configuring forms of social relations (Gagnon, 2006, p. 8). For example, in his analysis of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s, he contends that the ethnic aspect of such conflicts has been overemphasised in the Western press and academic literature, providing a misleading interpretation of what was happening on the ground. In fact, violence was not caused by pre-modern ethnic bonds or attachments, but was the outcome of a dialectics between a rising mass mobilisation for socio-economic and political change and strategies employed by elites in power to maintain their positions. The use of violence had the effect of "*demobilizing* key parts of the population by trying to impose political homogeneity on heterogeneous social spaces" (Gagnon, 2006, p. 7). The challenge to the existing structure of power was met with a process of re-framing the concept of political space, grounding the discourse on a contest over who had the right to occupy it, rather than on the claims around which the population was being mobilised. Gagnon maintains that violence participated in at least three ways in the process of configuration of the conflict narrative. First, it redirected the demands for change towards an alleged threat. Second, it reformulated ethnicity as a fixed, immutable category and

> ethnic groups as clearly bounded, monolithic, unambiguous units whose members are linked through ineffable bonds of blood and history and who thus have a single, objective common interest, which is identified with the status quo elites.

Third, this reinterpretation of ethnicity defined a homogeneous political space and eclipsed calls for changes and new opportunities in the contemporary dynamics of power (Gagnon, 2006, p. 7-9). Thus, according to Gagnon, "ethnic conflict" was not the cause but rather the outcome of certain forms of mobilisation through and discourses about violence.

Similarly, in his study of hostility and hatred between multi-ethnic British imperial forces and the Japanese military during the Second World War, Barkawi proposes an argument about the role of violence as constitutive of "ethnicity". According to the author, war and fighting generated extreme antagonism along ethnic lines, so that conflicting identities, that in retrospect appear to have motivated the atrocities perpetrated by the two armies, were in fact a product of that very brutal

violence (Barkawi, 2004). The processes of production of ethnic boundaries and the configuration of ethnicity as a focal point for mobilisation were, in that sense, not the cause but rather the outcome of complex socio-political processes in which violence played a crucial, structuring role.

Interestingly, some authors push the critique to the ethnicity paradigm even further, by questioning the validity of the concept itself. Gilley argues that the notion of ethnic conflict is weak in that it "tends to homogenize quite distinct political phenomena" (Gilley, 2004, p. 1155). According to Gilley, ethnic markers may be present in political conflict, but this does not necessarily mean that such a phenomenon should be labelled "ethnic conflict". In fact, he contends that, if ethnicity is considered a simple "focal point for mobilisation", then nothing such as "ethnic conflict" can be projected as a self-standing phenomenon (Gilley, 2004).

The different perspectives offered by approaches to ethnicity and ethnic conflict provide an overview of the difficulty of engaging with a social space, constantly shifting and defined by the very discourses that are meant to analyse it. In that sense, the reflections proposed in the last part of this review of literature offer the possibility for a shift in perspective, which starts from a reflection on the configuration of social boundaries and moves to an understanding of their multiple, intersecting dimensions.

Social Boundaries and their Symbolic Construction

This study seeks to depart from the approaches stressing the primacy of ethnic bonds and affiliations. In fact, they tend to overlook the processes through which boundaries of ethnic difference become meaningfully relevant and the socio-political circumstances in which such representations emerge and are articulated in social practices.

This part draws upon different perspectives on the notion of social boundaries as analytical categories. Friedrich Barth's and Anthony Cohen's contributions (Barth, 1969, Cohen, 1985) are briefly explored and integrated with an approach that looks at the dynamics of boundary configuration and their multiple dimensions, providing examples from the Indian context. The purpose of this part is to offer a conceptual background for the analysis of the notion of religious community and the "communal paradigm".

In a landmark study on ethnicity, Barth rejects a culturalist perspective to focus on a relational approach (Barth, 1969). First of all, ethnic groups are produced by the actors themselves through processes of exclusion and identification. They are not, therefore, objective entities, pre-dating conflict and stemming from given cultural contents, but categories configured in the forms of social interaction. In that sense, Barth stresses the relevance of the processes and dynamics through which the notion of ethnic group is generated and maintained. Consequently, instead of focussing on the structures and institutions of single ethnies, Barth's analysis concentrates on ethnic boundaries, the processes through which they are configured and reproduced, and the way they become meaningful and transform in particular circumstances.

Speaking about gender as a fundamental principle for the construction of social boundaries Peiss and Gerson contend that "boundaries highlight the dynamic quality of the structures of gender relations, as they influence and are shaped by social interactions" (Gerson & Peiss, 1985, p. 319). Gender, in that sense, is regarded as an axis along which distinctions are articulated and social boundaries reproduced in a relational process. More in general, the perspective offered here focuses on discourses and practices which configure boundaries of "religious communities" at the intersection of multiple dimensions, structuring relations of super/subordination in society which, in turn, unveil the "permeability" of such distinctions. The reproduction of social boundaries is thus deeply connected with the (in)visibility of the processes of their configuration and, ultimately, with the structuring of relations of power in society.

Interestingly, A. P. Cohen suggests that the notion of community does not exist out of simple cultural aspects, structures or institutions but as a symbolic construction, through which social boundaries are produced. Thus, communities are "symbolic forms" adaptable to changing circumstances, thanks to the very ambiguity of symbols, which shape their boundaries in relation to other communities (Cohen, 1985, p. 40). The meanings attributed to symbols, rituals and actions depend on the interpretations people give to them according to their idiosyncratic experience. In spite of their "official" form, symbols and rituals have as many meanings as the interpretations attributed to them by individuals. Thus, thanks to their malleability, symbols allow for different interpretations to coexist, shift and transform within the boundaries of the community[13].

[13] See for example the contestation over the meaning of the movement for a separate Telangana state and its symbols. Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

Cohen underlines the important role played by interpretations of the past in reasserting the community's boundaries with respect to other socio-political entities and in dealing with internal tensions. In line with this perspective, and with reference to Hindus and Muslims in India, Parekh argues that one of the major ongoing debates surrounding the idea of national identity focuses on the importance of historical roots, which can ground the concept of "Indian identity" as a unique category with respect to which different sections of society are positioned (Parekh, 1994). In Parekh's view, the shaping of a solid and effective sense of history is of pivotal importance not only to enhance internal identification, but also to explain and justify the current situation of the group in relation to others (Parekh, 1994, p. 492-504). With respect to this, the movement of the Hindu Right in India is an interesting example of the way symbolic discourses and practices construct and continuously negotiate religious communities' boundaries and relations through a discourse of history and tradition.

In *Hindutva. Who is a Hindu*, V.D. Savarkar defines the essential aspects of what he names "the Hindu civilisation" (Savarkar, 1923). In analysing the text, Jaffrelot (Jaffrelot, 1992) identifies kinship and the moulding of the community's historical roots as two fundamental elements on which Savarkar grounds the core of the "Hindu nation":

> These are the essentials of Hindutva – a common nation (Rashtra) a common race (Jati), and a common civilization (Sanskriti). (Savarkar, 1923).

A Hindu is a member of a *jati*, a kinship group to whom Savarkar attaches racial contents[14] and whose roots are to be found in the "Vedic golden age". The reference here is to a "classical Hindu period", portrayed as a time in which culture and politics flourished. This image is combined with a narrative of the "Muslim period" as "an age of conquest, destruction and the consequent decay of Hindu civilization" (Brass, 2004, p. 22). A third, fundamental aspect of *Hindutva*[15] is territory. According to Savarkar, the uniqueness of Hindu civilisation derives from the fact that it originated in the "sacred

[14] According to Savarkar, the *jati* is the social category in which a Hindu is born and that defines, not only the individual's placement into the broader caste to which his/her *jati* belongs, but also some fundamental aspects of the physical appearance and the personality of the members.

"The word *jati*, derived from the root Jan - to produce - means a brotherhood, a race identified by a common origin, possessing a common blood. All Hindus claim to have in their veins the blood of the mighty race incorporated with and descended from the Vedic fathers, the Sindhus". (Savarkar, 1923, p. 84-85).

[15] According to Anand, "Hindu nationalism (*Hindutva*/Hindu Right) [...] is embodied within various political and cultural organizations, most of which are branded as part of the *Sangh Parivar* ("the Sangh family": *Sangh* loosely translates as organization but is used as a proper name in this context)" (Anand, 2007, p. 257).

geography" of the motherland, in opposition to other "alien cultures". The relevance of the sense of belonging to a land emerges in Savarkar's interpretation of the word Hindu (Shindhu) as:

> [...] he who looks upon the land that extends from Sindu to Sindu – from the Indus to the Seas, - as the land of his forefathers – his Fatherland (Pitribhu), who inherits the blood of that race, whose first discernible source could be traced to the Vedic Saptasindhus [...] (Savarkar, 1923, p. 115-116).

This argument represents a fundamental narrative of the Hindu Right's ideology in India, shaping the boundaries of a religious-political community with an exclusive right to rule in India. Therefore, besides the production of symbolic boundaries, this narrative can also be regarded as an ideology of domination[16]. Throughout this work, I argue that the dominant discourses about fundamental symbols involve not only the construction of the "communities'" boundaries and their mutual relations, but also the configuration of relations of power between different sections of society within and across "religious communities". Thus, multiple dimensions intersect and different social tensions unfold and are accommodated in the process of configuration and reconfiguration of the social boundaries rendered visible in conflict narratives.

With respect to the founding myth of *Hindutva* for example, the notion of a united Hindu fold originating in this legendary "golden age" in fact mirrors a social order of homogenisation, which extends onto certain sections of society (including lower caste and tribal people) a myth of origin and homogeneity rendering them completely invisible. In the process of representing "Hinduism" as an overarching identity, Savarkar's narratives of symbols reproduce relations of super/subordination within the category of the "Hindus" and diffuse multiple social tensions unfolding, for example, around the idea of the universality of a patriarchal, caste order.

On the one hand, this rhetoric of symbols determines the distinctiveness of one community so that "almost any matter of perceived difference between the community and the outside world can be rendered symbolically as a resource of its own boundaries" (Cohen, 1985, p. 117). On the other, within these very boundaries, a variety of positionings are assigned and power relations articulated by virtue of the multiple representations and meanings for which symbols allow.

[16] Kapur and Cossman argue that the *Hindutva* ideology is part of a contest over domination or hegemonic way of understanding the world that contributes to legitimating social power and inequality (Kapur & Cossman, 1993, p. 35).

Barth's and Cohen's approaches move the focus from the content of identities to the context of social relations in which the "sense of discrimination" is constructed (Cohen, 1985, p. 12). The configuration of boundaries and the meanings attributed to them constitute according to Cohen the symbolic aspect of community. Boundaries are produced in social interactions and become relevant only when people attach particular meanings to them and render them symbolically as the references for internal identification and external differentiation.

Building on Barth's and Cohen's contributions to the study of ethnicity, this research aims at unveiling the contexts and processes through which boundaries of religious communities (Hindu/Muslim) are constructed and reproduced symbolically, by focussing on the various dimensions of interfaith relations in the city of Hyderabad.

However, drawing from studies of Indian colonial and postcolonial state and integrating feminist approaches to violence, identity and power, this analysis moves beyond the Hindu-Muslim paradigm as it tries to explore the multiple dimensions of the social space of interfaith relations. In so doing, it attempts to represent the power dynamics that configure boundaries not only between but also within and across the very religious communities that practices of interfaith relations contribute to mould. This process is considered momentous for understanding the tensions over pushes for social change, often hidden behind the dominant discourse of communalism.

2.2.2 Communalism as an Analytical Paradigm

The paradigm of communalism has been applied in different ways to scholarly analysis of interfaith relations in India. These studies offer a variety of perspectives on the dynamics and processes inherent in this social space, sometimes focussing on elite's manipulation (Brass, 1997; Brass, 2003), electoral competition (Wilkinson, 2004), economic factors (Engineer, 1995), civil society networks (Varshney, 2002) or psychological dynamics (Kakar, 1996) etc. However, drawing from the different perspectives on the concept of ethnicity and in the light of the above reflections on social boundaries and their symbolic construction, this section aims at presenting the limitations of the communal paradigm as a conceptual tool for analysis and at further developing this study's perspective on interfaith relations in the city of Hyderabad.

Among the dominant approaches to communalism, some focus on the socio-economic divide between Hindus and Muslims and the process of secularisation as

major explanatory factors. One of the most prolific scholars supporting a similar line of argument is Ashgar Ali Engineer. Though sharing with instrumentalist views the idea that institutions, political parties and organisations play a central role in producing Hindu-Muslim violence for electoral purposes, he combines this dimension with socio-economic and cultural aspects, stressing the importance of clashing interests between religious groups as a core element for the production of conflict and violence[17]. Engineer's main point is that communalism must be analysed in the light of the changes in the social structure, affecting relationships among different sections of society. He argues that communal strife did not exist, in its endemic and violent form, during the medieval period, when all relationships were regulated by loyalty within a rigid feudal social structure that hindered competition for political power and economic resources. Instead, he places the rise of communalism in India in the colonial period, when the introduction of a capitalist economy led to a crystallisation of religious identities in the context of competition for resources and power. Simultaneously, the classification of religious communities by the British colonial administration with the help of *Ulamas* and *Brahmins* brought about a polarisation of religious identities, whose borders were originally shuffled and overlapping.

However, Christopher Bayly rejects the idea of communalism as the outcome of colonial ruling strategies. According to him, in pre-colonial India forms of resistance to the hegemonic social order of caste Hinduism, later institutionalised during the colonial and post-colonial periods, existed in the form of "communal strife". Moreover, according to Bayly, communalism as conflict over economic and social issues emerged in the course of the eighteenth century at the core of the feudal system. The emergence of Muslim gentry in the system of land-revenue mainly managed by Hindus and Sikhs peasants led the local rural society to attack Muslim aristocracy and its religious symbols. Thus, interest-based conflict took a communal form. According to Bayly, some episodes of violence in the pre-colonial era took place in rural areas in the form of "land wars", because the main socio-economic interests revolved around land. On the contrary, in the colonial and post-colonial period communal violence has been a

[17] According to Engineer, ethnicity is composed by a "primordial identity" and by a continuous "renegotiation of intergroup power status" (Engineer, 1995, p. 5). Under specific circumstances, the combination of these two aspects can lead to the enhancement of those features defining an exclusive religious affiliation and to an instrumental politics of religious identities.

predominantly urban phenomenon, because the main socio-economic and political interests have developed in the cities (Bayly, 1985).

Besides locating the origin of "communal conflict" in the colonial period, Engineer's discourse focuses on the structural change in the economic and political assets, as the foremost causes for the spread of communalism in India. In particular, the changes at the economic level produced social inequalities between Hindus and Muslims, because of the different positions from which the two communities approached socio-economic change. While Hindus found their way into the new patterns of production, thus benefitting from industrialisation, the Muslims ruling class remained anchored to the feudal economy that represented the basis of its aristocratic power. Hence, the power balance between the two communities started to shift in favour of the Hindus[18]. Engineer argues that in this context, competition between political and economic elites and their instrumental use of religion was of pivotal importance. This strategy arose when, during the independence movement, mass politics fostered the political and social participation of a large part of the Indian population. The increasing awareness among the people of the profoundly unequal social order and of the possibility to renegotiate social positionings in the state and nation building processes led minorities to claim their political and social rights, challenging the supremacy and privileges of the majority. The degree to which this phenomenon led to communal violence depended on the extent to which politicians appealed to the "emotional potential of communal issues" to pursue their interests, through the polarisation of religious communities (Engineer, 1995, p. 90).

Engineer also elaborates on the nature of Indian secularism mirrored by the Indian National Congress's politics of equal treatment of all religious groups within a context of national unity. At the basis of this project is the idea that religious minorities would be granted a share in the political and economic resources and that their interests

[18] According to Engineer, the role played by capitalistic development in fostering communalism in India is multifaceted. From a psychological point of view, by promoting individualism within a society deeply attached to collective values and group affiliations, capitalism produced a sense of loss among the people. Moreover, industrialisation fostered a process of urbanisation, with the consequent creation of slums and ghettoes were people with different religious and ethnic identities were forced to live together. Capitalism and modernisation also questioned traditional forms of leaderships by starting up a process of secularisation of the public life. The search for new reference points, led elites belonging to different communities to consolidate their leadership by strengthening religious affiliation. This process was combined with an increasing competition for resources and power that made religious appeal one of the most powerful means to gain support for pursuing political, social and economic interests. Thus, the introduction of a capitalist economy into a former feudal organisation, together with colonial strategies of domination, produced a polarisation of social identities, transforming "medieval religious consciousness into communal consciousness" (Engineer, 1995, p. 14).

would not be subordinate to those of the Hindu majority (p. 265). Engineer argues that in India, secularism had to cope with the peculiarity of the local context in which religion continued to represent a fundamental dimension for defining individual as well as group identity. According to this view, the incapacity of the National Congress to counteract a communalisation of social and political life depends on the failure in providing a convincing Indian way to secularism, interpreted instead as a politics of appeasement of religious communities' requests depending on the political momentum. According to Engineer, the "attacks" on Indian secularism mainly moved by organisations linked to the Hindu Right are part of a political strategy asserting the Hindu majority's right to dominate India politically and culturally. Thus, the communalisation of society flowed into a political competition of interests that have challenged the building and affirmation of the Indian democracy along a secular line[19].

Engineer's analysis on the competition between religious communities leaves some fundamental questions unanswered. First of all, it fails to acknowledge the contexts and the processes of configuration of the politics of interfaith relations in terms of majority/minority and the dynamics through which Hindus and Muslims are configured as homogeneous and discrete religious and political folds. In that sense, the role of the National Congress as the main political formation claiming ownership over the discourse of Indian secularism is not convincingly elaborated in terms of its participation in the "communalisation" of the colonial and post-colonial society. In that sense, by accepting the "communal paradigm" as a framework for analysis, his approach seems to overlook the connections and interactions between communalism and the discourse of Indian secularism, which seems instead to be posited in a dichotomy[20]. More in general, the multiple tensions that inform the social order that communalism contributes to reproduce are not considered beyond the category of the religious community and the Hindu-Muslim dichotomy.

Other studies adopt an instrumentalist perspective to communalism. As mentioned in Section 2.2.1, one of the most prominent representatives of this approach is Paul R. Brass. In his study of Hindu-Muslim riots in India, Brass argues that communal violence is functional to the achievement of political ends, especially during election periods, when parties and organisations exacerbate the electorate's religious

[19] For a debate on the secular vs. the communal character of Indian democracy see (Chatterjee, 1994), (Nandy, 1990), (Madan, 1987; 1993), (Vanaik, 1998), and (Bhargava, 1998).

[20] See Section 2.2.3

identities to gain the vote of one community as a whole (Brass, 1997). Brass's study offers interesting insights on the role of violence in configuring hostile interfaith relations, the dynamics of identity politics put in place by elites and the mechanisms of construction of a "riot-prone" city. The core of Brass's argument is that the production of Hindu-Muslim violence is based on the activity of riot-specialists, a "network of actors, groups and connections involving persons from different social categories whose effect, leaving aside intentions for the moment, is to keep a town or city in a permanent state of awareness of Hindu-Muslim relationships" (Brass, 1997, p. 284). An area thus becomes riot-prone or communally-sensitive when the people of different faiths are assigned specific and reciprocally opposed political, social and cultural locations based on their association with a particular religion. Brass calls this phenomenon an "institutionalised riot system" and contends that its origins and purposes are essentially political and elite-oriented. Consequently, the endemic character of Hindu-Muslim conflict in certain Indian cities is associated with the presence of an institutionalised riot system, managed by local and state elites and aimed at gaining support from people polarised along religious lines.

The identification of the institutions' and politicians' role behind episodes of violence shows that riots depend largely on the consequences and practical manifestations of a strategy rather than being spontaneous outbreak of sectarian rage. Moreover, according to Brass, the way in which such events are interpreted is the point at which violence assumes the function of polarising social groups for political purposes, by constructing the discourse around the rhetoric of hostility between two religious communities. In his works, Brass presents insightful conclusions concerning the responsibility of political parties, the state and cultural organisations in promoting riots as an ordinary means to compete for power. Moreover, Brass hints at the idea that riots are an integral part of a broader structure of domination that uses violence to perpetuate polarisation, antagonism and social control to the extent that it becomes an acceptable and effective instrument to gain political consensus. Institutionalised riot systems are the product of this implicit legitimisation of communalism as a tool for political competition[21]. However, by stressing the instrumentalist logic without

[21] Another approach to communalism regards electoral competition as the main aspect accounting for the presence or absence of hostility between Hindus and Muslims. Wilkinson maintains that "town-level electoral incentives account for where Hindu-Muslim violence breaks out and that state-level electoral incentives account for where and when state governments use their police forces to prevent riots" (Wilkinson, 2004, p. 4). More in general, Wilkinson

addressing its limitations, Brass leaves other fundamental dimensions of interfaith relations underexplored. For example, according to Van de Veer, religious issues are not simply smokescreens hiding the "real" clash of material interests and social divides, nor are they simply political tricks that benefits politicians' interests. Religious discourse and practice are, according to him, constitutive of changing social identities. Moreover, Van de Veer stresses the importance of analysing both the ideologies that produce conceptions of the world and personhood, and the historical context in which they are produced (Van de Veer, 1994). While drawing inspiration from some of Brass's insightful observations, this research aims at accounting for the tensions that remain unaddressed when referring to Hindu-Muslim conflict, trying also to acknowledge the agency of people other than elites in the production of multiple narratives and practices of interfaith relations.

The relevance of elites' interests and manoeuvres is instead downsized in Ashutosh Varshney's approach, looking at social networks to explain the origins and reproduction of communalism. In his work, Varshney includes communalism within the broader category of ethnic conflict, underlying the importance of the identification with a set of values shared by a group of people as the main force strengthening the sense of belonging to a religious community[22] (Varshney, 2003). Varshney's main argument is that ethnic or communal violence is directly linked to the structure of civil society that, according to its organisation, can act either as a preventing or an enabling force. Varshney maintains that the presence of inter-communal forms of civic engagement within a defined social context hinders the polarisation of communal identities and, consequently, decreases the likelihood of communal riots. He identifies two different structures of networks between social groups: "everyday" and "associational" forms of civic engagement. The former refer to informal, friendly relationships among individuals, while the latter arise mainly through structured and organised associations. Formal networks are stronger than everyday connections because their interest-based nature entails a set of social and economic relationships limiting elites' incentives to employing polarising strategies for political purposes.

Varshney's analysis focuses on the structure of civic life as the starting point for the study of violence, reducing the importance of politics and institutions in affecting

confutes the validity of state-centred approaches that seek to explain the recurrence of Hindu-Muslim violence focusing solely on the weakness of state institutions (p. 85-96).

[22] See Section 2.2.1 for a critique to the notion of ethnicity based on categories of membership.

the state of interfaith relation. Using this conceptual framework, Varshney compares pairs of Indian cities presenting similar demographic and social characteristics, but different degrees and forms of social engagement. He underlines the opposite roles of inter-communal vs. intra-communal forms of civic engagement in the configuration of ethnic relations. While the former, as stated above, are more likely to induce communal harmony, the latter often lead to a crystallisation and polarisation of communal identities and the formation of opposing groups competing for resources and power.

The attention paid to social rather than political aspects of communalism is interesting inasmuch as it tries to account for variations in the occurrence of violence. Nevertheless, the very identification of civic life as the main cause for the outbreak of violence seems to lead to a circular argument. For example, according to Varshney, since most of South India has never had a ruling Muslim aristocracy, social stratification has been deeply affected by the Hindu castes system. Therefore, when mass politics arose in the 1920s, the political discourse focussed on Hindu intra-communal struggles for social justice rather than taking the form of Hindu-Muslim divide. This situation favoured the growth of a thick network of inter-communal civic engagement on the one hand, and the rise of inter-caste conflict on the other. Therefore, the development of inter-communal civic engagement, which Varshney identifies as the main reason for the production of a non-communalised political arena in certain cities, turns out to be a consequence of the pre-existing caste-centred social structure that started to be questioned when mass politics was introduced and the disobedience campaigns were launched in the first decades of the 1900s. Hence, the development of inter-communal forms of civic engagement was possible only where religious identities were not polarised, communal affiliation not emphasised and where conflicting interests involved caste or intra-religious matters, meaning, where Hindu-Muslim relationships were good and where religious affiliations did not imply conflicting economic, political and social interests. In conclusion, civic engagement in an inter-communal form seems to require specific conditions which depend on the political and socio-economic context. Again, the categories of Hindu and Muslim are not questioned as fundamental constructions of discourses of communalism. The interconnections between dynamics within, between and across "religious communities" and the processes of configuration of conflicting social categories within the discursive landscape of communalism is thus not addressed in Varshney's argument.

In this thesis, social networks are considered a fundamental aspect for the configuration of interfaith relations beyond the communal paradigm. However, Varshney's idea that it is because of inter-communal forms of civic engagement that, "despite having the same demographic proportions of Hindus and Muslims, some cities remain peaceful but others have repeated communal violence" (Varshney, 2002, p. 281) does not provide us with insights about the relations of power unfolding within the space of interfaith relation beyond a rather static Hindu vs. Muslim dichotomy.

The last section of this review presents an approach that, among others, attempts to combine perspectives focusing on the socio-cultural and religious dimensions of interfaith relations with others oriented towards interest-based, materialist explanations (Shani, 2007, p. 9).

In his study of Hindu-Muslim relations in the city of Hyderabad, Kakar examines the origins and patterns of communalism from a psychoanalytical perspective, conceiving of religious identity as "a person's feelings and attitudes towards the self as a member of an ethnic/religious/cultural collectivity" (Kakar, 1996, p. ix). In his analysis, Kakar focuses on the individual's perceptions of belonging to a group, in opposition to another. Accordingly, the subjectivity explored by Kakar does not refer only to ordinary people's narrations and explanations of violence, but encompasses accounts provided by media, politicians, community leaders or scholars. In particular, he contends that "official" interpretations are often ideologically and emotionally charged and tend to emphasise the religious dimension of violence. Hence, the accounts, interviews and perspectives presented in his work have the purpose to uncover the subtle influence of personal convictions and ideologies and to understand the way they affect reconstructions and interpretations of interfaith relations and violence. This aspect is particularly relevant because, in dealing with such issues, "a blend of religious, political, and economic aims becomes imbued with religious ultimacy" (Kakar, 1996, p. 40-41). According to Kakar, processes of identification and differentiation produce representations of the Other as aggressive and threatening, paralleled with the victimisation of one's own group, coming to represent purity, morality and tolerance. Conflict tends to be perceived as a consequence of the essential differences opposing Hindus and Muslims rather than a product of local, contingent conditions and issues. The identification of natural, fundamental features of both the Self and the Other tends to exacerbate conflict, because it crystallises identities and cultures along divisive lines,

constructing polarised communities and the boundaries between them. Interestingly, Kakar claims that these instrumental interpretations of culture have influenced explanations of communal strife provided by scholars, politicians, journalists and, ultimately, by the people in general.

In the accounts gathered through his fieldwork in the city of Hyderabad, Kakar identifies the "rhetoric of violence", portraying the opposite group as a homogeneous, stereotyped category, characterised by negative, sinful and aggressive attitudes. This discourse emerges for example in the words of both Muslim and Hindu wrestlers living in Hyderabad's Old city and often involved in acts of violence during riots[23]. Their accounts, as well as those provided by other people, are imbued with the image of the Other as a permanent threat, whereby collective identities are fundamentally shaped in opposition to another community[24].

Kakar's perspective adds more insights on the role of violence in the construction of social boundaries and processes of inclusion and exclusion. Moreover, his fieldwork-based research offers an interesting approach to the psychological aspects of the politics of communalism in the city of Hyderabad. He mentions that so-called "communal identities", are continuously negotiated according to stereotypes and categorisations that place people within Muslim or Hindu communities, despite the many diverse ways in which people locate with respect to both religious faith and the many other dimensions of life experienced. At the same time, however, the communal paradigm seems to be taken for granted in Kakar's narrative, as the framework for analysis of interfaith relations in terms of Hindus vs. Muslims[25].

In the course of this study I will try to account for the multiplicity of tensions that inform the space of interfaith relations and show their potential for transcending

[23] Kakar argues that wrestlers trained at dedicated gyms often belong to local branches of political organisations. See Section 7.2.1.

[24]More precisely, Kakar attributes the rise of religious revivals to the effects of the modernisation process on the psyche of people, and the subsequent need for structured and reassuring communities which offer shelter and give an ultimate sense to life. At the same time, however, these communities happen to represent socio-economic and political interests embodied by specific political and social organisations, composed in their head-quarters by educated, secularised and modernised elites. The people's support to these organisations is often fomented by the depiction of the other community as menacing their interests, as threatening their right to live and as suffocating their allegedly common and shared religious identity

[25] Amartya Sen maintains that religion and ethnicity cannot be considered exhaustive concepts for defining people's identities, because they ignore the many other affiliations and positionings individuals experience in different contexts and circumstances (Sen A. , 2006, p. 31).The distinction between the human need for self-identification and the phenomenon of communalism is momentous in that religious affiliation is not the sole categorising paradigm and, most importantly, it does not necessarily place people in homogeneous and reciprocally antagonist social groupings (Sen A. , 2006).

communalism. This last is regarded as one narrative of interfaith relations, implying social marginalisation of certain categories and the configuration and re-configuration of social boundaries that reproduce different, intersecting forms of violence.

2.2.3 Communalism as a Socio-Political Paradigm

The Configuration in the Context of Indian Nationalism

The approaches analysed above, while focusing on different aspects and issues related to hostile interfaith relations do not explore the implications of communalism as language, discourse, imagery and action within and across the dichotomous categories of Hindu and Muslim.

As argued by Peter Gottschalk, many works on interfaith relations in India refer to the analytic categories of Hindu and Muslim as fixed, essentialised and unhistorical communities, repositories of totalising religious identities and often divided by antagonism and animosity (Gottschalk, 2000). As a consequence, many and diverse approaches to interfaith relations reproduce the fundamental parameters of the communal paradigm.

Pandey argues that the terminology of "communalism", coined during the colonial times, mirrored the attempt to make sense of the complex social fabric and relations peculiar to the Indian context along "orientalist" lens (Pandey, 1990, p. 1-22). Through the notion of communalism, the British were (dis)qualifying the Indian context as backward, sectarian and bigot and essentialising religion as a homogenising and stable source for social classification and for the demarcation of the boundaries of religious communities[26]. However, though the role played by the British in institutionalising communalism as an essential cleavage of India's society is crucial, it would be simplistic to attribute the emergence of the communal paradigm simply to the "divide and rule" policy without exploring the existing structures of power and their reconfiguration during the colonial rule, the independence struggle and the life of independent India.

Since the colonial times and during the struggle for independence, the "communal" has been a synonym of sectarian, anti-secular and violent. Hence, organisations, politics, groupings and individuals to which this label is attached are

[26] See Chapter 4 for a perspective on the configuration of "tradition" based on selected religious texts and the implications on socio-economic and gender relations beyond the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm.

disqualified as a threat to the stability of the democratic state and of the ideology of "Indian secularism". With respect to this, I would like to draw from Upadhyay's perspective on Indian secularism, proposing an angle for understanding the connections between the politics of caste and communalism. According to Upadhyay, the notion of secularism is inherent in "India's dominant nationalist creed" (Upadhyay, 2007, p. 3). During the times of the independence struggles, the mainstream nationalist movement embodied by the Congress Party engaged in a process of "redefinition of secularism in a uniquely Indian way", based on the concept of *sarva dharma sambhava* (let all religions prosper) (p. 4). The notion is fundamentally inscribed in a discourse of democratic representation which overlooks caste as the organising principle for socio-economic stratification of society while reproducing a form of "hegemonic majoritarianism" based on the unacknowledged power of upper-castes/classes. This, Upadhyay argues, legitimises "India's political system as democratic, and as representative of all castes, classes and communities, while in fact protecting the interests of the tiny minority who constitute its dominant castes and classes" (p. 4)[27]. Similarly, Mahmood argues that the principle of *sarva dharma sambhava*, underlying the Indian way to secularism mirrors in fact the tendency at hegemonic inclusiveness of the "Hindu framework" whereby the "majority community defines the terms according to which other religions may flourish" (Mahmood, 1993, p. 753) .

In order to contextualise the complexity and multidimensionality of interfaith relations in India and their connection with the politics of "secularism/majoritarianism", it is necessary to acknowledge and account for the processes of reconfiguration that local structures of power and relations between different sections of society underwent during the final period of the colonial rule, as the social order was being questioned at a multiplicity of levels. To this end, it is useful to briefly clarify certain terminology recurring throughout this work with respect to relations of power in society and the way they are articulated, legitimised and justified through appeals to tradition, culture and religion. In particular, the term Brahminism needs to be understood as an explanatory category in the context of analysing the space of interfaith relations, as it helps clarify

[27] Interestingly, argues Upadhyay, when "lower caste groups attempted to use the majoritarian vocabulary of community to demand social and economic justice, high caste elites responded by calling upon merit, competition and efficiency – slogans of a market society – to justify their unwillingness to countenance further reservation" (Upadhyay, 2007, p. 5). Thus, the appropriation of community and caste idioms by the lower sections of society to articulate a politics of recognition and redistribution has contributed to a process of their re-adaptation to a logic of "majoritarian politics" increasingly based on market society principles.

the fundamental connection between ideologies and practices of majoritarianism and communalism. Aloysius defines the "Brahminical" as a social organisation of

> people of different castes, who by birth first, but more importantly by conscious-moral adoption believe in, practice and stand to gain by *varnavyavastha* [caste system] in social relations (Aloysius G. , 2010, p. 8).

More specifically, according to Aloysius, Brahminism is expressed in both ideology and human agency. The former articulates the caste system as an essential principle for socio-economic organisation of society according to a fixed hierarchy which also translates into the cultural-political dominance of the upper-caste groups. The latter identifies those who benefit from this ideology, who regard themselves as Brahmins, as a "political formation with the majority of 'ideologically re-traditionalised' Brahmins at the core" (Aloysius G. , 2010, p. 41). Brahminism can thus be conceived of as a social order through which unequal relations of power are articulated based on a set of values, beliefs and practices. It is a relational principle of social stratification which is not limited to the Brahmins as a social/religious group, but that is engrained in the institutions, structures and cultures of power in the larger social context. According to Aloysius, the institutionalisation of Brahminism during the colonial rule followed a process of identification and configuration of a "Brahmincal class and its ideology", whether intended or not, as the partner-successor regime". The reconfiguration of the dominion of the upper-castes in the political and socio-economic spheres went hand in hand with "the rise to hegemony of the Brahminical imaginary concerning the unity, organicity and religiosity of the subcontinent through the new and overarching social discourse of 'Hinduism'" (Aloysius G. , 2010, p. 9). Thus, caste as an ideology and practice became constitutive of the social structure in the process of configuring a "local" elite alongside the British and, later, in the creation of independent India. Significantly, in the process of institutionalisation of Brahminism, the discourse of Hinduism became inclusive of the largest section of the population identified as part of the stratified "majority community", configuring the hegemony of the upper-castes and the exclusion of the non-Hindus (Aloysius G. , 2010, p. 11).

In that framework, caste is understood as a social system and an ideological discourse[28] based on hierarchical ascription and relations of super/subordination among

[28] Franco and Sherry Chand argue that "ideological discourse, interpreting the relationships of signs, creates a meta-language: thus, for instance, 'black' and 'white', originally indicators of colour, with a racist framework, evoke a whole range of negative and positive associations and emotions (Franco & Sherry Chand, 2009, p. 14).

different sections of society[29]. Franco and Sherry Chand contend that "in the language of *varna* (caste) the words purity/impurity, *savarna/avarna* [caste/outcaste] call immediately to mind and heart a constellation of particular meanings and emotional connotations" (Franco & Sherry Chand, 2009, p. 14). The "ascriptively segmented occupational and endogamous castes" (Aloysius G. , 1997, p. 25) have Brahmins, their religious symbols, texts and practices, their language and their beliefs at the top, attributing privileges and power, rules of behaviour and moral status according to a hierarchical order to all other social sections .

Aloysius argues that in the political economy of a society, power emerges in the context of contestation for resources ("economic, cultural and intellectual"). In the multiplicity of its forms, power is structured around a specific "nodal point or principle, settling into a harmonious unity in the form of a cultural specificity over a period of time". This makes power peculiar to each society. Moreover, power represents aspirations of groups and collectivities having unequal positions and force and can be expressed "either as dominance or as resistance" (Aloysius G. , 1997, p. 23-25). Brahminism was not, therefore, invented by the British in the sense that the *varna* ideology, as a hierarchical social system of domination of the upper-castes, configured itself in the Indian subcontinent over time, with different degrees of intensity in different regions and periods and was characterised by a high degree of malleability and persistence. Forms of resistance and contestation have also developed within it, sometimes articulated in the form of "religious heterodoxy" other times in the form of socio-political movements[30].

In this context, Aloysius links the process of consolidation of the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm to the emergence of political consciousness[31] among the lower strata of society during the colonial times in the midst of socio-political contestations for power. The origins and claims of these movements differed from the elitist aspirations of the Congress with which political awakening of nineteenth-century India is usually

[29] For in-depth explorations of the development of a caste system in India, see (Srinivas M. N., 1962; 1966).

[30] Buddhism, Jainism, the Bhakti movement and other regional movements have been interpreted as anti-hierarchical, anti-brahminical ideologies. See (Thapar, 1996; Mahmood, 1993, pp. 732-735; Aloysius G. , 1997, p. 28-30). Aloysius provides an interesting framework for the analysis of the Brahminic tradition and the challenges to its hegemony as an uneven and articulated expression of a dialectic of power as dominance and resistance. Notwithstanding this conceptual duplicity, there is a degree of ambiguity that blurs boundaries between the two levels (Aloysius G. , 1997, p. 24-33).

[31] Aloysius defines political consciousness as "the perception of power relations within society and of one's own (individual or group) position in that frame. It also refers to "an urgency to take collective action in order to strengthen or alter that position" (Aloysius G. , 1997, p. 53).

associated. Their various expressions emerged in response to and as a reflection of changing power relations in the social and political systems. Those originating in the lower rings of the social structure found in these changes a possibility to question the ascriptive caste hierarchy that kept them subjugated (Aloysius G. , 1997, p. 52-55). Aloysius notes that, despite their extreme variability in terms of geographic location, inspiration and cultural roots, these movements shared a twofold goal. On the one hand, they aimed at transforming the existing power structure based on the multiple inequalities articulated within a Brahminical social order. On the other, they attempted to play a role in the anti-colonial struggle and the ensuing nation-building process (Aloysius G. , 1997, p. 19).

For example, one of the most prominent struggles articulated at that time was the self-respect movement led by E. V. Ramaswami "Peryiar" in Tamil Nadu. Aimed at empowering the lower castes, particularly the Dalit (Untouchable) population and, more in general, at questioning the *varna* ideology at its roots, the movement openly exposed the dominant unequal social order promoted by Brahminical Hinduism and institutionalised by the colonial rule[32]. To take a more widely known example, B.R. Ambedkar contributed to mobilise the untouchables and raise consciousness of the undemocratic and discriminatory foundations of mainstream nationalism, which refused to question casteism in discourses about the social, cultural and political arrangements of independent India[33]. Coupled with regional movements who refused to identify with a broad and centralised Indian state led by the Congress, many of these struggles were substantially rejecting the discourses and practices of Indian nationalism as hegemonic and elitist. Thus, in many respects some of these tensions were internal to the so-called Hindu fold, challenging the foundations of mainstream nationalism and its leaders for reproducing an oppressive social order and claiming at the same time to represent an all-encompassing Indian nation. With respect to the consolidation of Brahminism, these struggles could be regarded as questioning the inclusion of certain marginalised sections

[32] For a comprehensive understanding of the Self-Respect movement see (Geetha & Rajadurai, 1998; Hodges, 2005; Pillai, 1982).

[33] "We were never against our country getting independence. But we want a straight answer to only one question. What will be our fate in free India? I posed that question before Gandhi and other Congress leaders. Only one question is what will be the position of our people in Swaraj? Whether we will remain the same Bhangis and Chamars as we are today; whether our children will not be admitted to the schools in the same way as it being done now; and our people will have to suffer as they are suffering now in the villages? What will happen to our people? At the Round Table Conference, this question was again raised, whether we want Swaraj or not. I asked Gandhi who was the sponsor of this move, the same question that what will he do for the poor people, if India got Swaraj" (Vol. XVII *Speeches of Ambedkar*, Part 3, p. 417, cited in (Aloysius G. , 2009, p. 72). See also (Ambedkar, 2008).

of society, as subordinated categories, within the Hindu fold (Aloysius G. , 2010, p. 11). At the same time, the other "religious minorities", especially the Muslims, were excluded from the imagined space of a (Hindu) India. The articulation of the "two-nation theory" and the common portrayal of certain Muslim elites' fight for a separated Pakistan as expression of "Muslim communalism"[34] can also be understood in the context of an overarching "communal" discourse of inclusive, encompassing "religious communities" whose internal differences, forms of contestation for power and social tensions were rendered invisible. Accordingly, Jalal contends that

> while Indian nationalism asserts its inclusionary idioms in the secular garb and Pakistani nationalists in an inclusionary religious mode, neither avoids the pernicious process of exclusion resulting from the implicit denial of difference (Jalal, 1997, p. 18).

The violence of Partition marked the final identification of the "communal" with interreligious hatred, imbued with an anti-secular, sectarian and therefore anti-national strand[35].

In the process of legitimisation of the National Congress movement as the embodiment of India's national-political aspirations, the multiple social tensions emerged and articulated in the context of social change began to be described as expressions of communal consciousness. At the same time, the above considerations show that the association of the term communal with an endemic Hindu-Muslim antagonism was inscribed in a condition of instability within the dominant discourse of Hinduism and of contestations of socio-economic and political hierarchies sanctioned by the colonial rule, in a process of their reconfiguration within the new regime.

According to anthropologist Cynthia Keppley Mahmood, Indian communalism is entrenched in the socio-political relations of Brahminical Hinduism (and its tendency to intellectual hegemony) with other spiritual and philosophical traditions (Mahmood, 1993, pp. 729-737). However, it is only when these lasts develop into a political consciousness that the forms of cultural and structural violence associated with Brahminical hegemony become openly visible. Thus, the rise of political awareness among all sections of Indian society (including women) during the late colonial and

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[34] For a critical view on the scholarship of Partition and the rhetoric of "Muslim nationalism" see (Jalal, 1994; 1996; 1997).

[35] It is mainly after independence that issues of ethnicity and communalism started to question the nature of the Indian democratic and pluralist state. As noted by Aloysius, "while problems of culture, ethnicity, identity etc., did form a strong undercurrent during this period, they emerged as a major challenge to state power only in the post-colonial era" (Aloysius G. , 1997, p. 17).

post-colonial times, in a context of institutional and socio-political change, rendered these tensions visible and challenged the social, cultural and political hegemony of the upper sections of society.

A final remark with respect to the nexus between Brahminism, secularism and communalism might help connecting the exploration of the origin of the "communal paradigm" with its contemporary implications. In that sense, it is interesting to reflect on Devji's perspective about the intersection of Brahminism, secularism and the ideology of the Hindu Right. According to Devji, the rhetoric of *Hindutva*[36] seems concerned with becoming mainstreamed within a nationalist project and vis-à-vis the state, a process which has led to an assimilation of *Hindutva*-Hinduism-Brahminism-secularism (Devji, 1992, p. 7). However, the identification of an external threat to the Indian nation, which underlies *Hindutva's* discourse of the anti-national, threatening Muslim, mirrors an aspiration for hegemony transversal to political ideological positionings, which displaces onto the "Muslim" the mark of difference threatening the very existence of an idea of India as a nation. Therefore, Devji argues,

> the Muslim would exist as a sign of national failure and remain a focus of attack even were there no Hindu nationalist parties, because the real problem is not religiosity but the politics of nationalism itself (Devji, 1992, p. 7).

This "politics of nationalism" has implications beyond the *Hindutva* discourse and the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm, because different sections of society are swallowed by and thus rendered invisible in discourses of communalism. Based on the above remark, a fundamental underlying assumption on which this work is based is well expressed in Aloysius argument that the

> class-like core of the Brahminical, in praxis united both through traditional kinship as well as the near-monopoly exercise of contemporary power, cuts across the self-proclaimed different political party affiliations and possible religio-cultural orientations (Aloysius G. , 2010, p. 41).

Violence and its Role in the Politics of Communalism

Broadly speaking the term "communal" has acquired two main, closely interrelated connotations, one regarding interfaith relations and conflict and the other referring to an alleged intrinsic belligerent and sectarian attitude of particular groupings or movements. Both meanings originated and spread during the colonial period when,

[36] *Supra* note 15.

parallel to the British effort to categorise and classify the population of the Subcontinent into fixed and rather homogeneous categories, more or less organised struggles and social movements started to question the reconfiguration of hegemonic power exerted by local Brahminical and feudal elites and the British colonisers.

The communal paradigm currently appears in descriptions of episodes of violence based on the different religious affiliations of the people involved. As noted above, this term contains in itself a specific interpretation of the phenomenon, i.e. perpetrators and victims belong to two different religious groups that are, for some reasons, antagonists. Hence, labelling an episode of violence "communal" implies that some sort of competition – economic, political, social or cultural – between two religious communities rests at the roots of the violence.

However, the identification of violence as the product of an alleged Hindu-Muslim hostility risks hindering a more in-depth exploration of the implications of such violence and, above all, of the power relations articulated in its interpretations, as part of the phenomenon itself. The communal paradigm tends to naturalise violence as the product of interreligious hatred, without considering the constitutive role violence itself plays in a politics of religious communities that seeks to legitimise a social order of domination and exclusion. Various forms of violence can become mechanisms for the perpetuation of and the resistance against a specific social order.

In the case of interfaith relations in India, attention is often paid to episodes of direct violence (riots) as expressions of Hindu-Muslim antagonism, either for the pursuit of vested interests or as sudden outbreaks of sectarian rage. However, forms of direct violence are part of a much broader system of violence laying the foundations for the reproduction of an order that has implications for the positionings of and mutual relations among different sections of society[37].

For example, the qualification of the 2002 violence in Gujarat with the term "communalism" is fundamentally misleading because it overlooks the involvement of the state and the underlying complex socio-economic dynamics within and across the categories of Hindu and Muslim[38]. In fact, a communal perspective neglects the larger picture of the historical, political and social contexts of the events and the narratives

[37] See Section 2.3.2 for an understanding of "communalism" as structural, cultural and direct violence.

[38] See for example (Shani, 2007) for an understanding of the massacre in Gujarat focusing on tensions among Hindus over the caste regime and their diversion onto Hindu-Muslim antagonism.

employed to legitimise a hegemonic socio-political system based on relations of super/subordination among different sections of society.

Implications of the Politics of Communalism

The language of communalism contributes to the process of naturalising religious communities and their mutual antagonism, veiling more complex and articulated social relations, and bearing negative connotations that impact on the practices of interfaith relations in terms of majority/minority relations.

Moreover, the term "communal" has become a political tool in the hands of different political actors, through which they conduct a struggle for domination and visibility. Since "the communal" is deemed to question the state's pluralistic and secular values, its derogatory qualifications attached to groupings and individuals have the effect of delegitimising their claims, reducing their foundations to sectarianism.

Consequently, the association with a religion becomes a social marker in the sense that it assigns a specific positioning with respect to the political and social arenas, according to the community at stake. For example, many Hindu Right leaders identify themselves as "nationalists" in opposition to "the Muslims" who are said to be "anti-national", following an "alien" religion whose fundamental teachings represent a threat to the unity and integrity of India as a nation[39].

Accordingly, Ayesha Jalal states that "neither the Congress nor the RSS, BJP and VHP[40] combination would plead guilty to the charge of communalism [...] The original sin of being communalist for the most part has been reserved for the subcontinent's Muslims" (Jalal, 1997, p. 2), as if a "communal consciousness" was inherent in the political and social views of "the Muslims" (p. 4). An example of this trend and the way it adapts to the changing political discourse is the association of

[39] As noted by Ajit Shai, "the sort of nationalism that is being projected by the Hindutva lobby is fiercely anti-Muslim. It is premised on a Brahminical worldview. It projects Muslims, but also all non-Hindus and those Hindus who do not agree to its ideology, as 'anti-national'. The *Hindutva* groups say they are willing to accept Muslims so long as they don't "look westward". This is a cunning strategy aimed at forever stoking the flames of divisiveness. For what is a Muslim worth if he doesn't look westward, toward Mecca?" Ajit Shai interviewed by Yoginder Sikand for www.countecurrents.org , Nov 10th, 2008.

[40] RSS is the acronym for Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer's Union), a Hindu nationalist organisation, part of the so-called *Sangh Parivar* family. It was founded in 1925 by K.B. Hedgewar. It is organised in "shakhas" (branches) that train the members in what are considered the tenets of the Hindu Right movement. The RSS is considered a militant organisation, having a strong influence on the ideological line of the political face of the Hindu Right movement, the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party). The VHP, acronym for Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) was founded in 1964 as the international branch of the Hindu Right movement. Its promoters are Hindu scholars and *sadhus* (religious leaders) and its aim is to foster a modern and commonly accessible Hinduism as the foundation for the establishment of a Hindu nation. The VHP was the main supporter of the Lord Ram temple agitation in Ayodhya that led to the Ramjanmabhoomi/Babri Masjid controversy and the demolition of the ancient mosque in Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh) by Hindu Right activists.

Muslims with terrorism. In mainstream media and politics, all bomb blasts occurred in India in the past few years have been directly attributed to "Islamic terrorism", leading to episodes of incarceration and torturing of "suspected Muslim terrorists". The assimilation of "terrorism" with the "Muslim community" and its inherent "communal" character are analysed in Chapter 7 in connection with the socio-economic and gender dimensions of such discourse.

The above considerations show that such processes of labeling have an impact on the configuration of social relations and political positioning of people whose identity is designated based on their faith and who are consequently assigned to different, unequal social locations. Moreover, they call for a perspective on interfaith relations encompassing and transcending the underlying dichotomies – Hindu/Muslim, majority/minority, conflict/harmony, riot-prone/peaceful – which overlook the intersection of multiple dimensions and power relations that constitute the social space of interfaith relations.

2.3 THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF INTERFAITH RELATIONS

The essentialising rhetoric of the politics of communalism neglects the multiple positionings and social tensions articulated in the web of relations among different sections of society. It is in the visibility of these very processes and in their dynamic and contextual nature that rests the possibility for transformation of which this research aims at giving a representation. Though this work is situated in the debate of peace and conflict studies as it tries to unveil the intellectual, ideological and practical predicaments reproduced through certain conflict narratives, it draws heavily on recent studies of Indian nationalism and on feminist perspectives that crosscut studies of gender, power and conflict. The theoretical framework of this research is based on the consideration that interfaith relations configure and are configured by a variety of dimensions that contribute to construct and reproduce boundaries and relations of super/subordination between, but also within and across "religious communities". Such dimensions can be veiled behind hegemonic discourses informed by the naturalised categories of the communal paradigm. Articulations of interfaith relations imply particular representations of difference in terms of relationships between "religious communities", interpretations of culture, history and tradition, the framing of space and the politics connected to its demarcation and appropriation, narratives of violence,

political and legal discourses etc. The way these themes are configured vary depending on the time, space and circumstances; accordingly, they constitute social boundaries, reproduce social tensions and, contrary to what discourses of communalism may suggest, encompass a variety of intersecting dimensions beyond religion, such as gender and socio-economic positioning.

Thus, while studies of interfaith relations conflict to focus mainly on episodes of violence and riots as expressions of the politics of communalism, this research explores the different processes through which hostile interfaith relations are produced and reproduced, feeding structures and cultures of violence that sustain, legitimise and continuously reconfigure multiple inequalities based on religion, socio-economic and gender positionings. The dimensions of interfaith relations are not static issues but relations configured around the shifting configurations and positionings of social categories. The focus on multiple dimensions allows for an understanding of conflict and change as potentially expressed in the same social space. Such framework for the analysis of interfaith relations offers insights on the possibilities to transcend the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm while at the same time cross and renegotiate other social boundaries configured along gender and socio-economic axes of power, reproduced in the discursive landscape of communalism.

This section offers a perspective on the notion of multiple, intersecting dimensions as an angle for representation of discourses and practices of interfaith relations. It also aims at introducing the themes identified for the process of deconstruction and reconstruction of the social space of interfaith relations. In fact, while each theme is dissected separately in the following chapters, the purpose of the argument proposed here is to show their interconnectedness and the way they configure and are in turn configured by narratives of interfaith relations.

2.3.1 The Role of Gender and Socio-economic Differentials as Crosscutting Dimensions

Based on existing literature, this section explores the idea of gender and socio-economic positionings as crosscutting dimensions of narratives and practices of interfaith relations. It shows how such conceptualisation might offer a perspective on communalism as a boundary-generative ideology with reference to the larger web of social relations. This perspective locates the discourse of communalism in the context of

relations of power in society, articulating the ideological, political and socio-economic dominance of the upper-castes/classes.

As mentioned in the previous sections, the connection between communalism and caste/class dynamics has been suggested by a number of studies in Indian historical sociology. Moreover, they have been explored with respect to the evolving narratives of Hindu nationalism (Aloysius G. , 2010a; Shani, 2007; Teltumbde, 2005). The present section builds on the existing literature, to explore the intersection between gender and socio-economic dimensions of the Hindu-Muslim paradigm, as a fruitful perspective to uncover the multiple implications of narratives of conflict and violence on the relations of power and the relative positioning of different sections of society. In the context of the communal paradigm, the perspective offered conceives of interfaith relations as a social space unfolding within and across the categories of Hindus and Muslims. Thus, the communal paradigm has implications for the location of different sections of society vis-à-vis the category of the "religious community" in an unequal social order. The reading of such category as configured around gendered and socio-economic distinctions is crucial to grasp the multiple tensions that unfold in the social space of interfaith relations. In particular, the connection between gender and socio-economic dimensions in narratives of hostile interfaith relations is momentous to understand how the naturalisation of antagonism between Hindu and Muslim communities is grounded on a process of veiling multiple tensions and the respective social locations of different sections of society.

Cynthia Cockburn argues that in feminist analyses

> the differentiation and relative positioning of women and men is seen as an important ordering principle that pervades the system of power and is sometimes its very embodiment. Gender does not necessarily have primacy in this respect. Economic, class and ethnic differentiation can also be important relational hierarchies, structuring a regime and shaping its mode of ruling. But these other differentiations are always also gendered, and in turn they help construct what is a man or a woman in any given circumstance. (Cockburn, 2004, p. 28).

In line with Cockburn's argument, the perspective adopted in this study conceives of gender as a fundamental and crosscutting dimension of narratives of interfaith relations whereby representations of masculinities and femininities contribute to configure social boundaries in terms of binary oppositions, by nourishing socio-economic inequalities and processes of identification and othering.

While the implications of the so-called communal violence and of religious nationalism on women have been dealt with in part of the literature on communalism[41], the gender dimension of interfaith relations with respect to the construction of social inequalities, boundaries and conflict has been quite overlooked until recently. Feminist analyses have paved the way for a more in-depth exploration of how an ambiguous discourse of gender is in fact an integral and fundamental aspect of communalism, understood here as a narrative of both domination - perpetuating relations of super/subordination among different sections of society - and social polarisation - configuring internally homogeneous and reciprocally antagonistic religious communities. These two implications of a communal paradigm exist only in relation to each other as processes intersecting and contributing to reproduce a Brahminical order, patriarchal and socio-economically unequal[42].

Hence, in the politics of religious identity the intersection of gender and socio-economic dimensions[43] ascribes to men and women unequal social locations that entail expectations on their behaviour, roles and spaces of action. Catia Confortini maintains that gender is a principle through which the world is structured along dichotomous categories, hierarchically organised (Confortini, 2009). Conflict is based on "gender symbolism", whereby binary distinctions are qualified through attributes attached to either femininity or masculinity. Thus, gender is a relation of power that informs other social interactions and power dynamics (Cockburn, 2004, p. 25)[44].

An interesting example is the legitimisation of direct violence in the name of the need to defend and protect women, custodians and symbols of the community's cultural heritage, from the external aggressions of a threatening Other[45]. These processes do not

[41] See for example, (Anitha, Manisha, Vasudha, & Kavitha, 1995; Bacchetta, 1996; 1994; Patel, 2005; Sarkar, 2002; Sarkar, Butalia, & Raman, 2001).

[42] Warren identifies five main levels of reproduction of "systems of domination": (1) value-hierarchical thinking, that is, Up-Down thinking which attributes higher value (status, prestige) to what is "Up" than to what is "Down"; (2) value dualism, that is, disjunctive pairs in which the disjuncts are seen as oppositional (rather than as complementary) and as exclusive (rather than inclusive); value dualisms include reason/emotion, mind/body, culture/nature, human/nature; and man/woman dichotomies; (3) conceptions of power as power-over (in contrast to power-with, power-within, power toward, and power-against power); (4) conceptions of privilege which favour the interests of the "Ups"; and (5) a logic of domination, that is, a structure of argumentation which presumes that superiority justifies subordination (Warren & Cady, 1994, p. 6).

[43] Other dimensions such as age are also relevant for defining narratives and practices of interfaith relations. Though it is not possible to account for all of them here, their relevance will emerge in the unfolding of this work.

[44] In the first place, gender is a social construct that produces specific roles, behaviours and expectations differentiated in terms of masculinity and femininity. "But gender is also an analytic category, which helps to organize the way people think about the world. People thus come to see social reality as a set of mutually exclusive dichotomous categories, in relationship of super/sub-ordination to each other" (Confortini, 2009, p. 50).

[45] See Chapter 4.

simply naturalise boundaries between religious communities and their reciprocal hostility. They also legitimate and reproduce relations of super/subordination between and within the categories of men and women, defining normative ideal masculinities and femininities and their location and (in)visibility based on their caste/class, age, religion. Finally, in so doing, they erase from the representation of social relations subjugated voices forcefully included into frozen social categories and groupings, whose relations contribute to structure and are articulated within an unequal social order. The relevance of feminist contributions to the study of conflict is precisely the focus on the fundamental intersecting dimensions structuring power and its contestation, social tensions and change. Ultimately, they help go beyond the Self/Other dichotomy because they point to the reproduction of relations of super/subordination transversal to naturalised conflict narratives.

In the discourse of communalism, representations of masculinity and femininity are constructed across categories of class, caste, minority, majority, religious belonging, drawing boundaries, perpetuating unequal power relations and enhancing processes of inclusion and exclusion between and across "religious communities". Images of the ideal woman and man are projected in the wider discourses and practices of interfaith relations and power politics, functioning as fundamental symbols around which multiple tensions are configured. They contribute to shape the motivations, imagery, practices and social structures that constitute the politics of communalism.

In that context, the process of reproduction of hostile interfaith relations is linked to the perpetuation of an unequal social order grounded on naturalised and asymmetric binary distinctions. In the processes, socio-economic differentials and their interconnections with gender and religion play a fundamental role in configuring internal and external boundaries of communities and perpetuating relations of super/subordination within and across them.

The previous section argues that the locus of "communalism" rests on a fundamental socio-economic dimension, linked to a Brahminical ideology and social practice. Shani has highlighted how the continuous reconfiguration of relations of power within the caste order actually lies at the heart of narratives and practices of communalism (Shani, 2007). She argues that communalism is the outcome of the displacement onto an impoverished Muslim minority of growing social tensions, especially along caste lines, redefining the boundaries of social categories and their

relationships, and challenging the position of power of certain sections of the Hindu population.

Understanding negotiations and tensions over gender and socio-economic differentials is therefore crucial for exploring narratives and practices of "communalism". These last are in that sense articulations in the form of dominance and social polarisation of a variety of social relations and conflicts within a specific context. This work tries to offer a perspective of the intersection of these multiple dimensions, to provide a representation of interfaith relations as a dynamic social space, informed by a multiplicity of tensions among different sections of society, beyond the official conflict narratives.

Gender and socio-economic positionings are therefore also crosscutting dimensions of interfaith relations, constitutive of representations of culture, history and tradition, the practices of space demarcation and appropriation, the representations of religious homogeneity and difference, the forms of violence perpetrated and, more in general, the different articulations of the communal paradigm. The interplay between gender and socio-economic differentials provides a framework of binary oppositions defined by unequal power relations in which women and men, upper and lower castes, majority and minority become homogeneous, essentialised and dichotomous social categories within a Hindu-Muslim paradigm.

Feminist analyses offer an angle to explore the interrelationship between more visible social tensions and other crosscutting ones, by deconstructing the master narratives of the conflict. In that sense, this study draws from such insights to look at interfaith relations as configured around a multiplicity of discourses and social practices, allowing for fluid and multifaceted manifestations of violence across gender and socio-economic dimensions, feeding the discursive landscape of Hindu-Muslim conflict.

Tharu and Niranjana argue that the fundamental interconnectedness of issues of gender, caste, class and community is hidden in the representation of the "'subject' of dominant culture, which is structured in the official discourse of Indian democracy and society as "politically neutral" (Tharu & Niranjana, 1994, p. 95). Thus, while the discourse of communalism tends to essentialise religion as the fundamental axis of a conflict between "communities", a search of its gender and socio-economic dimensions reveals how, across a number of intersecting social tensions, communalism as discourse

and practice contributes to reproduce a social order grounded on relations of super/subordination at different levels of the society and, above all, within and across the boundaries of "religious communities".

2.3.2 Communalism as Cultural, Structural and Direct Violence

Gender and socio-economic positioning thus cut across discourses and practices of interfaith relations through which boundaries between communities are configured. Moreover, they inform the tensions, the power relations and the forms of inequalities that the paradigm of communalism reproduces across different sections of society. Deconstructing the fundamental dimensions of the politics of the religious community as narratives of conflict also clarifies the interrelations between different forms of and discourses about violence and their mutually constitutive nature.

In that sense, this research is located in the field of conflict studies. I would like to conceptualise this perspective by following Confortini's insight on combining feminist perspectives with certain contributions to the field of conflict analysis (Confortini, 2006). The interplay of gender, religion and socio-economic differentials can be regarded in conjunction with certain tools proposed by Johan Galtung for the study of violence. Galtung suggests that violence can be analytically divided into three main forms: direct, structural and cultural (Galtung, 2004). The first relates to the visible violent behaviour between two or more subjects. Structural violence refers to all forms of inequality and the hierarchical power relations built up in a social order constituted in and constituting the conflict. Finally, cultural violence pertains to the symbolic systems that legitimise, justify and reproduce a violent social order[46].

While Galtung seems to suggest a causal relationship between the existence of cultural and structural violence and the occurrence of direct violence[47], Confortini underlines that, though for analytical purposes these levels are discussed separately, in practice they should be regarded as mutually constitutive and interconnected. For example, a form of direct violence like rape during the Gujarat carnage in 2002 has a symbolic (gendered) dimension (taking over the other community's honour and

[46] By 'cultural violence' we mean those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence – exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) – that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence" (Galtung, 1990).

[47]"The big variations in violence are easily explained in terms of culture and structure: *cultural and structural violence cause direct violence,* using violent actors who revolt against the structures and using the culture to legitimize their use of violence as instruments" (Galtung, 2004, p. 2).

reproductive capacity of which the woman is a sign) that appeals to structures and cultures of domination (reinforcing dynamics of power at the intersection of gender, caste, class and religion) that are, in turn, reinforced and legitimised through the very form of direct violence perpetrated. Thus, direct violence itself contains the symbolic dimension that reinforces the very structures and cultures that legitimate it. The above example also clarifies how an approach encompassing the structural, cultural and direct levels of violence and their interconnectedness, unveils the multiple dimensions of interfaith relations, even when hidden behind the dominant Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm.

The paradigm of communalism can be understood as cultural, structural and direct violence, informed and reproduced by specific representations of gender and socio-economic relations and configuring social boundaries. Understanding how discourses and practices of violence are sustained and legitimised, by deconstructing the binary distinctions on which they rest, helps recognise the potential for transcending the communal paradigm inherent in the space of interfaith relations.

2.4 Conclusion: Transcending Communalism and the Potential for Social Change

The angle adopted in this research looks at interfaith relations as containing the sources of domination and social polarisation and, simultaneously, the resources for transcending them; it proposes a framework to explore the various dimensions of narratives of interfaith relations, their interconnectedness and the relations of power they contribute to reproduce. Finally, it offers a perspective on discourses and social practices that transcend the binary distinctions grounded on a communal paradigm. Interfaith relations are thereby regarded as a complex social space in which a multiplicity of narratives and practices coexist, besides the dominant discourse of Hindu-Muslim conflict.

By stressing the relational aspect of interfaith relations as a social space and the different dimensions that intersect in it, this study intends to reject its essentialisation in terms of religious positioning and to represent the social processes through which it is configured and the structures of domination that are reproduced in it.

Feminist perspectives on conflict include a focus on the multiple inequalities at the social and economic levels unfolding in the context of the conflict and allow for an exploration of the potential for transforming "power imbalances that include gender

relations" (Giles & Hyndman, 2004, p. 4). This is possible because gender and socio-economic inequalities lie at the heart of the binary oppositions that inform discourses and practices of conflict. Acknowledging their role as fundamental intersecting dimensions provides a framework for exploring the connections between multiple forms of domination and violence perpetrated in the social order constituted by and constitutive of the conflict itself. This perspective leads also to a process of transcending, conceptually, the focus on the presence or absence of direct violence between the parties configured and made visible by conflict (Hindu/Muslim). Thus, it proposes to explore the processes of configuration of a social order in which power relations and social tensions are concealed or made visible, transcending the binary distinctions inherent in dominant narratives of conflict.

Interfaith relations are thus represented here as a space of continuous negotiation of social positionings and power relations, encompassing the discourse of communal conflict and violence and including spaces for social change. Hence, from the perspective adopted in this study it is important to account for the way in which the discursive landscape of interfaith relations contains the very potential for transcending the main conflict narrative.

In order to construct an angle that allows for the analysis of such dynamics, I will draw from the insights offered by Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana in the context of theorising gender (Tharu & Niranjana, 1994). The authors suggest acknowledging the political dimension of certain feminist struggles in India instead of offering interpretations that, by framing them within dominant gendered discourses, reproduce the dichotomy of private/public spaces. In particular the authors stress the paradoxical interpretations offered in media and political discourses of certain organised struggles of women in rural areas of Andhra Pradesh to protest against the state's business on the selling of arrack[48]. Officially, these actions were labelled as "authentic" feminist struggles. As such, they were attributed the aim of preserving the wellbeing of husbands and sons and of purifying the family, the village, the body politics and, by extension, the nation (Tharu & Niranjana, 1994, p. 109). The feminist character of these actions was thus associated with a stereotyped image of the ideal woman, fulfilling her natural inclination of nurturing, caring and protecting the (moral) integrity of the family

[48] Arrack is distilled liquor, very popular in South India and other parts of Asia. The state of Andhra Pradesh backs the production and sales of arrack, contributing to the high rate of alcoholism among the male population.

(nation). These women and their actions were framed within the image of an ideal femininity, rescuing India from moral decay and endorsing their "status of citizen-subjects" in the context of being mothers and wives (of the men addicted to arrack). Through the reproduction of certain gendered categories, these struggles were relegated in the a-political, a-historical private sphere and devoid of their intrinsic political dimension, while the circumstances and the issues on which the movement was being articulated by the women themselves were neglected and erased (Tharu & Niranjana, 1994, p. 100-111)[49].

The authors then advocate for an understanding of "the micro politics of everyday life" as the actions taken outside the dominant political discourses by subjugated voices to address social tensions and forms of inequality and reconfigure power relations. Extending Tharu's and Niranjana's approach to the context of interfaith relations, the acknowledgment of the political dimension of certain actions, unveils the tensions between the adaptability and reproduction of dominant discourses and the potential for transcending them.

In this sense, the agency inscribed in certain social practices and initiatives analysed in this study refers in particular to the denaturalisation and contextualisation of the social order sustained by the paradigm of communalism, and to the way the malleability and permeability of the boundaries configured in and through it is practiced by different sections of society. So doing, they too unfold at the intersection of gender and socio-economic positioning, making visible the multiple tensions inherent in the communal paradigm. The investigation of such practices does not imply the existence and enactment of specific parameters, actions or conditions defining social emancipation or peace[50]. In fact, they are negotiated and framed in different ways according to the worldviews, positioning and aspirations of the people in different contexts and circumstances. Moreover, they unfold as a fundamental tension between a discourse of domination and social polarisation and pushes for social change. In that

[49] "By emphasising the 'familial' impulse behind the women's militancy, dominant explanatory narratives deny the status of the *political* to their actions and seek thereby to contain their scope" (Tharu & Niranjana, 1994, p. 111).

[50] Ruane and Todd, speaking about the conflict in Northern Ireland, propose an approach to social change that tackles the visible dichotomy produced within the conflict. They argue that emancipation from conflict "seeks to dismantle a system which constitutes two communities in mutually antagonistic and destructive relationships. However it is partial in the sense that the emphasis is only in dismantling this one system. It does not address the struggles of women and other groups for full inclusion, participation and social justice. In the process of restructuring that emancipation demands, however, different struggles may converge and mutually reinforce each other" (Ruane & Todd, 1996, p. 15). However, the perspective proposed in this work looks at the system of hostile interfaith relation as directly constituted in and constitutive of forms of inequalities that encompass the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm and embrace power relations between different sections of society.

sense, throughout this thesis, I explore some of these practices as expressing a potential for social change precisely by virtue of their contextual character and their political and conceptual significance. Accordingly, they are represented here as discourses and actions articulated within the discursive landscape of interfaith relations.

In the process, the gender and socio-economic lenses help envisioning the social and political contexts of a tension between a social order of domination and social polarisation and the potential for social change. They help unveil the multiple dimensions of interfaith relations and the social boundaries they contribute to reproduce while offering a framework to explore practices that transcend them.

These aspects account for the political significance of practices inscribed in wider contexts of agency ("community development", "religious education", "civil liberties", "women's emancipation", "interfaith dialogue"), that expose the multiple social tensions at the heart of a "communal" social order and the politics that sustain and reproduce it. At the same time, they transgress boundaries between and across different religious affiliations. These actions will be examined in the course of this work. It is worth mentioning here that they are examples of direct engagement of people, organisations and sometimes institutions with the tensions that constitute the paradigm of communalism. From the perspective of this research, their significance rests in allowing a perspective on the patriarchal and socio-economically unequal social order sustained by the communal paradigm, by engaging with themes that are crucial to its perpetuation. In fact, by addressing the naturalisation of social categories in terms of Hindu/Muslim, men/women, majority/minority, upper/lower caste etc as produced by and productive of forms of domination and violence, they offer an angle for, at least analytically, transcending the communal paradigm.

This chapter offers a framework for the exploration of interfaith relations that, in this research, focuses on the city of Hyderabad. More in general, it engages with the issue of so-called "identity conflicts" by reviewing some of the existing approaches to the study of ethnicity and communalism. Furthermore, drawing from studies of Indian nationalism it contextualises the research on communalism within a strand of scholarship which explores such paradigm as discourses and practices of and about power. In that sense, this chapter focuses on the notion of Brahminism as an analytical context to explore the way the rhetoric of communalism reproduces forms of domination and social polarisation, challenging the dominant conflict narratives as

absolute conceptual perspectives. The process of deconstruction of such discourses and practices develops around the notion of multiple intersecting dimensions, which constitute and are in turn transformed and shaped within the social space of interfaith relations. Of the various dimensions, gender and socio-economic differentials are regarded as the fundamental organising principles of a social order of which the communal paradigm represents a crucial regulatory discourse. Drawing from feminist contributions to the study of conflict, power and identity, this chapter offers a general framework for analysis that allows for an exploration of the various tensions inherent in the social space of interfaith relations beyond the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm and the relations of super/subordination configured through hegemonic discourses, articulated at the intersection of religion, gender, caste and class. The processes of deconstruction of discourses of communalism thus entail at the same time an articulation of a perspective on interfaith relations as a social space reproducing the potential for transcending communalism as an ideology of domination and social polarisation.

In conclusion, the angle adopted in this research aims at uncovering the multiple and interconnected dimensions of interfaith relations and the centrality of gender and socio-economic differentials for their configuration. At the same time, it proposes a perspective on the various tensions unfolding in the discursive landscape of interfaith relations, articulating a potential for social change.

The purpose of this work is to contribute to the study of "communalism" by conceiving of it as a dominant paradigm that naturalises conflict and violence in the process of reproducing a Brahminical social order. In that sense, it offers an angle for exploring how conflict narratives are produced in and contribute to configure a social order of domination and social polarisation across multiple dimensions. In so doing, it proposes a shift in perspective on the various tensions unfolding through and despite conflict narratives, between the malleability and persistence of forms of domination and social polarisation and the potential to transcend them, through pushes for social change.

Chapter 3
At the Intersection of Theory, Methodology and Ethics: Research Practices in the Study of Interfaith Relations in Hyderabad

3.1 INTRODUCTION: SITUATING THE RESEARCH PROCESSES

This chapter attempts to establish a harmonious connection between different research practices connected to ethics, methods and theory, by presenting the epistemological and methodological framework of this research. The reflections proposed here have been developed in connection with the conceptual angle elaborated in the previous chapter. Situated in that analytical perspective, the methodology has been designed with the purpose of exploring the continuous unfolding of interfaith relations in Hyderabad without reproducing essentialising binary oppositions of narratives of communal conflict. Based on feminist contributions to social science methodologies, this framework acknowledges the contingency of representation and the relational character of research processes, while attempting to unveil the potential for social change in the context of interfaith relations. In particular, this chapter shows how research methodologies have been informed by the notions of positionality and situated knowledges, connecting fieldwork to the processes of interpretation and analysis and discussing how research methods have been adapted to different contexts and circumstances.

The attempt to expose dichotomous categorisations producing relationships of super/subordination between different sections of society in the politics of interfaith relations, translates into a reflection on how to avoid the reproduction of similar distinctions in the process of interpretation. Thus, the considerations on research methods discussed in this chapter attempt to come to terms with a possible methodological impasse related to the analytical categories employed and to the positioning of the researcher vis-à-vis the contexts and processes of research. In that sense, the methodological perspective offered acknowledges and at the same time tries to avoid subscribing to the very dominant discourses that inform the social tensions explored, such as Hindu/Muslim, conflict/harmony, communal/secular etc. In the process, it elaborates on the connected risk of representing the researcher as capturing

some fixed and immobile external reality without assessing the extent to which the perspective proposed builds on the researcher's location within a relational process of representation (Dauphinée, 2007).

Throughout the practices of research, constant attention has been paid to the way a politics of communalism overlooks and veils multiple social tensions, narratives and practices constituting the social space of interfaith relations. Thus, starting from the assumption that interfaith relations encompass a multiplicity of crosscutting and continuously unfolding dimensions (Section 2.3), the methods for this study have been designed to account for interlocking positionalities, perspectives and contexts. At the same time, an attempt to practice reflexivity has informed the whole research process. First of all, with reference to the researcher's location in the contexts and in the encounters with the people who have participated in the development of this research project. Second, in order to assess the extent to which my narrative of interfaith relations offers a representation of the tensions inherent in this social space and of the potential to transcend the communal paradigm both as an analytical and socio-political paradigm. Such perspective stems from the engagement with feminist contributions to social science methodologies, aimed at enhancing the possibility to grasp multiple inequalities, represent power relations and transformative social processes and account for the positionalities of the participants (including the researcher) in the research process.

The methodological approach discussed in this chapter unfolds around four main interconnected points. The first regards the researcher's personal engagement with the research and, accordingly, my own positioning with respect to the topic of this thesis and the outcomes produced. As an introductory part, this aspect is discussed with reference to the concepts of positionality and situated knowledges, providing a framework for a process of deconstruction of dominant categories of interfaith relations, bearing significance in specific contexts. It offers a perspective on the interpretive lenses adopted for the representation of the social space of interfaith relations, conceived as a continuum that connects the personal to the national, passing from the family and the community. It establishes links between the dynamics explored in the city of Hyderabad and wider social processes of which the dichotomies of Hindu/Muslim, communal/secular, conflict/harmony are the dominant but not necessarily the only possible discursive categories. Thus, the reflections on the methods

and epistemology of this research on interfaith relations in Hyderabad fundamentally connect the intellectual effort of exploring and providing tools for a critical interpretation of "communalism" with a positioning vis-à-vis the social processes analysed and the potential for change.

Second, the argument proposes an exploration of fieldwork as a fundamental dimension of the research and its connections with the processing, interpreting and writing endeavour once back in the academic environment. The implications of considering fieldwork as a process that configures the positioning of the researcher in the dynamics of knowledge production are multiple. First of all, the methods employed in the field, though explored and studied before the trips to Hyderabad, have been chosen, accommodated and practiced according to the relationships, circumstances, interactions and emotions that have characterised the fieldwork experience. In that sense, the distinction between field research and ordinary academic work blurs as they represent mutually constitutive moments in the construction of the perspectives articulated in this work. Second, the experience in the field becomes also a process of growing awareness of the interconnectedness of a particular analytical angle and the social space under study, with respect to which the researcher inevitably occupies a specific location. Thus, the second part also explores the concept of reflexivity framed by some feminist scholars in the process of conducting field research and the simultaneous interpretation and production of narratives about the material collected, the power relations involved and the way in which they contribute to the research.

Closely linked to the previous one, the third part discusses the ethnographic research methods adopted in the course of the fieldwork and the way they have been adapted to the contexts and adjusted according to the insights of the participants. Moreover, this section deals with the research practices enacted and the information produced outside structured research settings, during informal conversations or unexpected events or situations. It proposes some observations on the importance of insights gained through reflections on the narratives and practices of fieldwork itself, the way they reproduce certain dominant discourses and the way they are inscribed in the social tensions under study. In that sense, the questions asked, the contexts explored and the people met become part of the articulation of the field as a meta-discourse of interfaith relations. The use of photography as a tool for interpretation of fieldwork

activities is analysed in line with this perspective, contributing to provide a representation of the multiple tensions veiled under the flag of "communalism".

Finally, this chapter looks at the process of interpretation of interfaith relations in Hyderabad. It establishes a connection with the concept of situated knowledges and accounts for the researcher's choices in privileging methods for deconstructing narratives and practices in relation with the representation of processes of social transformation. It situates the interpretive space within a specific politics of interfaith relations while simultaneously acknowledging the contingent and variable character of the categories produced. This final and conclusive part is concerned with the processes of interpretation of discourse, actions and imagery in the politics of interfaith relations.

3.2 RESEARCH AS DECONSTRUCTION AND REPRESENTATION

The research engagement with the social dynamics of interfaith relations in the city of Hyderabad has been informed by some ethical concerns and reflections on the location of the researcher in the act of representing Others. Especially after my first visit to Hyderabad in August-September 2009, I decided to explore methods and tools for analysis through which a critique of the communal paradigm and a representation of the potential for transcending it, would not lead to freeze people, processes and contexts into static and absolute social and analytical categories.

Feminists have long debated on the possibility for a researcher to offer an image of the Other without imposing a mystifying representation that, by naturalising identities, affiliations and positionings, implicitly denies an autonomous voice to the researched (Hintemberg, 2007, p. 76-77). Such debates stem from the acknowledgement that some research practices tend to reproduce the mechanisms of identity politics, whereby people of, for example, the same religion are identified along that single, naturalised axis of positioning and assumed to share the same perspectives in the context of, for example, interfaith relations[51]. According to Stoezler and Yuval-Davis a researcher engaging with issues of identity and conflict needs to be constantly aware that a variety of practices can be related to the same social location, not only for

[51] A similar debate has occupied a prominent position in feminism, especially after black feminists in the United States started to criticize the unquestioned category of womanhood preached by white, second generation feminists to encourage the construction of a global "sisterhood" in the fight against gender discrimination and oppression. The paradigm of intersectionality, used for the first time by Kimberle Crenshaw with reference to the legal domain, was developed in the context of such reflections (Crenshaw, 1991).

maintaining ethical consistency, but also to enable the potential for dialogue across social and disciplinary boundaries. Academic knowledge aims to be a product of that very dialogue, of a social interaction between the participants of a research relationship and is therefore always situated in a particular context, (Stoezler & Yuval-Devis, 2002, p. 315-333).

Such reflections represent an attempt to construct a methodology that seeks to be connected with social agency without losing its analytical capacity. However, they pose two fundamental challenges, especially when the research process is informed by an active engagement in the production of knowledge on less visible perspectives, practices and phenomena. First, it raises a problem of representation, linked to the categories utilised and attached to the research subjects[52] and to "the way 'differences' between 'others' are invoked and relied upon" (Hintemberg, 2007, p. 79). For example, even when categorisation is necessary for analytical purposes, there are not encompassing Hindu or Muslim positions, but rather circumstances and conditions under which such categories and the social positionings connected to them become relevant in specific ways. At the same time, the recognition that certain structures and relations of power among different sections of society contribute to the perpetuation of a social order of domination and social polarisation renders it inevitable to acknowledge the political significance of certain positionings, the inequalities and the forms of super/subordination in connection with the categories unfolding in discourses of interfaith relations. Thus, the semantic of social positioning/location is preferred to that of identity in that it allows for more interpretative flexibility. In a way, it shifts the analytical angle from the attribution of encompassing social attachments to the relational positioning vis-à-vis dynamics of power unfolding in and constituting a specific social space. Second and consequently, it calls for the acknowledgement of the location of the researcher in all stages of the research process and the relations in which s/he is involved, requiring a constant consideration of the ongoing act of representation. It is in this contexts that feminist reflections on epistemology and methodology warn the researcher against claiming to return a transparent, fixed and universal representation of the "reality" explored and at the same time compel her/him to take responsibility for the

[52] According to Dauphinée, "knowledge manifests as a grasping – a groping – of perception, comprehension, repetition, a subsuming of the Other into a framework of intelligibility that orders alterity into a category or taxonomy for ease of analysis" (Dauphinée, 2007, p. 20).

positions s/he occupies in the different acts of the research process, for the place s/he is speaking from and for the politics of representation in which s/he is engaged.

In fact, it is through a process of deconstruction of such categories that the act of representation becomes visible and the researcher accountable for the particular perspective s/he is privileging. With respect to this thesis, the contingency of representation is linked both to the multidimensionality of interfaith relations and to the specific way in which my own engagement with the research topic and with the responses of the people with whom I interacted have brought to the surface particular themes, relevant at that specific time and context.

According to Donna Haraway, representations claiming to offer a totalising, transparent, impartial image of the Other risk reproducing axes of domination. In fact, while imposing the researcher's standpoint, they conceal at the same time the very processes of production of the perspective offered. Instead, "partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustain the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversation in epistemology" (Haraway, 1988, p. 584). It is a call to account for where the researcher stands in the production of knowledge, the critical location s/he is speaking from and the perspective privileged. At the same time, it refuses claims of transparent objectivity on the one hand and relativism on the other, to endorse the "epistemology of partial perspective" (Ibid.) as the privileged space for deconstruction, critical interpretation and the construction of connections across different positionalities. Claims of universality and non-engagement do not allow for actual contestation and transformation and tend to reproduce axes of domination because they do not recognise that the analytical angle and the social space under study are, in fact, mutually constitutive. Hence, the fundamental impossibility and undesirability of locating the research outside the field of experience of the researcher and its different manifestations in the interactions with the various spaces, contexts and relationships of the research activities. Situated knowledges instead speak from a nameable place, account for the power-relations unfolding in the course of the research and in the process of representation, and allow for political engagement and the acknowledgment of the continuous unfolding of multiple perspectives and possibilities (Dauphinée, 2007, p. 27).

Similarly, Duncan argues that the knowledge produced in social sciences (but academic knowledge in general) is defined by its context. However "it conventionally

presents itself as a 'view from nowhere'" (Duncan, 1996, p. 4). Thus, a reflection on the positionality of the researcher is actually a fundamental part of the construction of the project and of the research activities, including the writing process.

In the case of the present work, the reflections about situating the knowledge within specific political and relational processes have started to be articulated in the context of the fieldwork experience. The awareness of the "impossibility of impartiality and disinterestedness" (Duncan, 1996, p. 4) emerged while deeply involved in relations and interactions with the people and the spaces in the field. Interfaith relations were not reduced to an object to be explored but a social space to be constructed as a complex intersection of dimensions, which trespass narratives of conflict and harmony. The return from the field implied, unexpectedly at first, a further elaboration of such reflections in relation to all stages of the research process. My positioning as an active participant in the production of situated knowledge, took shape while engaging with the politics of interfaith relations and offering an interpretation of the potential for social change through my location in the city of Hyderabad.

In this sense, my positioning in the research process defines the attempt at exposing, through this work, specific politics of interfaith relations implicated in drawing boundaries and perpetuating inequalities and discriminatory practices between, within and across religious communities. It stems from a commitment to represent the potential for transcending communalism as both a socio-political and an analytical paradigm. These aspects have inevitably and consistently influenced the methods and approaches adopted.

3.2.1 Fieldwork as Relationship

A politics of situated knowledge is implicated in all stages of the research process. Especially with regard to fieldwork practice, the experience in Hyderabad has revealed how the interactions and observations are deeply entwined with the process of representation.

The identification of the questions and the selection of the contexts of research was already a part of representation, based on what was considered more relevant for my understanding of the communal paradigm and the politics of interfaith relations in Hyderabad. As Amit frames it,

> in a world of infinite interconnections and overlapping contexts, the ethnographic field cannot simply exist, awaiting discovery. It has to be laboriously constructed, prised apart from all the other possibilities for contextualization to which its constituent relationships and connections could also be referred. This process of construction is inescapably shaped by the conceptual, professional, financial and relational opportunities and resources accessible to the ethnographer (Amit, 2000, p. 6)

In that sense, fieldwork practices in Hyderabad were never simply part of a process of extracting data or information on phenomena existing outside my experience that would then be processed once returned to the academic environment. Instead, the field was actively constructed according to the resources available, to the connections established and to the choices made on the most appropriate amongst the contexts accessible for research.

This recognition brought to the surface some questions related to connections in fieldwork or, more precisely, to fieldwork as connections and relationship. The attempt to exercise reflexivity relates to an exploration of the research context in terms of the processes and structures that are configured by and contribute to configure relations among the participants.

In the disciplines that privilege ethnographic research methods in fieldwork, such as anthropology, geography and the crosscutting fields of feminism, scholars have largely discussed the possibilities to transcend the power inequalities that inform the research contexts (Chacko, 2004; Joseph, 1996; Wolf, 1996). In particular, the debate has focused on how to deal with the researcher's privileged position with respect to other research participants and the possibilities to involve them in advising on and designing the most appropriate methods, timings and locations for the activities (Hintemberg, 2007). With respect to that, reflexivity also entails the acknowledgment of all research participants' agency in the fieldwork process. Awareness of the role played by relationships in the production of research is a step towards recognising that the perspectives offered are always constructed in the relations with the context and the other research participants, who exercise their agency to inform, suggest and sometimes also refuse and condescend. In that sense, the different narratives and practices of interfaith relations I have explored in this study were actively produced in exciting as well as discomforting encounters and interactions. In fact, accounting for the agency of the research participants also involves the exploration of emotions attached to specific circumstances, episodes and situations. For example, experiencing the attribution of

gendered positionings in certain situations or interpersonal exchanges put me and probably also my interlocutors in uncomfortable situations more than once. Sometimes, the distance between my life experiences and choices and some of the culturally ascribed roles and positions attached to a woman of my age in a specific context would have a prominent role in the interactions, limiting my possibility to explore certain spaces and engage in conversations, but in a way opening up the space for further reflections. In other instances, being a young woman would provide easier access to some places and settings or more relaxed and informal relationships with certain people. For example, during the month of Ramadan I was invited by a Muslim woman to visit her home in the neighbourhood of Sultan Shahi (Hyderabad). Once there, I met her mother, nieces and one of her aunts and had a pleasant and insightful conversation on the issue of women's mobility outside the family and "religious community" spaces. In a different context, after meeting a social activist from Civil Liberties Monitoring Committee (CLMC) in Hyderabad, I had the chance to visit a female *madrasas* where she works and to meet and interact with several students of different ages as well as with the teachers.

Nevertheless, awareness that some aspects of the research participants' (including the researcher's) background and expectations on each other's social location and behaviour are culturally assigned does not translate into an essentialist assumption that research relationships are based on pre-existing, pre-determined positionings. In particular, I refer to the debate regarding the insider/outsider dichotomy that continues to inform reflections of research ethics especially when conducted by Western researchers in areas of the Global South. According to certain approaches, only the perspectives of those belonging to the context under study are "true", while an outsider will always have a partial view affected by the position of power s/he occupies with respect to the research subjects. Such a view has generated fundamental reflections over the risk of reproducing forms of domination while conducting research and a debate on the necessity to embrace the voice of subjugated standpoints. However, I contend that the dichotomous categories of insider and outsider turn out to be somehow problematic in that they tend to homogenise relational positionings in terms of oppressor/oppressed and to neglect the differential power relations and the diversity of experiences existing amongst those broadly categorised as outsiders and insiders. This work is based on a perspective that conceives of research as relationship and on the constant attempt to

work on connections among all the research participants in the process of providing a representation of the social space of interfaith relations. This approach does not translate into denial of power relations during the research process and the possibilities and limitations they allow for, but accounts for the way in which they continuously unfold, acknowledging the agency of the research participants. Positionings and power relations in fieldwork are always relational and negotiated in the course of the interactions amongst the research participants and according to the contexts in which such dynamics take place.

The example of two occasions of engagement in fieldwork settings in Hyderabad might help further clarify this perspective. While contextual to the topic of interfaith relations, conversations with residents of Sultan Shahi and other neighbourhoods in the Old city of Hyderabad focused primarily on the tensions and forms of inequalities that people experienced on a daily basis. My presence and interest in such themes engendered at one point some overestimation on the part of certain research participants on my possibility to bring about change in their situations. Some of the children in the "Aman Shanti"[53] school run by Henry Martyn Institute (HMI)[54] in the neighbourhood of Sultan Shahi thought that, because of my repeated visits to their centre and my participation in the class activities, I might be in a position to organise a school trip to Italy, my country of origin. Although both the teacher and I tried to defuse the enthusiasm, it was nonetheless quite disturbing for me to realise that my presence and my way of relating with the kids had contributed to elicit such expectations on their part. Similarly, some of the parents of the children and the women with whom I repeatedly interacted during my field research were very open to share stories about their situations but also requested me to use that information to persuade those in power at HMI to expand their projects in order to ensure that the positive results of the activities undertaken could actually promote virtuous cycles of education – vocational training – gender empowerment for the community.

Reflecting on both these circumstances, I became aware that in certain contexts the tensions associated with socio-economic conditions and opportunities, and gender

[53] Aman and Shanti are respectively the Urdu and Hindi word for "peace".

[54] The Henry Martyn Institute is an international centre for research, interfaith relations and reconciliation located in Hyderabad. It runs academic programmes in Islamic Studies and Interfaith Relations, Conflict Transformation, Peace-Building and Interfaith Relations and other Summer courses. HMI is also extensively engaged in projects of research, teaching, training and engagement in the fields of community development, conflict transformation and peace-building in conflict torn areas in India and South Asia. http://www.hmiindia.com/

hierarchies are paramount dimensions in the context of interfaith relations. The agency of the research participants and the emotional aspect of research relationships contributed to my perspective also on the potential for social transformation, based on the experiences I had and on the assumptions and the stereotypes that were crushed during the research processes. It also compelled me to recognise that I was not located outside the research context and to take these situations seriously by engaging with the requests and expectations that had been so openly shared. Of course not in a position to organise a school trip to Italy, nor to influence the decision-making process at HMI, especially vis-à-vis the allocation of funds into the different projects, I tried to explore with the participants the possibilities to address the needs or expectations raised within the possibilities of our respective and relational positionings.

Accordingly, relationships can in some case engender misunderstanding and emotional challenges or create spaces for sharing which can even unfold in processes of healing. In that sense, reflexivity in the fieldwork experience became a process related not so much to the researcher's identity as to the way in which the interactions, negotiations and possibilities of connections unfolded within specific contexts and circumstances.

3.2.2 Research Methods and Configuration of the Field

The above argument regarding situated knowledges, reflexivity and positionality practically translates into the way ethnographic research methods are employed in the course of fieldwork and how the processes of interpretation and representation take place.

The fieldwork has been carried out in the city of Hyderabad and partly in New Delhi. The choice of Hyderabad as the focus of this research was made while drafting the research project, after a first meeting with Dr. Andreas D'Souza, former Director of the Henry Martyn Institute[55]. Andreas D'Souza shared some of his work experiences in Hyderabad and introduced me to the work of the institute, which later became the base from which I conducted my fieldwork. Born as an evangelical organisation in 1938, HMI's mission and vision gradually transformed while the institute began to engage in academic and praxis activities in the field of interfaith dialogue and, later reconciliation and conflict transformation (D. D'Souza, 2001). Today, among other activities, HMI

[55] *Supra*, note 54.

runs "community development" projects in some areas of the Old city of Hyderabad that have been repeatedly affected by violence. The fundamental idea behind the approach adopted is that zones exposed to communal discourses about violence are generally also plagued by social exclusion in which multiple forms of violence intersect. HMI's approach is to promote peace by encouraging the direct engagement of the people of different social and cultural backgrounds in education, health care, sensitisation on issues of gender and socio-economic justice, political awareness, conflict prevention, vocational training and income-generating activities. HMI's approach to interfaith relations is thus, at least in the way it is conceived of, comprehensive of multiple and intersecting dimensions which include gender, socio-economic positioning and religion[56].

Second, Hyderabad is, together with other Indian cities, often labelled "riot-prone" and "communally-sensitive". Since the beginning, my research interests have been focussing on the association of discourses and practices of communalism to a particular place and the implications these dynamics have for the positioning of different sections of society and their mutual relations.

My first journey to Hyderabad took place in August-September 2009. Conceived of at first as an exploratory trip that would deepen my understanding of Hindu-Muslim relations in the city, the experiences, conversations and observations in which I was involved made me question the core of the communal paradigm itself as a valid descriptive and analytical tool. These perspectives found further confirmation during my second and brief (8 days) visit to the city in November 2009. Then, and again during my third trip to Hyderabad and New Delhi in July-September 2010 and the last one in May-June 2011, discussions with scholars and social activists inspired me to approach the issue of communalism from a perspective that would also allow for an exploration of less visible narratives and practices within the social space of interfaith relations. In particular, I conducted fieldwork with the intent of grasping the intersection of gender and socio-economic dimensions and its implications for the structuring of relations of power in society. Both in Hyderabad and New Delhi, contacts were established mainly thanks to the faculty and staff of the Henry Martyn Institute (HMI). Later, connections

[56] It is not in the purpose of this study, nor in my field of expertise, to provide an assessment of HMI's "community development" projects and activities and the way they are actually participatory and inclusive or of the impact of such activities on the lives of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood visited during fieldwork.

were made with other four organisation, ASMITA Resource Centre for Women, COVA, ANVESHI and the Civil Liberties Monitoring Committee[57].

My field research focused mainly on some of the so called communally-sensitive areas in Hyderabad and in particular on the neighbourhood of Sultan Shahi. There, I had the chance to interact with the staff who work in the community development projects run by HMI and with the local people who participate in the projects and more generally, live in that area. Outside this context, I have visited other areas of the Old city in Hyderabad and met with journalists, scholars, social activists and local leaders with whom I have discussed the issue of interfaith relations from different perspectives.

In formal research settings, interactions with other research participants took place mainly through conversations, life narratives, group discussions, group activities and most of all participant observation. During my first visit to Hyderabad, the idea to conduct various traditional semi-structured interviews was abandoned, favouring repeated non-structured conversations. That choice reflected an attempt to render the research process participatory and to integrate insights from the people with whom I interacted. Thus, though semi-structured interviews were conducted in some cases, they did not constitute the main method for enquiry.

For similar reasons, I decided to avoid tape recording of the conversations. First of all, many people expressed a sense of uneasiness with the tape recording and the interview format and preferred to have open and less formal discussions. From my side, I felt the relationship established through less structured interactions and note-taking allowed for an open exchange and offered more possibilities for negotiation and ongoing construction of the context. Second, some people explicitly asked not to record the interactions on tape because of a feeling of insecurity that such a method of enquiry generated in them in the context of ongoing social tensions and episodes of police abuses. Thus, I decided to put the recorder aside and to meticulously note down not only

[57] Asmita works at the academic and social levels for women empowerment in different contexts: family, work but also in conflict situations and peacebuilding actions. www.asmitacollective.in
The Civil Liberties Monitoring Committee is an organisation whose aim is to document, advocate and sensitise about civil rights and rights abuses by law enforcement and other Government and non Government agencies in India. They undertake research and action focused on preventing and ending abuses of human rights. www.civillibertiesindia.org
COVA (Confederation of Voluntary Associations) is a network of organisations whose aim is to promote interfaith dialogue, women emancipation and conflict prevention. http://www.covanetwork.org
ANVESHI is a research centre for women studies focusing in particular on issues related to Dalits, minorities, health care, development, law from a feminist perspective. www.anveshi.org

the perspectives shared but also the processes, emotions and dynamics that were contributing to the content of the interactions. In this way, observation became the core part of the work associated with note-taking during the fieldwork activities in different contexts and situations.

In order to complement the notes taken during the work in formal research settings, I decided to keep a daily journal compiled every evening and to take pictures of the places, spaces, people and activities.

As part of the fieldwork methodology I also conducted discussions and activities in groups, following the suggestion of some women who attend vocational training at "Aman Shanti" centre in Sultan Shahi. Through group discussions on specific themes, I was exposed to the different perspectives of the people involved and the processes of negotiation in cases of contested issues, when attempts were made to find a way to transcend or accommodate the tensions. Group discussions and activities were also carried out with the staff in the neighbourhoods of Sultan Shahi, Shanker Nagar and Chandrayangutta, with the school children of the 3rd and 4th grade under the supervision of their teacher, with some of the mothers of the children and with the women groups.

Similarly, when I visited other organisations, I had the chance to participate in group discussions with the staff on certain themes related to my research.

All interactions were conducted based on a set of themes[58], identified as constitutive of narratives of interfaith relations. The themes provided some sort of structuring of the context and at the same time allowed for the contribution of research participants to the configuration of the relational dynamics and the content of the interactions. The conversations took place in English when possible or with the help of an interpreter, who was always known by the people involved. The question of language is obviously a very relevant one in terms of (in)accessibility of certain contexts and the active participation of an interpreter. Academia has often considered conducting fieldwork with interpreters a problematic, unavoidable constraint related to not mastering the local language. However, according to Edwards, such a standpoint

> reflects a particular model of the research process, one that mainly adopts a traditional 'value-free' and unreflexive stance towards the role of the interpreter, and which occludes the ways disparities of power operate contextually in the research process (Edwards, 1998, p. 197)

[58] See next paragraph and Table 1. Thematic chart for the analysis of interfaith relations.

The mediation of the interpreter is certainly part of the ongoing construction of the field. However, according to Edwards, most of the training on fieldwork methods often implies that "interpreter and interpretation should not be revealed" (Edwards, 1998, p. 202), they should not be visible in the written account of fieldwork. In the case of this research project, since the beginning, the people who helped me through their language competences played a fundamental and precious role in the configuration of the contexts, possibilities of relations and actual interactions. They were known by the other research participants and often occupied a specific positioning among them, mostly thanks to their skills with the English medium. I had several conversations with the interpreters on their views about the topic of my research but also on their life experiences and relationships within the social context they were located. The active participation of the interpreter (who changed according to the context of research) constituted a fundamental connection between the different positionings of the research participants and the research context. In a way, working with interpreters, connecting with them, depending on their availability and familiarising with their perspectives helped me ask "difficult" questions, have access to certain social spaces and reflect on my interactions with other research participants through them. Thanks to the bond established with some of them, I received and shared comments, criticism, suggestions and opinions in a rather straightforward way. In that sense, their contribution to the research process was not necessarily against the interest of the research participants, but part of the "politics of the research process" (Edwards, 1998, p. 206), in which negotiations, tensions and agreements unfold according to the form, the content, the context and the implications of the interactions. It also enhanced the sense of the constitutive role of relations in fieldwork both between the researcher and the other research participants and among the latter. The "problem of interpreters" became in that sense a further element of reflection on the nexus between theory, ethics and practice of research and the fundamental interconnectedness of the analytical angle and the social space under study.

Finally, photography represented an important tool for fieldwork activities in Hyderabad. It is worth focusing briefly on the way this support has been used as an instrument for research. Dauphinée argues that a picture always has a context which is lost, together with the circumstances that made that particular image possible, in the process of freezing the scene into a snapshot. Intentions and agency are transferred from

the subjects of the picture to the work of representation of the researcher who attributes meanings to people, objects, situations and places (Dauphinée, 2007, p. 58-64).

In my case, photography has been conceived of as a tool for interpretation of fieldwork activities that, like note-taking and the journal, was already implicated in the process of representation. Instead of showing motives and intentions through the visual representation of a particular scene, event or phenomenon, the picture "frames an event" that resonates within the perspective of the researcher (Grady, 2008). It offers a record of the engagement with a subject that attracted the researcher's emotional and cognitive attention in a specific moment, from which meaning is produced and reproduced. It is therefore not a way to capture events or situations happening outside the researcher's field of experience or a "proof", through visual take, of the solidity of the claims presented in the written text. Instead, in the case of this work, the combination of images and text aims at offering a perspective on different politics of interfaith relations in Hyderabad, with respect to imagery, action and discourse. Photography is therefore part of the process of constructing the field and providing an angle through which multiple dimensions can be explored and understood within the context of interfaith relations. Pictures are incorporated into the narrative of interfaith relations proposed in this thesis, in connection with the fieldwork experiences and relationships. The picture therefore entails a reflection of the various interactions in the field and the way they have increasingly contributed to my perspective on interfaith relations[59].

Finally, note-taking, photography, conversations and observation found direct application also in informal research settings[60], like for example while walking around the city alone or with friends, conversing occasionally with a fellow traveller on a train or participating in festivals and celebrations. The interactions and events occurred in unstructured research settings have deepened my understanding of the contexts, the circumstances and the contingent situations in which narratives and practices of interfaith relations unfold. It has helped me move beyond the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm and explore the multiplicity of tensions contained within the space of interfaith relations in Hyderabad. In order to ensure that some kind of recording would take place in such occasions, I carried with me a notebook and a camera most of the

[59] For an exploration of visual ethnography see (Pink, 2007). For a sociological perspective on visual representation see (Chaplin, 1994).

[60] Chacko maintains that the time spent with people in non structured research settings during her fieldwork in a rural area in Bengal, enhanced her awareness of the "contextual issues that impact their lives" (Chacko, 2004, p. 8).

times, whose inputs were then reinterpreted while writing the journal in the evening[61]. Because of this openness to insights coming from almost all situations, events and interactions during my stay in India, the journal became the fundamental tool for the day to day production of situated knowledge on interfaith relations in Hyderabad.

3.2.3 The Significance of Interpretation

As argued in the previous sections the moment of gathering information and materials is not separate from the act of interpretation (Okeley, 1994, p. 20). Collecting and analyzing fieldwork material in Hyderabad was based on continuous processes of reflection that revolve around a multiplicity of themes identified as relevant in the context of interfaith relations.

The interpretation seeks to include the different ways in which interfaith relations are represented and practiced in the exchanges, the encounters, the situations and the activities that I was able to observe. Texts, images, discourses, the use of symbols, the practices of everyday life and those related to extemporaneous events have been related to specific categories, such as religious difference, culture, language, history and tradition, space and territory, politics, etc[62]. The themes and the subthemes and their interpretation are described in their composition, their visible and more veiled meanings, their contexts and the implications they have for the practices of interfaith relations. Ruiz Ruiz maintains that sociological discourse analysis (defining discourse as "any practice by which individuals imbue reality with meaning") is based on three main interrelated levels: textual analysis, which implies that discourse be regarded as object and explored in terms of its character and content; contextual analysis, focusing on the discourse as event; and sociological analysis, which provides the interpretation of the implications of the discourse (Ruiz Ruiz, 2009).

For example, I look at the removal of green flags (remaining decorations for a Muslim festival) and the placement of orange ones for a Hindu religious celebration all along the streets of an urban area inhabited by people of different faiths (description) as practices of (re)appropriation of space, based on symbols distinctive of the "religious community". It takes place in a particular context (soon after the celebration of a

[61] "From the outset of field work, the anthropologist adopts an open-ended approach to the full range of information and to all manner of people. This is the essence of the holistic approach. The material and ethnographic concerns are not cut to size at the start. The people who are the subject of study are themselves free to volunteer their concerns in their own voice and context". (Okeley, 1994, p. 20).

[62] See Table 1, p. 76-79.

Muslim festival, in a moment of political instability at the state level linked to the actions of the secessionist Telangana movement and the heated discussions over a policy of reservation quotas for Muslims) and is carried out with the support of an organisation linked to the Hindu Right. A similar episode is considered by many of the people with whom I interacted as the triggering event for the outbreak of riots at the end of March 2010 in various areas of the city of Hyderabad. However, an analysis of such spatial practices entails an understanding of the implications that the demarcation and appropriation of the space has in the context of interfaith relations, for the configuration of boundaries between religious communities, for the imposition of a specific form of domination in terms of "who owns the space", the production of cohesion within the category of "the Hindus", as the people who are supposed to be celebrating such festival and the exclusion of other sections of society from the demarcation of the space into question. Thus, flags become not only religious symbols but also tools for the assertion of a specific ideology of interfaith relations.

From the point of view of semiotic analysis, Sandoval maintains that ideology is the appropriation of a sign system and its endowment with new meanings - "a Signifier for a second newly arrived Signified" (Sandoval, 2000, p. 94) - that are naturalised and disconnected from the historical context in which they are produced. Deconstruction of the links between the sign, the signifier and the signified and their contextualisation in a specific time and space allows for the unveiling of dynamics of domination and violence and for the exploration of the potential for resistance and social change.

The same tools for interpretation are employed for the analysis of material gathered through sources different than my fieldwork that provide further insights or introduce and elaborate on themes that did not emerge as relevant during my experiences in Hyderabad. In fact, as noted by Okeley, the interpretation and writing also has to confront with gaps in the material due sometimes to restrictions in the access to certain spaces, contexts and people or to control on information (Okeley, 1994, p. 27).

In that sense, the use of the thematic chart allows for a multiplicity of levels of interpretation and shows the complexity and the multidimensionality of the politics of interfaith relations in Hyderabad. The classification also allows for the identification of dimensions that recur in all or some of the main themes. Such a tool has for example helped in the development of the idea, originally emerged as an insight during the time

spent in Hyderabad, that gender and socio-economic positioning can be considered fundamental dimensions of interfaith relations in Hyderabad.

The same thematic classification and method of analysis are employed with pictures, as providing insights on visual and symbolic dimensions of interfaith relations.

An interesting example can be drawn from the pictures taken in September 2009 and 2010 during the *Ganesh Chaturthi*, a religious festival that revolves around the figure of Lord Ganesh[63]. The analysis of the iconic representations of the deity during the 10-day-festival offers insights on the multiple dimensions of the politics of communalism with respect to the themes of religious difference and space appropriation. It also shows the fluidity of representations and the change in meanings and practices associated with the festival and the figure of Lord Ganesh (see pictures in Section 7.5). The images help contextualising the gender and socio-economic dimensions of interfaith relations within the demarcation of the religious community's boundaries both internally and externally. Most of all, the pictures offer a different channel for interpretation that puts the themes explored in a perspective seeking to account for the relationship between the researcher and the subject represented in the picture. By taking the picture and offering it as a form of interpretation, I propose a synthesis between images, discourses and actions, as practices carrying meanings with implications at a multiplicity of levels for different sections of society in a particular context and beyond a communal paradigm. Similarly, the pictures of the two "religious communities" areas in the neighbourhood of Sultan Shahi (Section 4.6) offer a representation of what was recorded during conversations with some of the research participants. The image from the rooftop of HMI's building (Figure 5, p.129) contextualises the perspective on spatial practices offered in Chapter 4 by showing what I was invited to observe: HMI as standing at the interface of the Hindu and Muslim areas. The powerful discourse that the picture proposes refers to its very location in a narrative of Hindu-Muslim conflict that overlooks the many unspoken tensions related to the space of interfaith relations. Thus, the pictures also show how the socio-economic and gender dimensions discussed in Chapter 4 can be veiled if the main interpretive lens remains within the paradigm of communalism. By looking at the picture one could simply notice that the neighbourhood is segregated into a Hindu and a Muslim area. In that sense, the picture itself reproduces the fundamental digits of the dominant

[63] See Chapter 4 and Chapter 6.

discourse. However, in the context of the perspective proposed in this thesis, the picture also represent my own engagement with the research context and the attempt to elaborate a representation which acknowledges the rootedness of the Hindu vs. Muslim rhetoric (the indication to notice and photograph the spatial segregation in terms of "religious communities" by one research participant) and at the same time the possibility to transcend it by looking into its intersecting dimensions (the multiple tensions, socio-economic differences and various overlapping forms of spatial segregation analysed in Chapter 4).

In conclusion, the process of interpretation is a reflection on fieldwork and the whole research process as a holistic experience that defines and is in turn defined and transformed by the methods, the unfolding relationships, the situations occurred and my own positionings with respect to them. It is a process of finding connections between imagery, discourse and action, and to identify inconsistencies and tensions that need further exploration. It can ultimately be regarded as simultaneously deconstructing and re-constructing the social space of interfaith relations, by integrating a variety of sources and insights into a framework of analysis that accounts for the possibilities of narrating interfaith relations transcending the dominant conflict paradigm.

3.3 CONCLUSION: REFLECTING ON RESEARCH PROCESSES

This chapter situates the research within an epistemological space and presents the methodological lenses through which narratives and practices of interfaith relations are framed and explored. The fundamental preoccupation that has informed the construction of this methodological framework for analysis is the attempt to build a coherent connection between the ethics, theory and practice of research. In that sense, this chapter is inextricably linked to the previous one, further developing the overall perspective of this thesis. Indeed, the purpose of developing theory and practice consistently with ethical preoccupations is pursued through the construction of a theoretical and methodological framework capable of capturing the continuous unfolding of interfaith relations without reproducing the binary oppositions, the forms of domination and social polarisation of the communal paradigm. A process of deconstruction of the dominant categories that constitute narratives and practices of interfaith relations is here combined with a representation of such social space as multidimensional and fluid.

In order to clarify my position with respect to the study of interfaith relations, this chapter provides a perspective on the research practices, the main methods applied and the epistemological background on which they have been rooted.

The inspiration provided by the debates in feminism on methodologies, ethnography and analysis focuses on two main issues: positionality and situated knowledges. Such paradigms have been explored and translated into practice as the most appropriate perspectives with which to engage, in the deconstruction of narratives and practices of interfaith relations. This research engagement stems first of all from the attempt to avoid the reproduction of the same dynamics of naturalisation and binary thinking that this work aims at deconstructing. Second, it was stimulated by ethical concerns regarding the position that the researcher occupies and the responsibility s/he bears in the production of knowledge. Reflections on how to provide a representation of interfaith relations without attributing to people fixed, unhistorical identities and social locations was directly linked to such ethical preoccupations. At the same time, those reflections also translate into an awareness of the political significance of representation and its development through relationships established during the research process. Finally, it is inspired by the acknowledgment of the direct implication of the researcher in the construction of knowledge against the image of an impartial presence located somewhere outside the context of analysis, devoid of any responsibility on what s/he writes and the representations s/he produces.

In order to translate such approaches into actual methods of enquiry and analysis the research has been conceived of as relationship, in which agency of all the participants is acknowledged both in the process of interpretation and in the actual interactions (Joseph, 1996). This requires the ongoing exercise of reflexivity, not in terms of the researcher's identity but of the positionalities that stem from the way in which the gathering of materials and the process of interpretations have taken place in specific contexts and interactions.

This approach has also inspired the choice to employ certain ethnographic methods and to adapt and contextualise them according to the contingent circumstances. Moreover, it has broadened the scope of fieldwork methods to embrace insights coming from encounters, conversations and situations happening outside structured research settings. The recording in written (notes and journal) and photographic forms of the fieldwork experiences has become an integral part of the interpretation process and

contributed to develop a thematic framework for the exploration of narratives of interfaith relations and their location in a specific context, space and time.

I consider such methodologies as an attempt to harmonise the various interconnected practices of a research, aimed at offering a perspective on the way the reproduction of a social order of domination through the configuration of boundaries between and within "communities" entails at the same time the possibility to transcend that very process of boundary production and configure a potential for social change.

3.4 ANNEX: THE THEMES OF INTERFAITH RELATIONS

THEMES	EXAMPLES	SUPPORTS
Religious difference and homogeneity		
Binary opposition - Internal homogenisation and differentiation	Wrestlers: ideal masculinity Rameeza Bee Taslima Nasreen: the ideal Muslim woman and sanctioning of internal dissent	Conversations, observation, newspapers, political and religious speeches, pictures, blogs.
Taboos about religious customs Internal social differentiation (caste and pollution)	Food (Beef, pork) Rituals Law and social system Discourse about position of women in Hinduism and Islam.	Conversations, observation, pictures, blogs, websites
Economic positioning	Reservations Caste/class Muslims Old city	Newspapers, conversations
Violence		
Perpetrators of violence/ Violence towards symbols/ Gendered violence	Violence and the community: Wrestlers "Outsiders" Rameeza Bee Taslima Nasreen Sexual mutilations, rape, assaults on pregnant women, annihilation of the other's reproductive capacity Protection of women and restriction to mobility	Pictures, observation, conversations, blogs, websites, reports, newspapers, documentaries
Interpretation of violence as communal and gender dimension	Rameeza Bee, wrestlers communalisation of crime terrorist violence	Newspapers
The Other as a terrorist	Poor, young Muslim men "Sensitive areas" (Old city as "little Pakistan") Pakistani "terrorists" training Muslim youth in Old city Hindu terrorism	Conversations, newspapers, blogs, websites, pictures
Bomb blasts and communalism	Police firing after bomb blasts Riots after bomb blasts	Conversations, newspapers, blogs, websites
Tradition, language and history		
Interpretations of history	Muslim rule - Hyderabad's accession - Independence Mulki/non-mulki conflict - Urdu/Hindi Gender/caste/class and religious community Nationalism/secularism/communalism Telangana People's struggle	Historical accounts, leaflets, newspapers, blogs, websites, conversations

Space and territory		
Static spatial strategies (delimitation and demarcation of space, choice of religious symbols)	Use of flags to mark the territory Paintings and decorations Location of religious sites (Mecca Masjid and Charminar Temple) Old City as "little Pakistan" Discourse about Muslims population Old city as a ghetto (Muslim and lower castes) Caste, religion, socio-economic location and housing	Pictures, observation
Dynamic spatial strategies (appropriation of territory, display of strength)	Routes of religious parades Gender, socio-economic positioning and mobility within and across religious communities	Pictures, observation, conversations
Access to housing and goods	Riots and looting Riots and land speculation	Conversations, newspapers
Communalism and everyday life	Segregation of Hindus and Muslims (Separation between public and private spheres along gender lines) Mobility of men and women across different areas	Pictures, observation, conversations
Migration patterns from and towards Hyderabad	Migration to the Gulf countries and remittances Immigration from Pakistan and Bangladesh	Conversations, newspapers, blogs
Politics and Law		
Government policy towards "deprived groups"	Reservations for Muslims Reservations for women Reservations for Scheduled Castes	Conversations, newspapers
Religion and political parties	Al MIM, Muslims, Old city Politicians' participation to religious events	Conversations, newspapers, observation
Elites and episodes of violence	1990 and 2010 riots Aggression Tasleema Nasreen (MIM as representative of the "real" Muslims)	Newspapers, conversations
Elites and interpretations of interfaith relations	The paradox of communal harmony in political speeches	Newspapers

Table 1. Thematic chart for the analysis of interfaith relations.

The selection of themes has been based on the existing literature on ethnic/communal conflict[64], adapted to and integrated with insights gained from the fieldwork experiences in India. The table offers an overview of the most salient categories identified as constitutive of interfaith relations. They are associated with examples of the discourses, symbols and practices and the supports that have been used for their exploration. It is important to note that these themes are closely interrelated and that in many cases they overlap. Moreover, not all of them have been incorporated into the written text, although all have contributed to the development of the perspectives offered in this work.

[64] See Bibliography.

As emerges from the analysis of themes identified and the examples provided, the gender and socio-economic dimensions of interfaith relations cross-cut most of these categories and inform multiple practices of interfaith relations beyond the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm. The external dimensions of the conflict (interfaith relations in the rest of India, migration patterns, relations between India and Pakistan) also play a transversal role in reinforcing certain positionings, discourses and practices observed.

The main purpose of this analysis is to identify processes through which social boundaries are drawn and tensions, violence and an unequal social order configured and reproduced. This is accounted for in the course of the analysis.

This table is a fundamental tool for the process of deconstruction of the major themes, identified and explored as constitutive of the social space of interfaith relations.

Chapter 4
Boundaries of Difference and their Transgression in Narratives of Interfaith Relations

4.1 Introduction: The Politics of Religious Difference

The notion of religious difference in discourses of communalism tends to be framed as a static category, based on existing elements of distinction between two discrete religious communities. The various chapters of this work offer a perspective on the configuration of interfaith relations, by focusing on specific themes - such as violence, history, politics and law – which participate in the definition of discourses of communalism and in the demarcation of the religious community's boundaries. The meanings and implications of such themes, it is argued throughout this work, are constantly negotiated at the intersection of multiple dimensions in narratives of interfaith relations. In particular, gender and socio-economic differentials contribute to configure the paradigm of communalism as a discourse articulating unequal power relations across different sections of society. In the very process of unveiling these dimensions, this research offers a perspective on the complexity of interfaith relations beyond the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm and on the possibilities for transcending such discourse of domination and social polarisation.

The present chapter explores the notion of religious difference not only as a process of boundary demarcation of "religious communities", but also as configuration of a social space. This last, constantly unfolds in narratives of interfaith relations, as they define the locations of different sections of society at the intersection of gender and socio-economic dimensions. Discourses of communalism and the politics of the religious community encompass and conceal the complexity of social practices and relations of power beyond the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm. In fact, between the shifting boundaries of religious communities, different social categories position themselves with respect to the very narratives of religious difference assigning them to one community or the other. In this sense, the social locations ascribed through the category of the religious community are inscribed in the contingent forms of social relations, which they contribute to define.

Examples explored in the following chapters show how the different themes identified as constitutive of discourses of communalism intersect, defining the location of different social categories and their mutual relations.

This chapter discusses how religious difference is constantly configured, as a source of conflict but also a space for change, as multiple positionalities are articulated with respect to narratives of interfaith relations. Thus, distinctions about religions as ritual orders are reflected in specific social practices which have implications for relations among different sections of society. They are, therefore, fundamentally political and imply the maintenance, subversion and reconfiguration of existing relations of power in the wider social context, at the intersection of multiple dimensions.

In his seminal work "Why I am not a Hindu", Ilaiah proposes a critique of *Hindutva* as a discourse of domination which contributes to define an unequal social order in particular with respect to the position of Dalits in India (Ilaiah, 1996b). While the text can be regarded as a manifesto of Dalit political consciousness, Tharu rightly points out how Ilaiah's critique is also a reflection on the way "caste, like gender, structures every aspect of our [i.e. Indian] society" reproducing a system of unequal relations of power at the socio-economic level (Tharu, 1996). Thus, it bears significance for the larger web of social relations, for the way it intersects with other dimensions of the social processes and, ultimately, for an understanding of communalism as a discourse pertaining to the various forms in which power manifests itself. It has therefore implications that transcend the boundaries of Hindu-Muslim relations, encompassing a multiplicity of social locations, forms of interactions, tensions and dimensions.

This chapter proposes a mode for exploring discourses of religious difference, offering a perspective which trespasses the dichotomy of conflict narratives. On the one hand, it explores the forms of domination unfolding through religious symbols and practices. On the other, it acknowledges religious difference as constantly configuring possibilities for transcending the boundaries of religious communities, by acknowledging the multiple dimensions and tensions that find expression within and across them. Hence, this chapter further elaborates the analytical bases for the rest of this work.

Narratives of interfaith relations tend to naturalise religion as a fundamental category of difference which defines the boundaries of communities and their mutual

relations. The perspective offered here first introduces gender and socio-economic dimensions as angles through which to explore the configuration of religious difference. It then analyses specific narratives of space as a fundamental theme which contributes to distinctions between "religious communities". Space, in that sense, can be regarded as constantly organised and reconfigured along the very axes of power defined by gender and socio-economic differentials in discourses of communalism.

The argument developed here conceives of religious communities as social locations from which specific politics of identity are articulated. At the same time, however, it tries to show how the assignation of certain positionings through discourses of religious difference reflects broader dynamics of power, which have implications for people and groups and their mutual relations. Moreover, while such positionings are selected to respond to the contingent dynamics of political, social and economic relations, narratives of Hindu-Muslim conflict tend to conceal the multiplicity of locations and possibilities of social interactions that unfold within and across the category of the religious community. In this context, deconstructing religious difference as a fundamental theme for defining the boundaries of communities also means engaging in a twofold process. On the one hand, while exploring the ways in which narratives of difference define conflict as a fundamental mode of relations and naturalise forms of super/subordination between "religious communities", the perspective transcends the notion of religion as a mere doctrinal order to understand its implications in the social dynamics of power, within and across the unit of the religious community. On the other, it proposes a reflection on religious communities as spaces of constant negotiation of social positionings and identities, and interfaith relations as configured by multiple dimensions, their intersection and continuous unfolding. In that sense, this chapter also aims to lay the foundations for an argument about the potential for social change in narratives of religious difference.

4.2 GENDERED BOUNDARIES AND THE POLITICS OF RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE

This section examines the gender dimensions of narratives of religious difference. It aims particularly at showing how the boundaries of religious communities, though continuously shifting, are always gendered and how such dimension functions as an organising principle for relations between and the relative positionings of different sections of society.

The interrelations between discourses of communalism and gender with respect to the wider social context (and beyond the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm) have been quite overlooked until recently. Debates have mainly focused on forms of discrimination – either against women or religious minorities – with attention paid to the fundamental connectedness between narratives and practices of gender and communalism mainly to discuss and expose the brutal victimisation of women during riots, sometimes focusing on the Partition of the Subcontinent (Menon & Bhasin, 1998; Butalia, 2000). As a first step towards unveiling the gender dimension of interfaith relations, Agnes calls for the need to focus on the "intersectionality of gender and identity" (Agnes, 2002, p. 3697) in order to unpack how notions of masculinity and femininity inform interpretations of violence and the practice of interfaith relations.

Such a connection sheds light on the continuous processes of identification and differentiation between social categories and groupings that occupy different positions in an asymmetric social order. These processes in turn, reproduce a gendered discourse which implies unequal locations for and relations between the categories of man and woman, with different implications according to their socio-economic positioning[65]. With respect to these social dynamics, specific representations of masculinity and femininity contribute to configure social boundaries and forms of violence, but also multiple tensions upon negotiations and assignations of different social positionings. The notions of masculinity and femininity are employed here with reference to discourses and social practices that are contingent to the gender relations in a particular social context. They are therefore relational rather that discrete and static concepts and

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[65] Yuval- Davis argues that feminists have used the term *patriarchy* to conceptualise "the autonomous system of subordination of women in society" (Yuval-Devis, 1997, p. 6). However, she underlines how unequal gender relations are in fact endemic and intrinsic to social relations with respect to the distribution of power and resources. Thus patriarchy is not autonomous system but closely intertwined with the plurality of social dynamics and power relations from the domestic to the public sphere. This is also why it manifests itself in different ways according to the individual's social positioning. (Yuval-Devis, 1997, pp. 6-8).

entail a "multidimensional understanding of gender" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 812).

Feminist scholars have shown how many identity-based ideologies have framed women's bodies as the symbols of the community, its cultural heritage, its internal structure (based on gender hierarchies) and its opposition with the antagonists (Yuval-Devis, 1997; Nagel, 1998; Mayer, 2000).

In the Indian context, the gender dimension of certain politics of religious identity manifests itself in representations of women's bodies as the ultimate symbols of culture and tradition, which become the contested sites of purity and vice, integrity and moral corruption, loyalty and treachery, safety and danger[66]. All these qualities are attached to the "female" and then transferred to the ambiguous notion of the "religious community", configuring its internal organisation and distribution of power and its relations with other outside entities. The contents of such rhetoric are articulated in different ways, according to the social and historical contexts, drawing and shifting the boundaries between and within social groupings.

The argument developed in this section shows that representations of masculinity and femininity, and in particular the symbolic construction of women as signs of culture, inform certain politics of religious identity and, more in general, the configuration of a communal paradigm. These very aspects play a fundamental role in producing boundaries between opposing images of Self and Other - categorised as religious communities - but also in shaping their internal organisation. Ultimately, they contribute to the production of a dominant discourse of social polarisation, embedded in the politics of the religious community but cutting across its boundaries.

Hence, this section analyses the evolution of narratives and practices of religious identity that foster processes of identification with respect to the way male and female spaces and spheres of action are configured, with particular reference to specific developments in the discursive landscape of the Hindu Right. The aim of the first two parts of this section is to show how, like other nationalist projects, *Hindutva* relies on projections of men and women as fundamental principles for drawing distinctions that define the boundaries of "religious communities".

[66] According to Patel, "power struggles of identity politics are settled over women's bodies by control (dress-code, restriction on mobility, code of racial purity and punishment for mixed marriages of intercaste, interreligious and interracial varieties), violence (rape and assault), forced fertility (ethnic cleansing) and psychological damage (by terrorizing, humiliating and subjugating women continuously)" (Patel, 2005, p. 193).

The reference to the Hindu Right inevitably homogenises different organisations and discourses which present degrees of difference and transformation throughout time. However, for analytical purposes, I discuss here some of the gendered narratives that underlie the discursive space of "Hindu nationalism", despite the specificities of its various articulations. Moreover, it is important to note that certain paradigms, which are visible as constitutive of the *Hindutva* ideology, cut across different political affiliations, as they are in fact ingrained in the forms and relations of power reproduced in and reproducing a Brahminical social order (see Sections 2.2.3 and 4.3.3).

The official discourses of *Hindutva* analysed here are part of a powerful rhetoric that influences representations of interfaith relations along the communal paradigm. The narrative offered in this section aims mostly at exemplifying the ways in which gender becomes a fundamental axis of power, whereby the configuration of social boundaries also implies the reproduction of social inequalities within and across them. In that sense, the discourses of the Hindu Right offer an interesting example of a gendered politics of religious communities. The analysis proposed shows that men and women are expected to play distinct, complementary but unequal roles as members of a community in opposition to another. Internal homogenisation and cohesion is produced through appeals to mythological and historical narratives portraying the ideal men and women as opposed to the "antagonist". These various representations draw on and perpetuate fundamental inequalities and discriminating practices based on gender, religion and socio-economic categories, all implying a distinction between private and public spaces and specific positionings within them. Then, the analysis moves to processes of differentiation through gendered discourses. While for analytical purposes the two processes (identification and differentiation) are dealt with separately, it will gradually emerge how representations contributing to constitute the "antagonist community" and those moulding the Self are mutually constitutive and inextricably embedded. Again women, this time symbolising the Other, become the centre of a variety of narratives and practices drawing on interpretations and definitions of "tradition".

The relevance of stereotyped images of the "Other's women" is located in the context of understanding such boundary-drawing narratives as also configuring spaces for contestation and change. Thus, a final part explores representations of women in narratives of interfaith relations as discourses of and about power, accommodating and concealing multiple social tensions at the intersection of gender and socio-economic

dimensions. In that sense, the final part offers a further exploration of the gender dimension of narratives of interfaith relations which, by establishing a parallel with colonial discourses, introduces a perspective on the implications across "religious communities" and the relations of power unfolding between and within their boundaries.

This section shows how, though fluid and malleable, certain politics of religious identity grounded on the rhetoric of hostile interfaith relations tend to build on gendered narratives as organising principles for constructing social categories standing in relations of super/subordination. In so doing, it locates gendered narratives of religious difference in the wider social processes, conceiving of them as pertaining to the larger dynamics of power unfolding within discourses of religion, culture and tradition.

4.2.1 The Boundaries of Religious Communities: Processes of Identification

Representations of masculinity and femininity are a fundamental aspect of the discursive landscape of interfaith relations. As mentioned above, they can be regarded as organising principles for relations of power in society and their constant reconfiguration. This part explores how images of the "ideal man" and "ideal woman" contribute to shape social boundaries with different implications for various sections of society and their mutual relations. The analysis focuses on the *Hindutva* ideology, as it represents an articulated example of how gendered discourses are inherent in the configuration of an unequal social order, with implications for the locations of different social categories across the boundaries of religious communities.

Indian feminist scholars have argued that representations of what could be regarded as a "hegemonic masculinity"[67] actually inform discourses and practices of interfaith relations. For example, while exploring the discourse of the Hindu Right from a gender perspective, Banerjee (Banerjee, 2006) distinguishes between two main, complementary models of masculinity: the soldier and the warrior monk. This imagery combines the ideal of the healthy, strong body with moral integrity and religious fervour. The relevance of physical training dates from the origins of the movement, especially with Keshav Baliram Hedgewar's founding of the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak*

[67]According to Connell and Messerschmidt, "masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals. Masculinties are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 836).

Sangh (RSS) in 1925[68]. However, it has acquired increasing relevance with the growth of the movement from the beginning of the 1980s, along with an accentuated emphasis on the warrior-like attributes of certain Hindu deities[69], and the discursive appropriation of Indian martial art traditions[70]. In this way, the images of the soldier and the warrior monk are connected to *Hindutva*'s articulation of the ideal Hindu man with respect to his responsibility to protect the family and the community from "external threats". Through moral integrity, loyalty to the nation and attachment to the myth of a glorious Hindu culture, the Hindu body is expected to help in the restoration of a "golden age"[71]. In fact, the very reference to the decline of the Hindu civilisation under first the Muslim and then the British rules is the starting point for the construction of an ideal "militant Hindu masculinity" (Anand, 2007, p. 260) and is a landmark of the discursive landscape of the Hindu Right since its origins (Jaffrelot, 1992; Hansen, 1999).

The organisation and functioning of the RSS[72] is probably the best example of how this image of physical strength and spiritual fervour merges into one powerful narrative. Nowadays, the stated scope of the organisation is conceived of as "serving the nation and its people in the form of God - *Bharat Mata* (Mother India) and protecting the interests of the Hindus in India"[73]. Historically, the decline of the "Hindu nation" has been explained through the theme of the "gentle, mild and tolerant" (feminine) Hindu, unable to chase away the invader. Hence, the call for the construction of a militant Hindu masculinity, attached to a glorious cultural heritage and symbolised by mythological and religious figures, adapted to suit the current ideology. The growth of the Hindu Right's visibility as a political, cultural and social movement is certainly associated with the imagery of Lord Ram as the most popular hero and emblem of Hindu revivalism especially in Northern India. The deeds of the mythical figure, celebrated in the epics of "Rāmāyana" have, starting from the mid 1980s, become a

[68] See (Van de Veer, 1994, pp. 71-73; Jaffrelot, 1996, pp. 33-45).

[69] See for example, starting from the 1980s, the increasing relevance of the warrior attributes of Lord Ram as the emblem of Hindu nationalism along with the growth of the Ramjanmabhoomi movement and the broadcasting of a television serial on the epic of *Ramayana* in 1987. See also the recent increase in images of Ganesh *pehlwan* during the Ganesh Chaturthi in Hyderabad (Section 7.2.1).

[70] See (Alter, 1994) for a discussion of the appropriation of Indian wrestling tradition into the discourse of the Hindu Right.

[71] See Chapter 2 p. 16-17.

[72] *Supra*, note 40.

[73] http://www.sanghparivar.org/wiki/rashtriya-swayamsevak-sangh Accessed on 22 January 2010.

reference point for the image of the brave, loyal, nationalist and virtuous Hindu warrior[74].

Parallel to the imagery of the Hindu warrior, defending the honour of the community and embodying the power of the Hindu nation is the notion of the ideal Hindu woman. It is with respect to this very symbolic figure that the discourse of the Hindu Right combines narratives of femininity with stereotyped images of the external threats, establishing boundaries and hierarchies between and within communities. In line with other nationalist ideologies, *Hindutva* represents women's body as the cultural and biological reproducer of the nation (Banerjee, 2006, p. 73) and the sings of tradition. The main rhetoric surrounding the gendered discourses of the Hindu Right is that of *Bharat Mata* (Mother India). Narratives of Partition among *Hindutva* activists have often referred to India as the defiled body of a mother (Anand, 2007, p. 259), a theme which has, since the time of Partition, been brutally mirrored in the practice of ripping the stomach of pregnant women during riots. The Hindu woman must be pure, virtuous, modest, and subdued to her husband. Along with the image of Lord Ram, his wife Sita has surged as the model of womanly virtues, and the source of inspiration for all Hindu wives[75]. She embodies faithfulness and submission to her husband and the community's rules, especially in terms of chastity and purity. At the same time, however, Sita is a strong and courageous woman and mother. The combination of purity and strength is an underlying element in this notion of femininity, for the ideal Hindu woman is the guardian of the hearth and tenaciously defends her wifely and motherly virtues against external aggressors. She must therefore be protected and defended from the dangers coming from outside the community's boundaries. These narratives create a continuum through idealised images of the family, the community and the nation as safe spaces for women. In that sense, the opposition between the community and the outside world reproduces the dichotomy between private and public spaces and the resulting

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[74] In order to understand the extent to which this imagery is linked to an ideology of hostile interfaith relations it is helpful to recall the Babri Masjid/Ram Janmabhoomi controversy, reactivated at the beginning of the 1980s and culminated with the demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya in 1992. The Hindu Right gained tremendous visibility through this campaign, claiming the ancient mosque had been erected on the site of a temple situated in what is believed to be the birthplace of Lord Ram. The VHP (*Vishva Hindu Parishad*, leading organization within the *Sangh Parivar*) fuelled the mobilisation in the name of Lord Ram and claimed that every Hindu should be involved in the fight to protect *Bharat Mata* (Mother India) from the Muslims just as Ram saved his wife Sita from the villain (Ravana) who had abducted her (Katju, 2005, p. 182). As a consequence of the mobilisation and the destruction of the mosque, rioting and violence took place across the country. For more on the Babri Masjid/ Ram Janmabhoomi controversy and the discourse of Hindu nationalism see (Van de Veer, 1994).

[75] These mythologies are imbued with religious symbolism. While Lord Ram is the avatar of Vishnu, Sita is the incarnation of Lakshmi.

socially assigned positioning of women and men. This is also reflected in certain restrictions prescribed to the woman's mobility outside the boundaries of the allegedly safe space to which she "naturally" belongs (family, community and, eventually, the nation). Such restrictions apply at the discursive level to an image of the "Hindu woman" as a homogenous category despite the fact that multiple dimensions (such as socio-economic and age differentials) largely affect the actual everyday practices of (dis)location of women's bodies[76].

Paola Bacchetta and other feminist scholars have explored a growing phenomenon that has apparently changed the face of the *Hindutva* movement. Starting from the first half of the 1990s and increasingly throughout the decade, some of the organisations within the *Sang Parivar* have witnessed the growth of a form of female militancy, which is apparently at odds with the image of the shy, submitted wife (Bacchetta, 1996; Banerjee, 1996; 2006; Basu A. , 1995; Bedi, 2006; Vindhya, 2001). Many Hindu Right organisations have opened their ranks to women. Though some observers downsize the degree of involvement of women in episodes of violence[77], there are examples, such as the undisputable anti-minority fervour that Ms Uma Bharati[78] displayed during the Babri Masjid campaign, that unambiguously show the role played, at least at a discursive level, by women activists. This type of involvement embraces also campaigns aimed at promoting women's safety and self confidence outside the home and, at the same time, appeals to the rhetoric constantly exalting the ideal Hindu woman, pure, shy, and virtuous "angel of the hearth", symbol of the family's and community's honour[79]. The stress on the sacredness of myths (*Sita*), symbols (*Baharat Mata*) and on religious figures (*Durga, Lakshmi*) allows the coexistence of the two contrasting models within the same femininity paradigm.

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[76] See for example (Tharu & Niranjana, 1994) for a critical perspective of gender as a multidimensional category and its implications.

[77] Usha Menon maintains that women's participation in riots has been emphasised by biased academics in the process of construction of the pejorative image of the Hindu Right (Menon U. , 2003). In fact, women's engagement in violence has been reported in various cases (Banerjee, 1996; Basu A. , 1995).The Shiv Sena, a nationalist right-wing Hindu organisation active in the state of Maharashtra, has quite a consistent female section whose members tend to combine the discourse of the Hindu mother and wife with an active participation in campaigns, activities and also violent episodes involving their organisation (Vindhya, 2001).

[78] Former Chief Minister in the state of Madhya Pradesh, Ms. Bharati is a BJP politician, famous for her inflammatory speeches. She considers herself a *sanyasini*, an ascetic, committed to remain unmarried and work for her spiritual growth.

[79] As Banerjee frames it, the divergent models of female behaviour articulate two main themes: "one, women's bodies represent national honour, and two, this embodiment only works if women are chaste and virtuous" (Banerjee, 2006, p. 62).

Interestingly, certain feminist scholars have noticed how women negotiate their agency and militancy in the movement and outside the domestic realm within the restrictions imposed by gendered spatial distinctions (Bacchetta, 1996; 2002; Vindhya, 2001). Bacchetta argues that in the Rashtra Sevika Samiti - the female wing of the RSS –

> women supplemental agency, as additive and substitutive alike, retains gender differentialism and produces *gender equilibrium* (not equality) in the overall Hindu nationalist project. In turn, women's stabilization of the project reinforces women's subordination therein" (Bacchetta, 2002, p. 45).

Though women's agency can replace the dominance of the male wing in the organisation, it does so in time/space-restricted circumstances which result, in the end, in the addition to an already complete and dominant RSS flow. More specifically, gender tensions within the family, domestic violence, and certain limitations to mobility are addressed in specific contexts but overall justified in the name of a "traditional" gender order despite the rhetoric of the strong and emancipated Hindu woman (Banerjee, 2006, pp. 69-70).

The implications of women's agency in the context of interfaith relations are particularly relevant to understand the continuous reconfiguration of narratives and practices concerning the wider power relations among different sections of society.

Women's position within the family, the community and society at large is defined with respect to the alleged external threat and to the need to preserve the integrity of the culture she is deemed to embody. These gendered discourses, which foster mechanisms of internal homogenisation and identification, are part of a larger picture that encompasses gendered narratives of the Other.

4.2.2 The Boundaries of Religious Communities: Processes of Differentiation

The configuration of the internal boundaries of "religious communities" in narratives of hostile interfaith relations implies the construction of the Other as the threat against which the community must be defended. Again, the image of women as custodians of specific representations of culture, tradition and, ultimately, identity inform the contents that define "the antagonist". Thus, narratives and practices concerning sexuality, gender relations and women's rights are fundamental aspects, not only in the configuration of gender hierarchies within the community but also with respect to the generation of its external boundaries. These are produced through

stereotyped representations of masculinities and femininities as well as gender relations within the other community.

As noted by Kakar, in a context of social polarisation, the threatening Other is imagined as lustful, dirty, immoral and incapable of controlling his instincts (Kakar, 1996, pp. 106-107). For this reason, women must be protected and along with them, symbolically, the whole cultural repertoire they represent. Anand underlines the quasi-obsessive insistence of the ideologues of the Hindu Right on the myth of the "overpopulating Muslim" (Anand, 2007, pp. 259-260), which adds to the image of the Other's masculinity in two main ways[80]. First, it informs a discourse regarding the way women are treated and discriminated against in the name of Islam. Polygamy, the veil, *purdah* and a number of habits attributed exclusively to the Muslims are framed within the stereotype of the backward, patriarchal Muslim community[81]. This representation justifies the need to assimilate the Muslims within the "more developed and egalitarian Hindu civilisation". Second, stereotyped reproductive habits attributed to Muslims have increasingly been explained as deriving not only from an uncontrolled sexuality but also from a strategy aimed at numerically overcoming the Hindu majority. This discourse has become particularly popular after the publications of the 2001 census results that allegedly showed a sharp increase in the rates of Indian Muslim population's growth[82]. The figures were in fact misinterpreted. The 2001census included Jammu & Kashmir, the only state in India with a Muslim majority, which was instead excluded from the 1991 census, due to episodes of extreme violence occurring at the time in which the surveys were conducted[83]. Though still higher than the growth rate of the Hindu

[80] These images contribute to the construction of the Other as a danger by depicting it as immoral and sexually corrupt. This in turn justifies the control over women's bodies and mobility. In her analysis of the *Hindutva* ideology, Katju remarks that Muslim men are accused "of marrying four times, having innumerable children as well as abducting and forcibly marrying Hindu girls, in order to overtake the Hindu population of India" (Katju, 2005, p. 179).

[81] Most of these habits are in fact widespread among different religious groups. *Purdah*, literally "curtain" refers to the various practices, ranging from veiling, and modest dress to spatial segregation of women. Thus, different degrees of veiling but also strict limitations to women's mobility outside the home are amongst its visible manifestations. *Purdah* is mistakenly considered an exclusively Islamic tradition but, in a variety of forms, is widespread among families of different faiths. During my visit to Rajasthan in 2005 I interacted with women belonging to Hindu, Sikh and Muslim families and living in the slums of Jaipur city. Many of them referred to *purdah* as a habit encompassing categorisations of caste, religion and class. See Sections 4.3.3and 4.5 for an exploration of the multiple meanings of and positionings related to *purdah*.

[82] http://www.indiatogether.org/2004/sep/hlt-census.htm http://www.countercurrents.org/comm-dayal120904.htm

[83] Acharya Dharmendra, a VHP leader is reported to have said at a meeting held on 16 April 2003 (one year after the massacre in Gujarat) in Roha (Maharashtra) that ""Muslims breed like rabbits and their population would soon overtake
that of the Hindus". And "Muslims can continue to live here only provided they all become Hindus. In this land of Shivaji, we should all follow Shivaji's example and finish off all the descendants of Afzal Khan just as Shivaji did." *The Hindustan Times* 4 July 2003 "Blah, blah, blood" by Rajmohan Gandhi.

population, the Muslim one has in fact decreased. However, the initial interpretations legitimised in a way the discourse of the Muslims as a threat to the Hindu nation. This discourse is usually connected to the location of Hindus and Muslims vis-à-vis the India-Pakistan relations and the representation of Muslims as supporters of Pakistan, anti-national and, ultimately, non-Indian (Pandey, 1999; Devji, 1992). An underlying narrative of history portrays Muslims as an alien people, implanted in India through war and destruction. Accordingly, in the ideology of the Hindu Right, Muslims are considered responsible for parting India in 1947 and for the carnage that stained the process of formation of the two separate states. Hence, Muslims and other "religious minorities" have to gain their right to be Indian by proving their loyalty to *Bharat Mata* and willingly accepting and endorsing the "native" Hindu/Indian culture. These discourses draw heavily on revisited historical accounts of the deeds of "barbaric" Muslim rulers, on the myth of the "ultra-virile Muslim male bodies and overfertile female ones" (Sarkar, 2002, pp. 2872-76) and the rhetoric of the anti-national Muslim, belonging to a different cultural universe (read nation)[84].

A complementary image to the aggressive and lustful Muslim man is the oppressed Muslim woman. An illuminating example is the discourse of fundamental rights based on the necessity to impose a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in India to grant equal rights to Muslim women, oppressed by their men and the "obscurantist customs" deriving from Islam. The debate is articulated as a tension inherent in the Indian constitution over the principle of equality before the law on the one hand, and the recognition of religious-based Personal Law on the other[85]. Since 1986, the Hindu Right

[84] However, such discourses are not confined to the language and rhetoric of the Hindu Right and have direct implications for everyday narratives of interfaith relations. In fact, at least in Hyderabad, they feature quite commonly in everyday descriptions of areas predominantly inhabited by Muslims such as the Old city. During the time spent in the neighbourhood of Sultan Shahi I was repeatedly told that rumour has it that young Muslim men be trained by Pakistani terrorist and that certain parts of the Old city be inhabited by "Pakistani sympathisers". This narrative is also widely reproduced by media, state authorities and the police combined with descriptions of the Old city as a communally-sensitive zone. See for example: Asia Times online, Sep 7 2007 http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/II07Df02.html; Times of India, Dec 31, 2005 http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hyderabad/IISc-terror-trail-may-lead-to-Hyderabad/articleshow/1353509.cms ; Times of India, Jun 5, 2009, http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Fear-of-LeT-strike-puts-South-India-on-alert/articleshow/4621576.cms See also Section 7.3 for an exploration of the gender and socio-economic dimensions in narratives of Islamic terrorism.

[85] For a more in-depth exploration of the intersection between gender and the legal discourse in the context of interfaith relations see Section 6.3. Discourses about equality and secularism are particularly sensitive in India especially with respect to constitutional provisions for minorities. The constitution grants equal rights to all citizens irrespective of race, religion, caste, class, sex, place of birth (Art. 15 Constitution of India) and, at the same time, stresses the secular foundations of India as a democracy. These notions however have been criticised for not taking into account the peculiarity of the Indian scenario and for implicitly favouring the majority, identified with a broad and homogeneous Hindu community. The ideology of *Hindutva* plays on this very ambiguity to foster its hegemonic aspirations (See Chapter 6).

has deliberately endorsed the cause for the introduction of a UCC, which has become more rampant with the rise of the BJP as a prominent actor in the Indian political scenario.

Contrarily to the image of the Hindu woman, the Muslim one is portrayed as ignorant and subdued to the Muslim men. The representations of femininity attached to the other community, divested from all the sanctity and the motherly virtues characterising the ideal Hindu woman, allow for the justification of Hindu supremacy by virtue of the backwardness and religious bigotry of the Muslims. Through appeals to conceptions of equality and secularism framed vis-à-vis gender and religion, *Hindutva* ideologues have thus claimed that Muslim women should be freed from the customs they are subjected to and be granted the same rights as Hindu women[86]. This rhetoric is consistent with the promotion of the Hindu woman's empowerment and her role as the sign of Indian culture, but overlooking the gendered discourses that permeate and actually configure the whole ideology. Curiously, however, if the Muslim woman shows a more emancipated behaviour, irrespective of the limitations imposed by these "Islamic codes of conduct", she is regarded as immoral, wicked and unchaste. In her research among *Shiv Sena* female activists Bedi notes how these women display an emancipated and sometimes aggressive behaviour in the public space and in men-dominated environments while at the same time advocating a "private obedient role" for women belonging to the "other community" (Bedi, 2006, pp. 61-62)[87].

Processes of identification and differentiation are mutually constitutive and reinforcing. In the case of the Hindu Right, the configuration of the Muslim's backwardness and threatening intentions justifies a system of domination or, according to the most extreme version, deletion from the social and political arenas.

4.2.3 "The Way They Treat Their Women": Representations of Gender Relations in Religious Communities

The previous parts discuss the gender dimension in the politics of religious identity, whereby narratives of identification and differentiation are constantly

[86] Agnes points out how the legal discourse regarding private law is complemented by complaints for the state's policy of "appeasement" of minorities, which plays a fundamental role in the articulations of *Hindutva* discourses about majority/minority rights in India (Agnes, 2002, pp. 3695-96).

[87] See also (Bacchetta, 1994) for an exploration of the different articulations of gender as a fundamental dimension of the Hindu Right discourse across different periods and organisations.

reproduced through the articulation of specific themes that define the boundaries between communities. As an extension of that analysis and with reference in particular to the theme of religious difference, the argument developed here elaborates on the implications of distinctions between religions as ritual orders configured through gendered categories. So far, the need to offer a narrative of gendered discourses of religious difference has provided a rather static image of representations of masculinities and femininities as reinforcing the Hindu-Muslim divide in *Hindutva* ideology. This part proposes a shift in perspective that aims at grasping the power relations and the processes of their configuration through gendered narratives of religious difference, which produces the rhetoric of the "incompatibility" of Hinduism and Islam as spiritual "traditions".

In fact, discourses of the position of women in everyday life play a crucial role not only in the demarcation of distinctions between "religious communities", but also in the configuration of relations of super/subordination between them and for gender relations within and across their boundaries. Thus, the narrative of how "a religion treats its women" is at the core of many constructions of the religious community in terms of difference with respect to another - more oppressive towards women and, therefore, backward. Women, in this sense, represent the ground of a discourse whose focus is, in fact, the construction of the religious community as an autonomous, discrete and homogenous entity with a moral superiority vis-à-vis the Other.

The argument proposed here aims at understanding how narratives of everyday religious practices rest on the theme of the treatment of women without however actually questioning the processes of construction of gender inequalities in social relations. While the discourse revolves around gendered distinctions between "religious communities", its implications transcend such boundaries and embrace gender relations within and across them.

Chapter 6 explores how representations of the position of women in Hinduism and Islam become a fundamental theme in discourses of communalism with respect to the question of reform of the personal law system. This, in turn, mirrors the maintenance of unequal power relations according to a patriarchal, upper-caste/class social order.

Here, I argue that positions of superiority and inferiority are assigned to one religion vis-à-vis the other based on a notion of relations between women and men,

wherein one ritual order is more advanced, egalitarian, just and, therefore, more dignified than the other. As in the case of legal discourse, these distinctions are constitutive of narratives of hostile interfaith relations but have implications that unfold at the interface of multiple dimensions.

Through narratives of difference based on the position of women in the everyday life of a "religious community", the identification of the accomplished womanhood vis-à-vis the subjugated one coincides with the definition of differences in "religious traditions", defined in terms of backward/developed, oppressive/liberating, threatening/protective. However, the implications of such discourses encompass and transcend the locus of the religious community, as they contribute to the articulations of social tensions and relative positionings of different categories within and across the community's boundaries. The reflections proposed in this part therefore represent religion as a constantly transforming system of power contributing to the definition of relations of super/subordination among different sections of society and the processes of their construction.

They also show how the notion of "tradition" and its intersection with representations of womanhood plays a crucial role in the configuration of religious difference and the continuous unfolding of relations of power in society.

Colonial Discourses: Woman as Tradition

Interestingly, gendered discourses of religious difference nowadays show striking similarities with British representations of Indian women in colonial texts. As argued by Chatterjee

> a central element in the ideological justification of British colonial rule was the criticism of the 'degenerate and barbaric' social customs of the Indian people, sanctioned, or so it was believed, by their religious traditions. [...] By assuming a position of sympathy with the unfree and oppressed womanhood of India, the colonial mind was able to transform this figure of the Indian woman into a sign of the inherently oppressive and unfree nature of the entire cultural tradition of a country (Chatterjee, 1989, p. 622).

Thus, Chatterjee remarks, in colonial representations of Indian society, forms of oppression where attached to "Indian religious practices" of which women were portrayed as the unaware victims.

Significantly, if such representations ideologically legitimised colonialism, constituting the discourse of the British "civilising mission", their implications extended

far beyond the coloniser/colonised relation, unfolding in the complexity of social relations within and across such categories. In fact, they interacted with the existing dynamics of power and with the positionings of different sections of society in the colonial space. The "religious customs" identified as the "tradition of India" stemmed from a representation of specific practices, legitimised and sanctioned through the exploration of certain religious texts by the local and colonial elites.

In her work on the debate on *sati*[88] in colonial India, Mani shows how the official discourse was concerned less with the subjugation of women than with portraying the "backwardness" of the practice as a deviation from the "authentic" Indian religious customs. The process had consequences for the demarcation of the boundaries of tradition based on selected religious texts and for the connotation of such scriptures as prescriptive of universal "rules for social behaviour" in India. With respect to this, Mani argues that "women *as* tradition" were "neither subjects nor objects, but rather the ground of the discourse on *sati*", which located them in a de-historicised, a-political (religious) "tradition". Women were therefore only marginal to the colonial discourse about *sati*, which was instead a reconfiguration of the existing relations of power in the wider colonial society (Mani, 1987, pp. 119-124). The "colonial discourse", to which local elites actively contributed, institutionalised selected Brahminical scriptures as the "locus of authenticity" of Indian religious customs and as the reference for the re-codification of "Indian tradition". Thus, Mani argues, the whole question of the abolition of *sati* was articulated around a debate on its (non)-conformity with the *Vedic* texts.

The debate assimilated tradition with *Vedic* scriptures and "Hinduism" with Brahminical values, extending and institutionalising their legitimacy as the sources of Indian religious system. This had fundamental consequences for the positioning of different sections of society vis-à-vis an elitist social order which erased the visibility of certain categories (women, lower castes/classes and tribal people) and their location in culture, history and society.

The discourse over the admissibility of *sati* had two intersecting implications. On the one hand, by elevating *sati* as the quintessential practice of women's subordination in Indian society, it sanctioned the "civilising mission" of the colonial order. On the other, by drawing on local elite's interpretations of what constituted

[88] *Sati* is the burning of the widow on the death pyre of her husband.

admissible "religious customs" and by equating religion, tradition and social norms, it reinforced the homogenising myth of a Hindu/Indian tradition based on a Brahminical ideology[89]. As noted by Mondal, in the discourse of social reform "the disembodied sign of a 'woman' becomes the embodiment of an identity, a cultural sign which marks an identity's essential being, first within the parameters of a 'Hindu' community in Bengal, and then within the wider scope of the nation as a whole" (Mondal, 2002, p. 917)[90].

I would like to establish a parallel between the processes analysed above and the rhetoric of religious difference in narratives of communalism, in particular with respect to the way power relations are structured based on discourses on the position of women in culture/religion. In this way, I hope to clarify how the demarcation of religious difference in narratives of communalism is actually a re-configuration of social tensions that unfold not only between but also within and across the category of the "religious community" vis-à-vis an elitist discourse of a "homogenous" and "original" cultural core. More specifically, in this context, I address how, as was the case of colonial India, debates about the position of women as the sign of a religious tradition mirror processes of (re)definition of power relations among different sections of society.

Implications for Narratives Interfaith Relations

The reflections on the rhetoric of the Hindu Right (Section 4.2) show how the theme of gender relations in Islam tends to be framed in terms of the threatening masculinity of the Muslim men, sanctioned by backward religious traditions. According to Kirmani, the discourse of the "plight of Muslim women" in India unfolds in different contexts, in the media, politics, social activism, academia etc., contributing to configure "Indian Muslims" as a coherent and homogenous category. Section 6.3 briefly mentions the way in which the case of Shah Bano has become the paradigmatic example of a politics of the religious community involving the state, Muslim elites, and the wider relations among different categories in Indian social and political realms, on the ground of a debate on Muslim women's rights. According to Kirmani, "the notion that 'Muslim

[89] "C.B. Elliot, [joint magistrate of Bellah] [...] suggested that the preamble to *sati* regulation should include apposite quotations from the Hindu scriptures so that indigenous subjects would *rejoice in the mercy and wisdom of a government which blends humanity with justice, and consults at once the interests and prejudices of its subjects, by recalling them from practices revolting, and pronounced erroneous even by their own authorities*" (Mani, 1987, p. 127).

[90] See also Section 5.3.2 for an analysis of the construction of a middle-class religious identity in Hyderabad through the framing of the ideal Muslim/Hindu woman.

women' represent a distinct category with a common identity and set of interests has gained symbolic import as part of the wider discourse of 'communalism' in India" (Kirmani, 2009, pp. 48-49).

With reference specifically to the RSS, Bacchetta argues that though the category of "Muslim women" does not recur very often as a subject in the official discourse, it constitutes a fundamental part of it, in that it defines the relations between "Hindus" and "Muslims" in terms of superiority/inferiority. Thus, whether as former Hindus converted to Islam through marriage, as subjugated to Muslim men, as sexual objects, the category of the Muslim woman is always contextualised within a process of eroticisation of the domination/subjugation dichotomy (Bacchetta, 1994, pp. 216-217).

More in general, the portrayal of the oppressed Muslim women paradoxically displaces the actual debates regarding gender relations in society onto the construction of boundaries between "religious communities" along an axis of super/subordination.

In a conversation with a *Hindutva* activist in Hyderabad, this discourse emerged repeatedly with respect for example to polygamy, veiling, women's access to education and more in general their position in the family[91]. Polygamy is one of the recurring themes in narratives of Hindu-Muslim difference. The practice of polygamy is admitted in Muslim personal law and formally prohibited under the Hindu Code. However, cases of polygamy are still present as part of the diverse customs regrouped under the banner of Hinduism[92], though considered illegitimate by law. According to Agnes, for example, this has implications for women's right to maintenance. In fact, while the rituals and the law of Hindu marriage have been increasingly homogenised under the Hindu code, the persistent practice of polygamy is no longer regulated by non-codified customary laws that granted economic rights to wives (Agnes, 2000, p. 130). However, in the rhetoric of the Hindu Right, polygamy represents one of the signs of Muslim women's subjugation and of the "Muslim community's" backwardness. In this discursive context, the theme of the position of women in a polygamous marriage loses relevance as an issue in itself to become the ground of a distinction between "religious communities", their fundamental identity and their opposition in terms of secular/fundamentalist. In that sense, Chapter 6 argues that in the context of relationships between the state and "religious communities", the Hindu Right and its political wing, the BJP, have

[91] Conversation with a *Hindutva* activist 23 June 2011.

[92] *Towards Equality: Report of the Committee on the Status of Women in India,* New Delhi: Govt. of India, Ministry of Education & Social Welfare, Dept. of Social Welfare, 1974 p. 104.

positioned themselves against the idea of a "communal personal law" and in favour of a Uniform Civil Code. With respect to that, they have assumed a "secular outlook" against the Muslims, represented as sectarian and, fundamentally, "communal" (Devji, 1992, p. 7)[93].

According to a Muslim social activist with whom I interacted in Hyderabad, the issue of polygamy in Indian society is regarded as disrespectful of women's dignity and builds upon a negative stereotype about Muslims as a backward community. However, he contended, while Islam defines the rules and laws by which polygamy is admissible whereby women are granted their rights, Hindus simply practice it without a legal sanction, thus depriving women of any right within a polygamous marriage. Thus, he argued, while the blame is put on Islam because polygamy is accepted and regulated by law, in fact Hinduism tacitly accepts it without however defining any formal rules for its application[94]. Again, the position of women in official discourses of religious traditions and the related practices, become the stage of a politics of the religious community for the definition of its boundaries vis-à-vis the Other. The discourse of polygamy is, in fact, about which "religious tradition" is more legitimate than the other as a source for legislation (or whether the Muslim one is admissible at all), rather than about the lived experiences of women in marriage. As shown by Mani with respect to the colonial discourse about *sati*, along with the construction of polygamy as a "Muslim tradition" and the identification of Brahminical rituals and scriptures as the source for "Hindu tradition", a multiplicity of practices and positionings of women vis-à-vis marriage are engulfed in the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm.

The words of a *Hindutva* activist clearly show how the issue of women's dignity configures a social order of super/subordination between religious communities, homogenised by a universalised and essentialised notion of "tradition" and "religious doctrine". His representation of the Hindu woman as mother, whom according to him Hindu boys are taught to worship as a goddess, completely lacked a perspective on its implications for the structuring of gender relations within and outside the family and with respect to the multiple socio-economic (caste) positionings of women and men vis-

[93] Kapur and Cossman have clearly articulated how the Hindu right's notion of equality remains quite blurred. While the BJP seems to have incorporated a formal approach to equality whereby "individuals who are the same should be treated the same" and that implies a substantial non-engagement with issues of power differentials and relations of super/subordination in society, the RSS has an understanding of equality as "harmony within difference" which seems to confuse difference with social oppression and harmony with homogenisation (Kapur & Cossman, 1993).

[94] Conversation with a Muslim social activist, 6 August, 2010. Charminar, Hyderabad.

à-vis "Hinduism". Instead, the narrative was contrasted with the image of the Muslim woman, subjugated, ignorant and sexually available. The latter aspect of his narrative is particularly interesting as the *burqa* that many Muslim women wear in Hyderabad was depicted as a way to disguise their identity when having secret encounters with men. In particular, he claimed: "the girls wearing *burqa* that you can see in Lumbini Park[95], well, they go there to meet with men. They wear the *burqa* so that nobody can recognise them"[96].

More in general, everyday gender relations are represented as pertaining to a specific "religious tradition" and define the moral superiority of one with respect to the other, ultimately represented by women and their position in the "religious community". Such discourses have implications at a multiplicity of levels. First of all, they demarcate the contours of categories such as "Muslim women" and "Hindu women" as homogenous identities and positionalities with respect to the family, the community and the society at large. Second, it conceals the complexity of women's experiences with respect to religion and also a multiplicity of other dimensions which cross-cut the boundaries of "religious communities". Third, it essentialises selected practices as belonging to a particular "religious tradition" and as the norms that define oppression of or respect for women, attributing to it an overarching connotation in terms of backward/developed, secular/fundamentalist etc. Finally, it naturalises the religious community based on the previous categories, and reaffirms the primacy of the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm as the fundamental social distinction, within which other social tensions and categories are assigned a specific location. In this respect, such discourses can also unfold in defensive attitudes towards the myth of the original, authentic norm within the "religious community" and a derogatory rhetoric against it from without.

This latter aspect is particularly relevant as the gendered discourses of religious difference unveil a fundamental ambiguity: the very processes of defining such distinctions are productive of the "tradition" itself and of the relations of super/subordination that find expression in them. With respect to these implications, the issue of the *burqa* is quite illuminating. In the context of discourses of communalism, the rhetoric about veiling becomes a fundamental difference between the "religious traditions" of Hindus and Muslims. Here again, little importance seems to be attributed

[95] A popular green area in the city of Hyderabad.

[96] Conversation with a *Hindutva* activist, Hyderabad. 23 June 2011.

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to the fact that different forms of veiling are practiced across a multiplicity of social groups of different religious backgrounds all over India. In fact, the debate appears to be focused on the meaning of veiling as a marker of Muslim tradition; as oppressive towards women on the one hand and a free choice of asserting a Muslim identity on the other. In any case, it is the demarcation of the boundary of the "religious community" in the form of differentiation and identification that defines the text and context of the discourse of veiling as "tradition" in narratives of communalism.

The result is that the complexity of lived experiences of women through and despite veiling and outside a paradigm of Hindu-Muslim relations becomes a problematic dimension, difficult to accommodate within a myth of the homogeneity of the religious community in discourses of communalism.

4.3 Socio-economic Boundaries and the Politics of Religious Difference

The above analysis explores how distinctions between religious communities are demarcated through discourses of the position of women in religious traditions. It shows how the notion and contents of "tradition" are produced in the very process of defining difference in terms of superiority/inferiority of a religion, understood as a homogeneous doctrinal order. The reflections proposed also show how discourses of religious difference articulated in the context of a Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm tend to mirror representations of tradition and culture in the colonial society. Hence, such discourses have implications for the positioning of different sections of society vis-à-vis the rhetoric of Hindu-Muslim difference and antagonism and, ultimately, for the relations of power in the wider social realm.

Thus, representations of the way women are treated and of "oppressive religious practices", define religious difference in terms of incompatibility, superiority/inferiority and, at the same time, demarcate the orthodoxy of religious traditions with reference to the selected practices.

This process has further consequences for the visibility of different sections of society, engulfed within the categories of the religious community, and for their socio-economic location. In that sense, as mentioned in Section 2.3.1, such location is not necessarily limited to a space understood in economicist terms, but rather as a discursive landscape configuring and in turn configured by the wider web of social

relations and practices. This remark is relevant to situate the current analysis in the critical exploration of discourses which homogenise and distinguish religious traditions as Hindu or Muslim along an axis of super/subordination. Moreover, as in the case of colonial narratives of "culture" and "tradition", the nowadays paradigm of communalism fundamentally involves the reconfiguration of relations of power in society and is grounded on underlying forms of social stratification in which the economic, the social and the religious intersect and are, fundamentally, inextricable.

The previous section on the position of women in religion shows how the generalisation and naturalisation of the category of the "Muslim woman" is reflected in the essentialisation of the "Muslim community", its connotation as backward and oppressive, but also in the configuration of gender relations and tensions in the wider social order. The analysis also hints at the links between gendered narratives of religious difference and a socio-economic dimension which defines power differentials in society. In this section, I will focus on the fundamental socio-economic aspect of narratives of religious difference and how the two – socio-economic and gender - are, ultimately, mutually constitutive.

During my fieldwork in some areas of the Old city of Hyderabad identified as "riot-prone", the theme of hostile interfaith relations has often polarised social positionings into the dichotomy of Hindu vs. Muslim. At the same time, however, narratives of religious difference have become ambiguous when contextualised in the everyday experiences of what being a Hindu or a Muslim entails. It is therefore relevant to explore how the configuration of religious communities around two distinct and discrete "traditions" intersects with narratives of the social and economic location of different sections of society and their mutual relations.

4.3.1 "Religious Tradition" and the Naturalisation of Socio-Economic Differentials

One of the recurrent stereotypes about Hindu-Muslim difference, frequently voiced by *Hindutva* activists, regards the socio-economic disadvantage of many Muslims in India as the result of their "culture" of giving birth to too many children without taking proper care of them, their disinterest in education, proneness to crime, untrustworthy in business etc. Interestingly enough, such stereotypes were not only expressed by *Hindutva* people, but also by social activists without any association with

Right-wing Hindu groups. In some cases, social work among Muslim communities is represented as a way to encourage the development of a "backward" social and cultural realm. The implication of such discourses seemed to be that the mere fact of being Muslim makes certain collectivities more "underdeveloped" than others. Their location in the lower ladders of the social order is therefore linked to the difference of their "religious traditions" and codes of behaviour from the "Hindu/Indian" ones. While the meaning of the category of "the Hindu" with respect to socio-economic positioning is explored below, it is interesting to note here that, with respect to this discourse of religious difference, several people of Muslim faith were eager to prove that the practices blamed as the cause for backwardness are not in the "tradition" of Islam[97].

Very rarely however, the conversation would focus on the processes of construction of and the actual tensions related to the structural inequalities in society, unfolding through and contributing to define the framework of Hindu vs. Muslim "cultures". It is the myth of originality proving the validity and moral standing of one "religious tradition" that defines the boundaries of religious communities and their location in society. What I find particularly interesting in these narratives is the processes through which the contours of an orthodox "tradition" are defined. In fact, as with issues of gender and religion, "tradition" is constructed in the discursive landscape that configures and at the same time justifies relations of super/subordination in society. Thus, tradition is both the locus of authenticity of social practices and the space to be constantly demarcated, in a mutually constitutive process in which discourses of interfaith relations unfold at the intersection of multiple dimensions. In that sense, religion and the rhetoric of the "religious community" can be regarded as discourses of and about power, which, paradoxically, naturalise social inequalities as sanctioned by an undisputable "tradition", by veiling the processes of its configuration and therefore the dynamics of attribution of social positionings.

This perspective does not mean to undervalue the relevance of understanding religion, its meanings and implications as ritual order and doctrine. Instead, it aims to point to the crystallisation of the discourse of religious difference, its displacing issues of gender and socio-economic tensions onto the preoccupation for defining the boundaries of religious communities and their mutual relations and concealing

[97] Conversations with social activists, Hyderabad, September 2009 and May 2011.

processes of construction of the communal paradigm in the form of discourse about and of power.

In order to clarify this point, it might be useful to refer to the debate about caste among Muslims in India. In fact, the way the whole discourse is framed clearly shows the primacy of a politics of the religious community, productive of and at the same time defined by a narrative of "religious tradition", whereby social stratification and relations among different sections of society are understood as the product of that very doctrinal order.

In fact, as different scholars have argued, a large part of the Muslim population in India descends from lower caste people who converted to Islam[98], maintaining specific habits based on caste with respect to, for example, marriage and occupation. As the analysis in Section 6.3.2 shows, the debate against caste-like reservations for Muslims has been unfolding along two main lines of argument. On the one hand, recognition of a caste system among Muslims is framed as a process of homogenisation of society according to a Brahminical order. This is resisted as inadequate to reflect the actual inequalities among Muslims in India and prone to create further social cleavages among the lower sections of society who compete for a specific recognition within the framework of redistributive policies[99]. On the other, the existence of structural inequalities in Islam is refused as "unorthodox" for a religion that regards equality and social justice as one of its fundamental precepts. Therefore, the official recognition of caste stratification among Muslims is regarded as the institutionalisation of a social order alien to Islam.

The question is once again related to the way in which Hinduism and Islam have been framed in colonial rhetoric[100] and, later on, reframed in the anti-colonial discourses, in the politics of nationalism and the communal paradigm (King, 2008). The language of communalism homogenises the Hindu community vs. the Muslim one without however addressing the fundamental question of what being a Hindu or a

[98] See for example, (Thapar, 1996; 1998; Sikand Y. , 2004).

[99] In that sense, for example, the idea of categorising castes among Muslims in order to grant reservations to the lower and disadvantaged groups would create conflicts between lower caste Hindus and Muslims and among Muslims themselves for access to benefits.

[100] In order to further clarify my position, the expression "colonial rhetoric" does not refer merely to the discourses of the British about Indian society and culture. Instead, it is inspired to the classic orientalist perspective conceptualised by E. Said (Said, 1978) regarding Western representations of the Orient and extended to the way in which discourses about culture and tradition were configured and reconfigured in the relations of power in the wider colonial society, beyond the coloniser/colonised dichotomy and including different sections of society and their mutual relations. See (Bhabha, 1985, pp. 150-155).

Muslim means and whether such categories actually have the encompassing connotations that the communal paradigm attributes to them. The issue of difference thus becomes not only one of defining the boundaries of such categories but also the space between them and the multiple positionalities within or without. While practices of social stratification mirroring caste are present across different social categories in India, their association with "Hinduism" renders their treatment as "caste" issues a "communal" problem, liked to the re-affirmation of a community identity based on a fundamental difference of "religious traditions".

Thus, the issue of marginalised groups among Muslims becomes the site of a controversy over the boundaries of the religious community, positing a choice between "Hinduism" and "Islam", caste and egalitarianism as the function of a specific location within one "religious community".

4.3.2 Food and the Boundaries of Religious Communities: Socio-Economic Implications

In line with the above reflections, debates about food habits, rituals and doctrines constitute illuminating examples of how tradition is constructed as religious conflict over specific practices and how these processes reflect the re-organisation of a hegemonic social order.

Among others, the practice of consuming beef is often regarded as a source of incompatibility between Hindus and Muslims in Hyderabad (and elsewhere in India). Here again, it might be useful to refer to the colonial discourses on tradition, especially with respect to food taboos and cow slaughter in order to contextualise the contemporary debate about food habits and their socio-economic implications.

One of the themes around which the "Hindu tradition" was constructed as part of nationalist discourses during the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries was the protection of the cow, especially in colonial North India (Freitag, 1980). Associated with vegetarianism and with the prohibition on beef-eating for the Brahminical castes, the universalising myth of the cow as symbol of "Hinduism" was a powerful official discourse for the definition of the community's boundaries vis-à-vis the Christian and Muslim "beef-eaters". However, the implications of such rhetoric, which spread all over the subcontinent[101], overcome the Hindu vs. Muslim (Christian) paradigm. In fact, the

[101] A total ban on cow slaughter was introduced also in Hyderabad State in 1938 (Copland, 1988, p. 791). Other parts of South India were also not spared. See (Freitag, 1996, p. 216).

representation of the anti-beef habits as a "Hindu" tradition, translated into the targeting of not only Muslims and Christians, but also low caste and Dalit groups among whom the consumption of beef was and is still widespread. Freitag maintains that the cow protection movement spread in North India at a time of significant socio-economic tensions, related to the growing power acquired by certain sections of the agrarian peasantry through land ownership. The challenge posed to the hegemony of upper castes represented by claims for upward mobility coming from peasant social movements found in the agitation over the protection of the cow a powerful defusing mechanism. The quest for a higher social status within the caste order among the new peasants-land owners, involved a process of association with the upper castes through the involvement in the cow protection movement. This mechanism had two connected implications. First, it reinforced the image of a united Hindu community homogenised by the practices of the upper castes. Second, it defused pushes for social mobility within the caste system by displacing them onto the reconfiguration of power relations vis-à-vis outside entities. In that sense, according to Freitag, it

> underscored certain traditional social schisms, setting up all those outside this cultural system – such as Muslims, Chamars, and Christians – as targets for protest against whom those who would otherwise contend could unite. So Mother Cow smoothed over new schisms by setting up as targets various groups previously constructed as the Other (Freitag, 1996, pp. 218-219).

Hence, the process of demarcation of a "Hindu tradition" interacted with socio-economic tensions and had, in turn, an impact on the positioning of various sections of society associated with Hinduness, including the beef-eating low castes.

Similar mechanisms are observable in the discourses about differences in food habits between religious communities. With reference to the BJP's rhetoric on the ban on cow slaughter, which since the 1990s resurfaces periodically in state and national debates[102], Ilaiah argues that the way in which the issue is framed reveals the ambiguity of the Hindu Right's discourse. In fact, while revolving around the rhetoric of respect for the "Hindu religious community" against the polluting and disrespectful food habits of Muslims and Christians, it erases from the picture the majority of the lower castes and the tribal people of India whose diet habits include eating beef. Thus, according to

[102] "BJP demands bill to ban cow slaughter", (*The Hindu*, 20 February 2003), http://hindu.com/2003/02/20/stories/2003022006281100.htm ; Karnataka BJP holds protest for cow slaughter ban, (*Deccan Herald*, 6 September 2010), http://www.deccanherald.com/content/94491/karnataka-bjp-holds-protest-cow.html , Last accessed on 9 September 2011).

Ilaiah, the measure translates into a "ban on beef food of Indian people", and into a denial of non-Brahmincal food habits of collectivities included, according to the Hindu Right rhetoric, into the Hindu fold (Ilaiah, 1996a).

The discourse of the protection of the cow thus unfolds in the codification of a "tradition" which defines the "Hindu community" in Brahminical terms, vis-à-vis other "religious communities". The identification of eating beef as a "tradition" of non-Hindu communities mirrors, according to Ilaiah, a "Brahminical Hindutva consciousness" which creates a "national myth that beef-eating – by killing 'sacred cows and bulls' – is a non-Indian cultural practice" (Ilaiah, 1996a, p. 1444). Thus, the rhetoric of cow protection still marks a fundamental line between what defines the "Hindu community" and the rest of Indian society, especially Muslims and Christians.

In conversations with people in violence-affected areas of Hyderabad, the issue of food habits and especially beef-eating was repeatedly raised as one of the main lines of separation between Hindu and Muslim communities. Interestingly, such stereotypes about the other's polluting or disrespectful food habits were contextualised in a discourse of communalism, in which the "food traditions" were defined by the practices of the religious elites[103].

4.3.3 Gender and Socio-economic Differentials in Spaces of Religious Difference

Discourses of religious difference can be regarded as having a fundamental socio-economic dimension which defines the relative location of different sections of society, with respect to the categories of Hindus and Muslims. As in the case of gender, religious difference is articulated around a fundamental narrative of tradition and culture that legitimises and is in turn legitimised by relations of super/subordination among different sections of society. The above reflections aim at showing that discourses and practices of caste and class stratification are integral to the communal paradigm and the configuration of "religious communities'" boundaries. The social tensions that result from the reproduction of an unequal social order are accommodated or engulfed into a narrative or the religious community based on essentialised notions of history, culture and tradition. This in turn is articulated as a communal issue with respect to which

[103] See Chapter 8 for a perspective on transgressing boundaries of "food traditions" between and across "religious communities".

different sections of society are positioned as either Hindu or Muslim and as subscribing to one particular religious tradition. Relations of super/subordination in society are thus configured, legitimised, justified and ultimately rendered invisible by a discourse of religious difference.

So far, gender and socio-economic dimensions have been dealt with separately for purposes of clarifying their contours and their meanings. In the process, the previous sections also aim at introducing fundamental themes that will be explored throughout this work. However, the two dimensions are deeply intertwined and it is their very intersection which defines the complexity of discourses of interfaith relations. The relevance of gender and socio-economic differentials is thus associated with a perspective that seeks to explore the processes configuring interfaith relations as a space of antagonism, binary polarisation and unequal power relations between "religious communities". In this sense, the representation of discourses of distinct religious traditions as having underlying socio-economic and gender dimensions allows for an understanding of their constant reconfiguration within the contingent relations of power in society. At the same time, such reflections offer a perspective that conceives of interfaith relations as a dynamic social space in which multiple positionings unfold at the intersection of gender and socio-economic differentials, with implications for different sections of society and their mutual relations.

The relationship between gender and socio-economic differentials in discourses about religious tradition is clearly visible in the various ways in which the implications of gendered discourses and the actual practices of the religious community differ according to caste/class differentials. The intersection between multiple dimensions thus contributes to configure a social order of domination and social polarisation based on discourses and practices of religious traditions. In a study of Brahminical patriarchy in India, Chakravarti argues that "caste hierarchy and gender hierarchy are the organising principles of the Brahminical social order and are closely interconnected" (Chakravarti, 1993, p. 579). Her work focuses on the subordination of upper caste women through the intersection of gender, caste and class ideologies. In fact, argues Chakravarti, the reproduction of the caste structure is contingent upon a strict control over the body of women, especially upper-caste ones who can be regarded as "gateways – literally points of entrance into the caste system" (Ibid.). Though Chakravarti refers to practices of

ancient India, I argue here that the processes through which caste/class and gender intersect are inextricably connected to unequal power relations in the social order.

The representation of masculinities and femininities analysed in the previous section are in a way subsumed within the homogenising discourse of religious community. Thus reproduction of the boundaries of religious communities also veils the reproduction of a social order of domination and social polarisation cutting across different social categories and defining their positioning vis-à-vis the hegemony of a patriarchal, Brahminical order. Thus, as Tharu and Niranjana frame it, "the shaping of the normative human-Indian subject involved [...] its coding as upper-caste, middle-class, Hindu and male. The coding was effected by processes of othering/differentiation such as, for example, the definition of upper caste/class female respectability in counterpoint to lower-caste, of Hindu tolerance to Muslim fanaticism as well as by a gradual and sustained transformation of the institutions that govern everyday life" (Tharu & Niranjana, 1994, p. 96).

The gendered rhetoric of *Hindutva* is in fact deeply rooted in a social order that cuts across political and religious affiliations. The very notion of a homogenous religious community, projected through certain representations of masculinities and femininities, veils boundaries and unequal power relations within and across its boundaries. Examples of caste violence can in this sense broaden the perspective regarding the unequal gender and socio-economic positionings assigned and reproducing a Brahminical social order[104]. Kannabiran & Kannabiran stress the fundamental role played by gender as an organising principle in caste society. As such, it defines multiple inequalities between men and women across different caste positionings, configuring a social order in which

> the 'manhood' of the caste is defined both by the degree of control men exercise over women and the degree of passivity of the women of the caste. By the same argument, demonstrating control by humiliating women of another caste is a certain way of reducing the 'manhood' of those castes (Kannabiran & Kannabiran, 1991, p. 2131).

Moreover, the authors argue that caste is not a religious institution but a web of practices that structure social relations across different religious communities (Kannabiran & Kannabiran, 1991, p. 2133). Their study, based on a number of examples taken from South India, shows that various social tensions are articulated

[104] For examples of the intersection of caste and gender dimensions in episodes of violence perpetrated against Dalit people, see (Kannabiran & Kannabiran, 1991).

around and simultaneously rendered invisible by the discourse of religious tradition and the boundaries of religious communities, which are at the core of the paradigm of communalism.

Interestingly, while discussing the issue of women and the politics of communalism with the staff of ASMITA[105], a women's organisation based in Hyderabad, the issue of socio-economic differentials emerged as a crucial dimension. They spoke about how their work for interfaith dialogue among women is often conceptualised and diversified keeping in mind the different implications of the communal paradigm on women from different religious and socio-economic background. For example, they stressed the problem of reaching out to upper-caste women for whom the responsibility to embody the community and the caste order translates into fundamental tensions over assigned religious, socio-economic and gender locations, in the negotiation of a position of relative power within a social order of domination and social polarisation. Thus, their super-ordination vis-à-vis lower caste and Muslim women, which implies a threat from lower caste and Muslim men, marks at the same time a form of subordination to a Brahminical system of which, however, they become fundamental reproducers[106].

Another relevant aspect of discourses of communalism and their reproduction across gender and socio-economic dimensions is the construction of the Muslim community mainly through narratives of poor, lower-class women and men, their mutual relations and their positioning vis-à-vis other "religious communities". Examples provided in the previous sections and others discussed in the next chapters[107], reveal a curious absence of non-disadvantaged Muslims from narratives of communalism. The representation of Muslims as a religious community is articulated around images of the backward, uneducated and violent poor men on the one hand and the oppressed women on the other. In that way, the "religious community" is configured at the intersection of gender and socio-economic dimensions, which define its essential features and, in the end, attributes to it a specific social location as the result of a "religious tradition". In my interactions with social activists from different backgrounds the category of "the Muslims" was almost constantly reproduced across the above

[105] *Supra* note 57.

[106] Conversations with the staff of Asmita, 4 August 2010.

[107] See for example Section 7.3.1 for the exploration of the image of the terrorist as poor, male, young and Muslim.

mentioned gender and socio-economic intersecting lines. In discourses of religious difference, therefore, the construction of social inequalities across gender, religion and socio-economic differentials are rendered invisible at a variety levels.

More in general, the rhetoric of communalism is an integral aspect in the configuration and reproduction of a social order in which multiple tensions over the social positioning of different sections of society, in terms of gender and socio-economic differentials, are accommodated and submerged within the boundaries of "religious communities". The reproduction of "Brahminical patriarchy" is thus a continuous process of construction of multiple inequalities which unfolds beyond the discourse of *Hindutva* and the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm.

In that sense, it is worth clarifying now my positioning vis-à-vis the analysis proposed in this section. In fact, explorations of processes of identification and differentiation within official narratives of religious difference rely mainly on discourses of the Hindu Right, lacking a systematic exploration of processes of othering within a politics of the "Muslim religious community". This depends on both the analytical angle adopted for this thesis and on the socio-political dominance of the Brahminical discourse in the configuration of the social space of interfaith relations. In the first instance, the focus on multiple dimensions as axes of power in the construction of social boundaries inevitably represents the Hindu-Muslim paradigm as a discourse of domination and social polarisation, concealing multiple inequalities which do not reflect into a horizontal conflict dichotomy. To put it simply, the analysis of the Hindu Right discourse is not meant to reinforce a Hindu vs. Muslim conflict narrative (of which the search for a Muslim counterpart would be an aspect), but to unveil the gendered dimension of interfaith relations as constitutive of discursive landscapes with a tendency to hegemony. The second instance pertains to the perspective on communalism as a socio-political paradigm. As argued in Chapter 2, I regard the communal paradigm as a discourse reproducing a Brahminical social order which veils multiple inequalities and forms of violence in society. Thus, according to this perspective there is not a Muslim exact counterpart of the *Hindutva* discourse because both are constitutive of a social order of domination and social polarisation constituted by unequal relations of power between, within and across the boundaries of religious communities. In that sense, official discourses articulating "Muslim identity" seem to revolve around the issue of the victimisation of the "minority religious community" in the context of state policies

and *Hindutva* ideology rather than producing a systematic discourse of "the Hindu" as their antagonist Other. Some aspects of this positioning contribute to reinforce the discourse of communalism as dominant by articulating "the Muslim" within the boundaries set by that very paradigm. The relative positioning of "Muslim political representation" is connected to derogatory representations of the "Muslim community" in dominant narratives of Hindu vs. Muslim conflict. Thus, official narratives of Muslim identity seem to be concerned with proving the moral standing of Islam and the potential at self-emancipation of the Muslim community as a response to *Hindutva* misrepresentations. This has further implications for the (in)visibility of the multiple inequalities within and across the boundaries of the "Muslim religious community" and for the latter's location in the space of interfaith relations only vis-à-vis the *Hindutva* discourse. In that sense, the forms and relations of power are varied and articulated at the intersection of multiple dimensions. The Muslim vs. *Hindutva* narrative shows that a social order of domination and social polarisation transcends political ideologies, because it tends to reproduce itself across different sections of society which configure their own location in the framework set by the dominant paradigm of interfaith relations. Explorations of Muslim's positionings in this chapter and throughout this work emerge either as "religious minority's" responses to forms of direct, structural and cultural violence or in the context of alternative discourses and practices of interfaith relations beyond the communal paradigm. That does not have the purpose to reinforce the image of a victimised "Muslim community" but rather to show how a Brahminical order is pervasive of the social relations across multiple dimensions.

The next section deals with practices about space in the production of distinctions between "religious communities" and their relevance for configuring the boundaries, the social locations and the possibilities of interaction of different sections of society. Space is in fact a fundamental theme in narratives of interfaith relations, which cuts across issues of history, politics, violence and, ultimately, religious difference. Thus, the social space of interfaith relations is explored as both physical and symbolic. While acknowledging social tensions and conflicts, the next section discusses the multiplicity of perspectives and connections that finds expression at the interface of religious differences. The exploration of such theme as part of the present perspective on religious difference proposes an example of how power relations unfold in lived

space, configured through narratives of tradition but also through practices that trespass and transcend religious, gender and socio-economic boundaries.

From that angle, the ambiguity of the religious community as a static, discrete social location emerges in narratives of lived experiences of people, which offer a perspective on the multiple dimensions of interfaith relations within and across categories of religious difference.

4.4 The Spatial Demarcation of the Religious Community's Boundaries

Another fundamental theme in the configuration of narratives of religious difference revolves around the organisation of space and its demarcation as a constitutive part of the religious community. This section argues that the politics of space defines religious community's boundaries both statically and dynamically and shows how such practices have direct implications beyond the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm, contributing to perpetuate unequal power relations among different sections of society.

Different works have analysed the connections between the forms of space appropriation and demarcation in the narratives of the Hindu Right in India and the construction of the Indian nation as "Hindu" in the *Hindutva* ideology (Deshpande, 1998; Jaffrelot, 1996; Oza, 2007; Van de Veer, 1994). In particular, they show how ideologies of space link physical places to abstract, sometimes mythological ones, producing a discourse about the historical and traditional legitimacy of the Hindu nation. This process reflects colonialist and orientalist discourses about Hinduism as the original civilisation of the Indian subcontinent. Such perspective legitimises the representation of those excluded from the boundaries of the Hindu community as later "invaders" and, as a consequence, as alien, bearers of non-Indian "cultures" (Oza, 2007, pp. 155-156). Similarly, the whole construction of the Hindu nationalist ideology is based on a fundamental rhetoric about the myth of India as a sacred geography, home of the Hindu civilisation (Jaffrelot, 1996, pp. 26-28; Oza, 2007, p. 154).

Based on the existing literature, the present section explores discourses and practices of space demarcation and appropriation. Its purpose is to show how they intersect with the rhetoric of tradition, with reference to the "religious community", the

demarcation of its boundaries and the legitimisation of relations of super/subordination in the wider social context.

Following Oza's perspective, this section understands space as both physical ("shrines and mosques where members of the community gather for collective performance of rituals or leisure") and imagined ("the nation and the public that inhabits these spaces") (Oza, 2007, p. 153). With respect to the perspective offered in this chapter and throughout this work, this premise is crucial in that it entails that the implications of such spatial strategies can be understood as transcending the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm to encompass multiple sections of society within and across "religious communities".

In their analysis of Jerusalem and Ayodhya, Friedland and Hecht argue that certain contested sites can be regarded as centres for the affirmation, consecration and display of power. The politics of the "centres" is "a struggle over the organisation and meaning of time and space both in the choreography of daily life and at the most sacred sites in the city" (Friedland & Hecht, 1998, p. 101). Thus, the control over a constested centre is fundamentally a conflict over the meaning of a "signifier", a "struggle over the basis of collective authority", which defines not only the relative positioning of the categories in conflict, but also their internal organisation of power (pp. 148-149).

The specificity of spatial practices is therefore related to the contingent meaning attributed to a particular site or ritual, at a physical and symbolic level. Deshpande argues that the main strategies of space demarcation and appropriation characterising the discourse of *Hindutva* are linked to "places, areas and routes" (Deshpande, 1998, p. 264). Based on this distinction, he explores the politics of "sacred sites", of localities and neighbourhoods (static) and of procession and pilgrimages (dynamic). Throughout his analysis, Deshpande shows how spatial strategies play a fundamental role in defining the shifting boundaries of the religious community and its discursive landscape.

Following Deshpande's categorisation, this section focuses on how practices of space demarcation and appropriation pertain to the wider discourse of communalism and the implications they have for the relations between different sections of society and for the identification of certain spaces as "communally-sensitive". In fact, by demarcating the religious communities' boundaries, discourses and practices of space contribute to configure the text and context of interfaith relations. Such processes

unfold, once again, through discourses about religious tradition and culture, as the fundamental authorities for defining "who owns the space". In turn, discourses and practices of space have implications for the social, political and spatial location of different sections of society.

From a wider perspective, most narratives of religious distinction have a connotation pertaining to space. For example, the identification of women as signs of tradition and culture analysed in the previous sections can be regarded as a strategy that demarcates the boundary of the religious community along gendered lines. This in turn, has fundamental consequences on the limitations imposed to women on the mobility within and outside the space of the religious community. Thus, the construction of the religious community's space unfolds along a continuum from the household to the nation, including the neighbourhood, the city and symbolic places within them, in which specific locations are assigned to various sections of society with respect to the categories of Hindu and Muslim.

For this reason, space is yet another theme in narratives of religious difference that can be explored at the intersection of gender and socio-economic dimensions.

This section focuses specifically on reflections based on my fieldwork experience in the city of Hyderabad. It aims at providing a perspective on how spatial strategies, in the context of interfaith relations, are linked to both the definition of shifting "religious traditions" and to the wider urban spatial dynamics.

4.4.1 Old City as the Site of Communalism: the Missing Socio-Economic and Gender Links

One of the main features of narratives of communalism in Hyderabad is the identification of the Old city as riot-prone and communally-sensitive. This discourse is explored throughout this thesis, with respect to, for example, violence, "communal politics" and interpretations of history.

In this section, I would like to focus on the politics of the Old city from the perspective of practices of space that demarcate urban areas as riot-prone and "Hindu" or "Muslim", along discourses of communalism. In fact, such labels also mirror the unfolding of social tensions along socio-economic and gender lines, with political implications extending beyond the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm.

The Old city has been widely regarded, in scholarly, media and politicians' accounts, as the locus of "communal conflict" in Hyderabad and as a predominantly Muslim slum area, where informal economic activities and "fundamentalism" flourish uncontrollably[108]. The main thread that runs across such narratives is the location of the Old city outside the discourse of modernisation and development attached to Hyderabad as a growing Indian metropolis. With regard to this, urban spaces already marked by multiple forms of social exclusion, more recently particularly with respect to the celebrated "development" of Hyderabad city, are often also the sites of violence[109]. Indeed, the Old and Hi-Tech cities are constantly contrasted: religiously conservative, backward and poor the former, and modern, westernised and "secular" the latter. In an article appeared on a national newspaper, the daily return to the Old city of a young Muslim professional working in the Hi-tech city is thus described:

> he cannot help but notice the striking contrast in landscape and culture. Neighbourhoods are visibly less affluent. Saffron and green flags flutter at every crossroad. Women on the streets are covered from head to toe, often in burqas, enforced or choice? Like many – he too is now unsure. For, a girl riding a two-wheeler in these parts is frowned upon even today[110].

The article dwells into contrasting images of women in the "public spaces" of the two urban zones, wearing t-shirts and skirts and going to the pub with their boyfriends in the Hi-tech city, while clad in their *burqas* in the Old city. Such discourse hints at the common rhetoric equating Islam, women's oppression, poverty and backwardness. In that sense, representations of religious difference have also a spatial connotation which defines an area as mirroring the "culture" of the "community" with which it is associated. What I find particularly interesting in this representation is that it completely overlooks the nexus of relations between different sections of society and the processes through which unequal positionings are assigned and reproduced. In the case of images of the Old city of Hyderabad, the *burqa*-clad Muslim woman becomes the symbol of the "backwardness" of the Muslim community and its "communal-

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[108] See Section 7.3 for a discussion of the Old city as the underbelly for terrorist activities. See also (Engineer, 1991b; Naidu, 1990, pp. 19-30).

[109] Here I refer to the construction business expanding in the city and its outskirts and also to the increasing identification of Hyderabad with the centre of Hi-tech industries in the north-west part of the city, renamed Cyberabad or Hi-tech City. See (Baru, 2007; Chacko, 2007; Chowdary, 2002). For a critical perspective on Hyderabad's "development" see (Ramachandraiah, 2000).

[110] "Breaking the Barrier" (*Times of India,* 10 July 2011), http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-07-10/hyderabad/29757796_1_culture-shock-boyfriends-workplace , last accessed on 14 September 2011.

fundamentalist" nature, which are projected onto the urban space with which it is associated.

This representation is even more interesting as Muslims inhabit also other areas of Hyderabad, while the Old city is populated also by non-Muslim lower-class and lower-caste people.

In his study of Hyderabad in Telugu cinema Srinivas interestingly argues how the portrayal of the city in the regional Telugu film industry of Andhra Pradesh, the second largest in India after the Mumbai-based Hindi one, tends to reproduce the distinction Old/New city. Claiming that in such movies the city becomes "a stage for the acting out of contradictions thrown up by perpetually incomplete nationalist projects", he focuses on the way the new and old areas of the city are contrasted along the dichotomy of backwardness/modernity. The former defines the norm of economic advancement, an upper-middle class space where people speak "standard Telugu"[111]. On the contrary, the latter, often epitomised by Charminar[112], is largely a lower-caste and Muslim area, controlled by gangsters and criminals who speak "dialect" and usually embody the villain (Srinivas S. , 2008, p. 92). The association of the people of the Old city with violence thus has also a clear socio-economic connotation which is linked to the spatial demarcation of that area as communally-sensitive. According to Srinivas,

> Charminar has been the metonym for the city of Hyderabad in general but one that is closely identified with the criminal underbelly of the old city, around which murders and riots often occur. In recent times the old city has also been a site of communal violence between Hindus and Muslim with Charminar figuring prominently in the news media as a hotspot of this violence (Srinivas S. , 2008, p. 93).

Thus, residents of the Old city have over the years been represented as "violent, culturally backward and lower caste" (Ibid). More recently, the figure of the Muslim terrorist, trained by Pakistani agents has become central to the reproduction of the distinction Old/New city. Interestingly, according to Srinivas, in these representations the city is the locus for asserting a specific socio-economic and political order in the state of Andhra Pradesh. Introducing his perspective on the movie *Okkadu* (The One, 2003) he claims that:

[111] The standardised version of Telugu is attributed to the inhabitants of the politically dominant and mostly upper class Andhra region of Andhra Pradesh.

[112] Literally, "Four Minarets", Charminar is the monument symbol of Hyderabad erected in 1591 by Sultan Muhammad Quli Qutb Shah (Figure 3, p.114).

this film is a useful point of entry for understanding Telugu cinema's considerable stake in and contribution to maintaining the status quo of the political geography of Andhra Pradesh as well as the ways in which recent Telugu films manage regional differences, especially given increasing evidence that the state of Andhra Pradesh is closer to reorganization than even before due to the unprecedented clout and popularity of the political parties calling for a separate Telangana state (Srinivas S. , 2008, p. 92).

What is of particular interest here is the way in which the imagery offered by Telugu movies reproduces a system of domination based on the identification of specific categories of people as the icons of illegitimate violence, disloyalty and danger, in a context of socio-political mobilisation for a re-organisation of the political geography of the state[113]. This is particularly relevant as representations of violence coming from the "Muslim terrorist" and "lower-caste criminals" of the Old city reflect a specific politics of identity which unfolds also outside the screen[114].

However, in narratives of communalism, the visibility of lower-caste groups loses relevance as shown by static and dynamic spatial strategies unfolding along the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm.

4.4.2 The Intersection of Static and Dynamic Practices of Space

The distinction between static and dynamic spatial strategies does not have any connotation related to the degree of persistence or malleability as narratives of interfaith relations. In fact, in both cases the meanings and contents of such practices change according to the contingent circumstances. Instead, it refers to the association of a practice of space to either a specific place or a ritual, that in turn have consequences for the representation of interfaith relations and for the positionings of different sections of society who populate that very space.

In the context of spatial strategies, Charminar continues to be a fundamental symbolic public place for the assertion of a discourse of communalism[115], a sort of crossroad for both static and dynamic practices of space. Thus, the rituals and the events

[113] See Sections 5.4.2 and 6.2.1 for an exploration of the movement for a separate Telangana state in the context of discourses of communalism and conflict.

[114] In that sense, it is worth noticing that many of these movies are remade in other regional languages such as Tamil and Kannada by the local film industries. This, argues Srinivas, shows that the issues addressed in the plot have relevance across Andhra Pradesh and in the wider South Indian region (Srinivas S. , 2008, p. 93).

[115] This aspect is particularly relevant also in the light of practices that transcend communalism as discourse and practice addressed in the conclusive chapter.

that take place in Charminar's area are fundamental aspects for the assertion of a politics of the space.

An interesting example is the growth of the temple erected over the *Mysamma* stone, literally attached to one of the pillars of Charminar (Figure 1 Figure 2, p.128). According to some accounts, the stone was worshiped in the name of the local deity Mysamma. In 1979 it was knocked down by a bus and replaced with a statue of the goddess Lakshmi around which a temple started to be built (Narendranath, 1984, pp. 18-19; Engineer, 1991a, p. 292). As Charminar's area is strongly associated with Muslim history and devotion (the Mecca Masjid is situated just beside Charminar), the simultaneous presence of the temple and periodical reports of skirmishes between the devotees at the two religious sites have earned it the epithet of "communally-sensitive" (Engineer, 1991a, pp. 291-292)[116]. For this reason, at the time of specific rituals, police are deployed for fear of incidents. In the same area, the main processions of the *Ganesh Chaturthi*[117] converge and stop in order to be addressed by political leaders and public figures.

Interestingly, the temple is also adorned with several orange flags, symbols of "Hinduism". Other sites throughout the Old city, such as shrines, schools, cultural centres, are demarcated by either orange or green flags according to the "community" with which they are identified.

During special occasions such as festivals, marriages and commemorations, flag hoisting becomes a practice not only of demarcations, but also of appropriation of public spaces. The action of hoisting flags is also regarded as a provocation often leading to rioting[118], especially at interfaces, which separate predominantly Muslim from Hindu or specific caste-marked areas. Interfaces are particularly important

[116] See Figure 2 (p.114), showing a truck carrying a Ganesh passing by the temple at Charminar. In September 2010 the Ganesh festival and the final days of the month of Ramadan coincided.

[117] Religious festival which has gained relevance in the past 20 years thanks to the increasing organisational efforts of dedicated trusts linked to Hindu Right organisations. It lasts for 10 days, during which devotees pray to Lord Ganesh, a deity portrayed as a man with the head of an elephant. At the final day of Ganesh Chaturthi, devotees take up a procession to immerse Ganesh idols in water. In big cities like Mumbai and Hyderabad, huge Ganesh statues are installed in different areas for public display. Legend has it that a young Ganesh, son of Parvati and Shiva, was put by his mother in charge of guarding her. One day, failing to recognise Shiva, Ganesh prevented him from visiting his consort while taking her bath. Enraged by what he considered arrogance, Shiva beheaded the young Ganesh. Deeply upset, Parvati managed to convince Shiva to bring the boy back to life. Thus, Shiva promised Ganesh would be given the head of the first sentient being that would cross his path, which happened to be an elephant (symbolising wisdom). This is how, according to one legend, Ganesh got his elephant head. The meanings and implications of the festival for narratives of interfaith relations in Hyderabad are explored in different parts of this thesis. See in particular Section 7.2.1.

[118] See for example the violence broken out in Hyderabad in March 2010, which most of the people with whom I interacted explained as the result of green flags being replaced by orange ones for a Hindu festival.

configurations, which actuate the narrative of Hindu-Muslim conflict in terms of spatial segregation. With reference to some cities in Northern Ireland, Féron classifies three main types of interfaces: a split (a wall, or a fence clearly marking the separation), an enclave (a "community area" surrounded by settlements of the 'other' community) and a buffer zone (mixed area which often becomes the site of violence) (Féron, 2011, p. 198). The relevance of such areas is crucial for the reproduction of a conflict dichotomy in that they become the "sensitive" areas par excellence, where violence usually breaks out[119]. In that sense, the "visual-symbolic" impact of a place is crucial for the definition of the religious community's boundaries, defining the "right to the land" and the relations between Hindus and Muslims in terms of visibility/invisibility (Deshpande, 1998, p. 267).

Similar dynamics seem to be associated with music and the use of loudspeakers for rituals. In that sense, the appropriation of space is not channelled through a visual marker but rather through sound. For example, throughout the preparations and during the *Ganesh Chaturthi*, music is often played with loudspeakers from the stages and trucks on which the statues are located[120]. In the context of the "sensitivity" of sound as distinctive of the religious community, in September 2011, on the last day of Ganesh festival, the organisers were requested by the police to switch off their microphones in front of the Mecca Masjid (Charminar area) during the afternoon prayer[121]. Regarded as a "tradition" by the devotees, the music and sound of rituals are considered possible triggers of "communal riots", invading the spaces of the city with the sounds of one "religious community". Thus, space demarcation and appropriation are directly connected to narratives of violence.

In his account of the legacy of violence in Gujarat, Breman shows the interconnection between space and violence and how it contributes to configure the boundaries of religious communities. In the context of religious festivals for example, the use of flags and music is linked to the passage of the parades through areas associated with the Other, disrupting the normal, everyday community life (Breman,

[119] At the same time, however Féron argues in favour of considering interfaces as fundamental locations for mediation and negotiation processes (Féron, 2011). See also the conclusive chapter here for an argument about the potential for social change by transcending the boundaries of religious communities at interfaces in Hyderabad.

[120] See Figure 15. Children dancing at the music of loud-speakers during the preparation of the altar for a massive Ganesh's statue. Asaf Jahi Road, Hyderabad, September 2010.

[121] "Ganesh Immersion Peaceful amid Tight Security", *Times of India* (12 September 2011), http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-09-12/hyderabad/30144859_1_ganesh-immersion-ganesh-procession-ganesh-idols, last accessed on 15 September 2011.

2002). In that sense, the politics of the neighbourhood can be regarded as crosscutting static and dynamic practices of space. In fact, while the locality is demarcated through specific symbols such as flags, a shrine or, simply a lane, the passage of a parade displaying the colours and the music identified with the other religious community challenges the purity and sanctity of the "community's space". Section 7.4 shows how in Hyderabad, the question of the routes of the processions and the changes they have undergone in the years is a fundamental aspect in the configuration of the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm, based on a discourse of right to the space. In turn, narratives and practices of "communal violence" tend to reinforce the notion of a "religious community's space", in which certain representations of residential segregation contributes to essentialise religion as the fundamental discourse of social difference.

4.5 Conclusion: The (In)Visibility of Socio-Economic and Gender Tensions in Spaces of Religious Difference

The previous section explores how practices of appropriation and demarcation of space configure narratives of communalism. However, as mentioned above, the processes through which such discourses are framed and the practices associated with them configure socio-economic and gender relations beyond the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm. Based on the above observations on narratives of religious difference and the spaces of communalism, this section proposes a conclusive reflection on the complexity of the multiple dimensions that continuously unfold at the interface of the Hindu-Muslim paradigm. Two brief examples taken from my fieldwork experience in Hyderabad show how a multiplicity of social positionings and relations among different sections of society unfold beyond narratives of communalism.

Both examples address narratives of religious difference (including the division of space) in areas affected by violence and in particular, how they configure a continuously unfolding process along multiple social tensions, framed through the lens of interfaith relations but defying the Hindu vs. Muslim dichotomy. As shown by Naidu, the geography of so-called "slum" urban localities is constantly subject to change under the push and pulls of migrations, episodes of violence and land speculations (Naidu, 1990). Therefore, the stativity of a discourse of Hindu-Muslim conflict which categorises spaces as either "Hindu" or "Muslim" certainly overlooks the actual fluidity of urban geography. In narratives of religious difference, including the

theme of space, the intersection of multiple dimensions is often visible when referring to lived social practices and locations. During a conversation with a woman from the neighbourhood of Sultan Shahi, I was told about the spatial segregation in which different religious communities live because of repeated episodes of violence. While showing me the lanes that separated the main "community areas", she pointed at the Hindu, the Muslim and the Dalit section of the locality[122]. This three-fold categorisation actually reveals that the lines separating religious and socio-economic differentials intersect and, ultimately, fade away[123]. Again, when speaking with a teacher of HMI's school in Sultan Shahi about the peace education programmes conducted for the construction of "communal harmony", I was told that the classes were attended by children from different communities: Hindus, Muslims and Dalits[124]. These narratives do not necessarily disavow the communal paradigm but in a way redefine its meaning in the context of a socio-economic dimension that, much like and the gender one, shows the very processes of configuration of a discourse of religious difference upon social inequalities and multiple social tensions.

While walking through the neighbourhood visiting the different "communities' areas", my local guide stopped at the interface lane separating the Muslim and the Dalit zone, made a turn and started to walk back. She insisted that there would be nothing interesting to see in that area and that it would be better to avoid walking through it. When I asked her whether this restriction had anything to do with caste hierarchies and connected forms of segregation, she argued that in India caste does not exist anymore. I felt disappointed about the spatial limits put on our "tour" of the neighbourhood, but accepted the restriction and headed back. While recording the episode on my journal, I remarked the awkward feeling of visiting and being guided through different "Hindu" and "Muslim" areas of a neighbourhood considered "communally-sensitive" and segregated, accordingly, along religious lines, while completely overlooking the existence of at least one further spatial segregation, which does not fit into the official communal discourse though it clearly contributes to define it. Moreover, socio-economic differences within and among the various "Hindu" and "Muslim" areas

[122] Conversation with a resident of Sultan Shahi neighbourhood, Hyderabad, 20 August 2010.

[123] "Are you a Hindu?" "No, I grew critical of it because of casteism...Actually, you should not ask people if they are Hindu. This does not mean much. If you ask them what their religion is, they will say, 'I belong to this caste'" Passage from an interview of the Belgian scholar Thierry Verhelst to a Tamil intellectual reported both by (Balagangadhara, 1994) and (King, 2008).

[124] Conversation with a teacher in Aman Shanti School, Sultan Shahi, Hyderabad. 12 August, 2010.

dependent upon multiple caste, regional and class stratifications show that several axis of social difference beyond the "religious community" play a role in structuring the housing geography of the neighbourhood. In a similar way, during a visit to a vocational training centre run by the Henry Martyn Institute in the neighbourhood of Shanker Nagar I was asked by my guide to avoid taking pictures of the area, for fear of incurring in possible troubles. In fact, she explained, people in Shanker Nagar are prone to radicalisation due to caste and religious cleavages. For this reason, they tend to become suspicious when they see new people (and especially a white, young woman, I assumed) going around, asking questions and taking pictures. In a way, I too perceived the area as being less accessible with respect to, for example, Sultan Shahi and realised that HMI itself is a far less visible presence in the neighbourhood. Throughout the conversation with a women's group at HMI's centre and with my guide, the issue of caste, gender and religious spatial separations emerged as a constant issue, hindering, according to many of them, the growth of social relations in the neighbourhood[125].

In fact, the "communal spatial segregation" as a discourse of religious difference contains, conceals and is in turn defined by multiple socio-economic and gender inequalities between, within and across Hindu and Muslim "communities". In the end, the whole experience helped me reflect on the implications of spatial practices on the mobility of different social categories within and outside the "religious community", contributing to ground the perspective that the Hindu-Muslim paradigm can be regarded as an ideology of domination and social polarisation. As such, it unfolds within the deep interconnections of multiple dimensions and reinforces the (in)visibility of certain categories whose location in the social order however is crucial to the very definition of Hindus and Muslims and their mutual relations.

A further reflection offered in this chapter revolves around the gender dimension of narratives of religious difference. As an organising principle for relations of power in society, gender underlies the distinctions between religious communities and their respective spaces. Indeed, practices of space are fundamentally gendered. Once again, reference to lived interfaith relations might help to further clarify the argument. In conversations with women from different areas of the Old city in Hyderabad, the issue of the restrictions to their mobility was often connected with a Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm. In fact, the "religious community" was constructed like a sort of "private

[125] Visit to HMI's "community development" projects, Shanker Nagar, Hyderabad, 2 June, 2011.

space", less safe with respect to the family, but certainly safer vis-à-vis the society "outside". The gender dimension of communalism thus was configured by but also contributed to define the boundaries of "religious communities" as a continuation of the family along a distinction between private safe spaces and public threatening ones.

At the same time, the space of the religious community was always negotiated and articulated around multiple social positionings that defied the static and essentialised locations assigned through the communal paradigm. For example, discourses about the "oppression" of women were framed in a perspective that ultimately blurred the boundaries between oppression and agency. Various women with whom I had the chance to interact in the Old city, described wearing the *burqa* as a possibility to move outside the family and the community's space, enabling them to negotiate their access to education, jobs and other outdoor activities, to confidently relate with male gaze, the family, other women and the spaces they accessed[126]. Thus, beyond the simplifying narrative of the "oppressed" Muslim woman, the veil in its different forms carries a multiplicity of meanings vis-à-vis different levels of the lived experiences of women according to their socio-economic, family and personal backgrounds.

On a different occasion, visiting a female *madrasa,* in the Old city gave me the opportunity to reconsider the issue of the community from the perspective of an only-female Muslim educational space. The institute called *Jamia Riyaz us Salehat*, which consists also of a boarding school, offers education from the primary school to the university post-graduate levels, combining standard curricula with Islamic teachings. Apart from the younger girls, all the students wore a *burqa*-uniform, accommodated into a *hijab* once inside the class. Through interactions with the director of the Institute, some teachers and the students of different ages, the issues of veiling, freedom of movement and education appeared central to their definition of a Muslim woman. They showed signs of approval at my wearing the veil inside the Institute and asked me questions related to Christianity[127] and Western women's lifestyles. Their eagerness to know more about "my culture" and to share about their views on *purdah,* education and social conduct contributed to expand and complicate the notion of community's space, especially with regard to the position of the "veiled Muslim woman". As suggested by

[126] Conversation with women's groups at Aman Shanti centres in Sultan Shahi, Chandrayangutta and Shanker Nagar. Hyderabad, May-June 2011.

[127] Here as in many other occasions in which interfaith relations were discussed, I was identified as a Christian.

Winkelmann, by priding themselves of living in *purdah*, most of these women reframe the cultivation of modesty and piety and their access to education as a counterdiscourse with respect to the rhetoric of the oppressed Muslim woman. For this reason, Winkelmann argues that the *madrasa* as a female space can be regarded as a "counterpublic" location from which participants act out "oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests and needs" against a dominant public discourse which contributes to discriminate against them as the living examples of a backward religious tradition[128] (Winkelmann, 2005, pp. 99-103). Moreover, the director of the Institute, a scholar and social activist, remarked the importance of Islamic education, both as a way to grow in self-awareness and to be respected as a woman, non only in the community, but in society at large. Her point was not to antagonise certain gendered practices justified by the official Islamic discourse but rather to reformulate the question of the space of the female *madrasa* as a locus for the configuration of a new positioning as a Muslim woman outside the oppressed/emancipated dichotomy.

The perspective offered in the conclusive chapter of this work aims precisely at deconstructing the various distinctions produced within the paradigm of communalism, to explore practices that reveal that oppression and agency have unstable boundaries and sometimes even lose analytical relevance when referred to lived interfaith, gender and socio-economic relations. The above cases show that power relations are enacted in lived spaces and that, as Duncan frames it, "spatiality constrains, enables and is constituted by forces that both stabilize dominant relations of gender and sexuality and that unsettle the relations between them" (Duncan, 1996, p. 5).

With respect religious difference, the intersection of gender and socio-economic dimensions is directly visible in narratives of space which assign specific positionings to social categories – such as the Muslim woman, the Hindu men – based on certain stereotyped and essentialised understandings of "religious traditions". In the various articulations of narratives of religious difference, different social categories gain visibility or disappear according to their location vis-à-vis the demarcation of the religious community's space. Thus, the ideal Hindu man portrayed in certain discourses of the Hindu Right appears as fundamentally upper-caste while the "Hindu tradition" that defines the places of women and men and their mutual relations reinforces the invisibility of low caste and Dalit people. Similarly, as the "plight of the Muslim

[128] Winkelmann quoting (Frazer, 1992, p. 123). In (Winkelmann, 2005, p. 100).

woman" configures Islam and the "Muslim community" as backward and oppressive, the boundaries of the religious community coincide with a specific urban area, the Old city, whose pejorative connotations are articulated at the interface of gender (the Muslim women in *burqa* and the violent Muslim men) and socio-economic positioning (the "typical", backward Muslim slum).

The various examples explored throughout this section aim at providing a perspective on discourses about religion as articulated around specific issues which reproduce relations of super/subordination in society. At the same time, they offer a perspective through which the same social space can be understood beyond the Hindu-Muslim paradigm, in its multiple dimensions which are reflected in the lived practices of interfaith relations.

The next chapters will further elaborate on this view. Many of the issues shortly addressed here are discussed in-depth while exploring different themes of discourses of communalism and, ultimately, the inherently transformative potential of lived interfaith relations.

4.6 Gazing at Spaces of Interfaith Relations in Hyderabad's Old City

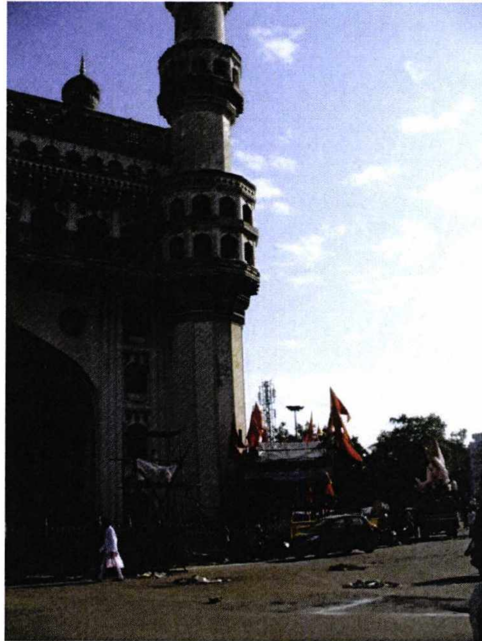

Figure 1. Orange flags marking the Lakshmi Temple against one of Charminar's pillars, Hyderabad, Old city, September 2010

Figure 2. A closer look at the same scene shows a truck carrying a Ganesh idol passing by the Charminar temple, Hyderabad, Old city, September 2010

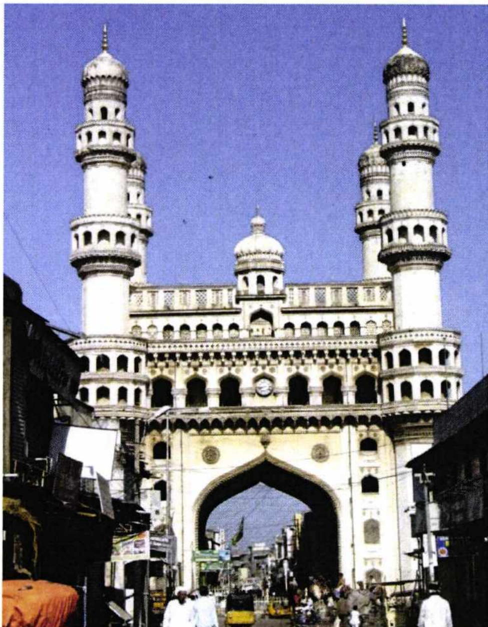

Figure 3. A view of Charminar, Hyderabad, Old city, September 2010

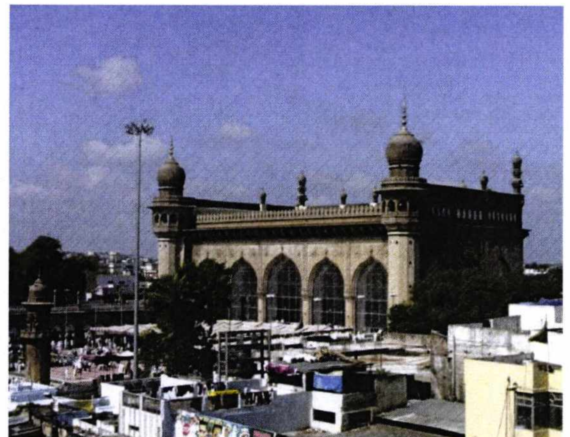

Figure 4. Mecca Masjid seen from the vaults of Charminar, Hyderabad, Old city, September 2010

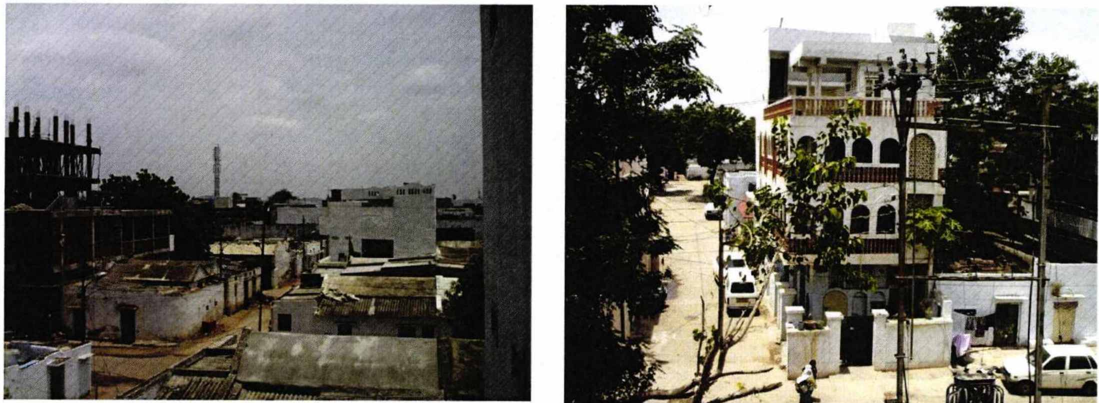

Figure 5. The "Muslim" (left) and "Hindu" (right) sides of the locality of Sultan Shahi, seen from the roof-top of HMI's Aman Shanti centre. August 2009

Chapter 5
History and its Representations in Narratives of Interfaith Relations

5.1 Introduction: Historical Gazes and Representations of the Past

This chapter deals with Hyderabad's history, its interpretations and how they contribute to configure narratives of interfaith relations. It aims at offering a perspective of how readings of history along a Hindu-Muslim axis contribute to reproduce relations of super/subordination among different sections of society. At the same time, it provides a background perspective with respect to interfaith relations in Hyderabad and their historical representations.

It conceives of history as a theme configured by and configuring "religious communities" and their boundaries in discourses of communalism. In that sense, history, like the notion of tradition explored in Chapter 4, is a fundamental category in the process of reproducing unequal power relations in the wider social context. As Margrit Pernau frames it, "each present creates for itself a past of its own by means of selection and interpretation. This past, then, provides the framework of reference for what is to be considered 'traditional'" (Pernau, 2000, p. 29). Thus, history and its representations are crucial for the legitimisation of the contemporary social order and for articulating discourses for its contestation.

The perspective offered focuses on the intersection of different dimensions as constitutive of narratives of history, reproducing unequal relations of power within and across "religious communities" and providing a framework for processes of social inclusion/exclusion. By exploring the implications of a reading of history through the paradigm of communalism, I argue that, framed as either harmony or conflict, it contributes to veil social practices and tensions cutting across boundaries of religious communities and expressing a potential for social change.

While framing representations of history through the perspective of understanding communalism as a discourse of domination and social polarisation, this chapter also explores the rhetoric of conflict vs. harmony and the way it is produced and reproduced through narratives of history. Moreover, it tries to understand the

implications of such rhetoric for the positioning of different sections of society with respect to the essentialisation of a religious dimension as the fundamental axis of distinction in society.

The first section explores the rhetoric of "communal harmony", which portrays peaceful coexistence as the "authentic" practice of interfaith relations in Hyderabad. This section investigates the way in which century-old traditions of "religious syncretism" under Muslim rulers, first of Shia and later of Sunni faith, contributes to reinforce this discourse. This first section focuses in particular on the practices of the tenth of the month of Muharram, which, though associated with Shiism, have been celebrated by people of different faiths. A delineation of the way these practices have evolved in Hyderabad and intersected with a discourse of communalism is provided as an example of the process of transformation of discourses of interfaith relations and of their politicisation in a historical moment under specific socio-political circumstances.

The second section explores the period in which a communal ideology gained relevance in Hyderabad state's political discourse and the implications it had for the visibility of forms of mobilisation that were questioning not only the existing structure of power, but also the configuration of the social order in the future Indian Union. It focuses in particular on the period between the end of the Nineteenth and the beginning of the Twentieth century, culminating with the princely state's annexation to the newly formed independent India (1948). Social conflicts first developed along a socio-economic axis with respect to the existing opportunities to enter government jobs and education. In this context, discourses about culture and education introduced the religious dimension as a fundamental issue around which social positionings and political affiliations were being articulated. In particular, the definition of internal and external religious community's boundaries was rooted in a debate on women's position in the family and outside in connection to the development of a new middle-class identity. At the same time, a growing female political participation started to emerge in the Telangana movement, stemming from a struggle for uplifting the conditions of the rural population and the lower castes in the state of Hyderabad.

This section also focuses on the debates regarding Hyderabad's accession to the Indian Union and the socio-political mobilisation coming from the grassroots. It analyses the implications that a discourse of Hindu-Muslim conflict had on the

representation of such forms of mobilisation as "communal" and for their subsequent repression in the name of restoring "communal amity".

The conclusive section of this chapter goes back to the contemporary narratives of Hyderabad's history and culture vis-à-vis interfaith relations to show how different representations of the past through a communal paradigm tend to reinforce or downplay hostility among Hindus and Muslims. It focuses on how the intersection of gender and socio-economic differentials constitutes a recurrent dynamic in the configuration of religious communities' boundaries that defines external and internal power relations, structuring patterns of social inclusion/exclusion.

The aim of this chapter is twofold. First of all, it shows how a discourse of communalism became paramount during the socio-political transformations that Hyderabad state underwent between the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries, exploring its implications for the definition of relations of power in society. On the other, it investigates how different versions of the past along a communal paradigm contribute to shape the positioning of social groups and the dynamics of power according to their relation with history today. In that sense, it provides a critical perspective on dominant representations of the past as communal in the form of either conflict or harmony.

5.2 Conflict and Harmony as two Narratives of Communalism

According to Devji, Indian nationalism is a narrative structured around the "problem of communalism" (Devji, 1992, p. 2), regarded as the potential failure of the secular project. As argued in Section 2.2.3, the configuration of Indian secularism as the foundation of the nation mirrors a discursive practice of "majoritarianism", which veils the intellectual and cultural hegemony of an internally unequal "majority community" behind the myth of "unity in diversity". Thus, the rhetoric of Indian secularism is based on the creation and exclusion of the difference (the Muslim) (Devji, 1992, p. 3) that threatens the celebrated "unity" of the "diverse" Indian nation. In the process, the assimilation of Hinduism with secularism ultimately displaces onto the Muslim body the responsibility for disrupting the aspirations to "communal harmony" of the Indian nation. Therefore, communalism in the form of a conflict narrative articulates the disruption of an otherwise "positive diversity". The dichotomy of communal harmony/conflict can be understood as pertaining to a discursive space which

participates in the configuration of relations among different sections of society and their positioning vis-à-vis the Hindu-Muslim paradigm.

Here, I contend that Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi's vision of "Hindu-Muslim unity", which became an underlying narrative in the dominant discourse of Indian nationalism, is of particular relevance for understanding the ambiguity and ambivalence of the rhetoric of "communal harmony" in terms of vertical homogenisation ("the Hindus" and "the Muslims") and horizontal discrimination (within, between and across such categories). As argued by Aloysius, in the process of gathering support for his non-cooperation movement, Gandhi appealed to unity both between and within Hindus and Muslims (Aloysius G. , 1997). His discourse revolved around a twofold strategy, entailing Hindu support for the Khilafat movement[129], reciprocated by Muslim acceptance of the ban on cow slaughter. Gandhi's discourse was complemented by a campaign against the practice of untouchability as part of a moral reform of Hinduism that would defuse the lower castes growing mobilisation against the *varna* ideology[130] (Aloysius G. , 1997, pp. 179-181). A fundamental aspect stressed by Aloysius in his analysis of Gandhi's religious/political discourse is the effect it had on the visibility and orientation of the forms of political mobilisation that were taking place amongst the subjugated masses of lower castes, tribal and Muslim people. In fact, the rhetoric of Hindu-Muslim unity, presupposing homogeneity of vision and interests within the two categories and a mutual cooperation, had the effect of displacing demands for social justice onto a call for national unity based on an undisputable, prescriptive but vague rhetoric of religious/cultural identity. The displacement was fundamental for the reconfiguration of relations of power in the new "civil society", in that the ambiguous conflation of the political and the religious had, paradoxically, the effect of de-politicising the forms of mobilisations amongst the masses. Such struggles were, in that sense, displaced onto a moral/religious level (the unity of Islam and the moral reform of Hinduism) and deprived of their political dimension. The mobilisation against the ascriptive social hierarchy which spread among the lower castes, the pushes for social emancipation among the marginalised Muslim masses in British India, the growing

[129] The Khilafat movement, launched in 1919 by the Muslim elites in British India in the process of constructing a pan-Indian Muslim consciousness, was meant to put pressure on the British with respect to the preservation of the Ottoman Empire's boundaries as of before 1914. The movement was based on an understanding of the Ottoman sultan as the representative of Islam. For a study of the movement see (Minault, 1982).

[130] According to Aloysius "Anti-untouchability in its turn reduced a total and substantial agenda consisting of the struggle against ascriptive hierarchy of the mass of lower castes, to a nominal symbolic struggle for a minority of untouchable castes" (Aloysius G. , 1997, p. 181).

political consciousness among women across different socio-economic backgrounds and the potential and progressive nexus between them were defused in Gandhi's national myth of "Hindu-Muslim unity", which also reinforced a communalisation of socio-political positioning. I consider Aloysius's reflections fundamental to understand the implications of a discourse of communalism in both its "harmony" and "conflict" declinations. In fact, the paradigm of communal harmony rests upon a discourse of "positive diversity", which has specific implications for interpretations of history and tradition today.

For the time being, I will thus mainly explore Hyderabad's nowadays representations of interfaith relations, swinging between a myth of "communal harmony" and a bleak prospect of "riot-proneness" and "communal-sensitiveness"[131] with respect to the "historical legacy" of interfaith relations. Both discourses reproduce a fundamental and clear-cut distinction based on religious belonging which departs from the image of an ingrained mutual respect, spoiled, at one point, by forces deliberately fostering antagonism. Conflict and harmony are thus the two poles of a dichotomy, in which the former constitutes the abnormality of an otherwise "traditional" peaceful and interactive relationship. The degeneration of the peaceful coexistence is situated in a specific historical moment, which is regarded as a turning point, a fundamental shift from harmony to conflict. Interestingly, this turning point coincides with the culmination of the modernisation project through the demise of the Nizam's patrimonial state. In that sense, the historical gaze communalises interfaith relations as either Hindu-Muslim conflict or harmony. In Hyderabad, the rhetoric of a "tradition" of communal harmony is also widespread in the tourism advertisement discourse (as elsewhere in India)[132] and among people of Muslim faith who tend to look at Muslim rule as a time of tolerance and peace[133].

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[131] For example the words of Andhra Pradesh Chief Ministers http://www.deccanchronicle.com/hyderabad/keep-faith-says-rosaiah-214, http://cm.ap.gov.in/02feb11press1.asp. See also: *Communal Riots in Hyderabad: Understanding the Causes*, 'Economic and Political Weekly, April 24, 2010 Vol. 65, No. 17, pp. 14-16, Swami Praveen, *An Inheritance of Hatred and Unrest,* "The Hindu" 07/09/2007 www.thehindu.com/2007/09/07/stories/2007090754661200.htm

[132] See for example the campaign "Incredible India!" which stresses the religious syncretism and cultural pluralism. Particularly on Hyderabad see descriptions of the city's history and culture in travel guides such as http://www.hyderabad-secunderabad.com/history.htm, http://www.asiarooms.com/en/travel-guide/india/hyderabad/hyderabad-overview/hyderabad-population.html.

[133] This tendency of identifying a golden age is a mechanism of defining the community by situating it in history, which has been identified as peculiar to different forms of identity politics in studies of nationalism. For a comprehensive work of myths in political discourses see (Girardet, 1986). For a focus on Hindu nationalism see (Jaffrelot, 1992; Hansen, 1999; Van de Veer, 1994). On Hindus and Muslims in Hyderabad see (Kakar, 1996). In the

The myth of an age in which Hindu-Muslim relations were peaceful and harmonious is obviously not peculiar to Hyderabad. Kakar shows how "secularist" historians throughout India identify in the colonial rule the moment in which Hindu-Muslim relations became hostile, portraying the pre-colonial era as a time of "communal peace". This perspective is also related to the tendency of framing interfaith relations along the communal paradigm regardless of the fact that the very term "communalism" was introduced during the British period to define hostility between religious communities. The application of such framework to the pre-colonial period actually risks overlooking the existence of conflicts with a religious dimension, as clearly shown by Christopher Bayly[134], but also to reduce interfaith relations to a Hindu-Muslim paradigm.

Of particular interest is the fact that the idea of communal harmony exists only in opposition to that of Hindu-Muslim antagonism, as the normality of which conflict represents the "disease". In the words of a Hyderabadi elder "in the old days when two chaps of different communities had a fight, it went around the neighbourhood that Ramiah and Hasan Ali had fought. Now, they say a Hindu and a Muslim fought, and we old people think it is terrible" (Lynton & Rajan, 1974, p. 252).

The widespread discourse on Hindu-Muslim relations is also visible in news reports that emphasise the "religious belonging" of the people, being it for celebrating harmony or exposing conflict. For example, a recent article appeared on the *Siasat Daily*, a Hyderabad-based Urdu/English newspaper, reports the story of two young men who drowned in a lake. The title recites: "Hindu youth drowns in an attempt to rescue Muslim youth". The whole article stresses the religious dimension of the situation by framing the event as an act of altruism that led a Hindu to risk and, in the end, lose his life in an attempt to save a Muslim[135].

The image of coexistence and of syncretism of religious practices and rituals started to be framed through a discourse of communal harmony as the "religious community" became the fundamental unit of the political discourse in Hyderabad. Interestingly, it happened at a time of growing mobilisation in the context of the

final section of this chapter the position of Hindu nationalists' vis-à-vis Hindu-Muslim relations in history will be discussed.

[134] See p. 25.

[135] See http://www.siasat.com/english/news/hindu-youth-drowns-attempt-rescue-muslim-youth last access March 9th 2011.

approaching demise of the princely state and the increasing relevance of a discourse of nationalism in British India.

The next two parts introduce two main examples in which the narrative of religious syncretism and "composite culture" is narrated as constitutive of Hyderabad's popular consciousness. They serve as a background for the exploration of how their framing through an opposition between communal conflict and harmony, at the intersection of gender and socio-economic dimensions, have specific implications for the positioning of and relations among different sections of society today.

5.2.1 Hyderabad: A Founding Legend

Historians tell that, as an independent princely state, Hyderabad[136] was carved out of the crumbling Mughal Empire in 1724, by a general of the army of Aurangzeb[137].

However, a more romantic allure surrounds the story of the foundation of Hyderabad city, which, in 1591, became the capital of Golconda Sultanate. Legend has it that a young Mohammed Quli Qutb Shah (1580-1612), the heir to the throne of the Muslim dynasty ruling Golconda, fell in love with the local Telugu dancer Bhagmati. The girl lived in a village on the opposite bank of the river Musi. As Quli Qutb's visits to her village required adventurous and risky passages across the flood-prone river, a bridge (nowadays called *Purana Pul*) was first built to facilitate Quli Qutb's encounters with his lover. Later, when in 1591 he decided to build a city on the banks of the Musi and make it the new capital of his kingdom, he named it Bhagnagar, after his beloved[138]. On Quli Qutb Shah's accession to the throne, Baghmati became the queen and her name was turned into a Muslim one: Hyder Mahal. Accordingly, the city was renamed Hyderabad (the city of Hyder).

The first time I heard the story of Hyderabad's foundation I was visiting the magnificent ruins of Golconda Fort, which dominate the Western part of the city from the top of a hill. There, a tourist guide narrated the myth of the romantic interfaith marriage between Quli Qutb and Bhagmati, as the epitome of Hyderabad's tradition of "communal harmony". Later, during my fieldwork experience I have been exposed to

[136] In this chapter, "Hyderabad" can refer either to the former princely state or to the city. As this overlap could cause some confusion the reference will be specified when not inferable from the context.

[137] Though the state gradually ceded some portions of its territory to the British, it included the divisions of Aurangabad and Gulbarga, which became in 1956 part of Maharashtra and Karnataka states, Medak and Warangal, nowadays part of the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh.

[138] For a more detailed narration of the legend see (Austin, 1991).

the legend (with slight variations each time) either through oral story-telling or by reading books on the history of the city[139]. The love adventure of Quli Qutb and Bhagmati are not only the myth of the city's origins recounted as both history and fairy tale, but are also considered a symbol of a typically Hyderabadi tradition of tolerance, harmony and religious syncretism. The legend is part of a popular consciousness spread especially among the Muslims of Hyderabad, configured around the image of a continual interaction and intermingling, constitutive of the city's cultural identity, not only as the capital of Quli Qutb Shah's sultanate, but also as a princely state under the rule of the Asaf Jah dynasty.

The tale represents, in a mythological form, what historians have been describing as a widespread policy among Deccan rulers to promote cultural and social interactions among an otherwise very culturally diverse population[140]. These "institutionalised practices of religious syncretism", which included the king's patronage of religious events, have thus been considered a distinctive characteristic of Hyderabad (state and city) and constitutive of its social organisation.

5.2.2 Practices of Religious Syncretism: the Example of the Muharram Festival

Probably, among the practices that have come to represent this interreligious and cultural exchanges, the celebrations of the Muharram season stand out as paradigmatic[141]. In fact, while the Muharram festival is associated with the religious beliefs and practices of the Shiites, it seems to be placed outside the strict Hindu-Muslim dichotomy. According to historical accounts the rituals and the parades taking place during the month of Muharram have traditionally been attended by Hindus and Sunni Muslims, including city officers (Pinault, 1997, p. 244).

The Qutb Shah dynasty was of Shia faith and was used to supporting and patronising Muharram celebrations. The habit was maintained after the Sultanate of Golconda was conquered by the Mughal emperor Aurangzeb in 1687 and later perpetuated by the Asaf Jahs in Hyderabad state. While most of the rulers of the Asaf Jah dynasty (called by the hereditary title of Nizam) were Muslim of Sunni faith[142], the

[139] See for example (Narendra, 1995; Lynton & Rajan, 1974).

[140] See for example, (Naqvi, 1993; 2006; Pinault, 1997).

[141] On the day of the Ashura (the tenth of Muharram), Muslims of Shia faith commemorate the battle of Karbala, when in 680 Ali (the grandson of the Prophet Mohammad), his followers and family members sacrificed their lives in a struggle against Yazid, the Umayad caliph.

[142] With the possible exception of the last Nizam, Mir Osman Ali Khan.

Muharram celebrations remained an important moment in the social and cultural life of the state and its capital, Hyderabad. Toby Howarth claims that rulers of the Deccan encouraged the participation of Sunni and Hindu people to Muharram celebrations as a "means of creating a common religious culture" without disavowing their own (Howarth, 2006, p. 23)[143]. Such accounts see the promotion of Shia religious practices among a diverse population as part of a conscious strategy aimed to bridge the cultural and religious difference and "create a common cultural ethos" (Pinault, 1997, p. 243). According to a narrative widespread both among historians and people of Shia faith, these rituals continued to be celebrated, though in a multiplicity of ways, irrespectively of religious and caste affiliation and to be patronised by the royal family and the nobles. Sadiqu Naqvi, a historian at Osmania University in Hyderabad, argues that since the time of the Qutb Shahs, the festival was performed by people of different creeds in a diversified way precisely due to the malleability of the celebrations and their adaptability to different religious cultures. According to Naqvi, worshippers of various faiths and social backgrounds would pay homage to the *'alam* (the religious symbolic banner that designates a Shia Muslim shrine)[144] in the *Ashurkhanas*[145], where "people could be brought together and allowed to participate in the ceremonies according to their own ways" (Naqvi, 1993, pp. 213-218). Thus, the Muharram festival stands out as the quintessential expression of a religious and cultural composite heritage that has characterised Hyderabad as a state and as a city from the Qutb Shah period up to the present.

However, when contextualised in a discourse of communalism, the above narrative often ends up representing the Muharram festival as a crucial example of Hyderabad's "communal harmony". Interestingly, such rhetoric was articulated by Donald Burrow, an English traveller reporting from Hyderabad in 1900, in his enthusiastic description of the Muharram festival.

> Hindu and Mohammedan, ancient and formidable rivals for the possession of India, jostle and are jostled in the motley crowd; while at every window and on every balcony and

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[143] Howarth also adds that "several Hindu noble families in the Asaf Jahi era patronized Muharram rituals. Some did so simply because *azadari* [mourning] was popular at the court. Other nobles did so in fulfilment of a vow, such as one Raja Rao Rambha who had promised to hold Muharram commemorations if he was granted a male child, an even which duly took place" (Howarth, 2006, p. 23).

[144] For an exploration of the symbolic significance of the '*alam* among Shia Muslims of Hyderabad see (D'Souza, 1998)

[145] The *ashurkhana* functions as both a place of worship and of gathering for Muslims of Shia faith.

roof-top the blaze of colour in costume, kerchief, banner, and umbrella fairly 'shouts' in rapture (Burrows, 1900, p. 589).

This representation is particularly interesting as it shows how the celebrations assume a peculiar connotation in the context of a Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm: a moment of "communal amity" in a space otherwise threatened by conflict. It shows how the Englishman's stereotype of a historical Hindu-Muslim rivalry contrasts with the image of harmony characterising the festive moment. In line with the overall colonial discourse of Nineteenth century India, this narrative frames practices and rituals of the Muharram festival within a paradigm of communalism, in a context of growing relevance of "religious communities" as the units for official political discourse. This has had fundamental implications for the way Indian history has been narrated and signified, in the colonial and post-colonial state. For example, British historian James Mill's periodisation of India's history (1817) into three main Hindu, Muslim and British times was incorporated into Indian historiography (reframed into the classic, medieval and modern periods), reinforcing the narrative of a timeless Hindu-Muslim struggle for the control of the Subcontinent (Thapar, 1990; 1996)[146]. The whole idea of religious and cultural syncretism thus acquired a specific meaning within an understanding of interfaith relations along a Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm which persists today[147].

Though the celebration of the rituals during Muharram has occasionally become tense in recent years, at least in terms of security measures taken to avoid violence, of particular interest to the present study is the way in which the practices associated with the festivity are largely considered a proof of amity between religious communities by people across multiple social backgrounds. Not unexpectedly then, the Shia identity nowadays, which is framed in terms of a "double minority" (Muslim and Shia), seems to be grounded on the very idea of expressing a composite culture and communal amity. With respect to this, Diane D'Souza underlines how many people of Shia faith in Hyderabad perceive their positioning as a religious minority in terms of bridging the divide between Hindus and Muslims and representing a point of religious intersection in the city (D'Souza, 2009, pp. 52-53). The fact that the Muharram festival can be regarded as a celebration of communal amity is due to its identification as a Shia festival, situated

[146] This despite, according to Margrit Pernau, even the designations of *qaum* and *millat*, which were rendered in English respectively as the Muslim and Hindu religious communities, referred in the practice more to a "solidarity-group resulting from interaction" than to a community defined by religious boundaries (Pernau, 2000, p. 72).

[147] See for example, "Hindus, Muslims observe Muharram together", *Siasat Daily*, 29 December 2009, http://www.siasat.com/english/news/hindus-muslims-observe-muharram-together.

beyond the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm. Thus, the distinction between communal conflict and harmony in narratives of interfaith relations draws heavily from legendary and historical accounts of religious syncretism, interpreted through a communal lens which essentialises religious communities as overarching units of political, social and cultural identity. In so doing, both conflict and harmony refer to and reinforce the Hindu-Muslim paradigm as the fundamental social tension, isolating it at the same time from the wider social order. The final section of this chapter returns to today's representations of Hyderabad's cultural and religious past to deconstruct the communal discourse in its implications for nowadays relations of power among different sections of society.

In order to shed light on the politics of communalism in Hyderabad with respect to history, the next section will instead try to answer the question related to how a discourse of communalism became dominant in Hyderabad and what implications it had for social relations across multiple, intersecting dimensions.

5.3 INSTITUTIONALISING A COMMUNAL DISCOURSE ACROSS GENDER AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIFFERENTIALS: THE CASE OF HYDERABAD STATE

This section engages with an exploration of some fundamental processes that contributed to the dominance of a discourse of communalism in Hyderabad. It introduces an analysis of its implications in defining social boundaries in terms of Hindu-Muslim antagonism, defusing demands for social change coming from different sections of society. Moreover, it provides a perspective on the process of articulation of communalism as a dominant discourse in Hyderabad's socio-political consciousness, focusing on the final years of the Nizam's rule. In the narration of the dynamics of power in a changing socio-political scenario, it stresses the gender and socio-economic dimensions of the different forms of political mobilisation that developed at that time and their connection with the nationalist movement in British India. In that way, I hope to clarify the process of configuration of a communal discourse and its fundamental dominant character in displacing calls for social change onto a Hindu-Muslim paradigm.

Susie Tharu and Tejaswini Niranjana underline how emancipatory projects are often based on the postulation of a "human subject" which is pre-existing and

independent of the social categories of gender, class, community etc. Thus, the principles of liberty and rights are predicated upon that notion, which defines otherness as a failure to fulfil this human wholeness (Tharu & Niranjana, 1994). In the social dynamics explored in this section, a similar process of differentiation is analysed with respect, for example, to certain discourses of female emancipation which were crucial for the definition of an upper-middle class consciousness in connection with "religious communities'" boundaries. In the process, the essential traits of womanhood were defined in terms of upper-middle class respectability in opposition to the lower-classes and in relation to upper-middle class men at the intersection of gender, religious and socio-economic dimensions.

Exploring the historical context in which a growing political consciousness[148] among different sections of society emerged in Hyderabad state through the lens of multiple dimensions is relevant in order to disentangle the differential social positionings vis-à-vis the existing hierarchy of power and the unfolding socio-political transformations. Such processes led the Nizam and his Prime Minister on the one hand and the British on the other to embark in attempts to "modernise" the administration of the state. In fact, the two phenomena (i.e. growing political consciousness and state's bureaucratisation) were expression of the reconfiguration of power relations in a process of social and institutional change. They were in turn influenced by the social and political movements that were taking place in British India and by the measures adopted by the colonial rule to deal with them.

The final period of the Nizam's rule is therefore contextualised in a process of social and political change not only in the princely state of Hyderabad, but also in the rest of the Subcontinent. The processes of "modernisation" of the state's administration, the formation of a middle-class consciousness in the city of Hyderabad and the growing political awakening of the subjugated masses in the rural areas are all explored in the light of an intersection of the socio-economic and gender dimensions and of their implications for the structuring of power relations in the changing social and political order. The emergence of a communal discourse in Hyderabad was thus linked to the challenge to relations of super/subordination in society, represented by different interconnected pushes for social change. First of all, political awakening spread among

[148] See note 31 for a framing of political consciousness according to the definition given by G. Aloysius, (Aloysius G. , 1997).

the subjugated rural masses against a hierarchical caste system entrenched within a patriarchal feudal order. Second, the reforms undertaken by the Nizam's administration under the pressure of the British encouraged the formation of a "middle-class" identity among qualified immigrants and local educated youth, reformulating gender and socio-economic relations in the search for a social positioning and political representation. Finally, the transformations taking place in British India influenced the discourse and practice of the "fall" of the princely state, the suppression of the popular struggles and the assimilation of Hyderabad's political discourse within the nationalist/communal idiom of Independent India.

5.3.1 The Configuration of Social Tensions in the Discourse of Modernisation: the Mulkī/non-Mulkī Divide

The process of bureaucratisation of Hyderabad state started when, in a condition of extreme financial constraints, the 6th Nizam Asaf Jah VI (1869-1911) was put in front of the choice of either giving up his sovereignty to the British or undertake a series of administrative changes. In the intentions of the British, these lasts would have increased their control over Hyderabad princely state, lessened the resistance of the Nizam to external pressures and limited his and the aristocracy's personal power (Pernau, 2000, pp. 29-77; Leonard, 1978, pp. 67-68). So, between 1853 and 1883, during the *diwanship* of Salar Jung I, measures to reform the administration were undertaken under British influence.

At the core of the princely state's bureaucratisation process was the importation of qualified, predominantly Muslim, officers from British North India. Many of these men were English-educated, often graduates from the newly founded Aligarh University[149], while others were Urdu speakers[150]. Both the Nizam and his Minister Salar Jung I forbid any contact between these professionals, the aristocracy and the British officers settled in Secunderabad[151]. This measure was probably meant to keep

[149] Aligarh Muslim University was founded in Aligarh (Uttar Pradesh) 1875 as a College for the education of Muslim under the leadership of Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan.

[150] In British North India Urdu was mostly considered the language of the Muslims. This aspect acquires particular relevance if one considers the growing polarisation along religious lines that was increasingly characterising forms of social mobilisation in many parts of British India. Margrit Pernau maintains that Urdu has had an ambivalent character as the symbol of Hindu-Muslim unity (Hindustani) and as the language of the Indian Muslims as opposed to Hindi (the language of the Hindus) (Pernau, 2000, p. 110).

[151] Secunderabad is also called Hyderabad's twin city. It was funded to host the British residents in Hyderabad Princely State during the XVIII century.

the new administrators outside the mechanisms of access to power and thus prevent them from challenging the existing social hierarchy (Leonard, 1978, p. 69)[152].

Such processes brought about fundamental changes in the socio-economic structure of the state. Indeed, one major effect of the occupation of government jobs by non-Hyderabadi officers was the reconfiguration of social tensions along a native/non-native divide. Especially in the city of Hyderabad, the gap between the rather limited social and economic opportunities of the *mulkīs* (natives) and the privileged access of non-*mulkīs* to government jobs became a fundamental issue for the definition of new social boundaries. Accordingly, a growing distance emerged between the urban spaces in which the *mulkīs* on the one hand and the British and the non-*mulkīs* on the other were settled. The Old city, which was once the cradle of Hyderabad's court and cultural life, gradually lost its centrality and appeal vis-à-vis the new urban areas, which became the centre of Hyderabad's social life.

In this context, a feeling of socio-economic alienation became the focal point for mobilisation for young, educated Hyderabadis on the one hand, and for the lower sections of society on the other.

At the same time, in spite of the limitations imposed under Salar Jung I and especially after his death in 1884, the non-*mulkīs* sought and acquired increasing influence on Hyderabad city's social and political life and, along with it, wider opportunities to access the existing and configure new sources of political power. For example, towards the end of the nineteenth century Urdu replaced Persian as the language of the administration. A change firmly resisted by Salar Jung I, the introduction of Urdu was advocated and implemented under the pressure of the British and the non-*mulkī* officials, marking their growing cultural hegemony over the life of the court and the state's administration. According to Tariq Rahman, the politicisation of language by its association with religious belonging mirrors the increasing forms of mobilisation around "Hindu and Muslim nationalism" in North India (Rahman, 2008, pp. 40-41). The replacement of Persian also implied a decline in the use of local languages - Telugu, Marathi and Canarese – at lower administrative levels and in the schooling system (Rahman, 2008, p. 44).

[152] Karen Leonard notes how the policy of segregation also involved the British officials and the Nizam. Salar Jung actually aimed at centralising power in the Diwan, namely his hands (Leonard, 1978).

Social polarisation went hand in hand with the production of different forms of economic exclusion along the *mulkī* /non-*mulkī* divide, combined with an increasing search for a specific social positioning and identity for the two groups. Thus, although a sharp distinction between natives and non-natives became more and more difficult to draw after a few years of the immigrants' settlement in Hyderabad city, the tension reflected a struggle for political recognition and social uplifting, increasingly imbued with appeals to culture, tradition and ultimately, religion.

Karen Leonard points out how, during the first decade of the Twentieth century, representatives of the ruling castes who had benefitted from the bureaucratisation process, such as the Reddis, Kammas and Velmas, started articulating demands for political representation within a "modernised" state system. At the same time, the non-Urdu speaking rural populations, predominantly constituted by enslaved "peasants" and groups below the "pollution line", started to mobilise for more opportunities of political participation and the dismantlement of the oppressive feudal system to which they were subject (Leonard, 1978). These movements from the grassroots aimed at subverting the caste system and the feudal structure, promoting self-respect campaigns, education and demanding more political opportunities (Charsley, 2002-2003)[153]. Such movements were not happening in isolation from the rest of India in which, beside mainstream nationalism, other less visible social movements were struggling for uplifting the position of the downtrodden sections of society in the future Indian Union[154].These reform movements were also articulating specific struggles against practices and norms considered oppressive and exploitative such as the *devadasi* (young Dalit women who were supposed to take care of the temple and that were practically sex slaves). These forms of mobilisation found expression either in organisations linked to the pressure groups in British India or in the Telangana people's struggle (1946-1952)[155].

The different strands of this growing mobilisation focused on education as one of the fundamental issues for the development of a solid political consciousness.

At the level of a growing middle-class consciousness, the establishment of Osmania University in 1918 provided a space for the articulation of two contrasting views of Hyderabadi nationalism (Leonard, 1978). On the one hand, the idea of a

[153] For an in-depth analysis of the mobilisation of Dalits see (Charsley, 2002-2003; Muthaiah, 2004; Ratnam, 2008).

[154] See for example (Aloysius G. , 1997, Chapter 3).

[155] See, Sections 5.3.4 and 5.4.2.

"Deccani synthesis" in which religious and cultural diversity constituted the very essence of *mulkī* identity under Muslim rule was developed to encompass different social movements inside and outside the city. Such articulation drew on the image of cultural syncretism as the core of Hyderabad state's identity. On the other, an overarching Deccani identity was configured around Islam as the unifying principle on which Hyderabad's glorious past and contemporary power rested. This discourse was promoted mainly by non-*mulkī* Muslim intellectuals and was keen on portraying the Nizam as the representative of the Muslims in India rather than the ruler and the binding force of a diverse and composite state. The contestation over the representation of Hyderabad state's identity was taking place in a context of growing influence of non-*mulkī* population on the cultural life and the decision-making mechanisms of the state.

In that sense, it is relevant to mention the connection between the Khilafat movement in British India and the increasing non-*mulki* influence in Hyderabad. In fact, the identification of the Nizam as the leader of Indian Muslims, encouraged by members of the Khilafat movement and seen by the Nizam as a source of legitimisation in religious/nationalist terms, established ambiguous but important connections between the nationalist movement in British India and the politics of Hyderabad state[156]. In the process, the idea of a "Deccan synthesis" based on the concept of composite culture lost visibility with respect to the articulation of religion as the unifying and distinctive principle for socio-political representation.

Thus, the categories of *mulkī* or non-*mulkī* began to be increasingly associated with religion for the definition of their social positioning.

The configuration of a discourse of religious antagonism in Hyderabad was inscribed in a complex mobilisation for the social and economic recognition and uplifting of different sections of society which were developing a growing political consciousness. It was thus not an aberration of a natural process of modernisation but one of the forms that such phenomenon took in the context of a reorganisation of the axes of power at the social and economic levels. In the process, gender began to assume a central role, in connection with socio-economic differentials, for the definition of such social groupings and positionings in the capital. In Hyderabad, as in other parts of India, the issue of women's rights became a fundamental question around which debates

[156] See (Pernau, 1999) for a perspective on the ambivalence in the relations between the Nizam and the leaders of the Khilafat movement in north India.

regarding modernisation, nationalism and, ultimately, interfaith relations were being framed.

5.3.2 The Centrality of Gender in the Emerging Political Consciousness

> It seems to me a paradox, at once touched with humour and tragedy, that on the very threshold of the Twentieth century, it should still be necessary for us to stand upon public platforms and pass resolutions in favour of what is called female education in India[157].
>
> Sarojini Naidu, 1906

Born in Hyderabad in 1879, poet and writer Sarojini Naidu became a fervent women's rights advocate within the movement of Indian nationalism. She received her higher education in England and, on her return to India, became an activist alongside Gandhi, at an all-India level. Her quote represents quite distinctively the kind of rhetoric that advocates of women's rights were articulating within the framework of Indian nationalism and a wider discourse of independence, secularism and democracy.

In British India, at the end of the Nineteenth and the beginning of the Twentieth century, political mobilisation for civil rights and social reform put to the forefront the issue of education of women and, more in general, their place in society[158]. In Hyderabad as well, the mobilisation along socio-economic issues intersected with a debate on gender roles and the location of women in the process of modernisation.

In general, respectability was associated not only with a certain degree of formal education, but also with the embodiment of a reformed religious "orthodoxy" which would mould the "ideal mother and wife".

Historian Margrit Pernau has explained the importance that articulations of gender roles had in defining the positioning of different social categories in Hyderabad. As shown above, the need to demarcate the boundaries of identities on which socio-political struggles could be fought implied the reconfiguration of socio-economic claims around issues of religion. The place that women were to occupy in such movements contributed not only to the construction of external boundaries of religious communities, but also to the redefinition of gender roles and socio-economic differentials within them.

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[157] *Speeches and Writings of Sarojini Naidu,* Madras. Originally, lecture delivered at the Indian Social Conference, 1906, Calcutta. Cited in (Sen A. P., 2003).

[158] See (Basu A. , 2004; Kumar, 1993).

Pernau focuses in particular on the attempt of non-*mulkī* Muslims to mark off an identity of their own, which could accommodate their social location as a new upper middle-class. The intersection of the socio-economic and gender dimension was crucial in this attempt to define the community's social position. In particular, Muslim reformists sought to define women's emancipation in terms of the appropriate education, manner, ways of social interaction and, more in general, location in the private and public spheres. In the process, the domestic, only-female spaces began to be represented as sites of superstition and ignorance, oppression and backwardness.

The space called *zenana,* destined to women and inscribed within the domestic walls was, Pernau argues, a totally "female universe", defined by specific hierarchies mostly based on age, and by habits, rituals and forms of knowledge in which different cultural and religious realms crisscrossed. According to Pernau, it constituted social networks located inside the domestic realm, creating spaces of interaction among women which transcended "the boundaries of caste and community" and the distinction between the private and the public (Pernau, 2008, p. 143). Though these networks are often referred to as "informal" due to the lack of official recognition, they were coded by specific rules intersecting categories of age, family ties and, of course, gender. This very female universe was the main target of the upper-middle class Muslim reformists, who portrayed it as a world of superstition and ignorance, where women were socialised to the habits of the lower classes. Instead, they prescribed a form of emancipation, which aimed at configuring an educated, socially active and pious upper-middle class Muslim woman. In the process, girls were encouraged to undertake formal education, to meet other women of their rank outside the home, to challenge the institution of *purdah*[159] and to avoid the constitution of socially mixed female circles dominated by non-educated elderly women in the domestic spaces.

At the end of the Nineteenth and beginning of the Twentieth century, Hyderabad witnessed the mushrooming of female poets, novelists, and journalists personally engaged in the struggle for women's emancipation. The general trend among all writings addressed to upper-middle caste women was the focus on educating the "proper wife". Many of the non-*mulkī* women writings used the Urdu language and endorsed the campaign against the segregation of women in the homes and in favour of education, which often implied discrediting the forms of knowledge transmitted orally

[159] *Supra* note 81.

or through the everyday practices inside the domestic walls. Many women reformers contributed to the construction of a female figure that could consciously take good care of the home and act as a respectable, pious wife. In this respect, Tharu and Niranjana's perspective is particularly interesting in that the project of modernisation was precisely grounded on the idea of the pure Muslim womanhood, defined and legitimised with respect to the upper-middle class man and mirroring a specific social positioning of the female subject vis-à-vis the lower classes. Most interestingly, in the process of configuration of the new upper-middle class identity in Hyderabad, women played a crucial role in actively participating in the demarcation of a female upper-middle class public space.

Within the reformist movement therefore, non-*mulkī* women participated in the definition of the contours of a new Muslim upper-middle class in Hyderabad, attempting to draw a line of separation between their "new" reality and the traditional ways of women interactions. The configuration of the internal boundaries of the Muslim non-*mulkī* community developed at the intersection of a gender and socio-economic dimension. At least officially, the world of the *zenana*, where women gathered across religion and social strata, was to leave room to a new space for women's action, based on "reformist expressions of piety and on modern education" (Pernau, 2002, p. 54). Significantly however, Pernau argues that the traditional forms of female interaction did not disappear but became in a way the basis on which new activities emerged. The developing women's networks such as the *Hyderabad Ladies Social Club* were, in their earlier arrangements, interpreted in terms of kinship ties very much like the older family-based interactions.

The wider movement for the emancipation of women included also the formation of female organisations, with the purpose of providing recreational spaces but also of promoting social work. Interestingly, most of the initial groupings, such as the *Hyderabad Ladies Association* (1901), later renamed the *Lady Hydari Club*, encompassed women of different faiths. However, quite soon, separate female organisations started to emerge, as their increasingly "public" profile required them to choose a specific positioning in terms of social and cultural values (Rani, 1997).

Among others, the *Andhra Mahila Sabha*, the women's wing of the *Andhra Mahasabha*[160], was particularly active in advocating reform within Hinduism and

[160] The organisation, founded in 1913, was working in close relation with Congress Party of British India.

against certain practices such as polygamy, child marriage, and taboos regarding widows' remarriage. They were also campaigning against the use of Urdu as the medium for education of Hindus (especially girls) which had been introduced by the Nizam's administration at the beginning of the 20th century (Uma, 2003, pp. 31-32).

In Hyderabad city, the presence of the *Arya Samaj*[161], a movement founded and mainly active in North India for the reform and promotion of Hinduism, contributed to the rhetoric of Hindu women's education as a fundamental aspect of a modern Hinduism. The interesting aspect of the *Arya Samaj*'s propaganda was the stress on the need to grant women access to religious texts and to train them in Hindi language, instead of the local vernacular languages (Telugu, Maharati, and Canarese) or Urdu.

Paradoxically however, the configuration of the boundaries of the new upper-middle class identity along religious lines led to the consolidation of the image of the woman as the sign of such identity and the figure around which the respectability and "orthodoxy" of the upper-middle class family were measured. Narrating the typical day of a Hindu "middle-class wife" in the era of Mahbub Ali Khan (1866-1911, alias Asaf Jah VI, 6th Nizam of Hyderabad state), Lynton and Rajan underline how concerns regarding the management of the home, religious rituals, practices referable to *purdah* and the boundaries of a strictly codified social life assumed all new meanings in the context of defining the social location of the woman and, by extension, her husband and family. Thus, preparing herself and her little daughter for a visit to Hanuman's temple, the woman makes sure to wear her finest jewellery and best dress to mark the socio-economic positioning of her husband, an educated young man employed in Hyderabad Civil Service (Lynton & Rajan, 1974, pp. 207-229). The woman and her daughter represent, through their outfits and attendance of the temple, the location of the family in society, from a religious and socio-economic perspective.

More in general, the issue of the position of women in a changing social and political scenario became a fundamental theme for the articulation of different forms of political consciousness in the context of modernisation of Hyderabad state.

Similar tensions involving gender roles and the definition of the religious community's internal and external boundaries persist nowadays. An interesting example is Joyce Flueckiger's narration of the healing practices deriving from "vernacular

[161] The purpose of Arya Samaj was the spiritual renewal of the Hindus. It became a mass movement in Hyderabad later than in the rest of India. The association was founded in the north of the Country in 1875 and it established a Hyderabad section in 1893. There it remained quite in the background until the 1930s.

Islam" in contemporary Hyderabad. Her study reveals that the "healing community" which configures itself around Amma, a woman healer, consciously transcends boundaries of class, caste and religion. Interestingly, though the practices and rituals performed by Amma are regarded by Muslim reformists as peripheral and even unorthodox, the healer and her patients seem to perceive their space as distinctively Muslim and to be at the very centre of intersection for different religious and social positionings (Flueckiger, 2006, p. 14). Moreover, the healing room assumes different functions as a commercial, a ritual and a domestic space. Business activities happen in the same place in which religious rituals and healing practices are carried out, while the veiling codes that women usually observe outside the home are not always practiced in Amma's healing room, despite the presence of male patients. (Flueckiger, 2006). This shows that strict dichotomies such as public/private sphere, Hindu/Muslim community which are actively constructed in the process of re-defining axes of power between different sections of society, unfold simultaneously with and in opposition to practices in which multiple identities and social locations intersect.

5.3.3 Hyderabad State in the Wider Indian Context: the Politicisation of Religious Communities

In order to understand the communalisation of the political discourse in Hyderabad, it is important to mention how the local context interacted with the wider Indian contemporary scenario, and how the different articulations of a growing political consciousness were being reframed along a fundamental communal ideology[162]. A major role in the definition of the language of political competition was played by organisations that emerged and acquired a certain prominence in the debates about modernisation of the Nizam's state, social reform and, later, Hyderabad's accession to the Indian Union.

The *Arya Samaj* for example based its activism primarily on the need to recover a mythical original Hinduism as the framework for starting a process of modernisation and democratisation of the state. Their representation of the Nizam as ruthless oppressor of the Hindu population was coupled with a practical engagement in a campaign for proselytism and re-conversion among lower caste people who had embraced Islam[163].

[162] See also Section 2.2.3 for a discussion on the institutionalisation of a communal discourse in Indian nationalism.

[163] As part of a self-respect campaign promoted by leaders of the untouchables, conversion to Islam and Christianity was encouraged for example by Periyar as a way to break free from the oppressive caste system which kept them

While the *Arya Samaj* claimed a non-political profile, the *Hindu Mahasabha* , established in British India in 1915, was born as a Hindu nationalist party and started its activity in Hyderabad in 1932 (Kooiman, 2002, p. 181-182). It framed its campaign around the necessity to reorganise the state, taking into account numerical relations between "religious communities" as the main criterion for the distribution of power. The party demanded also the recognition of more civil rights and a wider political participation for "the Hindus". Hence, both organisations aimed at representing the Hindus as a uniform group and at broadening their social and political opportunities.

While they grew in strength and popularity a new political party, *Majlis-i-Ittihad-ul-Muslimeen* (MIM), was created in 1926 under the aegis of the Nizam. Born as a creature of the movement for a Deccani nationalism grounded in Islam[164], the organisation concentrated on proselytism amongst the lower castes to counteract the *Arya Samaj*'s effort to retrieve converts[165]. As noted by Kooiman, the fact that proselytising campaigns acquired such relevance in conjunction with an emerging debate on Hyderabad's accession to independent India reflects the framing of social tensions along the Hindus vs. Muslims distinction as a majority/minority paradigm (Kooiman, 2002). This process of polarisation along religious lines also contributed to recast demands for social and political change coming from different sections of the society within the boundaries of religious communities.

The year 1938 saw the foundation of the Hyderabad State Congress (HSC). The party drew inspiration from the National Congress in British India and promoted the idea of "responsible government" under the Nizam, though in view of Hyderabad's integration to a future Indian federation. In fact, all political parties and pressure groups took up a specific position vis-à-vis Hyderabad state's possible accession to the Indian Union. The last Government of India Act of 1935, which represented a sort of initial draft of the Indian constitution, contained recommendations regarding the future of the princely states. Three options were envisaged: their voluntary annexation to either India or Pakistan, their independence or the formation of a unity among themselves. If both the British and Indian nationalists privileged the first option, in Hyderabad the

subjugated (Aloysius G. , 2004). See Section 2.2.3 for a perspective on the position of the lower castes and the effect of a Hindu-Muslim polarisation of Indian nationalism on their (in)visibility.

[164] The other version of Deccani nationalism was instead endorsed by the Mulkī League, created in 1935, but whose capacity to influence the public debate remained however quite limited.

[165] For a wider perspective on the conversion campaigns especially among the lower sections of society see (Sikand Y. S., 1997).

possibility to exercise a choice became a focal point around which all political forces that opposed or supported accession mobilised.

5.3.4 "Police Action" and the Institutionalisation of Communalism

A fundamental event of the recent history of Hyderabad which also finds a relevant place in contemporary narratives of interfaith relations is the so-called "Police Action" (officially named "Operation Polo"), which marked Hyderabad state's annexation to the Indian Union. This process of integration is often portrayed in accounts based on a communal paradigm, as a real "turning point", which signed the demise of the Muslim rule, the decline in status of the Muslim population and the institutionalisation of Hindu-Muslim conflict in Hyderabad. Of course, the meaning attached to it assumes specific connotations according to different socio-political positionings, which will be discussed in the final section of this chapter.

The Police Action[166] was in fact a moment in a process of transformation of social relations and political balances in Hyderabad state, which had been unfolding along the progressive decline of the Nizam and nobility's legitimacy in the eyes of the populace and of the socio-economic system in which they prospered.

In this respect, it is necessary to include into the picture the socio-political mobilisation coming from the grassroots which found expression in the Telangana struggle of 1946-1952. Studies of the historical development of "communalism" in Hyderabad, while stressing its religious dimension, have paid little attention to the articulation of this movement, the challenge it posed to the rule of the Nizam and the power of nobles and upper caste landlords, and its violent suppression first by the paramilitary formation of the Razakars and later by the Police Action. On the contrary, I contend that the challenges coming from the lower sections of society were questioning certain foundations of the social hierarchy and the power relations that found expression in it also in view of Hyderabad's integration to India. Their reading as an anti-Nizam's (anti-Muslim) revolt by different forces struggling for power in Hyderabad, not only despised the demands for a radical transformation of the social hierarchies, but also contributed to the institutionalisation of a communal discourse in Hyderabad.

[166] Several were also the doubts regarding the opportunity of an armed intervention in Hyderabad. The justification of a military intervention of the Indian state was grounded on the fear that the situation in Hyderabad could revive the violence that had devastated the Subcontinent during the process of partition. Nehru on the other hand feared that a violent action could trigger a reaction from Pakistan (Sherman, 2007, p. 495).

The Telangana people's struggle involved the rural population of the eight Telugu-speaking districts (which include Hyderabad city), mobilising against the exploitation from local landlords and the Nizam and against the *vetti* system, a form of forced labour, including sexual slavery, which affected the lower castes. The movement, led by the Communist Party, saw a wide participation of women in the different articulations of the struggle, as they made up a large section of the agricultural workers and sex slaves in Hyderabad state. In this sense, women's mobilisation, while still debating and struggling for education and emancipation, was ideologically defined within the context of the Communist Party and aimed at a specific goal: subverting the system of social and economic exploitation. Demands for greater political representation were coupled with a fight for the uplifting of the conditions of a large part of the rural population in Hyderabad state. The movement adopted a Marxist political outlook, stressing its rootedness in the local vernacular cultures against the hegemony of the feudal and caste system.

The Telangana movement was thus addressing various forms of exploitation which were inherent in the functioning of the state. The fact that its suppression was officially framed along a Muslim vs. Hindu line by representatives of the new Indian Union and by the local political forces hostile to the Nizam reflects the ongoing communalisation of the political discourse. With respect to this, while the decision to send the army to forcefully integrate the princely state into the Indian Union was legitimised by the nationalist rhetoric of Indian unity[167], the Police Action was followed by massive violence against the Muslim population[168]. That violence is often explained as "retribution" for the atrocities perpetrated by the paramilitary formations loyal to the Nizam. However, from a different perspective, it shows how the rhetoric of communalism, which spread during the final period of the Nizam's rule and informed the debate over a military intervention, can be situated within a general discourse of Indian secularism/majoritarianism and the use of violence for its articulation (Section 2.2.3).

In the years preceding the integration of the princely state, the struggle for power in Hyderabad city included the launching of a protest in 1938 inspired to the

[167] See (Sherman, 2007; Chopra, 2002; Brecher, 1963, p. 291-292).

[168] See for example (Sundarayya, 1972, p. 139-140; Pernau, 2000, p. 336; Smith, 1950, p. 45-47). See also A.G. Noorani, "Of a Massacre Untold", *Frontline*, vol. 18, No. 5, Mar 3-6, 2001.

satyagraha[169] that was taking place in British India. The *satyagraha* in Hyderabad was instrumental to the strengthening and the visibility of the organisations and political parties supporting both the anti-Nizam movement and the nationalist one outside the state. Indeed, the fact that those involved in the organisation of the *satyagraha* in Hyderabad were also largely engaged in the anti-British front is of great relevance for understanding the growth of discursive practices of interfaith relations in Hyderabad state, with respect to the rhetoric of Indian nationalism[170].

The initial stages of the repression of the Telangana struggle and the anti-Nizam mobilisations were led violently by the Razakars (volunteers), a paramilitary organisation. As an offspring of the MIM, the Razakars were founded by Kasim Ravi in 1946 (Sherman, 2007, p. 494) and grounded their ideology and action on a violent rhetoric of opposition between the Muslims rulers and their critics. The religious rhetoric, which had grown as the ground for the pro/anti-Nizam cleavage, became rampant in the final moments of Hyderabad's life as a princely state. Interestingly, the Razakars' actions received the support of various upper caste landlords whose power was being targeted by the Telangana people's struggle (Sherman, 2007).

The communalisation of the political discourse represented the multiple social tensions intersecting at that time as a fundamental fight between Hindus and Muslims. It veiled other forms of mobilisation along socio-economic and gender lines, defusing the potential for a stronger opposition against Hyderabad's integration and paving the way for the Police Action, which suffocated both the Telangana revolt and the Razakars and marked the forceful accession of Hyderabad state into the Indian federation[171].

In the middle of tensions between conservative forces embodied by the Nizam, the MIM and the nobility (including the upper caste landlords) on the one hand, and attempts to change the balance of power and the political and administrative structure on the other, religion became a focal point for mobilisation which rested upon the very categories that the process of bureaucratisation of the state had contributed to define.

[169] The term *satyagraha* refers to the non-violent resistance promoted by Gandhi in South Africa and in India.

[170] A sizeable part of the participants in the local *satyagraha* came from British India - mainly from Bombay - and belonged to disadvantaged social strata. Between 1938 and 1939, of the 12.000 *satyagrahis* arrested, only 5.000 belonged to Hyderabad State. Many of them were in precarious physical conditions, poor and either old or very young, acting more likely upon an economic reward rather than a strong political inspiration (Kooiman, 2002, p. 193). See also (Copland, 1988, p. 793-801).

[171] The military intervention began on September 13th, 1948. It took just four days to defeat the forces of the Nizam and declare Hyderabad's annexation.

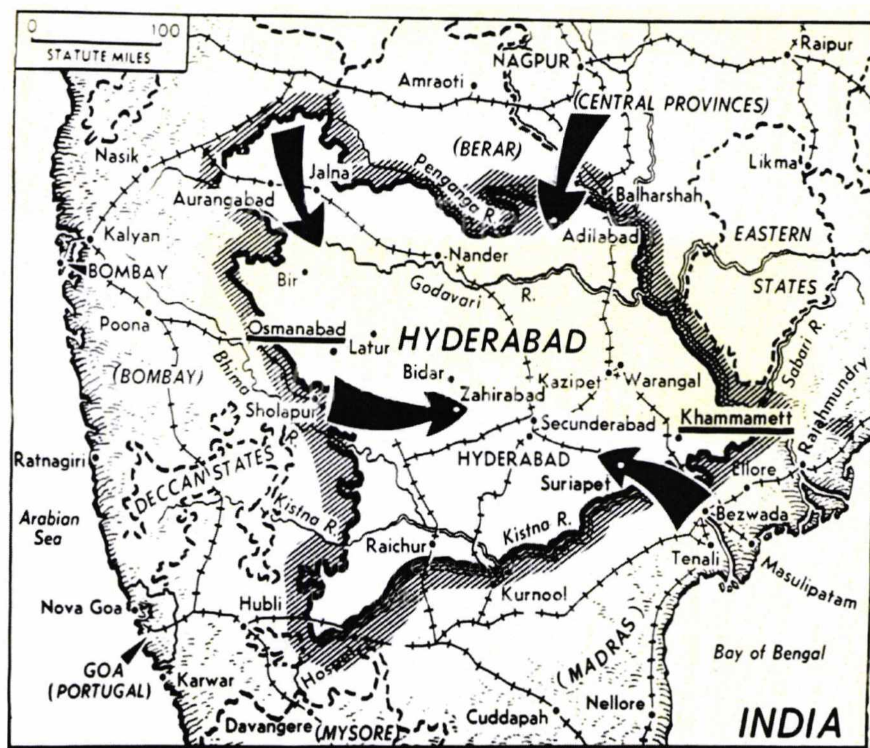

Figure 6. A map of "Operation Polo" suggesting how Indian troops entered Hyderabad state (1948) - Archives of the *Chicago Sun-Times*[172]

[172] Source: http://www.columbia.edu/itc/mealac/pritchett/00maplinks/modern/maps1947/maps1947.html last accessed, 03 November 2011.

5.4 Contemporary Narratives of Hyderabad History: Deconstructing the Communal

The above section provides a narrative of how a discourse of communalism grew and became rampant in the final years of Hyderabad's existence as an independent princely state. I have discussed the implications that such a discourse had for the configuration of different forms of mobilisation and their visibility, stressing how it also contributed to define multiple social tensions along a Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm. In the final section of this chapter I will try to explore contemporary narratives of interfaith relations based on interpretations of the past, and the intersection between different dimensions that contribute to configure external and internal boundaries of religious communities.

In this section, instead, I analyse interpretations of certain themes in Hyderabad's history and try to show how different representations unfolding along a discourse of communalism tend to reproduce relations of super/subordination between, within and across "religious communities".

According to Anagol, the overarching nationalist framework for the reading of Indian history deprives certain categories of agency and, in the end, let them disappear from the representations of the past. She rejects "the nationalism-imperialism framework because its inbuilt assumptions about the location of historical agency effectively marginalise women" (Anagol, 2008, p. 621). She thus proposes a new periodisation of and approach to Indian history that could restore women's agency as a fundamental dimension of social change in time. The problem, she argues, is that even the subaltern school with its attempt to make the voices of the subjugated masses speak, has failed to recognise women's agency by focusing mainly on the way women's voices have been silenced (Anagol, 2008). Reflecting on Anagol's perspective, the historical gaze can be regarded as a framework for the present, which can contribute to the reproduction and invisibility of certain relations of power in society. While my representation of the process of communalisation of the political discourse does not provide an deep understanding of women's agency[173], it tries to offer a reading of its implications for the visibility of multiple tensions and their contribution in the process of social change in Hyderabad princely state.

[173] Such a project would not be in the purpose of this study and would certainly require access to sources in local vernacular languages.

The purpose of the next section is to explore some of the current narratives about Hyderabad's past through a communal paradigm and the implications for the relations between different sections of society and the visibility of their socio-political agency. The themes selected for this reflection are connected to the main narratives to which I have been exposed while conducting my fieldwork in Hyderabad from 2009 to 2011.

Again, the romance between Quli Qutb and Baghmati stands as a metaphor for such processes. On the one hand, it is the emblematic tale of Deccan rulers' tolerance and religious syncretism and, by extension, of Hyderabad's "composite culture", which powerfully mythologizes a unique Hyderabadi spirit of interreligious dialogue in the discourses of communal harmony. On the other, however, Kakar notes that the same story assumes a completely different connotation within a discourse of communal antagonism as emerges in the words of present day Hindu nationalists (Kakar, 1996, p. 22-24). Interpreted as an example of how Muslim's domination has been grounded on the conversion and sexual exploitation of Hindu women[174], the story again serves as a paradigm. This time however, instead of symbolising coexistence of different religions, it reinforces the image of the strong and luxurious Muslim man who, by abducting and marrying Hindu girls and forcibly converting them to Islam, threatens the very existence of the Hindu community. The woman, depicted in the story as a beautiful and talented dancer and singer, becomes in these narratives the sign of a threatened community and civilisation.

The centrality of the tale for defining the origin of Hyderabad (historically and symbolically) is such that a struggle to prove the existence of Bhagmati by locating her in history and defining her position vis-à-vis Quli Qutb Shah has become part of an intellectual debate among scholars of different backgrounds in Hyderabad[175]. The figure of the Hindu dancer becomes then the site of a struggle for the representation of interfaith relations in terms of either communal harmony or conflict.

Both perspectives look at interfaith relations from a communal paradigm. On the one hand, the rhetoric of communal harmony promoted by the tourist guides and intellectuals of "secularist" background sees Hindu-Muslim relations as the expression

[174] See Section 4.2.

[175] See for example Mir Ayoob Ali Khan, "For Hyderabadis Baghmati is vital part of history" from The Times of India March 22, 2010 http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-03-22/hyderabad/28143491_1_bhagmati-quli-qutb-shah-hyderabad or, "Baghmati mystery may be unravelled soon" from Times of India, February 15, 2011.

of a positive diversity that promotes unity, and conflict as its aberration and degeneration. On the other, the reading of the legend by Hindu nationalists depicts antagonism as the only possible outcome of Hindu-Muslim relations due to the ingrained incompatibility of these religious communities.

It is therefore not surprising that the two perspectives which build on an image of well-defined religious belonging can coexist and in fact reinforce each other in contemporary readings of Hyderabad's history. Moreover, they both reduce the complexity and forms of social interaction between different sections of society to the relations between two distinct and internally homogeneous "religious communities".

Interestingly, the exploration of how specific historical moments are chosen as fundamental turning points for the current configuration of religious identities reveals that multiple dimensions intersect to define the complexity of contemporary practices of interfaith relations in Hyderabad.

5.4.1 The "Legacy of the Razakars" in Discourses of Interfaith Relations

The accession of Hyderabad to the Indian Union has translated into a decline of the status of the Muslim population in the city capital. After Police Action marked the capitulation of the Nizam and the Razakars, a spate of violence targeted the population of Muslim faith. A large section of the wealthy Muslim people migrated to Pakistan, while many others lost their jobs in the government administration and found themselves reduced to a downtrodden section of society, living in the now decaying old part of the city.

By speaking with people of various backgrounds during my fieldwork, I have come to realise that interpretations of the 1946-1948 events in the light of a Hindu-Muslim antagonism have contributed to define the external boundaries of the communities of the "Muslims and Hindus of Hyderabad" in terms of the legacy of the violent actions perpetrated by the Nizam and the Razakars.

Political psychologist Vamik Volkan has investigated the mechanisms by which certain readings of past violent events delineate the contours of a "chosen trauma", which can become a focal point for the construction of a group's post-conflict identity. In Volkan's words,

> a chosen trauma is a large group's mental representation of a historic event that resulted in collective feelings of helplessness, victimization, shame, and humiliation at the hands

of 'others' and typically involves drastic losses of people, land, prestige, and dignity (Volkan, 2006, p. 173).

It is interesting to note that, according to Volkan, such representations of history are transferred to the next generation, adding to sources for the group's self representation and establishing "an invisible link among its individuals" (Ibid). Moreover, Volkan explains that the trauma can also feed an ideology of "entitlement" whereby "the group has a right to own what they wish to have" by virtue of the suffering they have been subject to in the past (Volkan, 2006, p. 174). Volkan's insights can help understand how certain readings of the past contribute to define the boundaries of religious communities. However, I would like to reformulate the idea of chosen trauma with respect to societal relations of power, arguing that it can have specific implications for defining social positionings of different sections of society vis-à-vis a dominant conflict discourse as the fundamental social cleavage. In so doing, it participates in the reproduction of forms of relative exclusion across multiple dimensions by veiling social tensions and relations of super/subordination within and across the boundaries of communities. An investigation of how certain readings of the past become more visible under certain circumstances can shed light on the way the "chosen trauma" is framed from potentially hegemonic standpoints.

In fact, the trauma mechanism works in different ways and with different implications according to the positioning of a collectivity in the social order. I argue here that the process of Hyderabad state's accession, with the violence of the Razakars and the Police Action, can be regarded as societal traumas for both the Muslim and the non-Muslim population of Hyderabad. It appears that different representations of history look back at those events as a choc which affected Hyderabad's Hindu-Muslim relations, explaining the current general situation of deprivation and marginalisation of the people of Muslim faith as a "natural" consequence of those events. For the Muslim population, the conquest of Hyderabad state by the Indian army implied the capitulation of the Nizam and a loss of social status of the "Muslim community" in Hyderabad[176].

More interesting for the implications of a communal reading of history however, is the position of Hindu nationalists which tends to stress the anti-Hindu nature of the Razakars' actions, reinforcing the sense of entitlement to a higher social location today. This reading of history tends to clearly distinguish between the victims and the

[176] See for example (Smith, 1950).

perpetrators of violence and to define the source of oppression in the Nizam's rule[177]. The position of "defeated oppressors" that this narrative attaches to "the Muslims" is particularly significant due to their current position as a marginalised group. In this respect, it also reinforces the stereotypes regarding their "communal attitude", and the idea that "they deserve what they get" because of their "culture" (Chapter 4). The brutalities carried out by the paramilitary force have been narrated to me as one of the causes, sometimes the justification, for the prejudice that Muslim people are often subject to on the part of the "Hindus" in Hyderabad[178]. Interestingly, this kind of interpretations comes from different voices, like that of a Muslim journalist (writing for a national newspaper)[179] and a local social activist working in the field of interfaith relations[180]. While the historical figures of the Nizams are still regarded by many Muslims as examples of tolerant and benevolent rulers, the Razakars trigger a mix of guilt and shame. Their actions represent a real trauma in the historical memory of people of Muslim faith because their violence was perpetrated in the name of an Islamic state. In some cases, the Razakars are also associated with a threatening Muslim masculinity with reference to their physical and military training and the cases of rape that they perpetrated against women. Interpretation given by certain Hindu political leaders and historians of the Razakars' violence as deliberately targeting Hindus (through conversion, rape, abduction, torture), seems to have been internalised as an irreparable wound in the history of Hyderabad's interfaith relations[181].

Interestingly, within such discursive landscape the issues around which people were mobilising at that time and the process of political awakening of the weaker sections of society, including the lower castes, the peasants and women, were and are now inescapably veiled behind a communal paradigm. If the construction of a Hindu vs. Muslim narrative gained relevance in the context of the socio-political transformations that the state of Hyderabad underwent in the period between 1853 and 1948, the

[177] See for example http://andhrajihad.blogspot.com/2010/03/muslim-men-and-women-undergoing.html. The blog is entitled "Jihad in Andhra Pradesh. Have we forgotten the lessons of history so soon?" http://www.totalhyderabad.com/hyderabad-in-history/

[178] Interview with a Hyderabadi Muslim journalist, September 2009. Interview with a Hindu social activist, August 2009.

[179] Conversation in Hyderabad, 1 Settembre 2009.

[180] Conversation in Hyderabad, 6 August 2010.

[181] See for example http://andhrajihad.blogspot.com/2010/03/have-telugu-speakers-forgotten-jihadi.html, http://www.totalhyderabad.com/hyderabad-in-history/, http://www.sanghparivar.org/blog/dr-k-prabhakar-rao/does-hyderabad-belong-to-only-muslims-part-ii

contemporary interpretations seem to impact on the perception of an undeletable legacy which reinforces the construction of hostility between religious communities.

The feeling of discomfort that these interpretations of history leave on certain sections of the Muslim population in Hyderabad is well expressed by the words of a Hyderabadi scholar and activist who participated in the debate regarding the legacy of history on the positions of Muslims in Hyderabad today: "Why is everybody so obsessed with the Razaakaars, whose active life was only for two years? When can the Muslims forget about the Police Action? Why can't Hindus forget the Razaakaars? [...] It looks as if the Razaakaars will be kept alive for 50 years more and the Muslims will have to perpetually face the consequences of this active memory" (Moid, 2010, p. 4).

Again a debate regarding the nature of the Nizam's rule brings us back to the dichotomy between harmony and conflict within the process of legitimisation of Indian secularism as "majoritarianism". The actions of the Razakars are depicted as the deeds of Muslim fundamentalists disrupting a pre-existing positive diversity. This standpoint misses the broader context of a process of growing political mobilisation both among the upper castes/classes and among socio-economic disadvantaged social sections in a changing social and political scenario. Thus, the figure of the Nizam seems to embody the Muslim despot, and the Razakars to express the very nature of this oppression as anti-Hindu.

Of particular interest is how, recently, a communal understanding of Hyderabad's integration to the Indian Union has been fostered in the context of the resurgence of the separatist movement to carve a separate Telangana state out of Andhra Pradesh. A major question surrounding the implications of the communal lens through which the current mobilisation for a separate Telangana state is sometimes read has been raised by certain sections within the movement, with respect to the visibility of the multiple struggles that find expression in it.

5.4.2 The Communal Reading of Telangana Struggle 1946-1952

An article on the Telangana people's struggle of 1946-1952 published in the feminist journal *Manushi* in 1985 states that: "There is a prevailing misconception that the struggle was essentially against the Nizam's fundamentalist police, the Razakars ("volunteers"). But, in fact, the struggle was against both the Muslim Nizam and the Hindu landlords". Kamalamma, a woman activist in the struggle, sees in the repression

of the movement an alliance between the Nizam and the landlords to prevent the peasants from challenging the "grotesque form of feudal exploitation". Such alliance found expression in the brutalities (rape, torture, looting, arson and killing) perpetrated by the paramilitary forces of Khasim Razvi[182].

Kamalamma's words seem to become particularly relevant now that, in the context of a militant activism demanding a separate Telangana state, the meaning of the 1946-52 struggle has triggered tensions along a pro/anti-Nizam interpretation. As emerges from the analysis below, in this process, the different forms of exploitation to which the downtrodden sections of society were subject and against which they started to mobilise within the structure of Hyderabad state seem to lose analytical and socio-political relevance.

A debate that has recently unfolded in Urdu and Telugu newspapers shows how the Telangana movement that is questioning the unity of Andhra Pradesh nowadays has been tainted with a communal discourse precisely with respect to the interpretation of history[183].

Since the demand for a separate Telangana state has publicly re-emerged in the summer of 2009 all political parties in Hyderabad and Andhra Pradesh have been compelled to take a clear stand with respect to it. Interestingly, while the BJP and the Hindu Right in general have immediately sided with the pro-Telangana parties, the AIMIM[184], a political party claiming to represent the Muslim community, has endorsed a more ambiguous position vis-à-vis the mobilisation. If the position of the party could be regarded as instrumental to ensuring a high percentage of Muslim voters in case the new Telangana state became a reality (which should, according to them, include the Rayalseema region, comprising a consistent Muslim population), the participation of Muslims in the struggle has been affected by the trend towards a location of the symbols taken as distinctive of the movement within the discursive space of communalism.

In particular, the Telangana people's struggle of 1946-1952 has become emblematic for the tensions over the definition of the movement's political

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[182] "Your story will also be History.." Interview with Kamalamma, Activist in the Telangana struggle by Stree Shakti Sanghatana Working Group on Telangana Struggle, Hyderabad, Manushi , No. 31 (November-December 1985)

[183] *Nizam's Rule and Muslims. Truth and Fairy Tales about Hyderabad's Liberation,* Broadsheet on Contemporary Politics, Vol.1, No. 1, Anveshi Centre for Women's Studies, November 2010.

[184] The AIMIM (previously MIM) was banned soon after Hyderabad's state accession to the Indian Union because of its connection with the Razakars until 1957, when it resumed its political activity under the leadership of Abdul Wahid Owaisi.

consciousness. Along with that, a re-interpretation of the historical moment has portrayed the Razakars and the Nizam as the Muslim enemies against which the struggle was fought. The endorsement of this interpretation by some sections of the contemporary Telangana movement is rendering the participation of Muslims and their positioning within it more problematic, despite a large majority of them being in favour of a separate Telangana state[185].

In the context of political mobilisation, the resonance of the figure of the Nizam polarises the political consciousness of the people in Hyderabad[186] between representations of him as an Islamic despot, whose ambition and attachment to power found expression in the brutal deeds of the Razakars, and that of a tolerant but misfortunate ruler.

Endorsing a practice started by the BJP in 1998, the leadership of the Telangana movement has decided in 2010 to celebrate officially "Hyderabad liberation day" on September 17th, honouring the destitution of the Nizam after the Police Action in 1948. Since 1998, the celebration has been grounded on the interpretation of the final years of Hyderabad state as a struggle between Hindus and Muslims (Menon P. , 1998). The anti-Nizam rhetoric has thus assumed an anti-Muslim connotation which is partly alienating some of the units active in the movement.

In fact, besides Muslims, several activists from various backgrounds have been voicing their disappointment vis-à-vis such rhetoric.

Some participants in the mobilisation claim that these discourses are also having the effect of defusing the calls for social justice coming from less visible sections of the movement comprising women, the lower castes and classes. A Telugu writer and activist accordingly expresses the unease experienced by some people from the lower castes with respect to the anti-Nizam twist endorsed by certain readings of the Telangana struggle (1946-1952):

> This is a context of de-Brahminizing the Telangana Bahujan [deprived majority, i.e. lower castes] perspective and historiography. The foolish assertion that Telangana history is one of a struggle against the Nizam is the main cause for the eclipse of a self-respecting Bahujan history (Sreenivas, 2010, p. 10).

[185] According to most of the people of Muslim faith with whom I spoke during my visits to Hyderabad in 2009 and 2011, the creation of a separate Telangana state is necessary to stop the oppression of poor people of the Telangana region by the rich high castes of Andhra region.

[186] The Telangana movement is of course not a Hyderabadi phenomenon. However, being the Muslim population and political leadership mainly concentrated in the city, the communalisation of the issue seems to be more visible there.

Hence, A. Suneetha notes how this tendency of demonising the Nizam and his historical legacy has been countered by an increasing congruence in Hyderabad between Muslims and, interestingly, Dalit thinkers' representations of the Nizam's rule and its end in 1948 (Suneetha, 2010, p. 2).

Moreover, some sections of the women movements too have actively been voicing the risk that a communalisation of the discourse could divert the attention from the core politics of the separatist struggle. An article written by Kalpana Kannabiran[187] and issued by the online magazine *Sanhati* summarises quite well the different issues with which the movement is confronting, by providing a narrative of the Telangana struggle of 1946-1952. She focuses on the categories that seem to suffer from lack of visibility or even marginalisation in the current movement, due to its communalisation. First of all, she advocates for the need to reach out to the consistent Deccani [Urdu]-speaking Muslim population, constituting a sizeable part of the Telangana region and to listen to the different needs they express according to their social location. She recalls the role women played in the first Telangana movement and stresses the current lack of opportunities for female leaders, particularly Muslim, to officially contribute to the struggle. Finally, she focuses on the positioning of the tribal people, the Adivasis, and of the lower castes, arguing for the need to "keep sight of this diversity, and make every effort to be representative in real terms".

Among the different views on Hyderabad state's history and its representations, interpretations of the past through a communal rhetoric contribute to the definition of the boundaries of religious communities. The very configuration of such boundaries entails a process of exclusion of certain social categories from the historical and contemporary representation of the multiple tensions articulated in social relations. In particular, issues of gender and socio-economic differentials that are raised in the context of (re)defining axes of power in the society are absorbed in and veiled by discourses of communalism in history and in the social practices of contemporary Hyderabad.

[187] Kannabiran is a founding member of Asmita Resource Centre for Women and a lecturer in Sociology and Law at NALSAR University of Law, Hyderabad.

5.5 Conclusion: Narrating the Past, Configuring the Present

Aloysius contends that "the past is an explanation of the present, and it is recognized that the genesis of a social phenomenon is an important aspect of its present situation" (Aloysius G. , 1997, p. 3). In this chapter, I have tried to propose both a perspective on the "genesis" of the communal paradigm as a dominant discourse in Hyderabad and a reflection on interpretations of the past as "explorations of the present". The narration of the final period of Hyderabad princely state offered in this chapter provides an angle to understand the development of a communal ideology as a phenomenon configured within and configuring a growing social space. In so doing, it does not aim at offering an encompassing narration of events but rather to propose a reflection on a historical gaze concerned with the multiple dimensions of narratives and practices of interfaith relations and their implications for the positioning of different social groups.

Moreover, this chapter tries to show how communalism as a paradigm for social practices and relations have, both in its harmony and conflict declinations, specific meanings for the demarcation of groups' boundaries and relations of powers in society. In particular, it aims at reflecting on some of the narratives through which interfaith relations have been framed with respect to interpretations of history and at showing the implication of such representations. Deepa Reddy underlines how both popular and intellectual views about interfaith relations in India tend to portray "ethnicism"[188] as a pathology which disrupts the "natural" diversity that characterises the nation. Accordingly, these discourses "create a continuum that places diversity and celebrated ethnicity on one end and ethnic violence/ethnicism on the other". Modernity and "ethnicism" are seen in this discourse as two opposites, the former being a natural development and the latter its degeneration and disruption. Reddy adds that ethnicism is constructed both from within, through the definition of the attributes of a group, and from without, through its differentiation from and opposition to the myth of "unity in diversity". Both dynamics constitute a process of naturalisation of socio-political entities (Reddy, 2006, p. 35). In this chapter, the view that communalism can be regarded as a discourse generated in the context of Indian nationalism/secularism

[188] Reddy uses the term "ethnicism" in order to distance herself from the more common terms such as "communalism" and "fundamentalism" which, according to her, configure forms of extremism peculiar to the Indian scenario that express the failure of modernity. Reddy thus contests the placement of ethnicism outside the realm of modernity and claims it is in fact a very expression of it (Reddy, 2006, p. 25-58).

applies to the specificity of the social and political tensions in Hyderabad as a princely state and as a city in the postcolonial Indian Union.

In that sense, I argue that the very understanding of communalism as a discourse of interfaith relations is grounded on the distinction between well defined religious communities that stand in either harmony or conflict, defining the dominant national project and its impossibility/otherness. This discourse in turn builds upon the obscuration of other tensions, and the definition of the social location of different social categories with respect to Hindu-Muslim relations. A communal paradigm is in that sense a standpoint with a tendency to hegemony vis-à-vis representations of history, which define the relative positioning of different sections of society within the limitations of a discourse of Hindu-Muslim conflict or harmony. Exploring multiple and intersecting social locations and the tensions that are articulated in the wider social realm with respect to relationship with the past today is crucial for a perspective that seeks to account for the pushes for social change in the space, discourses and practices of interfaith relations.

For example, both contemporary and nowadays interpretations of the Telangana people's struggle of 1946-1952 in terms of Hindu-Muslim antagonism show how a communal paradigm participated in the legitimisation of Hyderabad's state integration in the Indian Union, in the loss of visibility of multiple focal points for mobilisation across gender and socio-economic dimensions among different sections of society and in the definition of the boundaries of the contemporary movement for a separate Telangana state. In the latter case, other forms of mobilisation that question fundamental power relations in society are veiled or recast in the framework of a communal paradigm[189].

The understanding of the role of history in the configuration of religious communities as fundamental units for relations of power in contemporary society is therefore crucial for the deconstruction of communalism as a discourse of domination and social polarisation. The peculiarity of Hyderabad as a former princely state offers a perspective on the multiple implications of constructions of "communalism" in history with respect to relations among different sections of society.

[189] A further analysis of the current mobilisation for a separate Telangana state will be discussed in the next chapter.

Figure 7. The boundaries of Hyderabad state before accession[190]

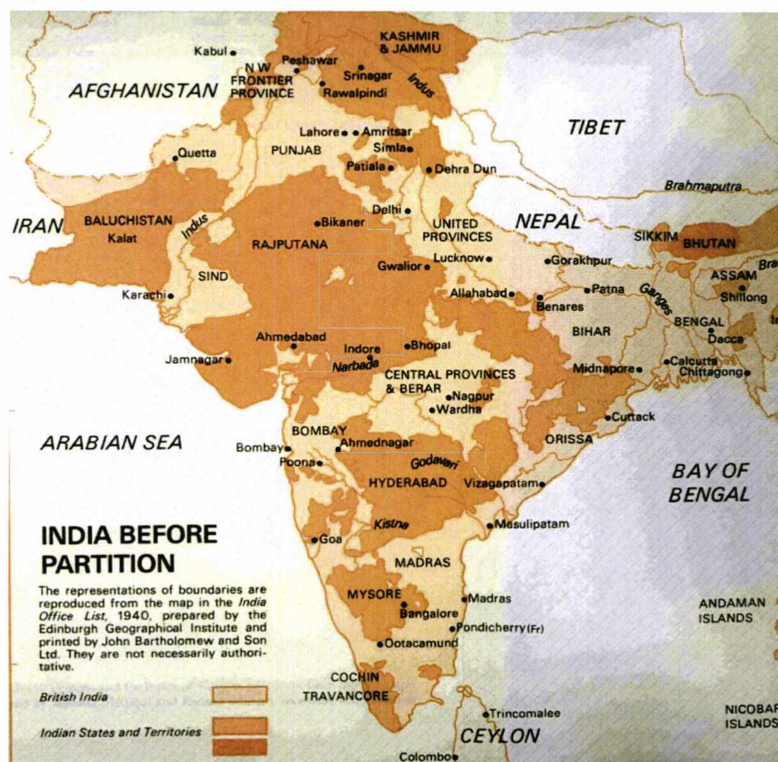

Figure 8. A map of India in 1940, indicating the British controlled areas and the Princely States (in darker colour)[191].

[190] Source: http://www.leeds.ac.uk/subjectstocitizens/places/hyderabad.html last accessed on 03 November 2011.

[191] Source: http://www.bl.uk/collections/images/independence/indiabeforepartition.jpg last accessed on 03 November 2011.

Chapter 6
Interfaith Relations in the Discourses of Politics and Law

6.1 Introduction: Religious Communities as Political/Legal Subjects

This work is based on an understanding of communalism as a discourse of domination and social polarisation, whereby relations of super/subordination in society are perpetuated and adjusted to change. A communal lens on interfaith relations implies that "religious communities" (in this case Hindu and Muslim) exist as discrete, homogenous categories and that they are mutually antagonist, veiling the very processes of construction of such entities and the relations of power involved. I am referring here in particular to the distinction between a Hindu and a Muslim community in which religion is the ultimate regulatory force for defining the position of men and women in society. As argued throughout this thesis, such rhetoric implies the existence of one Hindu and one Muslim religion that operates independently of other dimensions of social life and structures of power[192].

One of the main purposes of this study is to unveil the processes and dynamics through which discourses of communalism unfold and their implications for the positioning of and relations among different sections of society.

The issue that I would like to tackle in this chapter relates to how a discourse of communalism tends to obscure the mechanisms through which religious communities' boundaries are configured and how power relations unfold within and among them in the context of a debate on political movements, personal law reform and majority-minority relations. The perspective I develop with respect to the politics of interfaith relations is that the rhetoric of religious identity tends to overlook the processes of configuration and the visibility of different power relations in society. In practice, this mechanism becomes quite evident when discourses about specific issues relating to the political and legal realms unfold along a Hindu-Muslim dichotomy.

[192] Moreover, the very notion of a unitary and homogenous Hindu religion and community is controversial in terms of the practices, social locations and multiple tensions that are from time to time included and excluded in the discourses of the Hindu right. Similarly, the idea of a monolithic Muslim identity is implausible due to the large differentiation along socio-economic lines, region, and devotional and ritual practices etc. (Shani, 2007, p. 3; Hasan M. , 1997, p. 7).

The previous chapter offers a perspective on communalism as language and practice in the representations of the past. It explores the genesis of a communal paradigm as a dominant discourse of interfaith relations in Hyderabad in the context of socio-political mobilisations among different sections of society during the final period of the Nizam's rule. It offers a perspective on the role that a discourse of communalism played in reconfiguring relations of power in society. Moreover it provides a perspective on the dichotomy between conflict and harmony as a fundamental paradigm for the naturalisation of religious communities' boundaries and for the articulation of the discourse of Indian nationalism/secularism. Thus, a historical gaze is employed as a framework for understanding nowadays narratives of interfaith relations and their implications at the intersection of multiple dimensions.

The purpose of this section is to show that at the political level a communal rhetoric, as the axis along which discourses of conflict and harmony are articulated, neglects the tensions that cut across the Hindu-Muslim paradigm.

The question of how the political and legal discourses contribute to demarcate the social space of interfaith relations is crucial to the exploration of social tensions and their multiple and interconnected dimensions. This chapter presents a reflection on the way in which politics and law are produced by and productive of discourses of religious identity and communalism. It regards politics and law as another realm in which imagery, discourse and action are deeply interconnected with the social space of interfaith relations.

The analysis is based on a standpoint that seeks, in the words of Mary E. John, to "provide a better picture of the meanings and social locations that attach to group identities, produced through histories of naming, renaming or misnaming, intertwined with processes of relative dominance or exclusion" (John, 1998, p. 207). In fact, the political and legal discourses contribute to constantly configure "structural forms of marginalisation" (Ibid) defining the social positioning of different categories and groups and their mutual relations. Within the framework of a communal discourse, social tensions tend to be articulated around and often confined to the religious dimension, thus obscuring and at the same time reproducing structures of power that are transversal to multiple social spaces. Hence, the intersection of gender and socio-economic dimensions will be explored in order to trace certain dynamics of interfaith relations in

the political and legal discourses and to articulate possibilities for transcending the communal paradigm.

One of the fundamental categories which this section seeks to address is the notion of religious community, the way its boundaries are constantly re-defined in the political discourses and the implications of claims to self-determination and self-definition for the visibility of disparate voices speaking from within or across such boundaries. In this respect, the argument developed contends that religious communities can also be regarded as hegemonic standpoints vis-à-vis the composite character of social relations and tensions, articulating multiple strategic politics of identity.

The analysis draws from the perspectives of some feminist scholars such as Kumkum Sangari, Susie Tharu, Kalpana and Vasantha Kannabiran and Mary E. Jones on ideologies of cultural diversity also with respect to issues of representation of minorities and provisions addressing them.

I would like to start this analysis by reflecting on the perspective offered by Kumkum Sangari in her "Politics of Diversity", claiming that discourses of cultural diversity in the Indian political scenario are gendered and rest on "assumptions of discrete homogeneous communities, on religion as the singular axis of diversity, on a conflation of religion, culture and patriarchies, and on a confusion of social disparity with diversity" (Sangari, 1995, p. 3287). Her words highlight the risk inherent in reproducing a notion of religious community that becomes the absolute reference for political representation, identity demarcation and legal reform. The impossibility to transcend a reductionist view of religious community both from within - by acknowledging the multiple standpoints and social positioning it encompasses - and from without - by appreciating the complexity that is left out in the process of drawing its boundaries - has important implications for the perspective through which actions at the political, legal and social levels are undertaken. In fact, accepting the religious community as *fait accompli* and as the fundamental locus of political and legal activity in a way legitimises existing social inequalities and provides an easy escape from issues related to social tensions, exclusion and violence that cut across and encompass such categorisation.

Feminists have for long been debating from different social and geographical locations about how multiple axes of power intersect within and across the boundaries of groups, struggles and notions of citizenship. It is from this perspective that this

section also stands as a critique to the politics of communalism, which defines religious communities as un-gendered, socio-economically undifferentiated locations for political and legal action and reform, perpetuating forms of structural, cultural and direct violence in the name of internally homogeneous and externally sealed religious identities.

Sangari argues that the attribution of specific social positioning to the space of the religious community limits possibilities of change. In this sense, in the official political and legal discourses religious communities can shift from strategic locations for political mobilisation, to hegemonic spaces configuring unequal power relations. Accordingly, the "confusion of social disparity with diversity" against which Sangari is warning us is not incidental but a fundamental implication of such politics of religious identity. In particular, Sangari's argument calls for a reflection on notions of religious community that identify it as both the cradle of patriarchy and the privileged space from which to launch gender-sensitive reform. Sangari explores such representation in the light of a critique to essentialism, this last intended not as a standpoint for articulating specific social struggles, but as a static paradigm that homogenises complexity and neglects its fundamental role in the processes of social transformation. Hence, overlooking the interconnectedness and multiple levels of patriarchal practices translates into a failure to address some of the fundamental dimensions and processes around which social tensions and relations of super/subordination are configured.

The focus on politics and law in this section raises substantial questions that aspire to transcend the domain of electoral politics and its role in fostering essentialist views of communities for vested interests. In so doing, it aims at offering a more general consideration on the implications that different approaches to religious diversity and social justice have in the context of the political and legal discourses. The issue is particularly relevant also for the visibility of different social categories and groupings, offering elements for reflection on the multiple dimensions of interfaith relations. It extends the question of justice and representation far beyond a strictly intra/interreligious context by exposing the intersection of different axes of power, the designation of social locations and the unfolding of unequal power relations in the wider social context.

In brief, the chapter aims at representing the discourse of communalism as permeating the political and legal debates in Hyderabad and more in general to provide

a perspective of how a specific political language can veil certain tensions, by redirecting demands for social change onto the paradigms of communal conflict and the religious community.

In this respect, the argument also draws from of Tharu's and Niranjana's perspective on the contradictions with which notions of democracy and secularism confront. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the authors contend that such ideas are predicated upon a specific notion of the "citizen-subject" that tends to conceal gender, class, caste and community dimensions in the process of its structuring as "politically neutral" (Tharu & Niranjana, 1994, p. 95). This approach makes it possible to explore the extent to which legal reform processes and the language of politics tend to be blind towards the multiple dimensions that define the locations of people in society, in particular when based on the paradigm of communalism.

This form of demarcation and exclusion has important consequences for the identification of the subjects of politics, who are given access to the political process. According to Tharu and Niranjana in the Indian context, gender, caste and community have been articulated only in the realm of the social, "as incidental attributes of a human self thus rendering invisible the historical and social/cultural structuring of the subject of politics" (Tharu & Niranjana, 1994, p. 96).

In this sense, Tharu also remarks that oppositional social identities and categories should not be essentialised as *the* fundamental, overarching locus of politics because they are a product of the contingent political context, engaged in practices and actions for social change (Tharu, 1996, p. 2020). This point is helpful to reflect once again on the possible shift of religious community from a strategic site for social and political engagement onto a hegemonic standpoint, veiling the processes by which multiple positionings find expression within and across it, and the forms of action articulated from various social locations.

It is in this particular sense that certain representations of religious communities as the spaces and the fundamental targets of political and legal action might have implications for the veiling of certain forms of mobilisation.

Going back to Sangari's argument, there is another crucial point that is worth discussing for the purposes of this reflection. In particular, the author argues against accepting the conflation of religious community with a matter of faith alone, as it is often articulated in the political and legal discourses. In fact, Sangari argues, "religion

prevails as an institution more than consciousness" (Sangari, 1995, p. 3293) and it is in its institutional character that different axes of power intersect, defining certain social relations of super/subordination. Religion needs thus be regarded not simply as a spiritual and ritual order but also as a contemporary articulation of power relations at the cultural, socio-economic and political levels. In that sense, it is also enmeshed in processes of legitimisation of certain practices of domination, while at the same time containing the potential for configuring transversal oppositional identities.

Extending this view to the context of the current analysis, I seek to explore the assimilation of a communal paradigm with the political and legal discourses and how this contributes to the notion of static and discrete "religious communities", defined by the dimension of faith. Sangari notes how gender relations are deeply interconnected with issues of religion and, I would add, with the process of designating the socio-economic positioning of different social categories. It is the very purpose of the argument developed in this chapter to explore the dynamics of gendering and production of socio-economic differentials in the political and legal discourses of interfaith relations.

The argument draws from interpretations of my fieldwork experience in Hyderabad. Through the interaction with local political leaders, social activists, scholars and common people I have developed a perspective on the role of politics and law in the context of interfaith relations that goes beyond the rhetoric of communalism, conflict and harmony. In my interactions with many of the people in Hyderabad I found it particularly significant that, though the conversation were meant to revolve around issues of interfaith relations, politics and law, the actual exchange would often focus on aspects related to access to education, gender relations, social practices, health, socio-economic differentials and, more in general, social justice. For this reason, I have decided to only marginally touch upon the specificities of electoral politics, which have already been dealt with thoroughly by other authors in the study of communalism in India[193]. My representation of the political and legal discourses of interfaith relations in Hyderabad city instead aims to account for the issues that seem only transversally connected to that social space but that in fact can be regarded as fundamental tensions that unfold in it and as crucial processes for enabling a discursive transformation. In this sense, my positioning vis-à-vis this issue is in line with a perspective that seeks to

[193] For a thorough investigation of this theme see (Wilkinson, 2004; Brass, 2003; 1997).

acknowledge the articulation of social relations in their multiple dimensions as containing the potential for change.

6.2 THE POLITICAL BOUNDARIES OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

This section explores the contexts and processes in which discourses and practices of interfaith relations are articulated at the political level beyond the Hindu-Muslim paradigm. Drawing on fieldwork experience in the city of Hyderabad, the argument offers a perspective on how the communal rhetoric permeates the political debate and the representation that common people and also many local activists give of it as a political strategy negatively affecting the position and conditions of some specific social categories. It also proposes an exploration of different perspectives on the implications of certain narratives of interfaith relations which allow for fluid notions of community, not only vis-à-vis religion, but also in terms of the politics of identity that certain sections of society pursue. With respect to this issue, I will go back to the call for a separate Telangana state, briefly explored in the previous chapter in relation to representations of history, to show how multiple dimensions intersect in it and how the incorporation of a discourse of Hindu-Muslim relations by certain parts of the movement impacts on the definition of its boundaries and the processes of inclusion and exclusion.

The question of how a politics of religious identity is at the core of so-called "communal riots" in India has been studied and explored extensively in the literature. The fundamental question at the core of this idea is that politicians instrumentally engage in divisive politics of identity, foster animosity and violence and define the boundaries of the religious communities they claim to represent in opposition to another. All these mechanisms are regarded as strategic actions aimed at reinforcing electoral vote-banks and creating strongholds from which to conduct political activity. For example, in Hyderabad, the Old city has for years been regarded as a stronghold of the AIMIM[194], a political party repeatedly identified by the media as partly responsible for creating divisions among "religious communities". Various people with whom I had the chance to speak, confirmed the same perspective regarding the activities of politicians of different affiliations in various areas of the city.

[194] *Supra* note 184.

However, an exploration of the dynamics of community representation, while retaining the relevance of a look at electoral strategies, shows a complexity of mechanisms and processes whose implications go much beyond the issue of Hindu-Muslim relations.

The reflections proposed in this section show the interconnectedness between the reproduction of a Brahminical social order and the fundamental discourse of communal politics. The way in which the politics of the religious community is both homogenising vis-à-vis the diversity of experiences and social locations within it, and exclusionary through the processes of othering explored in Chapter 4, is fundamentally linked to the configuration of a social order of domination and social polarisation veiling social tensions at the intersection of multiple dimensions.

In his work on nationalism, Aloysius shows how the visibility of various forms of political consciousness, articulated as resistance against the Brahminic hegemony sanctioned by colonial discourses, was concealed by the rhetoric of Indian nationalism, mainly identified with the Indian National Congress (Aloysius G. , 1997). The dominant rhetoric of Indian nationalism at that time worked in favour of framing such struggles as communal and of universalising the upper-caste/class mobilisation as pan-Indian. The effects of a "communalisation" of different forms of political consciousness, with their regional, socio-economic and spiritual peculiarities, according to Aloysius "was the arresting of the process of horizontal and class-like polarization, and the replacement of the same with a counter process of vertical polarization in politico-religious terms" (Aloysius G. , 1997, p. 89). "Communalisation" of politics therefore can be regarded as a form of articulation, though contextually specific in its contents and processes, of a discourse organic to the dominant forms and practices of power and their reproduction, contributing to defuse political mobilisation for social change by displacing it onto a narrative of antagonism between religious communities. In so doing, it also reconfigures relations of super/subordination among different sections of society within and across their boundaries. It is in that sense that the religious community becomes a hegemonic location which relegates other dimensions in a de-historicised, a-political realm.

The rhetoric of communalism is an integral part of the politics of interfaith relations in Hyderabad and it is reflected in discourses and practices that continuously define the internal and external boundaries of religious communities. As noted above, the implications that such dynamics have for the wider social relations and the visibility

of certain social tensions is of particular importance to unveil the hegemonic character of the communal paradigm.

A trend that cuts across different ideological standpoints, the institutionalisation of the politics of religious identity seems to freeze the notion of religious community and its boundaries, veiling the potential for transformation, negotiation and accommodation of difference in the dynamics of power relations among different sections of society. These processes reduce the visibility of existing forms of contestation and resistance within and across religious communities, at the intersection of multiple dimensions and beyond the curtain of a dominant and violent politics of religious identity.

In the next section, I explore how the political discourse is linked to an adaptation and reassertion of a social order of domination in the context of the Telangana struggle and its discursive development from 2009 until now. In so doing, I will try to explore alternative articulations of the movement for a separate Telangana state, offering standpoints of contestation, difference and complexity. In particular, I will provide an illustration of the positions expressed by some Muslim, women and Dalit activists outside major political parties and their progressive alienation from the movement following its increasing "communalisation".

6.2.1 Participation as Critique in the Telangana Movement

In the previous chapter I have mentioned the way in which certain interpretations of Hyderabad state's history offered by some of the adherents to the contemporary movement for a separate Telangana state have incorporated a discourse of communalism that negatively affects the participation of certain social categories in the movement itself.

In this part, I would like to propose a more in-depth analysis of how a communal paradigm is becoming increasingly associated with the Telangana struggle and how internal tensions questioning the position of different sections of society in the agitation and in the future Telangana state are being despised by the resurgence and institutionalisation of a Hindu vs. Muslim discourse.

The movement for a separate Telangana state, though active for several years now[195], gained great public relevance in August 2009 when students launched an agitation in the campus of Osmania University in Hyderabad. From that time on, the struggle has gained increasing power and visibility, involving intellectuals, politicians, social activists and common people in an open confrontation, at times tainted with violence, with the state of Andhra Pradesh and the Indian government for the transformation of the Telangana region into a state[196].

The struggle finds its origins in the mounting tensions between the population inhabiting the region of Telangana (of which Hyderabad is an integral part at least geographically) and that from the coastal areas. According to Kannabiran the movement encompasses issues of socio-economic exploitation, underdevelopment, cultural and political hegemony, land and peasant issues, minorities and women, tribals and Dalits in a fight for self-determination and, most of all, self-respect[197] (Kannabiran, Ramdas, Madhusudhan, Ashalatha, & Kumar, 2010). Accordingly, it is regarded as a heterogeneous movement in which different constituencies articulate their perspectives while mobilising in support of a separate Telangana state.

In the course of political institutionalisation of the movement during the year 2010 however, this diversity and complexity has developed in the form of internal criticism vis-à-vis the political leadership, whose discourses have had the effect of increasingly concealing and despising demands from certain sections of the movement. In repeated interactions with Muslim activists in the struggle for example, the issue of their progressive alienation from the movement was often raised and discussed. As explained in the previous chapter, the interpretation of the Nizam period as a time of Islamic exploitation of the people from Telangana, together with the decision in 2010 to

[195] In different periods and based on contextual issues, a separatist Telangana movement has resurged in Andhra Pradesh. See (Forrester, 1970; Gray, 1971; Kannabiran, Ramdas, Madhusudhan, Ashalatha, & Kumar, 2010; Ram, 2007).

[196] However, different positions exist regarding the geographical arrangement of Telangana state. While some would limit the demand to the region of Telangana, others including the AIMIM leadership are proposing the idea of a Greater Telangana that should include also the region of Rajalaseema. Contestation also exists regarding the location of Hyderabad city, which is geographically part of Telangana but is also the capital of the state of Andhra Pradesh.

[197] According to a Telugu film director and activist in the struggle, "Telangana is an ethnicity that needs to be understood – we are a people with a language, a culture, dress code, dialect and distinctive food habits. We also have distinctive literary and performative traditions. And a distinct history that goes back 1,300 years. My films tell stories of Telangana" (B Narsing Rao, Hyderabad, 29 December 2009) Quoted in (Kannabiran, Ramdas, Madhusudhan, Ashalatha, & Kumar, 2010, p. 70).

take up the BJP's proposal of celebrating September 17th as "liberation day" have generated several tensions regarding the movement's socio-political outlook[198].

Some activists of the "Muslim forum for Telangana" voiced a strong commitment to the cause for a separate Telangana state. They maintained that Muslims too, like other sections of society, suffer particularly from forms of exploitation and discrimination and hope to have a larger space to express their views and affirm their rights in a new state. According to them the Telangana struggle offers a possibility for articulating a stronger political consciousness among their people and the opportunity to renegotiate their social location in a new political formation. With this vision in mind, they have engaged in sensitising campaigns to mobilise Muslim people in various parts of Hyderabad city and in the districts of Telangana. One of the activists told me that on the occasion of by-elections in 2010 they campaigned among the Muslim population of a particular district in favour of a BJP candidate supporting Telangana separatism, despite the anti-Muslim rhetoric that normally characterises the BJP as a political party. According to their account, participation of the 20-25% Muslim population had been highly encouraged by the leadership of the movement, knowing that their support would be of outmost importance for the success of the agitation.

However, after a stage of intense mobilisation within the Telangana movement, the enthusiasm of the members in the "Muslim Forum for Telangana" has declined. This progressive detachment from the political positions of the movement is mainly due to the marginality in which they have been relegated in terms of access to leadership and the increasing attacks to what have become, in this process of boundary definition, "traditional" symbols of Hyderabad Muslim identity, such as the Nizam. Their perception is that the struggle is being progressively transformed into a "Hindu movement" through which forces of the Hindu Right are gaining visibility and power. At the same time, their space of action has constantly reduced and, along with it, their motivation[199]. Their sense of disenfranchisement is shared in different ways also by women, lower caste and Adivasi (tribal) activists in the movement. Their initial enthusiastic participation has turned into criticism, challenging the official discourse of a Telangana state, rendering more visible the existence of different constituencies and

[198] It might be worth reminding the reader that on September 17th 1948 the Nizam's forces capitulated at the hands of the Indian state military which incorporated the then state of Hyderabad into the newly formed Indian Union.

[199] Interview with civil liberties activists, May 2011.

standpoints within the movement and asking question regarding their own position within it.

In the interactions with some women activists, for example, their frustration emerged as they claimed that their massive participation and contribution was not being given adequate visibility, while leadership positions in the political wings of the movement seemed to remain the prerogative of Hindu upper caste men[200].

All these different voices appear to have little room for articulating their claims in the mainstream political discourse, while finding space at the grassroots, in district-level politics, in the protest of the students, in intellectual debates and in the work of social activists. For example, one of the sources that have turned out to be particularly useful for the understanding of this dynamics within the Telangana struggle, otherwise invisible if relying only on politicians' discourses, is the "Broadsheet on Contemporary Politics" published by ANVESHI, a women's organisation located in the city of Hyderabad. The publication contains a number of articles appeared in Telugu newspapers and translated into Urdu and English in order to make them available to the wider public. Most of the articles reflect a debate among the less visible sections in the movement such as Muslims, Dalits and women. All of them, though speaking from the standpoint of their own political positioning, seem to lament a progressive restriction of their space and visibility, caused by the "communal" turn that the struggle has acquired in the leadership's rhetoric.

Once again, a communal discourse seems to have the effect of veiling social tensions generated from demands for radical social change, which imply a subversion of existing relations of power in society. It also veils the very foundations of such inequalities, by shifting the meanings of discourses and practices into the sphere of Hindu-Muslim relations and their respective positioning. It strengthens a hegemonic politics of religious identity while at the same time weakening strategic politics of identity coming from the lower sections of society.

The fundamental demands that Muslim, women, lower caste activists pose lose visibility (but not relevance) in the struggle over a reinterpretation of the movement's history and political symbols along a Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm. Most of the internal critics of the Telangana movement mention *Hindutva* forces as the main responsible for the new twist in the ideological framework. Indeed, the impression of a strengthening of

[200] Conversation with women social activists, May 2011.

Hindutva propaganda in Hyderabad after the resurgence of the Telangana struggle seems to find confirmation in the previously unseen massive celebrations of the religious festival of *Hanuman Jayanti*. The rallies have started in 2009 and have seen the participation of *Hindutva* religious leaders from North India[201].

However, it is important to note that the current ideological position is not the prerogative of political forces identified with the Hindu Right. Other political parties, such as the Communist Party of India (CPI) and the *Telangana Rashtra Samiti* (TRS – the Party for the Telangana Nation) have embraced the anti-Nizam rhetoric. Actually, it is their position, rather that the BJP's, that is particularly disturbing in the eyes of the internal critics who often attribute the problem to a conservative upper caste leadership in the movement, which operates transversally to political parties. This aspect also helps to situate the current analysis within the framework of relations among different sections of society in a social order of domination and social polarisation. At the political level, the Telangana struggle seems to be undergoing a process of boundary definition, which through a context-specific politics of religious identity based on the symbols and signs relevant for the movement, reinstates existing unequal power relations in society. What certain sections of the movement lament is the limitation and reduction of their spaces for agency in the process of reproducing relations of super/subordination within the movement itself.

The key issue at this point is to identify different possible sites of political action. On the one hand, the communalisation of the political symbolism in the Telangana movement seems to be entailing a restriction of possibilities for political action along the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm. On the other, however, it appears to be triggering an internal debate and even attempts to build connections among those sections that feel left out from the official rhetoric. In fact, the reflections of the women's movement in Andhra Pradesh on women's participation in the historical Telangana struggle (1946-1952) are particularly insightful for a critical standpoint vis-à-vis the challenges the current movement is facing, and the multiplicity of voices articulating their own agendas within it. In an interesting essay, V. Kannabiran and Lalita tell the story of the historical Telangana struggle from the perspective of the women who took part in it. They show how their engagement was experienced also as

[201] Videos of the rallies are visible on YouTube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1PMmxEBQnHs , http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Isqr2Age2Y&feature=related , last accessed on 12 October 2011.

an instrument for emancipation from the patriarchal social system and a way to ensure a position from which to negotiate their own needs and perspectives in a more equal society. However, their support to the movement did not entail an articulated criticism of its functioning along patriarchal hierarchies. The authors comment that while gender-related problems "were taken up in an attempt to involve women, we do not find that there was an awareness of these gender specific areas as valid sites of political struggle" (Kannabiran & Lalita, 1989, p. 187). Despite speaking about the times of the struggle as "magic", some of the women who participated in it express their deep disappointment vis-à-vis their position both within the movement during their militancy and in society in the years after the armed struggle was suppressed. Once the fighting was over, the old distinctions between the private and the public and the locations of women and men in them had not been shaken at their roots. No liberation was there to greet them at the threshold of their homes. Their realisation was that there can be no freedom from socio-economic exploitation without gender justice and that the latter cannot be expected to be a necessary outcome of a political and militant engagement in favour of the former (Kannabiran & Lalita, 1989).

I contend that similar issues of visibility, militancy and definition of a political agenda are confronting the less visible sections of the Telangana separatist movement today. However, the (in)visibility of certain fundamental tensions and their articulation as critique to the official discourse and as strategic politics of identity is one of the main challenges to the movement and at the same an opportunity to bring about social change from the grassroots.

In this sense, I would like to draw from Tharu's and Niranjana's idea of the "micro-politics of everyday life" in order to clarify my perspective on the potential for social change contained in the different dimensions intersecting within the discursive landscape of the movement for a separate Telangana state. The concept acknowledges the political relevance of certain actions and discourses outside the space of party politics. As mentioned in Section 2.4, Tharu's and Niranjana's perspective reattaches a political meaning to actions taken by subjugated voices in society, which are sometimes located outside the official political scene. The challenge that a communal discourse poses to the visibility of the multiple dimensions and tensions that unfold in the Telangana movement is also an opportunity for such standpoints to articulate different perspectives within it and to find alternative ways to make their voice heard both as

criticism of and contribution to the movement itself. ANVESHI's broadsheet of contemporary politics is one example, among others, of an attempt to bring to the surface an existing exchange and dialogue on the meaning of the political symbols, the representations of history and their implications for the relations of power among different sections of the movement. From the perspective of this research, the broadsheet represents both an archival resource and a reflection on a political positioning, committed to give more sound to existing voices and perspectives otherwise hardly audible within the official discourse of the socio-political movement.

A scholar and activists in the Telangana struggle explained to me that the vision behind their engagement with, for example, contrasting interpretations of history is that, in fact, different perspectives might coexist. They might become a mirror, which reflects the complexity of the movement, but they must be located outside mechanisms that reproduce a hegemonic discourse of domination and polarisation reflected in practices of social exclusion and violence[202]. Even though the communalisation of symbols and narratives has the effect to relegate these various perspectives into less visible spaces of political action, as Tharu and Niranjana argue, the locations and forms of the political are multiple and transforming across and within different categories and denominations (Tharu & Niranjana, 1994).

Figure 9. Proposed Telangana (north) and Andhra (south) states[203]

[202] Conversation with a scholar activist, June 2011.

[203] Source: http://telanganastatepoll.wordpress.com/tag/andhra-pradesh-gentlemans-agreement/ last accessed on 03 November 2011.

6.2.2 Marking the Political Boundaries: the Case of Taslima Nasreen

The reflections on the movement for a separate Telangana state show the implications of a communal ideology for the positioning of different sections of a political movement across the category of the religious community. In this section, I would like to explore how such paradigm works for the configuration of the internal boundaries and the political representation of the "Muslim religious community", occupying a position of relative lack of power vis-à-vis other social entities and the state. In that sense, I propose a reflection on the implications in terms of visibility of other forms of agency unravelling outside the politics of communalism. In order to illustrate my argument, I will focus on an episode happened in Hyderabad in August 2007. In the event, members of a local political party engaged in a violent action which, in my opinion, symbolically aimed at marking the boundaries of the "minority religious community" and at asserting the party's self-designation as representatives of the Muslims in the city.

My perspective on the event does not aim at narrating the way in which or the actual reasons why the action was taken. These are in fact controversial and not particularly relevant aspects for the purposes of this chapter. The focus is instead on the implications of certain official political discourses and practices, implicated in configuring the boundaries of the religious community with respect to both internal and external dynamics of power.

On 9 August 2007, during a book launch event in Hyderabad, Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen was attacked by members of the local political party AIMIM who not only damaged the venue premises, but also threw objects and shouted derogatory slogans at the writer. It is important to note that the woman has been for some years at the centre of an ideological controversy. The debate revolves around the provocative position articulated in her novel *Lajja* (Shame) vis-à-vis Hindu-Muslim relations and episodes of violence in Bangladesh and her open, harsh and at times demeaning criticism towards religion and what she sees as forms of gender discrimination practiced in its name. After receiving death threats following the publication of the novel, which is still banned in the country together with her other two books, Taslima fled Bangladesh, settled in Kolkata but was then forced to leave in 2007.

According to some accounts[204], after the attack in Hyderabad, members of the political party asserted that, should Taslima Nasreen come back to the city, they would try to implement the death "fatwa" pending on her. The action was officially motivated as a protest against her writings and her presence in Hyderabad, portrayed as an offence to all Muslim people. The party's official position also claimed that in a country like India, "where the sentiments of all communities are respected"[205], the circulation of such books and the presence of provocateurs like her should not be permitted.

What I propose here is an attempt to locate the whole event and its implications into the wider discourse of interfaith relations in Hyderabad and the extent to which political discourses and practices contribute to define the boundaries of the "Muslim religious community" along a communal paradigm. For that purpose, I would like to focus on the idea of "outraged communities", the processes of their configuration and the implications for the political discourse and the wider social relations[206]. Riaz argues that the boundaries of a "community" can be configured through a politics of emotions, crucial for mobilising against a danger coming from outside (Riaz, 2008). The threat is usually perceived as an insult towards the moral and founding values of the "community" itself. This cultural core is thus articulated, naturalised and elevated as distinctive of the community in the process of defining the menacing contours of the object of outrage. In a way, the notion also helps understand processes of legitimisation of certain discourses and practices, assuming specific moral connotations within the relationship between the object and the subject of outrage. In that sense, the significance of the assault on Taslima for the assertion of a certain political discourse is quite relevant in at least two ways in the context of defining the positioning of the party as representative of the "Muslim community" in Hyderabad and the methods and parameters for asserting its boundaries[207]. First of all, the attack was justified as a response to Taslima's sharply critical standpoint vis-à-vis certain social practices legitimised in the name of religion. The woman deliberately speaks about Islam and religion in general as obscurantist forces, responsible for social tensions and inequalities

[204] http://www.zeenews.com/news388105.html last access 18 May 2011, "Muslim lawmakers attack Taslima Nasreen", http://in.reuters.com/article/2007/08/09/idINIndia-28903220070809 last access 18 May 2011.

[205] http://www.zeenews.com/news388105.html last access 18 May 2011,

[206] For a discussion on the concept of "outraged communities" see "'Outraged Communities': Comparative Perspectives on the Politicization of Emotion in South Asia", South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal (SAMAJ), (2), 2008. Available at http://samaj.revues.org/index234.html, last accessed on 10 October 2011.

[207] It is worth noting that the Muslim Intellectual Forum, together with many other public figures and common citizens, of India condemned the attack.

in her country and for episodes of violence perpetrated against minorities[208]. Leaving aside my personal positioning regarding such statements, I think what is more interesting to note here is the way in which the mobilisation against her presence in Hyderabad has been conducted and justified in the name of defending the moral and physical integrity of the Muslim community.

Second, the use of violent speech and behaviour was regarded as a way to respond to Taslima's intellectually provocative positions. Though the question of the use of violence will be dealt with more in-depth in the following chapter, it is still worth noting that violence in this case is not represented as a possible outcome of social tensions but the very form in which they are expressed and framed. In the politics of communalism, in which the stativity and homogeneity of the "religious community" as the ultimate and fundamental site for political action is projected as constantly under threat, violence is one of the means through which its boundaries are re-asserted.

In an interview appeared on a news website few days after the event, the leader of the AIMIM and MP Asaduddin Owaisi affirms that the episode was not an attack but a protest against her presence in Hyderabad and that protesting is a fundamental right of every citizen. The semantic distinction here is quite significant as violence retains its negative connotation in the context of an "attack" but is reframed and somewhat cleansed when read as "protest". In that sense, the construction of the outraged Muslim community renders the action against Taslima Nasreen justifiable in the name of restoring the dignity and consolidating the moral boundaries of the collectivity.

Most importantly, according to the party's workers, their action was not addressed at the presence of the writer alone, but at the organisation of the book launch by Hindu Right-wing organisations, which gave a provocative flavour to whole event. Thus, though at a first look the episode does not seem to have much to do with a communal discourse, significantly enough, the narratives of the protagonists frame it exactly in terms of a Muslim vs. *Hindutva* dialectic. In the same interview, Owaisi states that

> the most important point, which has not got highlighted, is that the organizers are known Hindutva and Sangh Parivar members[209]. They did not even inform the local police. They didn't inform central agencies that she will be in Hyderabad. We are just fortunate that we

[208] For more on her positions vis-à-vis such issues, see the articles and statements published on her website http://taslimanasrin.com/index2.html . Last accessed on 12 October 2011.

[209] Sangh Parivar is an umbrella Hindu Right organisation, main proponent of the Hindutva ideology.

came to know when this function was about to end. We decided immediately that we should protest her visit. We wanted the message to go to Indian government and Indian people that this person has no other work apart from nuisance, creating division, provoking Muslims by hurting their religious sentiments[210].

Thus, taking action against Taslima Nasreen is justified by Owaisi because the event had been organised to hurt the feelings of the Muslim community and disrupt peace in Hyderabad (just few lines above he states: "Hyderabad has a long history of harmony between communities we don't want this environment to be polluted"). It becomes confrontational because of its implications within a discourse of potential Hindu-Muslim conflict and for the definition of the positioning of political leaders as representatives of a "minority religious communities" vis-à-vis such discursive landscape. According to Owaisi, the surreptitious way in which the book launch had been organised led to an escalation of the protest that was anyway not meant to harm the woman. Violence is somehow reduced to an inevitable consequence of the "communal" character of the whole event.

A similar position was expressed by two Muslim women activists with whom I interacted in Hyderabad. I asked them their opinion regarding the matter and, though they considered the action instrumental to enhance the visibility of the party and raise support for electoral purposes, they did not entirely condemn the idea of taking initiative against intellectuals who insult religious sentiments. In particular, they were stressing the fact that the writer should not call herself a Muslim, even though I have not found any material confirming such self-identification by Taslima Nasreen[211]. Their perspective was in fact more focused on the insulting way in which Taslima Nasreen speaks about Islam and on the inopportunity of her visit to Hyderabad, rather than on the (in)appropriateness of the action taken by politicians. In line with Owaisi's statement, the two women maintained that the protest was not aimed at harming her but at intimidating and preventing her from returning to Hyderabad in the future. They also shared however, that actions like those taken by the AIMIM tend to have the opposite effect of increasing the woman's visibility instead of harming her public image[212]. It is

[210] Asaduddin Owaisi's words reported in "Taslima is a threat to peace: Asad Owaisi", http://www.indianmuslims.info/news/2007/aug/13/taslima_threat_peace_asad_owaisi.html , last accessed 18 May 2011.

[211] In fact, the writer refuses association with any religion. See for example the statements in her official website http://taslimanasrin.com/index2.html.

[212] Conversations with women activists, 23 May 2011.

quite interesting to note that resorting to violence in the name of defending offended religious sentiments is in this context not considered wrong but at most, strategically unsound.

Taslima Nasreen is the embodiment of the threat and insult to the religious community especially because she is considered a Muslim by birth. As noted by Riaz, she personifies the "enemy within" (Riaz, 2008, p. 18) to the point that her being physically present in Hyderabad is offensive. She must be chased away and threatened because she, with her presence, dishonours, offends and provokes the "Muslims" of Hyderabad.

After the incident in Hyderabad and her later expulsion from West Bengal state where she was living in exile, Taslima Nasreen became the site of a battle for asserting the boundaries of political representation, which in turn configure the religious community's boundaries within a paradigm of communal conflict. She was appropriated by Hindu Right activists in an unusual and evidently instrumental battle for freedom of speech against "Islamic fundamentalists" and attacked by some Muslim political parties claiming to represent the hurt religious sentiments of the entire "Muslim community".

This appropriation of religion and its naturalisation as a homogeneous and static space from which to launch political activity and violent confrontations makes matters of religious feelings and orthodoxy the only visible axis of political activity, erasing from the stage a debate on the issues of cultural, structural and direct forms of violence cutting across different social spaces in political representations and "minority-majority" relations.

Moreover, it veils the multiple ways in which elected representatives engage with the people beyond the rhetoric of religious identity. The AIMIM, which has in the years been attributed and has partly earned the image of a male-dominated, violence-prone party, interested in land grabbing and keen to communal propaganda, has a very strong electoral base in the Old city of Hyderabad, where a majority of people of Muslim faith live. Some observers and political antagonists of the party attribute this success to the manipulation of people's feelings along "communal" lines. In fact, my interactions with people from the Old city, as well as a discussion with a scholar activist, M. A. Moid who conducted research in the party's headquarters, reveal that voters in fact exercise their agency based on their experiences with a multifaceted AIMIM's presence in the area. While the Old city suffers from visible neglect in terms

of services, housing, jobs, the AIMIM attracts votes also by offering responses to the everyday problems of the people, being them related to personal or community issues[213]. The AIMIM represents a sort of institution that in a way functions as a political party, a symbol, a business centre, an interest group, a service provider, a dispute settler, to which people resort for the management of everyday life issues. According to Moid, its legitimacy among the voters is probably also connected to this multidimensional presence in the Old city, which combines vested interests with a strong rootedness at the grassroots level[214].

However, in the realm of official politics, in a system in which the politics of religious identity has become institutionalised along negative stereotypes and forms of exclusion against the category of "the Muslims", the party seems to be seeking official legitimacy by reinforcing its image of representative of the "Muslim community", in a context of social, political and institutional marginalisation.

Thus, the paradigm of communalism is deeply implicated in the definition of the religious community's boundaries as a homogeneous political entity in a context of oppositional positionings. In this respect, however, it also leaves limited scope for a broader understanding of political mobilisation along religious lines, beyond the Hindu-Muslim dichotomy, and within an understanding of the "religious community" as a dynamic space for multiple forms of social and cultural mobilisation and practices of solidarity. The essentialisation of religion as the single axis of the political discourse prevents the articulation of forms of political consciousness among people of Muslim faith in the Old city across multiple dimensions and outside the limitations of a rhetoric of victimisation. In that sense, even a "minority" political representation reinforces the parameters of a social order of domination and social polarisation that reproduces and at the same time conceals inequalities within, between and across the boundaries of religious communities.

[213] Conversation with inhabitants of Sultan Shahi, 1 September 2010. Conversation with M.A. Moid, a scholar activist, 8 June 2011.

[214] A similar argument is offered by Javed Alam. (Alam, 1993).

6.3 THE BOUNDARIES OF RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN THE LEGAL DISCOURSE

This section focuses on specific themes which are relevant to the political and legal debates in Hyderabad and, more in general, in India. It seeks to explore their configuration and the implications that a communal paradigm has for their articulation in terms of Hindu-Muslim relations and for the positioning of different social categories along this discursive axis. It explores the debate on the reform of the personal law as defined through a discourse of communalism. With respect to this theme, I argue that such a paradigm reflects unfolding power relations among different sections of society and has specific implications for the definition of the terms of the debate, the visibility of certain issues and tensions and the attribution of social locations to the different categories that are defined and designated in these very discourses. In particular, I am interested in the way in which the very notion of the "religious community" is taken as the central unit of the discourse, defined either as the site of gender oppression and socio-economic backwardness or the space for gender and socio-economic emancipation.

The way in which the legal discourse is entangled with and contributes to shape boundaries of religious communities is discussed throughout this work with reference to specific themes. The purpose of this section is to show how "religious communities" have become the subject of legal discourse and how in turn debates and narratives about law and its enforcement contribute to shape their boundaries. In the process, multiple inequalities have been not only overlooked but also reinforced by legislations and debates about legal reform grounded on "Hindu" and "Muslim" religions as the fundamental axes of social diversity. Chapter 4 discusses the way in which the colonial state participated in the communalisation of society through the introduction of legal reforms which institutionalised a Brahminical social order while simultaneously reinforcing the rhetoric of the British "civilising mission". Thus, examples such as the debate about the abolition of *sati* and the introduction of the ban on cow slaughter contributed to universalising Brahminical religious texts as not only the sources of legislation but also of moral conduct, while at the same time concealing the multiple inequalities perpetuated through the process of their institutionalisation across gender, socio-economic and religious lines. Thus, the colonial state and its legitimisation through legal discourse had an impact on the definition of the boundaries of religious

communities and the power relations among different sections of society within and across them.

Of particular interest in that sense is that the communalisation of society through legal discourse passes through the rhetoric of equality which paradoxically reproduces asymmetric power relations among different sections of society across gender and socio-economic lines. The relevance of the law in providing the ground for the text and context of interfaith relations in India is connected with the ambiguous debate regarding Indian secularism explored in Section 2.2.3, translating in a form of "majoritarianism" that homogenises an internally sharply unequal Hindu fold and excludes other "religious communities"[215].

In her "Politics of Diversity", Sangari touches specifically upon the debate regarding the personal law reform in India. She points out how the discourse is confined to two main, opposed, standpoints: reform from without religious community, which would be crafted by the state mainly along the provisions of a reformed Hindu code, or from within, in line with the idea of self-definition and determination of minorities. Both positions appeal to notions of secularism and equality. According to Sangari, the fundamental problem related to a distinction between a space within and one without a defined religious community is that it ties up the issue of gender justice exclusively to religious belief, and relegates such combination to a private sphere separated from the public one. By relying on a distinction between private and public sphere, this position situates the question of gender relations in a domestic realm governed by religious norms.

Accordingly, debates on the issue of reform of the personal law systems tend to move along two possible lines: an internal self-regulation of a "religious community" or a common framework bestowed by a "neutral" and "secular" state upon the social space identified as the fundamental site of patriarchal oppression, namely the religious/domestic realm.

It leaves no room for a broader reflection on the complexity of gender relations in society beyond the private/religious space, because it defines that particular location and regards it as the locus of gender relations. Moreover, it feeds stereotypes concerning

[215] Another example in which the legal discourse provides the ground for the legitimisation of social inequalities along "communal" lines is provided by the case of Rameeza Bee, discussed in Section 7.2.2 in which the discourse about rape and murder is developed in the court at the intersection of religious, gender and socio-economic dimensions.

which religious system is more oppressive towards women. Such discursive trajectories are crucial for the construction of religious difference in terms of Hindu-Muslim conflict[216].

Sangari also maintains that the identification of religious communities, the definition of their boundaries and the location of patriarchal forms of interaction exclusively within such categories restricts the options for social change. Her main point is that approaches identifying a quintessentially religious form of patriarchy, neglect the fact that "patriarchies are intrinsically part of the wider social formation" (Sangari, 1995, p. 3293) and not determined by religion alone. It configures the legal boundaries of religious communities, in which the question of gender justice is tackled vis-à-vis women's position in the family, the latter being defined according to an alleged religious norm. In this case, the very notion of religious community is simplified as a discrete, homogenous and static entity, representing all people of the same faith, at the cultural, political and socio-economic levels. It overlooks the multiplicity of religious experiences outside a dominant orthodoxy and the intersection of patriarchies with multiple social spaces beyond religion and with other forms of social inequality, tensions and violence[217]. Moreover, it defines a sole, encompassing form of gender inequality which is determined by specific practices considered the marker of women's oppression, while overlooking the multiple ways in which gender structures power relations, defining forms of super/subordination in society.

Of particular interest for the purposes of this chapter is to identify some of the discourses that intersect within the politics of personal law reform in the context of a debate regarding the position of women in the family and within the more general issue of provisions for "minorities". I would like to show how these questions are articulated within a discourse of Hindu-Muslim relations, which often contributes to conceal the tensions inherent in the process of its definition.

In my interactions with people from Hyderabad city, I have found that different perspectives on such issues are implicated in the demarcation of religious communities' boundaries, their social, economic and political location and the position of women within them.

[216] See Chapter 4 for a more in-depth discussion of the production of religious difference in discourses of hostile interfaith relations.

[217] For a perspective on the practices of a Sufi woman healer with respect to religious "heterodoxy", gender and interfaith relations see (Flueckiger, 2006).

Chapter 4 discusses the ways in which religious difference is articulated as discourses of communalism within the ideology of *Hindutva*. One of the elements that emerged in that discussion is that such narratives contain a fundamental paradox: while being grounded on forms of othering, they lack a reflection on these very processes, the relative positioning and different articulations of political agency that unfold in them, their social location and their visibility. More in general, the way in which power relations are configured is not made evident in such discourses, but is instead naturalised as the differences between "religious traditions" and their practices.

In a similar way, in discourses of legal reform or minority legislation, the identification of the religious community as the fundamental locus of gender discrimination and socio-economic disadvantage has the effect of concealing the forms of cultural, structural and direct violence that are expressed in and constitute the very process of defining the majority/minority religious communities and their boundaries. At the same time, it veils the multiple tensions, forms of interaction and agency that unfold within and across the category of the religious community, and which defy stereotypes about the dichotomy of oppressed/emancipated on which these views tend to be grounded.

Rauf argues that the debate regarding the status of the Muslim community in India has prioritised "issues of poverty over social exclusion, absolute measures over relative ones, deprivation over inequality, and economic efficiency over social cohesion" (Rauf, 2011, p. 69)[218]. In that sense, the politics of the religious community tends to veil the power inequalities that cut across the main conflict narrative of Hindu vs. Muslim, reproducing, legitimising and at the same time naturalising the standpoint of those occupying the higher ladder of the social hierarchy.

This mechanism emerges in the exploration of the debate on personal law reform and special legislation for minorities, which tends to locate within the "religious community" (Muslim) the cause of women's oppression and socio-economic disadvantage. Such perspective denies on the one hand the existing structural disadvantage Muslims and other social categories experience in India today and on the other the way in which multiple patriarchies find expression in different social spaces,

[218] Similarly, in a study on societal attribution, Cristina Montiel, Maria Elizabeth and J. Macapagal argue that in asymmetric conflicts, "groups enjoying the fruits of the dominant structure tend to be oblivious to structural causes of social problems while marginalized groups remain sensitive to the structural arrangement that gives rise to their misery" (Montiel & Macapagal, 2006, p. 221).

intersecting with other social tensions. This perspective does not translate into a denial of how religion as institution and axis for social organisation is implicated in the production of hegemony and gender discrimination. Quite the opposite, it tries to unveil these very processes by focusing on the definition of the religious orthodoxy as one axis of power which participates in the definition of different social locations and relations of super/subordination in society. In the process, however, it departs from the assimilation of religion with religious community, but explores the discursive fields in which such categories unfold to configure relations of power among different sections of society.

In order to make my claim clearer, I will analyse some of the views shared by the people with whom I have interacted on the questions of personal law reform on the one hand, and reservation quotas in education and government jobs for Muslims on the other.

6.3.1 Gender, Religious Community and the Politics of Personal Law Reform

There is an extensive body of literature focusing on personal law reform in India, the debate on the introduction of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and the position of women in society[219].

In different analyses and perspectives, the issues of gender equality, the position of women in the family and the reform of personal law seem to be closely embedded with the processes of defining religious communities' boundaries[220].

The example quoted in Section 4.2.3 on the discourse articulated openly, but not exclusively, by *Hindutva* people with respect to this topic are quite revealing of the rhetoric legitimating an intervention to "liberate" Muslim women from the provisions of the *Shariat* law. Such discourse locates the problem of gender oppression within the boundaries of the Muslim community, whose personal law system needs to be amended in line with the existing Hindu code[221].

[219] See for example, (Agnes, 2001; Agnes, 2005; Hasan & Menon, 2005; Hasan Z. , 1994; Parasher, 1992; Narain, 2001).

[220] See also Chapter 4.

[221] The passing of the so-called "Hindu Code Bill" was presented to the Constituent Assembly in 1948 but was then divided into three main tokens because of the debate it stirred. It was aimed at providing a civil code for the "Hindus" of India and contained provisions regarding marriage, maintenance, divorce, adoption, inheritance. It applies to all those who are not Muslim, Christian of Jew by religion. For a perspective on the Hindu Code Bill and its implications for power relations in society see (Kishwar, 1994; Newbigin, 2008).

With respect to this aspect, I would like to refer again to the words of a *Hindutva* activist quoted in Section 4.2.3, articulating a non-well specified notion of "Hindu culture" characterised by an inherent respect, bordering with devotion, towards women. Interestingly, such image is contrasted with a "typically Muslim" oppression of women. The part of the conversation more relevant for the argument developed here is the subsequent claim that the respective Hindu and Muslim personal law systems reflect such a "cultural difference" [222]. In his view, the oppression to which women are subject under Islam is not acceptable in a "secular" country like India, mirroring a widespread rhetoric whereby Hinduism is a tolerant and more advanced "religious system" with respect to Islam and therefore, paradoxically, the legitimate carrier of Indian secularism.

In her analysis of the legal discourse surrounding the "Shahbano controversy"[223] (i.e. Mohd. Ahmed Khan *versus* Shah Bano Begum & Ors), Kishwar shows how the judgement's framing of women's right to maintenance is grounded on a stigmatisation of "Muslim personal law" and the "Muslim community" as backward, oppressive and patriarchal. Kishwar quotes a passage of the judgement that is worth reporting here for purposes of clarity:

> Undoubtedly, the Muslim husband enjoys the privilege of being able to discard his wife whenever he chooses to do so, for reasons good, bad or indifferent. Indeed, for no reason at all[224].

Later, the judgement states that

> A common Civil Code will help the cause of national integration by removing disparate loyalties to laws which have conflicting ideologies. No community is likely to bell the cat by making gratuitous concessions on this issue. It is the State which is charged with the duty of securing a uniform civil code for the citizens of the country and, unquestionably, it has the legislative competence to do so. A counsel in the case whispered, somewhat audibly, that legislative competence is one thing, the political courage to use that competence is quite another. We understand the difficulties involved in bringing persons of different faiths and persuasions on a common platform. But a beginning has to be made if the Constitution is to have any meaning (Ibid).

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[222] Conversation with a *Hindutva* activist, 23 June 2011. See Section 4.2.1 for a perspective on the implications that the imagery of the mother as a goddess has in the context of defining the boundaries of a *Hindutva* ideology and the position of women within it.

[223] Shahbano was a 65-year-old divorced woman who was granted maintenance rights by the High Court of Madhya Pradesh in 1979. Her husband, Mohd. Ahmed Khan appealed to the Supreme Court claiming that the High Court's judgement conflicted with the Muslim Personal Law provisions. The Supreme Court however dismissed Mohd. Ahmed Khan appeal and upheld the maintenance order. See (Mullally, 2004, p. 678).

[224] Mohd. Ahmed Khan *versus* Shah Bano Begum & Ors. AIR 1985 SC 945 (23 April 1985), available at: http://www.rishabhdara.com/sc/view.php?case=8401 accessed on 12 October 2011.

Kishwar argues that the judgement singles out Muslim men and Islam as the perpetrators of gender oppression in Indian society, which finds legitimisation in the Muslim Personal Law. From there, it derives an argument in favour of a Uniform Civil Code, which would grant justice to women. The whole discourse brings us back to the "plight of Muslim women" as a fundamental theme to demarcate religious communities' boundaries in terms of minority/majority, backward/developed, communal/secular. In this particular case, a judgement under Criminal Law (S. 125 Cr. PC – maintenance for indigent women) becomes the starting point for the articulation of the discourse disqualifying Muslim personal law as non-conform to the Constitution, based on its mistreatment of "wives". Most interestingly, the judgement awarding maintenance to Shah Bano stirred a strong opposition amongst the members of the Muslim Personal Law Board as going against Muslim Personal Law's provisions. The national debate on the issue, echoed in the media, immediately froze on the plane of communalism vs. secularism and minority vs. universal legislation. In 1986, Rajiv Gandhi's government issued the "Muslim Women (Protection of Rights in Divorce) Act", which limited the obligation of maintenance to Muslim women to the period of *iddat* (around 3 months). The provision was considered a victory of the conservative forces within the "Muslim community" and as a proof of the government's politics of "appeasement of minorities". It gave strength to a discourse of communalism and to the rise of the Hindu Right in the mainstream political debate (Mullally, 2004, pp. 681-685). Thus, the discourse grounded on Muslim women's rights was in fact shifted on a debate on Muslim Personal Law vs. Uniform Civil Code, Islam vs. secularism, minority vs. majority and, ultimately, Muslim vs. Hindu. It shows how the legal discourse and in particular the debate on personal law is regarded as a "communal" issue, grounded on the rhetoric of (Muslim) women's rights.

This perspective has at least two main implications. First of all, it is detached from the lived experiences of everyday gendered relations and practices in the wider social realm, through and despite the religious-based personal law. It identifies and selects certain practices as constitutive of Islam and its legal system, and derives from this a further element for constructing the image of the "backward" Muslim woman. It completely overlooks the multiplicity of experiences of women and men within and across a narrowly defined religious orthodoxy (which is equated in this discourse with a "religious community"), the intersection of various dimensions in the construction of

gendered social locations and their constant negotiation. Significantly, Kishwar notes that the way the case was discussed in the media made Shah Bano "feel as if by asserting her rights as a woman, she was exposing her already very vulnerable community to further attack". Thus, while Shah Bano continued to maintain that her husband had been unjust to her, she requested the Supreme Court to withdraw its judgment as "she did not want to be the cause of anti-Muslim riots" (Kishwar, 1986, p. 5). In Chapter 4 I have mentioned the way in which several Muslim women with which I interacted during my fieldwork articulate an understandings of agency, emancipation, gender equality in multiple and varied ways, notwithstanding the dress codes they choose or are expected to follow. What they mostly focus on is their everyday experience as women in the family, the community, the society and the spaces of action they negotiate at the intersection of religion, age, socio-economic positioning, culture, disability, health etc. as gendered dimensions which define and are in turn defined by their being women.

A second implication of the assimilation of the personal law debate with a communal paradigm relates to its blindness towards the forms of gendered cultural, structural and direct violence practiced across the different social categories featuring in discourses of interfaith relations, and therefore also within what *Hindutva* activists identify each time as the "Hindu community". In fact, the very Hindu Code fails to account for the multiplicity of customs widespread among all the peoples regrouped under the "Hindu" banner by imposing homogenising principles based on an anglicised version of Brahminical, mainly North Indian customs[225]. Moreover, it does not address and in fact renders more impervious the access of women to some fundamental rights like, for example, property in marriage (Agnes, 2000, pp. 106-137). Agnes's criticism in this respect allows for a reflection over the implications that a static and homogenising notion of religious community such as the "Hindu" has for articulating political and legal action and in particular for concealing the pluralism of voices and practices in favour of a dominant, "orthodox" perspective.

As Hasan and Menon argue, the problem of personal law "has been articulated within the framework of a religious discourse". In that sense, it lacks a real engagement with the everyday experiences of women within and across boundaries of religious

[225] For a perspective on the principles upon which a homogenising Hindu Code has discarded Dravidian customary practices in marriage see (Uberoi, 2009).

communities and the multiple structural forms of subordination in society (Hasan & Menon, 2005, p. 5). The invisibility of the processes through which such hegemonic discourses are constructed allow for the positioning of the "Hindu community" as a homogenous and fixed entity, engaged in a sort of *mission civilisatrice* with respect to Indian society in general and to Muslims in particular. This rhetoric is justified in the name of women's liberation, much like the colonial legislation analysed in Sections 4.2.3 and 4.3.2. Such an endeavour has its fundamental momentum in the debate about personal law reform[226].

In this discourse, the construction of the Muslim and Hindu communities takes place at the intersection of gender and law, defining its boundaries vis-à-vis a representation of men-women relations under Islamic vs. Hindu law. It also reinforces an image of the Muslim man as oppressor, disinterested of his own family and of Muslim women as devoid of any agency vis-à-vis their position in the family, the community and the society. In such discourses the Hindu-Muslim paradigm seems to exhaust the possible angles through which the question of personal law reform is discussed.

In this respect, for example, some Muslim women expressed an opposite, but in some ways, complementary position to that of the *Hindutva* activist. In a conversation regarding the debate on the personal law reform two women argued that Muslim personal law is based on religious sources and cannot be changed[227]. In their case, appeal to the sacredness of the scriptures becomes the way to counter *Hindutva* claims in the context of a politics of religious identity. In their stance vis-à-vis the impossibility to amend or reform the personal law they remain within the limitations of the religious dimension and the boundaries of the religious community as defined by a communal paradigm. The issue is confined to a discursive field that, as argued throughout this work, completely overlooks the different dimensions and the social tensions that contribute to define the positions of women in the family, the communities and society.

[226] It is interesting to note how a similar perspective seems to be at work in the context of a recent mobilisation against systematic corruption in the public administration in India. Forms of protest led by spiritual and political leaders close to Hindu Right organisations seem to have appropriated the discursive field of the mobilisation, strengthening the pan-Indian moralising image of the BJP and the *Hindutva* movement in general with respect to India social and political systems.

[227] Conversation with two Muslim women, 23 May 2011.

While gender relations are inscribed in the wider social structures and processes, the issue of personal law reform remains restricted within a discourse of religion and Hindu-Muslim relations.

The defensive attitude of some people of Muslim faith vis-à-vis personal law reform is also a result of the pervasiveness of this Hindu-Muslim dichotomy on which discourses of Indian secularism/communalism rest. In the struggle for gaining a hegemonic position these narratives appeal to the "secular values" of the Indian state among which gender equality is located, in contrast to the conservative and oppressive "Islamic religious norms". Significantly, such "secular values" are articulated within a discourse of the superiority of Hindu law with respect to Muslim law in granting equal rights to women and men. Thus, Hinduism becomes the champion of Indian secularism. Again, while the notion of equality acquires a specific connotation that attempts to accommodate the contradictions inherent in the ambiguous notion of a "Hindu community", the boundaries of religious communities are marked in terms of majority/minority, forward/backward, progressive/conservative along the axis of gender.

In fact, the whole debate seems to only marginally touch upon issues of gender in law and in the society. It rather shifts the focus on a demarcation and identification of a social category (Muslim religious community) as needing a reform of its internal personal law because of the "religious regime" that governs it. It then discusses women's rights in relation to religion and a private sphere (the community and the family), relegating issues of gender to either an intervention of the "secular" state (on the religious community's personal law) or of the self-governing and reform of the religious community's itself.

As Sangari points out, however, there is a fundamental problem in this perspective which resides in the terms of the debate and the very category of the "religious community". It seems to imply that women are governed only by family law and that any reform can be passed only through either an internal reform or a homogenising process of secularisation/Hinduisation.

Both ways present however underlying flaws. In the first case, the issue of gender equality is inextricably connected with a notion of religious orthodoxy whereby any attempt to argue against certain practices is regarded as an attack to religious sentiments. On the other hand, the homogenisation of personal law along the provisions

of the Hindu Code reproduces the perspective of a dominant section of society (by no means identifiable only with "the Hindus" but rather the expression of a Brahminical pervasive ideology and social practice) which erases demands for self-definition and determination of other constituencies. It is interesting to note how in this approach centred in the category of the "religious community" women disappear from the debate which is shifted on the plane of state-minority, minority-majority, and Muslim-Hindu relations. These very categories become hegemonic standpoints vis-à-vis an actual reflection on the relations between gender differentials and the law in India and how this translates into discriminatory social practices sanctioned by a notion of (non)conformity with a "religious and cultural tradition". (Sangari, 1995).

According to one of the activists with whom I interacted, the official position of Muslim religious leaders regarding the issue of personal law reform remains conservative and hostile with respect to the idea of a UCC precisely because of the position of both so-called secular and *Hindutva* leaders[228]. In the process, what is overlooked is the very issue of gender relations in the wider social context, which is understood as either a religious community's business or the "secular" state's responsibility framed with respect to a Hindu-Muslim paradigm, instead of a process that intersects with other relational dimensions such as caste, class, age, disability, etc. and entails multiple social tensions and unequal power relations in the wider social realm.

6.3.2 Provisions for Minorities and the Politics of Reservations

Similarly, the issue of special provisions and reservations for Muslims tends to be framed along a Hindu-Muslim/majority-minority paradigm. In this sense, Pandey's argument regarding the category of the "minority" is quite helpful for articulating a perspective across multiple dimensions. Pandey contends that in official political discourses Muslims as a religious minority are often placed outside the norm of Indian citizenship, which seems to be coterminous with the notion of Hindu majority (Pandey, 1999, pp. 610-611). Therefore, provisions addressing specific religious minorities seem to concern the relation of a social group with a unified and static Hindu politically conscious majority and the relations of power between such entities, for which the state

[228] Conversation with a scholar activist, 08 June 2011.

is ultimately responsible[229]. In this case, the main issue at stake concerns the terms in which reservation quotas for the Muslim minority in the state of Andhra Pradesh should be framed.

Since 2004, the state of Andhra Pradesh has tried to introduce reservations for Muslims in education and government jobs. The first attempt on 6 October 2005, with a bill passed in the state Legislative Assembly providing 5 per cent reservations for "socially and educationally backward Muslim classes", was declared unconstitutional by the High Court in November of the same year. In 2007, following the recommendation of the P.S. Krishnan Advisory Committee Report, another bill was passed which, after pending in the Supreme Court and the Andhra Pradesh High Court for approval, was then sanctioned in March 2010.

The issue has become particularly controversial as far as the principles on which the benefits should be granted and the methods through which beneficiaries should be identified.

In fact, while practices mirroring caste designations are present across different sections of society, they are firmly rejected as principles for social stratification and for the identification of social categories in law by Muslim social activists and political elites[230]. Ali argues that among certain Muslim communities in South India, it is common to find that status is ascribed through "certain conceptions of lineage that correspond to Hindu notions of caste". However, Ali contends that caste is not the fundamental mediator of social relations among Muslims or between Muslims and Hindus as "it does not regulate mundane, ritual and religious activities in the manner it does for Hindus" (Ali, 2002, pp. 602-603). Focusing specifically on the city of Hyderabad, Ali offers an interesting view of the differences in the principles for social stratification among Muslims in Hyderabad, focusing on how caste-like relations contribute to or instead remain marginal in the processes of attributing socio-economic and political positionings to individuals, families and groups. Mostly, Ali argues, "caste" among Hyderabadi Muslims functions in a symbolic way but, apart from certain exceptions, it generally cannot be regarded as the fundamental principle for the structuring of hierarchical relations among groups (Ali, 2002). This, however, does not

[229] See also the notion of Indian secularism as "majoritarianism" explored in Section 2.2.3. See also (Upadhyay, 2007).

[230] Syed Ali instead argues that the relevance of caste among Hyderabadi Muslims shifts according to the circumstances and can at times lose relevance in favour of education and income as a resource for socio-political positioning (Ali, 2002).

translate into a denial of socio-economic stratification among people of Muslim faith in Hyderabad.

According to some Muslim activists, the legislation providing reservation quotas for Muslims designates categories of "backward" Muslims benefitting from the provision, based on the surname, which is matched with a particular profession and, therefore, a social location. As the process mirrors a caste-based categorisation of society, many Muslims reject it as alien to their social organisation. Their perspective is concerned with the implications that sanctioning a caste system among Muslims by law might have for relations of power in society and for the demarcation of the "religious community's" boundaries. If reservations are welcome as a form of recognition of a structural disadvantage to which Muslims as a category are subjected in Andhra Pradesh (and the wider Indian) society, the methodology for its implementation seems to raise fundamental concerns about an attempt to "casteising" the Muslim society. According to these activists, the acknowledgment of disadvantages among Muslims would be best addressed by reservations based on general socio-economic indicators rather than by a system governed by norms of inclusion and exclusion based on surname.

This perspective draws a fundamental distinction between a social structure reproduced and constantly transformed under a Brahminical caste order and peripheral practices observable outside that specific social space. In a way, the legislation on reservations for Muslims is seen as having a double unwanted effect. On the one hand, it reinforces and institutionalises such practices, creating a structure to contain them and a system to demarcate the boundaries of Muslim castes. On the other, it has implications for the notion of religious community, its organisation and functioning. By identifying it as the site of mechanisms of social exclusion and marginalisation it overlooks the way in which caste transcends the category of "religious communities" and the structural inequalities to which people of Muslim faith are subject to in the society. In this way, the discourse is once again redirected towards a definition of the religious community instead of addressing the fundamental roots of social inequalities affecting many people of Muslim faith. As noted by Rauf, in India the debate on the socio-economic conditions of Muslims seems to be focused on their backwardness and, I would add, on causes residing within the space of the "religious community", rather than on the processes and practices that make most of them disadvantaged with respect to other social categories. Rauf maintains that "recognition of the various forms of social,

economic and political violence that have been inflicted on Muslims is a prerequisite for ensuring equality to the community" (Rauf, 2011, p. 69). It is precisely the lack of such understanding that, according to some social activists, makes the reservation Bill inappropriate to uplift the conditions of the Muslim population.

Going back to the reflection of Sangari on the notion of religious community and its implications for the articulation of a discourse on diversity and equality, the issue of reservations for Muslims, much like the debate over the reform of personal law, ends up only partially touching upon the issues at stake, namely the rights of socio-economically disadvantaged categories. In fact, the discourse tends to revolve around an idea of the religious community as a discrete, static and self-sufficient entity, which is at the same time the site of unequal practices and the recipient of provisions directed at some of its members.

In the case of reservations for Muslims, as the Indian Constitution does not allow for positive discrimination based on religion, the question seems particularly complex. In fact, if delimiting and sanctioning caste among Muslims raises major problems vis-à-vis the socio-economic organisation of the "religious community" and the relations of power within it, its identification as the principle on which reservations are based still poses an issue related to the intersection of caste, class and religion and the definition of the boundaries of the "religious community". As noted by Shani in her study of Gujarat, the whole debate on reservations revolves around a choice between caste and class as the categories for differentiation which is then translated into a choice between "religion" and "secularism" (Shani, 2007, p. 150). Interestingly, the BJP has opposed the politics of reservations for Muslims on the ground of the very unconstitutionality of positive discrimination on religious grounds and as a proof of the state's "non-secular" bias in favour of Muslims as a religious minority[231]. The question of what "secularism" means in a national discourse strongly associating secular values with "majoritarianism" is of crucial importance. In fact, the politics of reservation for "minorities" and its different articulations risk remaining entrenched within a communal/secular dichotomy which, in the end, reproduces relations of super/subordination in society. In that sense, it is the very intersection of multiple dimensions that is not acknowledged as a possible perspective to transcend the

[231] http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-andhrapradesh/article1878077.ece (accessed on July, 12th 2011) http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-andhrapradesh/article1204259.ece (accessed on July 12th 2011)

"religious community" as a monolithic entity and as part of a discourse on reservations for so-called "weaker section".

6.4 CONCLUSION: THE POLITICS OF THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

This chapter analyses the religious community as a political location which, as a playground for communal discourses, becomes hegemonic by concealing multiple voices speaking from within and also across its boundaries. Moreover, it further explores the processes through which forms of domination and social polarisation are configured and reproduced in the social space of interfaith relations.

In this sense, this chapter does not aim at neglecting the relevance of religion and the notion of community for defining the social location of many people who identify with a specific system of faith. However, it tries to shed light on the political dimension of the "religious community", especially in the way issues of religious orthodoxy, gender, socio-economic differentials define its internal and external boundaries through the discourse of political representation in a context of institutionalised rhetoric of communalism and Hindu-Muslim antagonism. At the same time however, it recognises the potential for the "religious community" to become a discursive space for reflection on these very issues which, if not contemplated at the official level, is articulated among the very sections of society that are excluded from the debate. It is the case of the Telangana movement but also of the issues of reservations and personal law reform. In that sense, they all could represent fundamental moments for a possible transformation of the political discourse and consciousness in Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh and the wider Indian context, starting from making the historical processes of construction of social inequalities visible.

In this respect, I would like to add a final note on the issue of caste among Muslims and the controversy over reservations. If practices mirroring caste are observable among people of Muslim (and other) faiths and need to be taken into account for a just redistribution policy through reservation, at the same time, it is important to acknowledge how the condition of many people of Muslim faith is related to discriminatory practices affecting the whole society, across the boundaries of the "religious community". Acknowledging how caste functions as an organisational principle among Muslims is in fact only one step in a process of recognition of the multiple forms of violence (structural and cultural) that are perpetrated at the

intersection of religious, socio-economic and gender dimensions from without the boundaries of the "religious community". The point that I would like to make as a conclusion to this chapter is that the "religious community" as the natural location of social tensions affecting weaker social categories and as the recipient of political and legal action can reflect hegemonic standpoints both vis-à-vis the multiple social locations that find expression within it but also with respect to the forms of exclusion and violence that are perpetrated across the wider social context. In the debate over reservations, the religious community becomes both the locus of oppression/backwardness and the recipient of redistribution policies. However, the association of reservations with the "religious community" raises tensions over the definition of its internal boundaries, the power relations unfolding within and also its location in the wider social and political context.

Thus, both in the case of personal law reform and reservation for Muslims in Andhra Pradesh, the question lies in the capacity that different voices will have to speak from within and from without the community to make the intersection of different axes of power visible outside the rigid Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm. This is particularly relevant for a political discourse entrenched in a majority/minority dichotomy as the fundamental ground for an ideology of secularism which feeds and conceals forms of domination and social polarisation in the form of a Brahminical social order.

Chapter 7
Violence and the Configuration of Interfaith Relations

7.1 Introduction: Violence in Narratives of Communalism

This chapter deals with interpretations of violence as communal and the implications for relations of power among different sections of society in India. It analyses different aspects of narratives of "communal violence" and tries to unveil the social tensions that find expression in them. It aims at exploring the paradigm of Hindu-Muslim violence and at providing some insights on the wider social and political meaning of it, for the positioning of social groups and their relationship with the state. In this sense, it draws from existing literature on violence and interfaith relations and on studies of discourses and practices of the *Hindutva* movement in India. At the same time however, it aims to shed light on the broader meaning of discourses and practices of violence, configuring a social order constituted of "religious communities" and to understand the multiple inequalities they reproduce. Like the rest of this work, this chapter too focuses on the socio-economic and gender dimensions looking specifically at narratives of violence. It tries to understand how they intersect and define the notion of religious community, the role they play in the demarcation of its boundaries and how these processes contribute to reconfigure relations of super/subordination among various social categories, attributing specific social locations in the struggle for visibility in the political discourse. Examples offered in this chapter draw from the fieldwork conducted in the city of Hyderabad and the way in which the discourse of interfaith violence has nurtured the image of a riot-prone, communally-sensitive city.

First, it offers a perspective on the reproduction of violent masculinities, attached to the "religious community", as paradigms of violence – either in the form of legitimate self-defence or brutal aggression. In this sense for example, the chapter explores the image of the *pehlwan* (wrestler) as the protector of the community and, therefore, the perpetrator of legitimate violence, as opposed to the threatening male body, anti-social, communal and terrorist, representing the Other's immoral aggressiveness. Moreover, it focuses on an episode of violence happened in 1978, its interpretations and their implications for narratives of interfaith relations in Hyderabad and the image of a "riot-prone", "communally-sensitive" city. Finally, this chapter looks

at the recent integration of the rhetoric of terrorism in discourses of communalism, and the way they affect narratives and practices of interfaith relations and relationships of power among different sections of society.

By presenting these examples, the argument developed in this chapter unfolds as an exploration and deconstruction of the relational dichotomy of Hindu vs. Muslim violence. At the same time, it offers a perspective on forms of violence perpetrated across and within the category of the religious community, through the institutionalisation of communalism as the paradigm for understanding interfaith relations today.

In this sense, violence is here conceived of in its broader implications as direct, structural and cultural, drawing inspiration from Johan Galtung's framework[232]. Such a conceptualisation as a tool for analysing social practices has met with some criticism for being all-encompassing and vague, running the risk of losing analytical strength (Boulding, 1977). However, I still contend that it helps looking beyond the main dichotomies of conflict (in this case Hindu/Muslim), to understand the dynamics and narratives of violence at different levels, to unveil the various dimensions of communalism and to understand its locations in the wider social context. More specifically, it acknowledges the relevance of representations of communal violence as themselves constitutive of a cycle of conflict and violence, which transcend the Hindu vs. Muslim discourse.

With respect to this, Confortini enriches Galtung's framework by framing violence as a "process through which social relations are built, legitimized, reproduced and naturalised" (Confortini, 2006, p. 356). In that sense, she stresses the importance of conceptualising violence as a productive phenomenon, contributing to the naturalisation of (violent) social relations and unequal power hierarchies between different social categories. In the process of exploring violence, Confortini conceives of gender as a fundamental category for understanding its manifestations and the power dynamics and as a dimension constitutive of relations of domination and social polarisation. In that sense, gender plays a crucial role as an organising principle based on "hierarchical, mutually exclusive categories, which are in relationship of sub/super ordination to one another" (Confortini, 2006, p. 335).

[232] See Section 2.3.2.

Moreover, Confortini argues in favour of placing language at the centre of analyses of violence and of recognising its role in framing the possibilities for social relations and, therefore, also in the legitimisation of violence as "necessary" or "natural". As Confortini frames it,

> gendered language defines the possibility and impossibility of pursuing different visions of the social world. Violence and peace can be constituted through language (Confortini, 2006, p. 333).

In this respect, I argue that communalism as a socio-political and analytical paradigm plays a fundamental role in naturalising not only "religious communities" but also their hostile and unequal relations. Accordingly, interpretations of violence as communal reinforce the boundaries between such social categories and, at the same time, conceal the processes through which narratives of interfaith relations and power dynamics are constantly reconfigured at the intersection of multiple dimensions, such as gender and socio-economic differentials. The language of "communal violence" defines the boundaries of the discourse of interfaith relations in terms of mutually antagonist religious communities, reducing the visibility of social categories and relations that unfold within, between and across such dichotomies. The discourse of "communalism" therefore is implicated in the reproduction of forms of violence, inequalities and social tensions and of their naturalisation and legitimisation in the form of "conflict".

Questioning the binary distinctions that violence contributes to configure also entails opening up possibilities for understanding conflict as a social space in which multiple dimensions intersect, and possibilities for change continuously unfold. In this respect, Confortini contends that understanding violence according to the dichotomies that it contributes to reproduce (such as in the discourse of "Hindu-Muslim violence") does not "accurately reflect the multiplicity of ways in which people live through and despite violence" (Confortini, 2006, p. 347). This chapter in particular, as well as the overall thesis, aim precisely at offering a perspective on the multiple dimensions and meanings of violence but also on the spaces for change and the possibilities to cross and transcend the communal paradigm as a narrative of domination and social polarisation.

In the previous chapters, I have explored various themes constitutive of the politics of interfaith relations, unfolding at the intersection of gender and socio-economic dimensions, and the role they play in legitimising and concealing discourses and practices constitutive of a Brahminical social order.

In this chapter, I would like to offer a further element for reflection, by exploring the role of violence and its continuously evolving interpretations in the configuration of religious communities, their boundaries and their mutual relations, with respect to gender and socio-economic dimensions. I will deal with the implications of such discourses for the positioning of different sections of society vis-à-vis the dominant paradigm of communalism, but also with the multiple ways in which such positionings are negotiated and transcended in lived interfaith relations in Hyderabad. Ultimately, this chapter can be regarded as a perspective on the overall thesis, connecting the other chapters and paving the way for the conclusive reflection on the tension between the persistence and adaptability of a communal paradigm and pushes for social change in the discursive space of interfaith relations.

7.2 THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF "COMMUNAL VIOLENCE": SEPARATING RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Violence plays a crucial role in discourses of religious identity, configuring the boundaries of communities and their distinctive symbols and practices. In order to clarify this point this section presents examples of how narratives of communal violence contribute to enhance forms of domination and social polarisation along Hindu-Muslim lines, focusing on processes through which such discourses are articulated and their implications for the wider social relations.

According to Shani, in discourses of communalism, violence serves three main goals. First, it reinforces external boundaries of "religious communities" as fundamental units of social relations. In the process, it reconfigures the Hindu-Muslim divide in a radical and non-negotiable way, while projecting at the same time an image of such categories as internally united and homogeneous. Second, it strengthens the visibility of religious communities in the official political discourse and, therefore, in relation with the state. Finally, it crystallises their boundaries through conflict narratives and, I would add, internal relations of power, as it conceals contestation coming from within and across them in the name of uniting against a threat coming from outside (Shani, 2007, pp. 156-157). Adding to Shani's conceptualisation, I argue in this chapter that, by reinforcing narratives of hostile interfaith relations and the boundaries of "religious communities", violence also defines social relations in terms of dichotomies and veils the complex dynamics of power, social tensions and forms of violence intersecting in

and unfolding beyond the Hindu-Muslim paradigm. In this process, the discourse of communalism (re)produces unequal relations of power, by positing violence as the fundamental mode of interfaith relations and by overlooking the processes that configure social polarisation and their multiple dimensions.

In fact, narratives of communal violence seem to reinforce the notion of static and discrete religious communities, their mutual hostile relation, based on a dichotomy between victim and aggressor. However, at the conceptual level, conceiving of violence as a productive discourse and practice also means understanding its intersecting dimensions and implications, and to recognise the complexity of social relations and positionings continuously negotiated in contexts of violence. This translates into exploring the categories of communalism to offer a perspective on the various tensions and possibilities for social change that find expression in spaces of violence, within and across "religious communities". This also means deconstructing the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm and opening up possibilities to transcend it at the intersection of multiple, mutually constitutive dimensions.

7.2.1 Pious Warriors and Aggressive Gods

A relevant way in which violence is inherent in the religious community's representation is through figures that embody its martial prowess. An interesting example which features in most narratives of communal violence is the image of the *pehlwan* (wrestler). In order to clarify the connection between Indian martial arts and discourses of communalism I would like to make reference to Alter's distinction between the two. Referring in particular to the difference between Indian wrestling and physical training of *swayamsevak* (volunteer) in the RSS as two nationalist ideologies Alter argues:

> unlike the RSS drill routine which overlays ideology with athletics, Indian wrestling is a somatic ideology in its own right. As such it offers a utopian vision of nationalistic reform that takes the body as a primary object of discipline and reform, rather than as a simple tool for the organization of a militant ideology. (Alter, 1994, pp. 558-559).

According to Alter, the two practices should be understood as constitutive of two distinct nationalist discursive spaces. He also acknowledges however the appropriation of traditional Indian wrestling in the discourses of the religious community/national body and the physical training associated with the politics of religious identity and religious nationalism. According to Kakar for example, the

tradition of Indian wrestling was widespread in the northern part of the Subcontinent, in Bengal, Maharashtra and in the princely state of Hyderabad where the art was patronised by the prince (Kakar, 1996, pp. 82-83)[233]. Nowadays, Kakar contends, the discourse of communalism and the episodes of violence have transformed wrestlers into icons of the community's physical power and martial prowess (Kakar, 1996, p. 85). In his work on the 1990 riots in Hyderabad, Kakar shows that some of the wrestlers trained at dedicated gyms belong to local organisations linked to the *All India Majlis Ittehadul Muslimeen* (AIMIM) or the *Sangh Parivar* and that they are keen on exalting the sense of loyalty to their "religious community" and the values they attach to it (Kakar, 1996, pp. 81-85).

Kakar considers the *pehlwan* a crucial figure in narratives of violence during riots (Kakar, 1996, pp. 52-86). While the wrestlers' engagement in such events resembles that of "contractors", hired by local businessmen and/or politicians to settle land disputes or gain political leverage[234], their image in the context of a communal discourse mirrors that of the valiant warrior, committed to protect the "religious community". As argued in Section 4.2 the physical training of wrestlers of different religious backgrounds is deeply intertwined with religious zeal and a sense of morality. This connection, in turn, translates into a legitimisation of violence to defend the lives of their coreligionists, and therefore the unity and dignity of the "religious community". In that sense, the *pehlwans* also embody the idealised masculinity of the strong, pious warriors, protectors of the community, because capable and ready to use violence against an external threat (Kakar, 1996, pp. 52-86)[235]. The violence of the wrestler is therefore almost ritualised and sacralised as a righteous deed in the name of the unity and safety of the "religious community".

The wrestler is not only a strong man often involved in riots and skirmishes, but also a sort of emblematic figure which contributes to define the community's external boundary as a discrete, homogenous entity along hostile lines, through the legitimacy of the violence he perpetrates. It is a gendered boundary, in that the *pehlwan* stands as the

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[233] "In return for the patronage, the wrestler would march on ceremonial occasions in royal processions through the streets of the capital, their magnificent physiques testifying to and reflecting on the power of the prince. They would represent the honour of the prince in their competitive bouts with wrestlers from other states" (Kakar, 1996, p. 85).

[234] Kakar remarks that most of the *pehlwans* are hired to intimidate the opposing party in disputes over property of land, or to settle political rivalries (Kakar, 1996, pp. 59-60).

[235] Paul Brass too remarks the role of Hindu wrestlers in episodes of violence in Ahmedabad, focusing on narratives of the ideal masculinity, which represent and is at the same time responsible for defending the "religious community" (Brass, 2004, p. 26).

ideal Hindu or Muslim man, who embodies an aggressive and at the same time religiously committed masculinity combining violence and piety. In this sense, the wrestler is a symbolic boundary because it not only protects the community through the capacity to perpetrate violence, but also mirrors what is to be regarded as the ideal masculinity within it, in discourses of communalism[236].

The configuration of the ideal masculinities that the wrestlers embody highlights how narratives of violence tend to swing between representations of aggressiveness and images of victimisation. In that sense, it is interesting to note that, while exploring Connell's concept of "hegemonic masculinity", Demetriou defines it as a "hybrid bloc that unites practices from diverse masculinities in order to ensure the reproduction of patriarchy" (Demetriou, 2001, p. 337). Hyrbidity is therefore a constitutive part of these gendered representations as they structure relations of power in society. Thus, the tension between hostility and tolerance, religious zeal and body building of the wrestler's image is an example of the multidimensionality and the complex social positionings the figure tries to accommodate within the space of the religious community.

The centrality of the *pehlwan* as a symbol of legitimate violence is visible in the changing representations of idols worshipped during religious festivals, as in the case of the statues exhibited during the *Ganesh Chaturthi*[237].

The celebration of this festival has grown in Hyderabad and other parts of South India in the last 20 years and has been associated by many analysts with attempts of certain sections of the *Hindutva* movement to reinforce the image of a homogeneous and strong Hindu identity. Alongside the increased grandeur of the celebrations, some representations of deities like Lord Ram and Shiva tend to lose the classical androgynous features in favour of muscular bodies, which recall the figure of the wrestlers. Certain icons of Lord Ganesh in particular have undergone a transformation. Traditionally represented with a prominent stomach, nowadays, on the occasion of the festival, some of the statues reproduce Lord Ganesh as a muscular and aggressive warrior (See figures in Section 7.5). In some cases, the label "*Ganesh Pehlwan*" is attached to the statue. By observing the religious parades during the festival in September 2009 and 2010, I noticed an increase in these new representations of Ganesh,

[236] See connections with gender representations explored in Section 4.2.

[237] *Supra* note 117.

which appeared all around the city of Hyderabad during the ten days of the *Ganesh Chaturthi*. This change in representation bears particular significance in terms of religious symbolism, as Ganesh's traditional big belly represents bounty and harmlessness. More commonly, Lord Ganesh is associated with a benevolent and wise deity, who removes obstacles and is deeply moved by the affection and faith of its devotees. Therefore, representations of the deity as an aggressive, muscular god, which became widely visible in Hyderabad during the 2010 *Ganesh Chaturthi*, seem to project a completely different image.

This also changes the positioning of the community which the Ganesh idols are made to represent during that particular religious festival vis-à-vis the social space in which it is located. This is significant, as the festival has been the occasion of rioting in the past both in Hyderabad and other Indian cities and is every year identified as a possible triggering event for episodes of violence[238]. In this way, the representation of an aggressive "Hindu" deity is combined with the potential for violence between "religious communities". Moreover, such images seem to embody a romantic ideal of the male warrior, which redefines not only the relations between religious communities by demarcating their external boundaries in terms of hostility and violence, but also within these very boundaries, by asserting a muscular, violent and religiously zealous masculinity as the "real" Hindu man. Thus, the meanings attributed to the image of Lord Ganesh have assumed a new contextual dimension linked to a politics of interfaith relations. Moreover, in these iconic representations, the symbols around which Hinduism is homogenised and through which religious difference is affirmed present a strong gender connotation, which equate the ideal masculinity with religious zeal, muscles and violence. It seems the very capacity for violence that the figure of *Ganesh pehlwan* embodies is what actualises the community as an entity which defends itself, or attacks outside its own boundaries.

The wrestler-Lord Ganesh-religious community are assimilated in these particular imageries circulating during the religious festival, within a paradigm of hostile interfaith relations, in which violence, in its symbolic and direct forms, is associated with an image of aggressive masculinity. This in turn is linked to the rhetoric

[238] "18 held during Mumbai Ganesh Chaturthi violence" (*Indian Express,* 20 September 2000) http://www.indianexpress.com/Storyold/160254/, "Violence Erupts on Ganesh Chaturthi" (*Times of India,* 1 September 2003) http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2003-09-01/ahmedabad/27212339_1_borsad-town-ganesh-chaturthi-kodinar . Last Accessed on 2 August 2011. On Hyderabad see (Naidu, 1990, pp. 127-138) and (Narendranath, 1984, pp. 19-20).

of *Hindutva* and its references to Lord Ram and the Ayodhya controversy. In fact, some of the images of an aggressive, muscular Lord Ganesh are enriched with attributes of Lord Ram (bow and arrow) or with representations of a similarly muscular Hanuman, the monkey-god and Lord Ram's devote disciple (Figure 12. Hanuman, Lord Ram's disciple, carrying Lord Ganesh on his shoulders. Beghum Bazar, Hyderabad, September 2010Figure 14. Lord Ganesh holding the bow and arrow. On His right Hanuman is worshipping Him. Sultan Shahi, Hyderabad, September 2010p.243). Interestingly, besides not being amongst the most popular traditional deities in South India, both of them are strongly associated with the Babri Masjid/Ram Janmabhoomi controversy and the *Hindutva* ideology.

Even more interesting for the purposes of this work is to explore the implication of that imagery across boundaries of religious communities. In fact, Hanuman is considered in *Hindutva* discourse the icon of the Adivasi (aboriginal) people in India[239]. Some groups amongst them have subscribed to the anti-Christian and anti-Muslim rhetoric of the Hindu Right. The support that such language has gathered among certain sections of the Adivasi people is quite telling of the complexity of the "communal" problem and its outreach far beyond the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm. While some observers consider this development as the result of manipulation of the weakest sections of society on the part of the Hindu Right, others more convincingly take into account also the wider socio-economic and political contexts in which these processes take place. According to Lobo, for example, the violence against Muslims carried out by certain sections of the Adivasi communities in some parts of Gujarat during the massacre of 2002 has to be understood in the context and as an integral part of the increasing pushes for social mobility and ensuing stratification among these very communities as they enter the socio-economic logic of caste/class positioning. Being *Hindutva* a fundamentally upper-caste (elitist) ideology, Adivasi's elites find it rewarding to subscribe to it in the process of uplifting their socio-economic location and acquiring a position of power within the boundaries of class/caste mobility (Lobo, 2002). A similar discourse has been developed with reference to the partial success of the *Hindutva* ideology among Dalits in different parts of India. By exploring the social mobility and multiple positionings within these categories it is possible to move beyond

[239] This is quite interesting as the Adivasis are traditionally not associated with Hinduism. In fact, they follow forms of spirituality that pre-date the development of Brahminism in India.

an instrumentalist explanation of why the very social groupings discriminated against by a Brahminical social order would subscribe to the ideology of *Hindutva*[240]. The iconic representation of a muscular Hanuman in the act of carrying Ganesh on his shoulders or kneeling at the feet of Ganesh-Ram mirrors the ambiguous inclusiveness of a violent *Hindutva* ideology, reaching out to the marginalised ones within Hinduism provided that the calls and struggles for social mobility be displaced onto "the Muslim body" and that the fundamental principles for social hierarchy be maintained.

It is also worth noticing that the increase in the number of *Ganesh pehlwans* in Hyderabad during *Ganesh Chaturthi* in September 2010 followed a wave of "communal riots" in March of the same year. The incidents happened in the city in conjunction with *Hanuman Jayanthi*, a festival in honour of Hanuman, which was celebrated with a procession for the first time in the history of the city. During the same period, the Telangana agitation was gaining strength at the political level against the will of certain sections of the Andhra region's elites, while critical voices from within were starting to articulate demands from marginalised sections of the movement itself (like women, Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims). In this context, the year 2010 saw the strengthening of the rhetoric of the Hindu Right within the Telangana movement and the celebration of September 17th as "Hyderabad liberation day" by some of its leaders. This was followed by an increasing polarisation along the anti vs. pro-Nizam positioning, which translated into a Hindu vs. Muslim controversy[241].

In conclusion, the inclusion of the figure of the *pehlwan* as an ideal masculinity within discourses of communal violence seems to play multiple roles in the demarcation of the religious community's boundaries. First of all, it defines the collectivity as a united and strong social entity with respect to the context in which it is located, encompassing multiple sections of society and concealing internal unequal social relations and struggles, which are displaced onto an outside threat. With respect to this, some of the fighters (not necessarily *pehlwans*) who perpetrate violence during riots look at themselves as symbols of the martial strength and the capacity of self-defence of the community (Kakar, 1996, pp. 52-85).

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[240] For more on the relation between the *Hindutva* ideology and the mobilisation of marginalised sections of society see (Teltumbde, 2005).

[241] See Sections 5.4.2 and 6.2.1 for an analysis of the development of the Telangana movement and the increase in influence of the *Hindutva*.

Second, it displays its strength, leverage and capacity to use violence both for aggression and self-defence. In that sense, it also defines its relations with other outside entities in exclusive terms, while negotiating a position of power in the wider social order.

Finally, it configures the social space of religious identity and interfaith relations as the fundamental locus of social relations and as a hostile one, of which violence is a natural constitutive dynamic. Thus, in these narratives the *pehlwans* seem to perform a double function of defending and representing the community on the one hand, and taking up the responsibility for violence on the other. It is in this way that discourses of communalism portray the *pehlwan* as both an icon of the religious community and its protector, combining devotional piety with martial strength. The exploration of the figure of the *pehlwan* therefore allows for a reflection on the role of violence in the communal paradigm in its symbolic and productive forms. In that sense, violence is not only an outcome of conflict, but a constitutive part of discourses of communalism, with implications for social relations beyond the Hindu-Muslim paradigm.

In fact, practices of violence mirror and in turn reinforce certain gendered narratives. This is also evident, more extensively and in a brutal and systematic form, in accounts of sexual mutilations (perpetrated on both men and women), rape and assaults on pregnant women committed during the Gujarat carnage and in general in the context of so-called "communal riots" in India. Agnes argues that, while "official records" ignored much of this symbolic, gruesome violence or attempted to "normalise it as routine occurrences", anecdotal evidence is full of detailed descriptions of such brutalities (Agnes, 2002, p. 3969). The theme of the uncontrolled sexuality of the Muslim men explored in Chapter 4 is reflected in the sexual mutilations perpetrated at that time and meant to destroy such "threatening reproductive capacity". At the same time, the violation of women's body (rape, slaughtering of pregnant women) is an aggression to the heart of the community and its symbolic core. Similar episodes relate once more to narratives of Partition, paralleling the division of the country (motherland) with the symbolic imagery of the violated woman.

7.2.2 Violence, Communalism and the Social Order: The Case of Rameeza Bee

The forms of interplay between gender and violence in narratives of interfaith relations are multiple and varied depending on the social and political contexts. They

can be articulated from different discursive landscapes outside the ideological space of the Hindu Right. Moreover, they are mirrored in representations of hostile interfaith relations pertaining to discourses of communalism that contribute to a social polarisation along religious lines and to the perpetuation of social inequalities. Therefore, they intersect with a fundamental socio-economic dimension.

This section offers a perspective of the interconnectedness between gendered categories and socio-economic differentials in narratives of communal violence in the city of Hyderabad. Its purpose is to locate discourses of communal violence within the wider web of social relations, as configuring and reconfiguring relations of power among and the relative positioning of different sections of society. It shows the connection between direct, structural and cultural violence by exploring the interpretations and implications of "the case of Rameeza Bee", an episode of abuses perpetrated by the police against a Muslim couple belonging to the lower ladders of society, happened in March 1978. While the rioting and violence that followed were officially explained as the result of Hindu-Muslim antagonism, a deconstruction of such discourses unveils a fundamental intersection of gender and socio-economic dimensions in the narratives of communal violence. In particular, it shows how such discourses are defined by and at the same time reinforce the attribution of specific social positionings to people already located in the lower ladders of society. This episode can be regarded as part of a process of communalisation of the political and social discourses about violence in the city of Hyderabad. In this sense, it is important to stress that, as the contents of such narratives are always fluid and shifting, the dynamics of social polarisation (boundary generation) and the unequal power relations that these discursive landscapes configure, reflect the accommodation and reconfiguration of multiple social tensions through the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm.

The Background

In the night of 29 and 30 March 1978 a Muslim woman, Rameeza Bee and her partner, Ahmed Hussain were returning home after attending a Telugu movie show in the city of Hyderabad. Their rickshaw was approached by a group of policemen who arrested the woman on charge of prostitution. At the police station, Rameeza was raped by the sub-inspector and two constables. The next morning she was accompanied home and then brought back to the police station along with her partner. There, the man was

severely beaten during a dispute with the policemen and later succumbed to the injuries[242]. The episode raised indignation among the neighbours of the couple who rallied and took the dead body to the police station to protest against the abuse. The police responded by firing and charging the crowd with *lathis*[243] contributing to turn the agitation into a massive protest involving violence, looting and arson.

Quite tellingly, the episode, known as the "Rameeza Bee case", was officially described as the first major communal riot in Hyderabad after 1948. State authorities and the media played a momentous role in attaching to the issue the communal label and in blaming the violence on "extremists desiring to disrupt relations between the Moslem and Hindu communities in Hyderabad[244]". Thus, the political and social implications of this case go beyond those of a simple though hideous episode of police brutality. The struggle for its interpretation in which politicians, the media and civil society organisations engaged, resulted in the "communalisation" of the issue. The Rameeza Bee case is an example of how the interface between practices of violence and narratives of communalism is inscribed into a wider arena of dynamic power relations, defined through a continuous appeal to identity and culture and imbued with fundamental gender and socio-economic dimensions.

The official discourse about rape that emerged during the works of the Supreme Court seemed to revolve around the alleged loose sexual conduct of Rameeza, combined with assumptions regarding the behaviour expected from a good Muslim woman (Kannabiran K. , 1996, pp. 35-40). It is interesting to note that such assumptions were also linked to the socio-economic position of Rameeza ("poor Muslim woman"), with which the "likelihood" of prostitution was associated. So, instead of trying to disprove the rape accusation, the defence concentrated on allegations of prostitution, sexual promiscuity on the one hand, and ignorance about and non-conformity with "Islamic principles/codes of behaviour" on the other, as the reasons why rape would not represent an offence (either personal or legal) to Rameeza Bee. The woman was requested to prove she was not a prostitute, that she was married with Ahmed and not simply cohabiting with him and that she was a good and observant Muslim (Kannabiran K. , 1996, p. 40). All allegations and assumptions, regardless of their accountability,

[242] Muktadar Commission Report, 1978.

[243] Sticks commonly used by the Indian police as a crowd control device.

[244] "Associated Press", April 3, 1978 AM cycle, reporting the words of the then Chief Minister M. Chenna Reddy.

aimed at picturing Rameeza as a non-victim by introducing a sort of morally and legally acceptable form rape – the one perpetrated against a "poor, Muslim prostitute"[245].

Significantly, the event was framed by the AIMIM as the result of prejudices against "the minority community" (though Muslim constables were involved in both the rape and the murder). In the end, the whole communalisation of the issue allowed state authorities to divert attention from the question of police brutality and to blame the "Muslim community" for the escalation of violence in the city and its spill-over to other regions of Andhra Pradesh. The protest of outraged people was thus marginalised, Ahmed Hussain's death almost erased from the narratives of the event and the whole issue caged into the discourse of the Muslims' "communal attitude". Interestingly, the representation of the case revolved around the figure of Rameeza, turned into a symbolic entity staging a power struggle for control over the meaning attributed to the event.

The Struggle for Interpretation and its Implications

The case of Rameeza Bee is an interesting example of the fundamental role played by gender and socio-economic categories in the communal discourses about violence. The transformation of the event into a Hindu-Muslim riot connected gendered practices to representations of interfaith relations. Moreover, it contributed to the legitimisation and production of an order based on cultural, structural and direct forms of violence towards the weaker sections of society. The communal paradigm developed at that time and mirroring a system of inequality and discrimination, combined the destruction of the man (both symbolically and physically) with the violation of the female body. While Ahmed Hussain's death was almost completely ignored in narratives of the case, the rape of Rameeza Bee and its interpretation became the elements around which the discourses about Hindu-Muslim antagonism and representations of the Muslim woman revolved. The figure of Ahmed Hussain disappeared behind a debate regarding the admissibility of raping a woman like Rameeza.

The case is particularly intriguing because, by exploring the interpretations given to it, it is possible to note that the paradigm of Hindu-Muslim antagonism applied to the rioting was the interpretive, but not the underlying dimension in official

[245] In the end the policemen were all acquitted (Kannabiran K. , 1996, p. 35).

narratives of the Rameeza Bee case. Indeed, these representations were inscribable in an overarching ideology of domination which extended not only over Muslims but also other marginalised sections of society (women, lower classes, poor etc). Such dynamics continue to frame relations of power among different social categories in Hyderabad also nowadays, although informed by new contents (such as terrorism). As the next section contends, narratives of police abuses are relatively frequent, especially after India's commitment to the "global war on terror" and the bomb blasts of May and August 2007 in Hyderabad[246]. However, of particular interest in the case of Rameeza Bee, is the fact that two of the policemen accused of rape were Muslim. This aspect seems to undermine the credibility of the AIMIM's version of an attack to the "Muslim community", but also the overall "communal" nature of the Rameeza Bee case. Thus, regardless of the alleged bias of police officers involved in the crime towards a Muslim couple, the event (both violence and the interpretations of the whole case) was transformed into a manifestation of communal conflict. In the two competing official interpretations, produced respectively by the judicial (and state) authority and the AIMIM, gender and socio-economic dimensions intersected with images of "the Muslim" (woman). While the former concentrated on gendered discourses combined with a naturalisation of Muslim religious extremism, the latter reinforced this process of communalisation by fostering the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm implicit in the accusation of a police bias against religious minorities. A communal logic was therefore interrelated with the wider realm of social and political power relations among different sections of society.

The recurrent interplay of gender, socio-economic positioning and religious affiliation in the reproduction of social boundaries and forms of structural, cultural and direct violence seems to suggest that the definition of gender and socio-economic categories and the construction of antagonist religious communities are not separate dynamics but part of a process of social polarisation, inscribed in a system of unequal relations of power.

7.2.3 The Politics of Violence and Everyday Life

The perspective on the wrestler as an emblematic figure in narratives of hostile interfaith relations shows how discourses and practices of violence are connected with

[246] See Section 5.3.

the configuration of the community's boundaries. Indeed, as Shani remarks, violence plays a role in creating an image of a united collectivity, sharply differentiated from outside social entities with which it relates through conflict and hostility (Shani, 2007, p. 158). As the exploration of the case of Rameeza Bee shows, however, there is a further implication of the way in which practices of violence become constitutive of narratives of communalism. In fact, violence can play a role in (re)asserting forms of domination in the wider social context, across the boundaries of religious communities.

In this part, I would like to explore how direct violence, intended as violent behaviour aimed at physically harming people, bears implications at the structural and cultural levels in the reproduction of forms of domination based on different dimensions, which intersect with the most visible one: religion.

As argued by Shani in her work on the 2002 massacre in Gujarat, episodes of violence labelled as "communal riots" are often linked to an increasing instability in the existing hierarchies of power at the level of class/caste relations (Shani, 2007)[247]. The example of the violence generated around the case of Rameeza Bee illustrates the relevance of not only the socio-economic dimension but its intersection with gender in narratives of communal violence, which re-affirms a form of domination based on a discourse of social polarisation between "religious communities".

This part dwells particularly on the way the gender and socio-economic implications of "communal riots" tend to reflect on the everyday lives of the people who work in and inhabit areas affected by violence in Hyderabad. In particular, as argued in Section 4.4, certain parts of the city seem to be regarded as the centre of "communalism", often in association with the contextual social and economic dynamics. The implications of discourses of communalism for the everyday life of the people who populate such urban areas are of particular interest for a perspective aiming at grasping the multiple dimensions intersecting in the social space of interfaith relations.

Ratna Naidu (1990) provides an insightful sociological account of the Old city of Hyderabad at the end of the 1980s, the neglect in terms of access to basic services and the complex social relations among the disadvantaged categories of people who mostly inhabit it. Through her study, she shows how the complete lack of public services experienced at an everyday basis, combined with forms of social discrimination

[247] See Section 2.3.1 for an exploration of Shani's argument vis-à-vis caste and communal violence.

based on class, caste, gender and religion provide the background and setting for most of the so-called "communal riots" in the area. In the Old city neighbourhoods I visited during my fieldwork experience in Hyderabad, neglect, poverty and social exclusion were also widely lamented by the people with whom I had the chance to interact in connection with the "communal" divide.

However, conversations about episodes of violence were mostly considered politically organised and perpetrated by *goondas*[248] or outsiders, coming from other areas of the city. More specifically, in the case of my experience in Hyderabad, inhabitants of "communally sensitive" neighbourhoods offered two main perspectives regarding "perpetrators". On the one hand, they attributed acts of violence to unidentified people, coming from "outside", with no connections with their everyday lives. The causes of violence thus seemed impossible to determine, because the real culprits were impossible to identify[249]. On the other, they pointed at the work of "professionals" of violence, hired by those in power to trigger or respond to provocations. In any case, the reasons for "communal riots" were mostly placed outside the community and the neighbourhood and largely associated with vested interests linked to politicians' electoral strategies or land disputes[250].

Interestingly however, the relevance of the "religious community" as the only safe social space was often invoked in discourses of interfaith relations with reference to Hindu-Muslim antagonism. Interpretations of violence seemed to unfold into a paradox. On the one hand, the perpetrators and the causes of riots were placed outside the rhetoric of Hindu-Muslim conflict and the space of the neighbourhood; on the other, their narratives of everyday life as inhabitants of "communally-sensitive" areas revolved around the image of an interfaith social space spoiled by Hindu-Muslim violence and constituted of endangered and mutually antagonist religious communities.

In this respect, there seemed to be a tension regarding the meaning of the Hindu-Muslim paradigm as a way to explain violence and interfaith relations.

In fact, as regards the practical implications for their everyday life, the themes people raised as central to their experience mainly touched upon the impact of riots on

[248] Word identifying urban bullies, often involved in petty or large criminal activities. It also refers to individuals who use force and threats to settle disputes or protect vested interests. Sometimes *pehlwans* are included in the category.

[249] According to Hansen, in India "acts of violence have acquired their own semiotic register, a singular form of political 'communication'" in which the acknowledgment of the action itself is associated with a sort of "anonymous agency" (Hansen, 2008).

[250] Conversations with local residents in Sultan Shahi, 27 August 2009.

their socio-economic conditions. In many of the interactions with inhabitants of Sultan Shahi and other areas affected by riots, recurring reference was made to everyday-life material problems and to the extent to which violence contributes to worsen their already harsh conditions[251].

Among others, the loss of property during and after riots and the imposition of curfew were two widely discussed topics. The former relates mainly to houses and shops being looted and burned down during riots and to the flight of entire families which either leave the neighbourhood for good or find their houses occupied or destroyed upon their return. The housing patterns in these areas also reflect the subsequent migrations of people previously leaving in mixed neighbourhoods and later shifting to a "religiously homogenous" zone[252]. Curfew instead is widely regarded as the most feared outcome of "communal riots" and is taken as proof of the state's inefficiency and brutality against already deprived sections of society. Most of the people with whom I interacted, including the pupils of local schools, would mention curfew as the worst form of violence they have to endure after riots[253]. The children in particular shared about how they suffered from hunger, the difficulty of getting medicines for the sick and their perceptions of the ongoing tension among adults in the family during curfew.

Most of the households in these urban areas belong to the lower ladders of the social hierarchy, both caste and class-wise, and survive on the daily wages as rickshaw drivers or occasional workers. Thus, during the time of curfew, which can last for several days or weeks, they lose all means of sustaining themselves. It is in these occasions that, in the absence of state-based relief measures, they resort to non-state support, mainly from political parties or local organisations. A woman resident in Sultan Shahi thus offered her view about the loop of "communalism": "Riots are organised by political leaders. Then curfew is imposed and families here suffer greatly. It is at this point that they resort to the help of the same political leaders who fuelled violence but also sustain and protect us afterwards"[254]. In this "us" one could read the wider social space of the poor and dispossessed, although the relief distributed by many

[251] Conversations with people in Sultan Shahi, Chandrayangutta and Shankar Nagar. Hyderabad, August 2010, June 2011.

[252] See Section 4.4 for an exploration of spatial strategies.

[253] Conversations with residents in Sultan Shahi and Chandrayangutta 23 August 2010, 14 June 2011. Group activity with the children of the Aman Shanti School in Sultan Shahi, 18 August 2010.

[254] Conversation with a teacher, Sultan Shahi, 1 September 2010.

political organisations is addressed to a specific group amongst them, namely the "religious community". The experience of violence has therefore very practical consequences on the housing patterns and social relations within the areas in which it occurs and also on the definition of the "religious community" as the unit of solidarity outside which one finds danger and hostility.

The theme of the "poor suffering the most" in narratives of communal violence is often mentioned in political speeches and people's perspectives as a way to identify the "victimised", but it is very seldom critically addressed as a fundamental dimension at the conceptual level. The normalisation of communal politics theorised by Paul Brass as an "institutionalised riot system" (Brass, 1997), is also reflected in keeping certain sections of society (namely the lower classes and castes often irrespectively of religious background) in a state of tension, limiting access to basic services but also to the possibility to express a political consciousness outside the "communal" one, provided by political parties and organisations engaged, as Shani frames it, in "civic defence and relief for riots victims" (Shani, 2007, p. 153). The argument here is not the simple claim of the poor being manipulated as that would fail to recognise their evident agency in making choices and negotiating different social positionings in the dynamics of social relations. However, it points to the limited spaces for social mobility, which are mainly channelled by the "religious community" in its (hostile) relationship with outside social entities. Thus, social differentials negotiated at the intersection of multiple dimensions (gender, age, class, caste etc.) find in the religious community the fundamental unit in which social tensions are resolved, in the assignation of a specific social location, which overlooks the forms of super/subordination reproduced across and within it.

At this level, the discourse of communal violence is generative of its own dynamics and categories of violence. In a conversation, a social worker engaged in community development projects in Sultan Shahi, shared her perspective regarding the legacy that episodes of violence leave in such places. She claimed that rather than living in a constant mutual antagonism, people tend to polarise as soon as rumours of communal incidents spread and the demarcation between religious communities becomes dominant[255]. Her emphasis on interpretations of violence along communal lines as constitutive of social polarisation and, in turn, violence, reveals the importance of language in the construction of hostile interfaith relations.

[255] Conversation in Hyderabad, 2 June 2011.

Based on the naturalisation of religious identity and of hostility between religious communities, the interpretation of violence as communal creates the very categories that define it: the religious communities and their hostile mutual relations. Hence, the processes of "communalisation" of violence have implications for the social location of disadvantaged social sections cutting across religious affiliations and for the positionings of different categories and grouping in the wider social relations.

These dynamics unfold also in representations of police abuses or, more in general, of the attitude of the police as "communal" in narratives of Hindu-Muslim violence. In the exploration of the case of Rameeza Bee this aspect was mentioned with reference to the AIMIM's interpretations of violence. Here I would like to elaborate further on the discourse of the communal behaviour of the police as another image around which the "religious community" is united in and through accounts of riots. In representations of violence by certain *Hindutva* and AIMIM militants, the police are often portrayed as religiously biased and ineffective, as perpetrators against their respective "religious community". While cases of police abuses are further analysed in the next section with respect to the discourse of terrorism, for the current argument it is more relevant to focus on the way in which the rhetoric of the "religious community" is reinforced by the opposition with the authorities who should, in principle, enforce order through the monopoly of violence. In fact, the police become embedded in narratives of Hindu-Muslim violence as the representative of the state and its biased policies against "religious communities".

Reflecting on the interpretations of violence, I contend that the reading along communal lines of the confrontational attitude between police and rioters contributes to the configuration of the "religious community" as a victimised entity, separated from and at the same time positioning itself and being assigned a specific positioning vis-à-vis the state. Interestingly, in a conversation with a *Hindutva* activist on episodes of police brutality against Muslim young males, I was repeatedly told: "that happens to our boys too". Though unable to give practical examples, he was very keen on proving that the "Hindu community" is victimised by the state and suffers police abuses as much as, if not more than, the Muslim one[256]. In discourses of communalism, the violence

[256] Conversation with a *Hindutva* activist, Hyderabad, May 2011. The impossibility to provide examples is due more to the "communal" tone of the discourse rather than to the absence of abuses perpetrated on categories other than "the Muslim". Of course difficult to frame it in a Hindu-Muslim paradigm, Dalits and Adivasis, who are often included in the "Hindu" category in *Hindutva* discourses, are victims of state and non-state violence in many ways. See for example (Aloysius, Mangubhai, & Lee, 2006, pp. 5,7-8,17-19).

perpetrated by the police as representative of the state becomes another brick in the construction of the religious community as a unitary, static and discrete unit, missing the complexity and intersection of multiple axes of power and social positioning within such entity. At the same time, the political implications of police's abuses, malpractices or inefficiencies, especially in certain areas of the city and against weaker social sections transversal to the category of the "religious community", disappear in the paradigm of communal violence.

In conclusion, the implications of riots on the urban area in which they occur and their representation as communal are multiple. On the one hand, the flight and the re-settlement in a more religiously homogeneous zone, the increasing limitations on contacts outside the family and the neighbourhood, the socio-economic consequences of curfew and the intervention of political parties and local organisations all contribute to configure the internal and external boundaries of the religious community. On the other, the very "communalisation" of everyday life, which stems from such discourses and practices of interfaith relations, seems to veil other forms of domination and violence and, above all, to hinder the growth and visibility of socio-political consciousnesses among the subjugated ladders of society, beyond the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm. In areas in which social mobility takes place among different categories within relegated groups, the communalisation of acts of violence displaces pushes for social change onto a conflict between "religious communities".

7.3 TERRORISM AS COMMUNAL VIOLENCE

The issue of the position of the police in the construction of religious communities' boundaries mentioned in the previous section is relevant also for the recent incorporation of a discourse of terrorism in narratives of communalism in the city of Hyderabad. This shift in the language is of course not peculiar to Hyderabad and is consistent with the increasing use of the paradigm of (Islamic) terrorism in the Indian and international official political discourses, especially after 11 September 2001.

The purpose of this section is to analyse how the process of transformation of the language of communalism is reflected in certain practices related to interfaith relations and, at the same time, to the wider relations of power in society. Before moving to the analysis of discourses of terrorism in the communal paradigm it is worth elaborating further on the way in which narratives and practices of violence and the

notion of "religious community" are mutually constitutive and in turn implicated in defining unequal power relations among different section of society.

In the politics of religious identity, the community is often represented as a victim, which needs to be protected from external threats. Accordingly, violence becomes legitimate defence against possible outside aggressions and therefore necessary and, ultimately, natural. Thus, in the case of discourses of communalism, violence is naturalised as a preventive measure against a potential danger which in turns contributes to define the boundaries of the religious community. An example of a similar discourse is the way in which the assault on Taslima Nasreen in August 2007 was framed by members of the *Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen.* Indeed, its representation as a "protest", instead of the word "attack" used by the media, against a writer who was offending the religious sentiments of "the Muslims" and hindering the tradition of "peaceful coexistence" in Hyderabad, implied its justification in the name of "communal harmony"[257].

In order to offer a perspective on the language of terrorism and the way it contributes to configure the image of a victimised "religious community", I would like to draw from Anand's perspective on the centrality of discourses of security for the legitimisation of violence against certain sections of society and the image of a collectivity under threat (Anand, 2005). Referring to the rhetoric of the Hindu Right, Anand claims that "security is a generative discourse – one that produces 'dangers' to security as well as the object to be secured" with particular reference to "representations of threatening Muslim masculinity in *Hindutva* discourse" (Anand, 2005, p. 204).

Anand claims that in such rhetoric the Hindu self is portrayed as

> virtuous, civilized, peaceful, accommodating, enlightened, clean and tolerant as opposed to the 'Muslim Other', which is morally corrupt, barbaric, violent, rigid, backward, dirty and fanatic (Anand, 2005, p. 207).

This discourse has important implications for the definition of a united Hindu core, which stands in opposition to a Muslim one, but also for the justification of violence as self-defence of a victimised community. In fact, according to a *Hindutva* activist with whom I interacted during my fieldwork, the martial training imparted in RSS camps and the belligerent tones used by some RSS leaders are necessary for

[257] See Chapter 6 for an analysis of the event and its implications for the construction of the religious community as a political unity.

defence against the threat that the Muslims might pose to the Hindus/Indian nation. Thus, the common image of a threatening Muslim masculinity is countered with the construction of a strong, aggressive Hindu one, capable of facing and erasing the danger coming from outside. According to him, *Hindutva* teaches tolerance and respect, but since the Muslims are untrustworthy and belligerent they compel Hindus to be ready to respond when "they stab you in the back"[258]. These perspectives present violence as necessary for protecting a threatened social entity, which is defined by this very paradigm of security. They in turn create a social hierarchy between two broad un-deconstructed categories, which stand in opposition to one another.

Nevertheless, the argument developed here aims at showing that the practices which mirror this kind of rhetoric are not limited to the field of the Hindu Right and have implications that transcend the level of Hindu-Muslim relations. In fact, they affect the wider social relations, creating systems of control and subordination which involve the media and the state apparatus, through the discourses and practices of the government, the police and the judiciary. As argued in Chapter 2, the identification of a Muslim threat to the nation is transversal to different ideological positionings because it is peculiar to a "secular"/Brahminical project. In that context, "the communal" stands as the representation of the social processes which challenge its fundamental digits and "the Muslim" as the category which bears the responsibility for such social tensions. In this respect, violence becomes also a tool to produce the danger and at the same time intervene to suppress it, by targeting specific categories in the society.

In that sense, the introduction of the rhetoric of terrorism provides an interesting example of how the roots of discourses and practices of communalism cut across different dominant standpoints and entail a fundamental intersection of gender and socio-economic dimensions.

7.3.1 The Image of the Terrorist in Narratives of Communalism

After the events of 11 September 2001 and the assault on the Parliament of India of 13 December 2001[259], but especially after the bomb blasts of 2007 in Hyderabad, Islamic terrorism has become a central theme in discourses of religious identity and communalism in the city. As a consequence, "terrorist" violence has started to be

[258] Interview with a Hindutva activist, 23 June 2011.

[259] On 13 December 2001, armed men entered the building of the Parliament of India and started to shoot, killing 2 people and injuring 18. All of them were killed in a confrontation with security forces.

projected as a fundamental category for assigning specific positionings to at least one category of people in Hyderabad, namely young, poor, Muslim men.

On 18 May 2007, a bomb blasted in the historical Mecca Masjid, the biggest and most ancient mosque in the city of Hyderabad located in Charminar area (Figure 3Figure 4, p.128). Soon after the explosion, which took place during the Friday prayer and caused casualties and injuries, more people died in police firing, as a crowd gathered around the mosque[260]. The violent action of the police in such a dramatic moment is analysed below in terms of the meaning attributed to it within a discourse of communalism and as a fundamental element of tension between the state authorities and Muslim social activists and certain Muslim politicians.

The same year, on 25 August two blasts occurred in Lumbini Park, a popular green area in Hyderabad, and Chhat Bhandar, a restaurant in a crowded zone of the city centre.

In the course of the investigations about the series of bomb blasts in Hyderabad, different interpretations have attempted to identify the culprits with members of one "religious community", translating into practices of violence against certain sections of society and into a further polarisation of the Hindu-Muslim paradigm.

Immediately after the explosions, many political figures claimed that the "terrorist attacks" were aimed at disrupting "communal harmony" in the city of Hyderabad and the state of Andhra Pradesh[261]. In an interesting discourse after the blasts at Mecca Masjid, the then Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh S. Rajasekhar Reddy claimed that the explosion was a "terrorist attack and not a communal incident" and that "the spontaneous action of the police after the incident averted major communal riots"[262]. The former Chief Minister's position seems to connect "terrorism" and "communalism" in a rather ambiguous way. On the one hand, the two phenomena are

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[260] While some accounts report that people gathered to protest after the blast, others say they were in fact trying to help the victims of the blasts. See for example "Bhaskar Rao Report on Makkah Masjid police firing in AP Assembly" (*Siasat Daily,* 28 March 2011) http://www.siasat.com/english/news/bhaskar-rao-report-makkah-masjid-police-firing-ap-assembly and "Justice Bhaskar Rao committee submits its report to CM" (*Times of India,* 17 October 2010) http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2010-10-17/hyderabad/28261103_1_camp-office-bomb-explosion-police-officers. Last accessed, 18 August 2011.

[261] "Blast was terrorist attack: AP Chief Minister", (*Rediff News,* 19 May 2007), http://www.rediff.com/news/2007/may/19hydblast10.htm, "9 killed in Hyderabad blast; 5 in police firing" (*Rediff News,* 18 May 2007) http://www.rediff.com/news/2007/may/18blast.htm , "Muslim groups condemn Hyderabad blast" (*Rediff News,*18 May 2007) http://www.rediff.com/news/2007/may/18hydblast7.htm , "Lok Sabha condemns Hyderabad blasts" (*Times of India,* 29 August 2007) http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2007-08-29/india/27985861_1_hyderabad-blasts-peace-and-communal-harmony-twin-blasts. Accessed on 4 August, 2011.

[262] Blast was terrorist attack: AP Chief Minister", (*Rediff News,* 19 May 2007) http://www.rediff.com/news/2007/may/19hydblast10.htm ,

understood as having two different origins. In fact, later Rajasekhar Reddy claims that "terrorists have no religion or caste", implying that "terrorist" violence is driven by a form of a-morality, of abnormality with respect to a more acceptable, religiously-motivated violence which finds expression in "communal riots"[263]. This way of representing the events seems to attribute the responsibility for their occurrence to something exceptional and impossible to ascertain. In that sense, it places the agents creating trouble outside the identifiable actors, state and "communities", included and manageable within the urban/nation space. On the other, however, terrorism and communalism are connected as the former is intended to foster the latter. In this statement and in those of other public figures who interpreted the blasts as an attempt to create "communal tensions", a "terrorist attack" is portrayed as a possible cause for riots. In that sense, the prevention of "terrorism" is also linked to the prevention of "communalism" and the designation of "the terrorist" leads to the identification of the "communal threat". Indeed, police firing soon after the bomb blasts and its justification as a preventive measure seems to actually confirm the above representation. Therefore, the language of terrorism enters the discursive landscape of communalism to legitimise violence as a tool to prevent riots or the radicalisation of a "religious community", which in this case refers to "the Muslim". It is interesting to note that, in many accounts, the people who gathered after the blasts are labelled as an "angry mob", which in turns justifies police firing as directed towards a sort of dangerous faceless crowd[264].

The Threat: Male, Young, Poor and Muslim

After the first enquiries on the explosions were conducted, the official discourse reported in the main media coverage accepted "Islamic terrorism" as the most plausible explanation of the tragedy, following which the culprits started to be associated with the poor, Muslim male youth of Hyderabad's Old city.

This phenomenon has been reported as a general trend in Indian media by several social activists and scholars[265], who look at these forms of labelling as political

[263] See Puar and Rai (2002) for an elaboration of the theme of the terrorist as the monster and the implications for the construction of the category of citizen-patriot with reference to the US war on terror.

[264] Along a similar line, the BJP's reaction to the bomb blasts was to invoke a re-enactment of the special legislation for counter-terrorist activities, POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act)[264] which gives the state special powers to investigate, detain and enforce order in areas considered "sensitive". For a critical exploration of the tensions between anti-terrorism laws and violation of civil liberties in India, see (Preeti, 2004; Kalhan, Conroy, Mamta, Scott, & Rakoff, 2006).

[265] See for example "Muslim 'Terrorists' Manufactured By The Media" (*Two Circles,* 26 August 2009) in http://twocircles.net/2009aug26/muslim_terrorists_manufactured_media.html accessed on 4 August, 2011.

weapons, aimed at ghettoising minorities and deprive them of political power. Here, the focus on the case of Hyderabad city is useful to explore the implications it had for the justification of certain practices of violence and for the social positioning of specific sections of society, which in turn is reflected in discourses of interfaith relations.

One of the practices associated with the labelling was the identification of young, poor, Muslim men as potential terrorists by the police and the state authorities. Through the work of some social activists and lawyers, evidence has emerged of the illegal detention of young Muslim men based on accusations of conducting "suspicious" activities, and of the extortion of confessions through torture (Fathima, 2009)[266]. The investigations over such abuses have thus brought to the surface the involvement of state authorities in stigmatising a category of "potential terrorists" along religious, gender, age and socio-economic lines, through a form of organised selective violence. One of the documents prepared for the State Minorities Commission by the lawyer Ravi Chander on illegal detention, arrest and harassment of Muslim youth after the bomb blasts of September 2007, provides an account of his visit, together with a doctor and a number of social activists from different backgrounds, to the jails in which the "suspects" were detained. It states that among the men arrested "there is a simmering sense of anger and helplessness. A feeling that they are being picked up and ill treated just because they belong to a certain community – a minority community at that"[267]. This aspect is linked to the way the detainees have narrated their direct experiences of detention and extortion of confessions. According to their accounts, they were inflicted multiple physical and mental abuses such as electric shocks administered to the genitals, sleep deprivation, firing near the ears, hanging upside down, hanging heavy objects from the genitals, beating, threatening of abduction and rape of women relatives, and at the same time forced to invoke Lord Ram instead of Allah[268] while in pain. It is interesting to note the gendered connotation of many of these torture methods, targeting

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[266] I would like to thank Mohd Lateef Khan, Kaneez Fathima and Rafaat Seema for providing valuable information on the topic and for sharing their views about the cases of detention of young Muslim men in Hyderabad.

[267] Chander Ravi, Report to the Andhra Pradesh State Minorities Commission, presented on October 2008. Interestingly, though the report was submitted in October 2008, first to the State Minorities Commission and later to the government, at the time of writing this thesis it has not yet been discussed in the Parliament. The same has happened for the report of the Bhaskar Rao Commission, submitted to the state government on October 2010 probing the police firing at Mecca Masjid after the bomb blasts.

[268] Chander Ravi, Report to the Andhra Pradesh State Minorities Commission, presented on October 2008 and Fathima (September 2009).

the reproductive capacity of the young male and threatening the appropriation of the female through sexual abuse[269].

In my interactions with people living in Old city neighbourhoods of Hyderabad, I have been repeatedly told about cases of young Muslim men being taken from their homes at night and held prisoners in unknown locations for several days, on allegations of being involved in terrorist activities[270]. These practices have in turn had the effect of creating a feeling of insecurity among the rest of the inhabitants in the area in at least two ways. Among the Muslim neighbours of the young men, who feel scared and threatened and tend to avoid contact with them for fear of being associated with "potential terrorists"; and among some of the non-Muslim neighbours, who regard young Muslim men living in the area as constantly exposed to radical ideologies and therefore dangerously driven into "terrorism".

Interestingly, during the preparations for the 2011 census, BJP leaders claimed that thousands of Pakistani and Bangladeshi people, staying illegally in Andhra Pradesh, were trying to register themselves as Indian citizens. One BJP politician in particular, called for tighter security measures especially in the Old city of Hyderabad which he defined "a den for terrorists and illegal activities" due to police inefficiency[271]. Thus, such discourses and practices also materialise a constant threat of Islamic terrorism as a local, subtle, but growing phenomenon. Moreover, it has relevant implications for the positioning of a whole social category at the intersection of religion, gender, age and socio-economic dimensions. In 2010, during an interaction with a woman in the neighbourhood of Sultan Shahi, busy in her preparations for the Ganesh festival, I was told that the biggest fear among the processionists was the possibility that Islamic fundamentalists targeted the main *Ganesh Chaturthi* rally to create communal tensions. In fact, she claimed, "in the Old city, Pakistani agents train young Muslim boys to become terrorists"[272].

The language of violence, which in this case combines the paradigm of terrorism with that of communalism, plays a role in the configuration of religious communities' boundaries but above all impacts on the (dis)location of certain sections of society,

[269] See also Section 4.2.

[270] Conversation with a group of local women in Sultan Shahi, 25 August 2010.

[271] "Foreign nationals trying to enrol as Indian citizens: BJP" (*The Hindu*, 28 April 2010) http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/article413826.ece, last accessed on 10 August 2011.

[272] Conversation with a woman in Sultan Shahi, 20 August 2010.

identified in this case as the danger to the stability of the social structure but also, more in general, of India as a nation[273]. In that sense, different cases discussed in this thesis show the implications of a communal discourse for the identification of categories of people who are placed outside the community/nation-space. The discourse of the abnormality of terrorist violence which is then displaced onto the Muslim body can be understood in connection with the recurring reference to Pakistan in narratives of communalism and terrorism and the centrality of the theme of the disloyalty of "the Indian Muslim". At the same time, the contrast explored in Section 4.4 between representations of the "New city" as modern and developed and the "communally-sensitive" Old city as backward, inhabited by Muslim fundamentalists and lower caste criminals clearly establishes two opposing sides of an urban space which intersect with and in a way seem to mirror the India/Pakistan dichotomy[274]. The association between Pakistan-Indian Muslims-Old city recurs as a paradigm of the threat to the nation-community-city and is telling of how discourses of terrorism and communal violence reproduce processes of exclusion, subordination of certain social sections and erasure of the spaces and social tensions that are impossible to accommodate within a "secular"/Brahminical social project.

The qualification of the threatening Muslim masculinity as "terrorist" certainly marks a shift in language but maintains certain specific connotations which can be linked back to the identification of the Muslim as disloyal and, by extension, the whole Muslim minority as a danger to a supposedly "united (Hindu) India"[275].

More specifically, it designates a category within the "religious community", namely poor, young men living in the Old city, as the potential terrorist and, therefore, the communal threat. In that sense, it is possible to notice a development in the language of communalism with respect to the identification of the (possible) perpetrators of violence. While in the pre-2007 rhetoric of communal violence rioters were regarded as "anti-social elements", in the post-2007 most of the official discourse seems to ambiguously conflate anti-social behaviour, fundamentalism/terrorism and

[273] See for example the report on terrorism produced by the Crime Investigation Department of Andhra Pradesh police for the government of Andhra Pradesh, M. Siva Prasad, " Terrorism" available at http://www.cidap.gov.in/documents/Terrorism_422200413619%20PM.pdf, last accessed on 13 September 2011.

[274] The discourse is strongly associated with the image of a threat represented by Pakistan (and Bangladesh) to India as a nation and it is constitutive of official narratives of Hindu nationalism. For a perspective on such rhetoric see Pandey (1999).

[275] See (Devji, 1992) for a reflection on the image of "the Muslim" in the politics of nationalism in India, how it reflects the incapacity of nationalist projects to "see difference as constitutive of the nation" (Devji, 1992, p. 2).

communalism[276], locating such labels at the intersection of religion, age, gender and socio-economic location.

In an article appeared on the national newspaper *The Hindu*, Praveen Swami comments what he calls "An inheritance of hatred and unrest" in Hyderabad as the result of a politics of communalism in the Old city, which has led to the spread of "Islamist terrorism". In the Old city, "gangs of killers were set up to wage war on behalf of their respective religious communities, operating under political immunities granted by various groups". More specifically, what the AIMIM represented in the age of communal riots is now taken over by terrorist organisations as "Islamist terrorism in Hyderabad marked the breakdown of faith in the Majlis' (AIMIM) riot system: Muslim interests, recruits to terror groups like the Lashkar-e-Taiba argued, could only be defended by integration in the global jihad"[277]. According to this account, the Old city is a sort of urban underbelly, in which the "inheritance of hatred" between religious communities is acted out by criminals and gangsters, some of whom become, if Muslim, terrorists.

Further Implications

One of the most interesting aspects of the debate about the bomb blasts in Hyderabad and the narrative of the Muslim terrorist associated with them is that no militant group of Islamic inspiration has ever been proved responsible for them.

In fact, in 2010 an organisation close to RSS and even prominent members of the RSS itself have been identified as potential suspects in the cases of Mecca Masjid and other bomb blasts occurred in different Indian cities, such as Malegaon (2006), Ajmer (2007) and on the Samjhauta Express train (2007). Investigations are still in progress. However, the possibility that the construction of the Muslim threat might actually be proved factious by the disproval of the Islamist track at least in relation to some of the blasts, has nourished narratives of interfaith relations with a new theme: the Hindu terrorist counterpart. The discourse of violence has thus incorporated a debate about a conflict between religious communities at the level of terrorist activities, within the traditional paradigm of the Muslim vs. the Hindu. Even the controversial confession of a *Hindutva* activist seems to run along similar lines, when he claims that the city of

[276] I would like to thank Mohd Lateef Khan for suggesting the importance of this shift in language.

[277] Swami says that "in Hyderabad, communalism and Islamist terrorism are locked in a deadly embrace" (Praveen Swami, "An inheritance of hatred and unrest" (*The Hindu,* 7 September 2007). http://www.hindu.com/2007/09/07/stories/2007090754661200.htm last accessed on 16 August 2011.

Malegaon was chosen because of the large Muslim population, Hyderabad because many people there support Pakistan's politics, Ajmer to deter Hindus from visiting the famous *Dargah*[278] in which the bomb was installed and the Samjhauta Express because it was used by many Pakistanis[279].

In the attempt to offer possible interpretations of the issue of "terrorism" in India, media reports and the statements of certain politicians and social activists reflect a semantic of terrorism, which fundamentally reproduces the communal one. The implication of this new form of Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm seems to be, once again, to reaffirm the rhetoric of a conflict between religious communities, in which one is responding to the other's act of aggression. However, such standpoints hinder a reflection on the unquestioned dynamics of power reproduced by the very rhetoric of Hindu-Muslim terrorism/communalism. As the threat/threatened dichotomy continues to nourish narratives of hostile interfaith relations, there seems to be a relocation of the "religious community" in relation to terrorism, while the issue of the positioning of the body politics, the intelligence, the police, the judiciary and the media vis-à-vis events of violence such as the bomb blasts, the firing at Mecca Masjid and the detention of young Muslims seems to remain only superficially addressed. They are left outside the scope of the interpretations provided, because they do not fit the overarching connotation (Hindu or Muslim, Hindu vs. Muslim) attributed to explanations of the phenomenon of "terrorism".

7.4 Conclusion: Occasions for Violence and Spaces for Change

This chapter presents a perspective on violence, its interpretations and their role in configuring narratives of communalism. It has shown how a multiplicity of intersecting dimensions contributes to define such discourses and practices, with implications for relations of power among sections of society differently located in the dynamics of power. In narratives of communalism, violence is thus ritualised, with reference in particular to the way in which certain events and spaces come to be perceived as "sensitive" and violence expected to break out in such contexts. Such

[278] The explosion happened in a Sufi shrine (*Dargah*) commemorating the saint Hazrat Khwaja Moinuddin Chishty. It is a pilgrimage destination and a place of prayer not only for Muslims but for many people of different religious backgrounds all over India.

[279] It is a train that connects New Delhi in India with Lahore in Pakistan.

reflections can also be understood in the light of the analysis proposed in Section 4.4 on space as a central aspect of narratives of interfaith relations, related to both violence and other practices marking social differentials between "religious communities".

In the literature on "communal violence" as well as in the opinions of various people with whom I interacted during my fieldwork experience, riots are often associated with some triggering event which, in the rhetoric of Hindu vs. Muslim, is represented as a provocation by one of the two "religious communities". In particular, specific celebrations such as certain religious festivals or anniversaries of particular memorable events have become "sensitive" occasions for Hindu-Muslim relations. Though electoral politics is often associated with riots as a strategy to gain votes among the members of a "religious community", this chapter has not focused on elections. This choice of course does not have the purpose to downgrade the relevance of such dynamics for the understanding of discourses of communalism, but rather to highlight how narratives and practices of violence have an impact on the relations of power in the wider social context and beyond the Hindu-Muslim paradigm which is usually the underlying narrative of electoral politics. Thus, its purpose is to understand how different forms of violence contribute to construct a social order of domination and social polarisation among different sections of society and beyond the boundaries of party politics.

This conclusive section explores through examples the way in which violence is ritualised in connection with specific events, contributing to win them the label of communally-sensitive. Accordingly, the practices characterising these occasions start to change as they begin to be associated with a discourse of communalism. In certain cases, the threat of violence becomes an integral part of the event, shaping its rituals and producing fears and expectations of the participants, with security measures being largely discussed in the media and the presence of the police becoming a fundamental part of it[280]. In this sense, religious festivals can be regarded as crucial moments that, at the urban level, contribute to the definition of Hyderabad (and especially the Old city) as riot-prone.

Certain religious festivals are also probably the most illustrative examples of transformation of practices of and through violence. The analysis of the changes in the

[280] For an elaboration of the relevance of ritualisation of violence in "communal" conflicts see (Féron & Hastings, 2003).

iconic representations during *Ganesh Chaturthi* reveals how narratives of violence mirror practices of social polarisation and domination, based on the configuration of a religious community's boundaries. With respect to this, the transformation of the practices related to the Ganesh festival in Hyderabad can help understand the further implications of violence as ritual at the cultural, structural and direct levels, expressed at the intersection of multiple dimensions[281].

Similarly, while acquiring relevance in the rhetoric of communal violence in Hyderabad another festival called *Bonalu* has gradually changed in terms of ritual and practices. According to Naidu, *Bonalu* originates in the rituals of the lower castes peasants in the region of Telangana, celebrating the harvest season through the worship of the Mother Goddess, embodied nowadays by the deity Mahankali. The people who take part in the main procession are traditionally women, who dance and offer food to the goddess, which is then redistributed among family members, friends and neighbours as *Prasad*[282]. After becoming the occasion for violence in the past, the parade has seen an increasing participation of men. Moreover, it has extended beyond the areas in which it used to be celebrated to cross the main roads of the Old city (Naidu, 1990, pp. 127-132). This change in the procession routes of course contributes to the image of that urban area as "riot-prone", while deployment of police has become a constitutive part of the festival itself[283].

Another event which has come to be regarded as "sensitive" is the time of the Friday prayer, especially at the Mecca Masjid and in other areas of the Old city. As the weekly ritual is associated with potential violence, contingents of policemen are deployed around such places. In particular, in the area around the Mecca Masjid, where a small temple has in the years been erected against the monument of Charminar, the time of *Puja*[284] is strictly overlooked by the police while, at the same time, others guard the entrance of the mosque and the surroundings. While conducting fieldwork in

[281] The crowded, public parades, backed by a whole year of fund raising by a capillary organisational structure, have been introduced at the end of the 1970s by the then Congress Chief Minister Chenna Reddy who also used to participate in the final procession and address the devotees with a speech. See (Engineer, 1991a, p. 293; Engineer, 1991b, p. 271), EPW (2010, p. 15). Some Muslim social activists with whom I interacted during my fieldwork confirmed the narrative about Chenna Reddy and its "communal" attitude.

[282] It is some goods, generally food that is first offered to the deity or directly given by the deity or the saint and then consumed by the devotees.

[283] "Heightened Security for Bonalu in Old City", (*Siasat Daily*, 17 July 2011) http://www.siasat.com/english/news/tight-security-deployed-across-city-mark-bonalu-fest-k-khan, "Bonalu Procession Passes off Peacefully" (*The Hindu*, 7 August 2007) http://hindu.com/2007/08/07/stories/2007080774610200.htm. Last accessed on 18 August 2011.

[284] The work *puja* identifies the rites of devotion to Hindu deities.

Hyderabad, I have been warned by some of the workers of the organisations with which I was associated, about the "sensitiveness" of Fridays in the Old city. However, by observing the police behaviour, the feeling was that even their presence in those areas on Friday had become part of the very rituals performed. The "communal" character of religious practices in the Old city on Friday is also defined by the very presence of the police and their supervising the actions without however looking particularly alert or concerned. At the same time, their presence gives to the rituals a sort of unique character, a sense of sharp identification with one "religious community" in opposition to the other.

The ritualisation of violence is also present in narratives of past events whose meanings are contested in terms of either celebration or mourning but that, because of this distinction, elaborate violence as a boundary between "religious communities". An interesting example of these dynamics is the way in which December 6th is regarded every year as a "communally-sensitive" date (in Hyderabad and other Indian cities) due to the opposing representations attributed to it from a communal angle. On 6 December 1992, the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya was destroyed after a long, renewed and never completely settled (not even after the Supreme Court verdict passed in September 2010) dispute regarding the "ownership" of the place by either "Hindus" or "Muslims"[285]. For months after that episode, violence broke out in various cities in India including Hyderabad. The memory of those events, but also the episodes of violence that have occurred more recently around the same date[286], generally interpreted in connection with the memory of the Babri Masjid's demolition, have marked the representation of interfaith relations of various people with whom I interacted in the Old city of Hyderabad. Some of them, especially young generations, regarded those events as the reason why Hyderabad is called "riot-prone". Much in connection with the idea of "chosen trauma" explored in Chapter 5, the violence of 6 December 1992 is a landmark in the construction of a communal discourse. In fact, in conversations with people from areas affected by violence, December 6th is a symbolic date for both "Hindus" and "Muslims". The words of a Muslim woman reflect quite well this fundamental opposition: "they celebrate while we mourn". In that sense, even the expectation that

[285] For a description of the events of 6 December 1992 in Ayodhya, see (Friedland & Hecht, 1998, p. 102).

[286] Violence has for example broken up in 2000, 2003, 2004.

violence might break out on that day is part of its ritualisation in the context of narratives of interfaith relations[287].

Thus, violence and its interpretations have implications for the lived experiences of interfaith relations in Hyderabad. Focusing on certain neighbourhoods of the Old city, this chapter offers a perspective on the impact of violence in the everyday relations, from the family to the wider social realm. As argued by Cockburn, violence expresses itself in a continuum which is often reflected in the categories that conflicts contribute to dichotomise (Cockburn, 2004). So, the experience of violence, its interpretation as communal and the imposition of certain security measures have fundamental implications within and across the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm, in the relationships within different social spaces and among various sections of society. The very multidimensionality of violence is reflected in its different dynamics and levels and its constitutive role in (re)configuring, for example, gender or socio-economic relations within and across religious communities.

In this sense, the very changes in the social processes occurring in contexts of violence bring about transformations in the spatial arrangements of the city, in the way various social categories find different positioning in the hierarchies of power and in the language of social relations. Such processes of transformation exist beyond the fundamental distinction marked by the language of violence (in this case Hindu vs. Muslim) because they regard processes and dynamics that unfold within and across it.

The introduction of the language of terrorism in association with communalism certainly reflects a discursive as well as a practical shift in the social space of interfaith relations. However, it reproduces forms of super/subordination according to a "communal" logic, which does not question the implications of a communal paradigm at its roots. At the same time, however, the attempts by certain activists and common people to investigate and render more visible the episodes of the abuses on young Muslim men in Hyderabad in the context of the fight against terrorism contributed to configure a social space transversal to "religious communities" though articulating a discourse about the "Muslims community". Different local organisations (such as the Civil Liberties Monitoring Committee, COVA), but also journalists, lawyers and common people participated in countering the narrative equating terrorism with young, poor, Muslim men. By trying to mainstream the counter-narrative of young, poor,

[287] Conversation with residents of Sultan Shahi, Hyderabad, 18 August 2009, 27 August 2009.

Muslim, men living in the Old city as a scapegoat category, targeted by selective state-violence and of the "Muslim community" as structurally disadvantaged, they also challenged the fundamental Hindu-Muslim paradigm by introducing state authorities as fundamental parties and by unveiling the processes of configuration and reproduction of inequalities in society as constitutive of it.

This chapter thus proposes an argument on violence as a productive theme of narratives of communalism, unfolding in a tension between the reproduction of relations of super/subordination in society and attempts at subverting the existing social hierarchies and the discursive paradigms that sustain them.

In this sense, for example, the perspectives of some women living in Sultan Shahi and involved in "community development" projects promoted by the Henry Martyn Institute are quite illuminating. During an activity with a group of women we were reflecting about the relevance for the everyday life of the programme activities for the promotion of interfaith dialogue. One of the participants took the floor and, asking the others to correct her in case they disagreed, listed three main aspects. First of all, they need to work: going to the centre, learning a job or teaching is extremely important for their families because of its economic reward. Second, they grow in personality because they get out of their homes and interact with other people. Restrictions to women's mobility, partly legitimised through the discourse of the dangerous Hindu/Muslim man[288], are mirrored in the limitations to their access to school, training and jobs. This has consequences also on the possibilities to socialise with peers from other social and religious background. The centre "Aman Shanti" in Sultan Shahi, after several years of activity, is now regarded by many residents as a safe space, and therefore girls and women negotiate their attendance to the classes it offers, subverting the very limitations and restrictions imposed on their mobility and opportunity for socialisation[289]. Third, they feel they are helping to build a more inclusive notion of community, rejecting the idea that Hindus and Muslims belong to different hostile "communities"[290]. In many other cases, the stress was put on the possibility to learn a job, earn money for their family, access to basic health care and the possibility to break the limitations to their mobility in a safe collective space. It seemed that the major

[288] See Chapter 4.

[289] Group discussion with female students in Shanker Nagar, 2 June 2011 and Chandrayangutta, 14 June 2011, Hyderabad.

[290] Group activity with the teachers at HMI centre in Sultan Shahi, 27 August 2009.

issues they face as women belonging to the lower ladders of society are poverty and exclusion at multiple levels. Accordingly, most of the mothers of the pupils in Aman Shanti school told me that one of the main motivation for sending their children to HMI's institute was the low fees, besides "of course" the open-minded, friendly environment[291].

From the interactions with these women it seems that the relevance of the projects rests in the availability of tools for dealing with fundamental issues and, therefore, building higher self-confidence for the people and the collectivity. The issue of interfaith dialogue is part of this process of acquiring a more structured social consciousness but it is inseparable from issues of socio-economic and gender location in the family, the neighbourhood and the wider social and political contexts. These aspects are interesting and not limited to Sultan Shahi. A group of women in Chandrayangutta shared how many of them manage to convince their families to reduce the restrictions on their mobility outside the home through a process of building confidence and overcoming fears. First, the teachers (women) talk to the parents and other relatives of the girls in order to make them aware of the activities and their purpose. Second, the girls who are allowed to visit the centre are accompanied by a male family member, usually the father or the elder brother, or picked up by the teachers themselves. Last, as they begin to socialise with the other students, they start to move in groups, usually with someone's younger brother (sometimes even 8 years old) but at other times also with no male escort. For some of them, the increasing flexibility in their possibility to go to the centre without being accompanied by a man extends slowly to other outings, not related to the centre's activities. Thus, the process does not stop with the possibility to visit the centre but unfolds in a constant negotiation of positionings and perspectives about gender, socio-economic and, ultimately, interfaith relations. One of the women with whom I interacted, said with an ironic smile "we take along an 8-year-old boy to protect us, so that they [family] feel more secure"[292].

Another perspective of particular interest with respect to the intersection of gender and socio-economic dimensions in narratives of communal violence was shared by many of the women with whom I interacted about their own particular experience of curfew. They mainly stressed the impact that riots and curfew have on their position in

[291] Conversation with two women, whose children attend Aman Shanti school, Sultan Shahi, 1 September 2009. Group discussion with women, Sultan Shahi, 25 August 2008.

[292] Conversation with a women's group in Chandrayangutta, 14 June 2011.

the family and the community, which becomes quite ambivalent. On the one hand, because of fear of sexual violence during and soon after riots, they are required to observe very strict limitations on their mobility outside the house. On the other, they are suddenly in charge of providing for food and basic goods for the family, as men tend to remain hidden for fear of being caught by the police. This aspect was also highlighted by the activists of ASMITA, a women's organisation based in Hyderabad[293]. They maintained that the discourse and the practices of communal violence not only have implications on interfaith relations, but have also a transversal impact on relations between men and women in the family and society at large. However, this very ambiguity provides some of them with the opportunity to negotiate a new role in the family. As it generates certain tensions, it also offers possibilities for new forms of agency in the family and in the wider social space. For example, in the case of some of the women of Sultan Shahi, the issue of mobility becomes crucial as more control is exercised on their traditional roles when curfew is imposed. At the same time, however, some of them start to imagine spaces of actions which can be negotiated based on the very roles assigned to them and on the impact that narratives and practices of communal violence have on the position of women in the family and the community. Traditional positionings are then subverted by initiatives such as the "human chain" at Charminar and the measures to prevent violence in Sultan Shahi, explored in the next, conclusive chapter (Section 8.2). The most interesting aspect of such actions is that they play on the very roles assigned to the woman in the context of hostile interfaith relations and violence to gain leverage and power and to make their presence visible in the wider collectivity. These dynamics in the context of lived interfaith relations, become relevant when exploring the multiple dimensions of narratives of violence and the different levels at which they find expression. Such processes disclose the way in which violence in its complexity nurtures discourses of Hindu-Muslim conflict that in turn feed gender and socio-economic tensions, practices of violence but also possibilities for change.

[293] Conversation with a group of social activists, 4 August 2010.

7.5 THE MULTIPLE FACES OF LORD GANESH

Figure 10. A traditional image of Lord Ganesh, Kairatabad, Hyderabad, September 2009

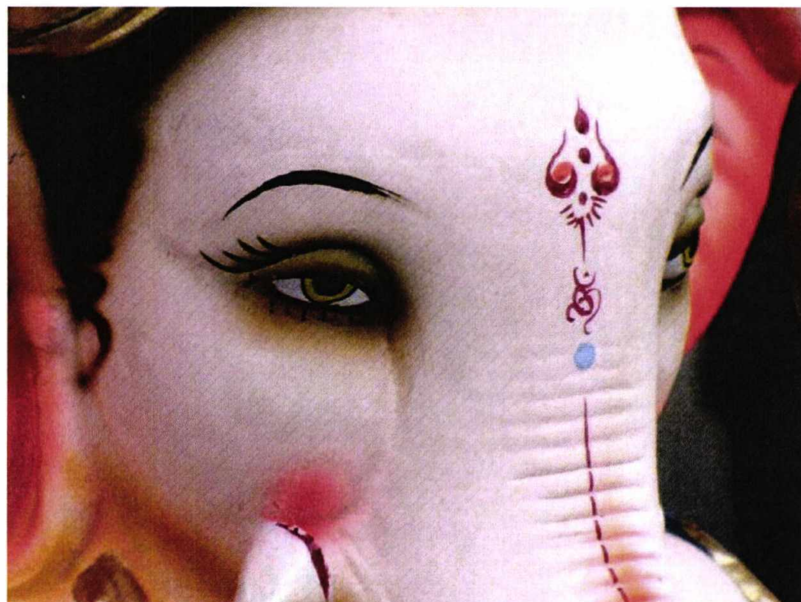

Figure 11. Lord Ganesh's sweet eyes in a traditional representation. Dhoolpet, Hyderabad, September 2010

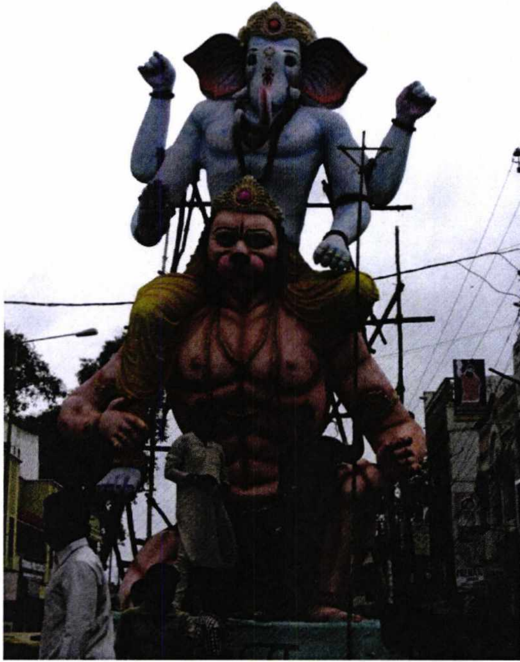

Figure 12. Hanuman, Lord Ram's disciple, carrying Lord Ganesh on his shoulders. Beghum Bazar, Hyderabad, September 2010

Figure 13. Lord Ganesh riding a lion. Near Bhoodevi Temple, Hyderabad, September 2010

Figure 14. Lord Ganesh holding the bow and arrow. On His right Hanuman is worshipping Him. Sultan Shahi, Hyderabad, September 2010

Figure 15. Children dancing at the music of loud-speakers during the preparation of the altar for a massive Ganesh's statue. Asaf Jahi Road, Hyderabad, September 2010

Chapter 8
Conclusion: Whither Communalism? Interfaith Relations, Conflict and Social Change

8.1 Introduction: Interfaith Relations beyond Communalism

The perspectives offered in this work draw inspiration from and try to establish a connection between various works that, besides their different disciplinary, methodological and conceptual backgrounds, share a fundamental aspect: a gaze at social conflicts as expressions of tensions over relations of power and, thus, as potentially transformative. In that sense, the exploration of the different themes of interfaith relations proposed in this thesis unfolds as a narrative of the processes through which a discourse of domination and social polarisation is reproduced amongst multiple, alternative representations of power relations in society.

According to Thapar, communal ideology "is an attempt to maintain the status quo in society and not allow the kind of change which will accommodate the aspirations of those who are deprived of resources and status, namely the lower castes and the lower classes" (Thapar, 1990, p. 5). Communalism, regarded here as a dominant narrative of conflict, is thus fundamentally a discourse of and about power, which participates in the reproduction of a social order grounded on relations of super/subordination among different sections of society. Multiple social tensions are therefore accommodated and constrained within a paradigm of Hindu-Muslim conflict, expressing the tendency to social, political, economic and intellectual hegemony of the Brahminical ideology and practice. This thesis is thus an attempt to explore the different processes of configuration and reconfiguration of the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm, its adaptation to changes in the social order, and the transformative impulses that subjugated narratives of interfaith relations can potentially have on the dominant discursive forms and practices[294]. In fact, the very tensions inherent and veiled in the communal paradigm, unfolding across multiple dimensions, represent what is regarded throughout this research as the pushes for social change integral to discourses and practices of interfaith relations.

[294] It is, in the words of Sandoval a perspective on "the rhetorical structure by which the languages of supremacy are uttered, rationalized – and ruptured" (Sandoval, 2000, pp. 2,3).

This thesis reflects also an effort to offer a narrative that could guide the reader through an exploration of a dominant discourse of interfaith relations and of social conflict as both persistent, in the way it structures social relations, and transforming in its continuous adaptation to pushes for social change. A way in which such dynamics are exemplified in this thesis is through the notion of "difference" in the form of multiple dimensions. Difference has been explored through the lenses of Indian secularism, epitomised in the phrase "unity in diversity" or in the politics of the religious community. According to that rhetoric, difference is configured as the essential character of Indian society. The idea of "majoritarianism" refers precisely to the essentialisation of difference and its conflation with social inequality, contributing to legitimise a patriarchal and socio-economically unequal social order. The conflict narrative of Hindu vs. Muslim is an expression of that very notion of difference that persists despite multiple changes in the official discourses of social relations.

In fact, this work also shows how the rhetoric of communalism and the politics of the religious community have adapted and changed according to the contexts. The integration of the narrative of terrorism, the growing of the *Hindutva* discourse, the specificity of Hyderabad within the wider Indian context are all examples of the malleability of dominant discourses, which is also indicative of their persistence in structuring social relations. In that sense, they unfold across multiple social spaces in different periods, but persist within an organising discursive landscape of domination, inscribed in the reproduction of a Brahminical social order. The notion of Brahminism employed in this thesis encompasses a number of forms of social interaction and of super/subordination, structuring relations of power in a patriarchal, hierarchical and non-negotiable way, across multiple dimensions (see Chapter 2, Chapter 4 and Chapter 6).

At the same time, in the research process, the discursive landscape of interfaith relations has also been represented through a notion of difference as a standpoint from which alternative languages and practices of representation and social relations can be articulated. In that sense, social change has a broader meaning which transcends the constant processes of adaptation of the forms of social interaction. It is in this way that the research process has developed also as a reflection of the analytical categories utilised to represent conflict. From the point of view of a meta-narrative of interfaith relations, this thesis proposes a reflection on the language, the meaning and practice of

researching conflict narratives. I refer here to the possibility of imagining alternatives to the dominant paradigm as a form of acquiring consciousness of the social positionings relegated in the a-political, non-public domain or alternatively identified as threats to an indisputable, naturalised norm. With respect to that, what this study proposes is an exploration of the tension between a dominant paradigm, its malleability and persistence through and despite discursive changes, and potentially transformative imaginations in the social space of interfaith relations.

The forms of domination that a communal paradigm contributes to configure within a Brahminical social order are based on a politics of difference that structures and naturalises relations of super/subordination in society. The exploration of such processes as unfolding at the intersection of gender and socio-economic dimensions revolves around a representation of two connected implications of narratives of interfaith relation. On the one hand, it offers a perspective on the processes through which a discourse of communalism configures and reproduces relations of super/subordination in society. On the other, it helps unveiling the multiple dimensions of interfaith relations and the tensions that find expression within, beyond and across the boundaries of "religious communities". In the process, it articulates a perspective grounded on everyday life as a fundamental discursive space that structures social positionings, meanings and relations of power.

8.2 TRANSCENDING COMMUNALISM IN NARRATIVES OF RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE

This section aims at further clarifying the overall argument of this thesis by providing examples of discourses and practices articulated at the grassroots and addressing multiple dimensions of conflict. It draws from my fieldwork experience in Hyderabad and focuses specifically on initiatives recently promoted, with the support of local organisations, in certain areas of the city affected by violence. The relevance of these cases for the purposes of this thesis rests in their unfolding as social processes at the intersection of gender and socio-economic dimensions, reclaiming a location in the political and reconceptualising the community as a social space configured in everyday life. In that sense for example, the actions of women rejecting the naturalisation of gender categories that legitimates cultural, structural and direct forms violence and asymmetric power relations from the domestic to the public spaces are regarded as

potentially transformative vis-à-vis the dominant communal paradigm explored in this thesis. At the same time, I will try to highlight how a perspective on the intersection of multiple dimensions (as axes of power) in narratives of conflict can help understand how a paradigm of domination transforms or persist through and despite attempts at overcoming the fundamental Hindu vs. Muslim discourse.

In the light of the implications of the rhetoric of communalism and certain politics of religious identity, this part explores social practices addressing the fundamental gender and socio-economic dimension of hostile interfaith relations, especially in the way they configure social polarisation and power asymmetries. In particular, discourses and practices that promote women's agency question the connection between hostile interfaith relations, socio-economic exclusion of certain sections of society and gendered categories that contribute to legitimate conflicts and dominance at a multiplicity of levels.

The examples presented here refer to initiatives enacted in the Old city of Hyderabad, based on women's direct engagement for the prevention of violence and the promotion of a space for everyday co-operation across different social positionings and religious affiliations. In particular, I propose below the analysis of two collective actions involving women (and also men, though less visibly) that, by challenging gendered discourses that justify the reproduction of Hindu-Muslim hostility, were designed to prevent violence through a renegotiation of gender relations. In that sense, the analysis proposed here is connected with the exploration of different themes throughout this work. In so doing, I hope to clarify how this research regards the adaptability of forms of domination and the potential for social change as both constitutive of the social space of interfaith relations.

8.2.1 Beyond Communalism: Women's Initiatives for Conflict Prevention in the Old City

Chapter 7 discusses the implications of violence and its interpretations in structuring social relations in the form of super/subordination and social tensions according to a Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm. In particular, it explores examples taken from certain areas in the Old city of Hyderabad repeatedly affected by waves of violence and inhabited predominantly by economically and socially relegated groups. As argued in Sections 7.2.3 and 7.4 such episodes of violence and the concomitant,

increasing relevance of a communal discourse have contributed to bring about spatial segregation along intersecting religious, socio-economic and gender lines.

Diana Francis contends that interventions for conflict transformation cannot ignore the impact that conflicts have on women and vice versa (Francis, 2004). The importance of this relationship emerges as one acknowledges the role played by gender and power asymmetries in the reproduction of conflict dynamics and is linked to the construction of safe spaces in which conflicts are addressed through non-violent and creative social practices. Thus, women can contribute through a specific gender-oriented approach to transformative processes. Along a similar line, Cynthia Cockburn offers a perspective on the relevance of a gender lens in addressing dynamics of social conflict. In that sense, she also offers an understanding of the implications of violence at multiple levels and for the wider relations in society beyond the conflict dichotomy. Cockburn's study of actions for reconciliation promoted by a women's organisation in Northern Ireland, called "Women's Support Network", claims that the engagement of women for the development of the community enabled those participating in the programme to acknowledge their needs as women across different socio-economic backgrounds, while engaging for the improvement of the living conditions of their "communities", plagued by poverty and violence (Cockburn, 1998).

My fieldwork experience in the Old city of Hyderabad has in part been associated with the work of some organisations which run community-based projects, aiming in particular at fostering reconciliation along with economic and social justice. Among them, the Henry Martyn Institute (HMI) has been working since the early 1990s, when riots broke out, keeping the city in a state of agitation, fright and under curfew for several weeks. The neighbourhood of Sultan Shahi was one of the worst hit by episodes of violence, which were and still are mainly narrated as "communal". The identification of the neighbourhood of Sultan Shahi with "communal violence" has recurred several times in the conversations I had with the residents. For examples, I was often told that drivers of auto-rickshaws from outside the neighbourhood and its surroundings would often refuse a ride to Sultan Shahi due to the "communal" divisions and the risk of incidents. More in general, the implications of a communal paradigm on the everyday lives of the inhabitants of the area have been discussed in Sections 4.5 and 7.2.3 with reference to the multiple forms of exclusion across gender, socio-economic and spatial dimensions, concealed by a dominant narrative of Hindu-Muslim conflict. In

that sense, the location of HMI's building at the interface of what are regarded as the "Hindu" and "Muslim" zones in the neighbourhood bears particular significance for the image of the centre as a "safe community space" that transcends the boundaries (both symbolically and physically) between Hindus and Muslims (Figure 5. The "Muslim" (left) and "Hindu" (right) sides of the locality of Sultan Shahi, seen from the roof-top of HMI's Aman Shanti centre. August 2009p.129). The centre in a way brings down a wall which defines the boundaries of "religious communities" and the mutual insecurities that such social categories generate. Within a discourse of conflict, physical and symbolic walls epitomise the dominance of a naturalising, dichotomous paradigm, framing every social tension as a declination of one single axis of separation and reinforcing it as the fundamental social cleavage. As Violi frames it, "a wall prevents the development of familiarity, of access to the 'other's everyday lives and narratives" (Violi, 2008, p. 52).

In that sense, HMI's centre has a specific symbolic function as an "intercommunity" location at the interface of Hindu/Muslim areas. The relevance of interfaces not only as sites of violence but also as spaces for negotiation and mediation has been articulated by Féron with reference to two urban settings in Northern Ireland (Féron, 2008; 2011). The effort to establish connections at interfaces is based on the recognition of the potential for reconciliation that such areas might have precisely for their physical and symbolic function as boundaries between communities. Féron shows how peace work at interfaces entails questions of trust, leadership, and prevention of violence and effective consolidation of everyday practices across "religious communities'" boundaries (Féron, 2008, pp. 46-50). In the present work, I would like to focus more specifically on the possibilities and the challenges to transcend the dominant narrative of conflict by reconfiguring social practices within and across social boundaries at interfaces. In the case of the examples discussed here, I will try to elaborate on the active role played by women at interfaces, in structuring a "politics of relationship" (Violi, 2008, p. 64), which articulates a discourse of reconciliation as a relational process rather than an outcome of specific practices. Finally, I will try to connect these initiatives with the overall perspective of this thesis and in particular to the tension between the rootedness of the communal paradigm with its implications for relations of power in society and the attempts at transcending it, at the intersection of multiple dimensions.

The activities at "Aman Shanti" centre have started in the 1990s and are conducted by the local population. They aim to combine a process of uplifting the collectivity's everyday life with broader initiatives for reconciliation. Paramount importance is attributed to the participation of women. Rajeswari, a former project officer at HMI, argues that women actively contribute to training, work and collective decision-making processes in a context of "interfaith dialogue" (Rajeswari, 2003). In order to build trust among people divided by years of violence and communal rhetoric, women and men of different religious affiliations and social locations share the spaces and the tools to improve the socio-economic conditions of the whole collectivity. Their way of representing this work seems to defy the norms and stereotypes that justify and legitimate the segregation between "religious communities" also through gendered discourses and practices.

Interestingly, however, this does not translate into a straightforward and shared perspective of the role of women in these "community development" projects, but into a constant negotiation of multiple tensions over gender roles and relations across age, religion and socio-economic dimensions. In that sense, practically, women's visibility in social relations within, between and across religious communities and the relevance of their participation in the activities do not always recur in the narratives of the projects[295]. The presence, contribution and responsibility of women is at times debated and configured along the process, but can also be veiled and relegated into the domain of the "important but less relevant". In that sense, in some of the interactions with women's groups as well as project officers, I observed a tendency to perceive their activities as having a minor impact with respect to the "official politics" oriented towards concrete outcomes, and as having an effect "only" at the level of family/community relations[296]. These perspectives are not peculiar to the context of HMI's projects in Sultan Shahi. They are for example in line with the dynamics observed by Violi among Israeli and Palestinian women with respect to the way they perceived the relevance of their activities vis-à-vis other, more "official" peace negotiations (Violi, 2008). In that sense, the distinction between two levels of the politics of reconciliation, "official" and "non-official", in terms of their relevance,

[295] In conversations with project officers and the participants, especially with groups of women the gender question was ambivalent in its relevance vis-à-vis the structuring of narratives of interfaith relations and community development.

[296] Conversations with women's groups. Sultan Shahi, Hyderabad, 27 August 2009 and 23 August 2010. Conversations with a project officer, Hyderabad, May 2011.

impact and effectiveness seems to reproduce the gendered separation and the differential value between a domain of the private and a-political vs. one of the public and political. Rajeswari in a way points to this problematic dichotomy while arguing that the commitment of public and political authorities to reject a politics of hostile interfaith relations and the communal paradigm is crucial to make women's initiatives truly effective (Rajeswari, 2002, p. 125).

As Tharu and Niranjana contend with respect to the anti-arrack women's agitation in Andhra Pradesh mentioned in Section 2.4, the interpretations that relegated the movement into the space of the family seem at the same time to devoid it of any "political" significance (Tharu & Niranjana, 1994, p. 109-114). However, from a perspective that acknowledges the "politics of everyday life", the potential for change inherent in such actions stems from their rootedness in the context of configuration and reproduction of practices of domination and narratives of conflict, transgressing their respective discursive boundaries. Their relegation into a private, a-political dimension is also a mechanism of reproduction of forms of dominance, normalised by a naturalisation of distinctions connected to power. In that sense, the perception that women's engagement for social change is less relevant with respect to that of politicians, community leaders and other more visible figures reflects certain dynamics of power relating to gender and socio-economic positioning, informing also the communal paradigm. Hence, the relevance of exploring the persistence of the forms of domination and social polarisation within and despite attempts at transcending them. Without underestimating the impact of the activities of women's groups in HMI's projects I would like here to point to the tensions, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, revolving around power inequalities and their adaptability to pushes for social change[297].

In her presentation of the initiatives in the neighbourhood of Sultan Shahi, Rajeswari cites an interesting example of co-operation which directly involved various women to prevent violence from breaking out in the area (Rajeswari, 2003, p. 124). During and after the Gujarat massacre in 2002, tensions and riots took place across

[297] This has also specific implications with respect to the differential value attributed to women leaders' and other less visible female participants' actions. The dynamics of power among the various women participating in HMI's community-development projects also reflects lines of separation along socio-economic and religious dimensions. Here, the generalisation of the category of women is however utilised to stress the attempt inherent in the initiatives explored to speak from different social locations through a unitary voice as "women" beyond "communalism". The very gender connotation of this discourse is analysed below in terms of its political positioning vis-à-vis of a communal paradigm.

India. In Hyderabad as well, the atmosphere became very tense and volatile especially in the Old city, to the extent that some inhabitants of the neighbourhood of Sultan Shahi decided to flee their homes, fearing a violent escalation of the situation. A group of around thirty women, encouraged by the staff of the Henry Martyn Institute held meetings to decide ways to co-operate in order to prevent incidents in Sultan Shahi. They agreed that their action would focus on monitoring the situation in the streets and lanes surrounding their homes in order to alert authorities in case of rumours[298] or possible incidents and skirmishes. They also chose to encourage the members of their respective families to avoid participating in possible clashes. These women decided that, instead of hiding in their houses or support men in perpetrating violence, they would make themselves visible in the outdoors, especially during and immediately after the Muslim Friday prayer, when clashes had taken place in the past (Rajeswari, 2003, p. 124).

The consciousness articulated of the responsibility and the possibility to play a role in preventing skirmishes and clashes and in subverting the "communal violence" discourse through a renegotiation of their role as women in it, interacted in those days with another predominantly female initiative which was conducted in a different part of the Old city, likewise considered "communally-sensitive". It is the area surrounding Charminar, which, as argued in Section 4.4, can be regarded as a location for spatial discourses and practices of "communalism" (Figure 1,Figure 2,Figure 3 andFigure 4, p. 128). On 15 March 2002, a group of women supported by a local network of NGOs, COVA[299], decided, by holding one another's hands, to realise a human chain around Charminar. The immediate purpose of the initiative was to avoid possible clashes at the end of the Friday prayer and to symbolise the desire for peace and reconciliation among people of different faiths. According to an activist from COVA, most of the women who organised and participated in this initiative lived in the Old city and belonged to the lower ladders of society[300]. During my fieldwork experiences, I had the chance to discuss the organisation, significance and implications of the action with social activists and few of the women who directly participated in it. They shared that in those days the

[298] This aspect is particularly relevant as in most cases the violence is announced by rumours of aggressions perpetrated by members of one community against someone of the other one (especially women). On the role played by rumours in riots see (Horowitz, 2001). For a specific focus on Hyderabad see (Kakar, 1996, p. 34-35).

[299] *Supra*, note 57.

[300] See http://www.covanetwork.org/peacein_1.htm

atmosphere in the Old city was so tense that the end of the Friday prayer had become an occasion for young people, inflamed by the slogans and propaganda of local militant Muslim and Hindu organisations, to engage in skirmishes and stone-pelting. The situation became particularly volatile also because a constant and consistent police deployment was contributing to increase the tension, due to their contested positioning vis-à-vis a Hindu vs. Muslim discourse (Chapter 7)[301]. So, practically, the circle of women around Charminar also created a sort of safe space between the different categories of the paradigm of communal violence. Such "buffer-zone" at the same time exposed and re-signified the woman-community-victim narrative, subverting its significance within a discourse of interfaith relations.

8.2.2 The Social and Political Significance

In spite of their apparent extemporaneous character, both initiatives were part of broader local projects connecting the social space of interfaith relations, with issues of socio-economic and gender justice. Thus, they have very interesting implications vis-à-vis the considerations offered in this thesis on the mechanisms of the politics of religious identity, the rhetoric communalism and the potential for social change. They both ground their strength on the presence and visibility of women in the public spaces with the purpose of avoiding clashes at times of tension. This is particularly relevant, keeping in mind the implications of the politics of the religious community for the structuring of gender and socio-economic relations and for the justification of violence by virtue of the duty of men to protect and defend women (read, the community)[302]. Thus, the activism of women of different faiths and social backgrounds in public places that tend to become, under certain circumstances, sites of riots, is a political move with both symbolic and practical implications.

First of all, women become autonomous agents with respect to the conflict. They reject the passivity associated with the role of victims that confines them to the "privacy" of the home and legitimises violence in the name of their safety, but also that of participants in the conflict in support of "their" men. In a way, women redefine their own social positioning while simultaneously questioning the one assigned by the conflict narrative. Rajeswari notes that the discussions among the women's group of

[301] The reference to the police presence was made in particular during an interview with a social activist from COVA, Hyderabad, 8 September 2010.

[302] See Chapter 4.

Sultan Shahi regarding how to engage in the prevention of violence in the neighbourhood were "lengthy and at times heated" (Rajeswari, 2003, p. 124), showing how the decision-making processes involved an amount of negotiation and accommodation.

Second, through the engagement in complex and complicated meetings, which required constant sharing and discussing of worldviews and positionings, women practiced a perception of themselves as potential agents of change. More importantly, the engagement with the languages, meanings and practices of interfaith relations and their multiple dimensions passed not only through short-term and "emergency" actions, but also through the everyday engagement within spaces owned by the whole collectivity. This approach allows for a notion of "community" grounded on the sharing of common spaces and on conducting activities that require constant interactions among people of different social and religious backgrounds. Rajeswari notes that the women in Sultan Shahi had been asked to participate in the human chain initiative around Charminar but decided to decline the invitation to ensure their presence in their own neighbourhood, in the light of the importance attached to assuming responsibility of the situation in the social context in which they were engaged on an everyday basis (Rajeswari, 2003, p. 124).

With respect to the above reflections, it is also important to note that the power of the actions was in part grounded on the very gendered narratives of the "woman as the harmless victim", constitutive of the politics of the religious community. While completely non-violent, public and inclusive, the two forms of social mobilisation presented play on the assigned women's religious, socio-economic gender positionings to cross the boundaries of private/public, Self/Other, weak/strong, super/subordination configured around narratives of communal violence. In the two examples presented here, agency is grounded on the visibility of the processes though which relations of super/subordination are structured and on the relative power deriving from the bodily presence as women in the public space, in the process of transcending communalism and its implications for social relations.

In that sense, these actions have a political dimension of particular significance for the perspectives articulated in this research. In the interaction with one of the participants in the human chain I was enthusiastically told that, at that time, the initiative struck the attention of the people in Hyderabad. The objective of the women

who organised and took part in it was precisely to enact something extraordinary, unexpected and completely new that could "awake people from inaction". The question of "taking action" recurred in the women's narratives as a fundamental step of imagining and enabling possibilities for change. In that sense, rendering their action visible in a "collective form of communication" (Violi, 2008) seemed to define their engagement as "political" in a wider and more structured way. Accordingly, the participation of women in such visible and extraordinary actions was showing their will and capacity to take an initiative of great impact on public opinion, challenging dominant gender categories and roles[303].

However, going back to the tension between the persistence of power inequalities and potential for change, I would like to stress a final aspect of the discourses about the human chain initiative that I find particularly significant. While stressing the political message inherent in the action, one of the activists who supported the initiatives told me that, so great was its impact that the leaders of the movement were harshly critiqued by journalists and other public figures[304]. The criticism was based on the idea that such an action had put women in a very dangerous situation at a time of tension and conflict between "religious communities". I found such positioning quite telling of how resilient the gendered discourse of the communal paradigm can be, despite attempts at exposing and challenging it.

The two conflict prevention actions in Hyderabad are examples of a politics in which difference is the starting point for the engagement in a process of building relationships by transgressing boundaries. In the process, they show some peculiarities and some common traits. While they both play on the visibility and direct engagement of women in the outdoors, the first one works at the level of the family as a public space and women's role as a political one. It is meant to prevent conflict by intervening in Sultan Shahi and the spaces of interfaith relations in the name of a collectivity that goes beyond the religious community's boundaries. The second instead seems to unfold at the level of the "religious community". It somehow acknowledges its boundaries as lines of separation: women intervene in a highly symbolical urban space (Charminar) to keep Hindus-Muslims-police (the main categories of discourse of communal violence) separate. Women, in this case, represent the possibility for transgressing such

[303] Conversation with a woman social activist in Hyderabad, 30 August 2010.

[304] Conversation with a man social activist in Hyderabad, 08 September 2010.

boundaries in a context in which, however, the danger of "communal violence" draws lines of separation.

In both cases, the religious, socio-economic and gender locations of the participants are the starting point, a necessary recognition for the articulation of a politics of reconciliation. However, they are representations contextual to narratives of interfaith relations at that particular moment. They are concretely shaped and creatively renegotiated and transformed in the course of actions. The positionings articulated in the initiatives explored can have different meanings for the various participants but share a significant trait: they are configured concretely in the attempt to subvert gender, religious and socio-economic boundaries. They also do not resolve but help us see fundamental tensions beyond the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm, which can then be represented as inherent in the malleability of conflict narratives, forms of domination but also as articulating a potential for social change. The actions are therefore inherently political, historicised in the process of elaborating a form of social consciousness among women that transcends the rhetoric of communalism across multiple dimensions. This is important as the power inequalities that the communal rhetoric contributes to configure transcend the dichotomy of Hindu vs. Muslim to encompass the broader social structure and the hierarchies that are expressed in it.

The perspective offered here does not regard these examples as the proof that forms of domination and social polarisation constitutive of a Brahminical social order are being overcome. However, the actions described are relevant at least for a reflection on the way we write about interfaith relations, conflict and social change. First, they show that communalism is a discourse and practice that pertains to a specific paradigm of power, which is dominant in the way it structures social relations and their meaning, but also constituted by multiple intersecting dimensions around which tensions and possibilities for change can be articulated. Second, they express a politics of everyday life as the space of constant negotiation, configuring "a new form of political discourse [...] very different from the traditional political agenda, both in terms of its themes, its language and mode of communication" (Violi, 2008). Third, they allow for a representation of different sections of society (in this case socio-economically relegated women across different religious background) not as pre-existing and static but as categories configured at the intersection of the different dimensions of a discursive landscape. In that sense, they also provide an example of the process through which a

form of political consciousness is configured among certain sections of society contextually to the discourses of domination with respect to which they occupy a subordinated positioning.

In that sense, another brief example might help clarify the relevance and meaning attached to a politics of everyday life in this work. It is a story that a group of women from the neighbourhood of Chandrayangutta in Hyderabad shared with me when I visited HMI's "community development" projects. The area is regarded as "highly sensitive" and as the electoral stronghold of the AIMIM. Only few weeks before my visit there, Akbaruddin Owaisi member of the Andhra Pradesh Legislative Assembly and brother of the AIMIM leader Asaduddin Owaisi, was attacked and shot at in revenge for his alleged misbehaviour towards the politically and business-wise rival family of Muhammed Pahalwan[305]. Interestingly, the media anticipated tensions and possible riots as a consequence of the event which was evidently a feud between two (Muslim) families. The episode and its interpretations show quite well how the "communal" label tends to be attached to events involving the AIMIM quite automatically and how this impacts on the representation of the neighbourhood as the electoral base of Akbaruddin Owaisi.

Back to the conversation with the women in HMI's centre, the story they narrated provides a perspective on everyday life experiences through and despite discourses of communalism, while connecting different themes discussed in this work as constitutive of "religious communities"' boundaries. On the day of my visit to the centre, the neighbourhood was celebrating a wedding between a young local woman and a man from Secunderabad. While conversing with a group of women I was offered food by the bride's family members. Some of the women thus started to make comments about the different types of food, how they had been prepared and for what auspicious purposes. In this context, they shared the story of the previous year's *Iftar* party (the evening breaking of the daily fast during the month of Ramadan) and how at that time they felt protagonists of a shift in practices within the neighbourhood. One day, as part of the centre's activities, the women's group organised a food sharing party for *Iftar*. Muslim women prepared the food and invited other women from the

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[305] See for example http://www.indianexpress.com/news/Owaisi-s-brother-shot-at--critical--Hyderabad-tense/784086/ ; http://www.deccanherald.com/content/157861/hyderabad-tense-attack-owaisi.html. In fact, while taking a ride along the usually bursting and lively streets of the Madina and Charminar Old city areas on the same day, I noticed that despite the shops closed and the police deployment, there were no signs of tensions.

neighbourhood to share it at HMI's centre. Some of the narrators remarked that the centre is located in the "Hindu" area. According to them, at the beginning of HMI's activities in the neighbourhood, this constituted a problem for Muslim women who had to overcome their fears and above all to convince their families to let them enter the "other community's space". Thus, the preparation of the *Iftar* party at the centre was already a form of boundary crossing. Proudly, the women shared how slowly during the evening, more people started to join them in the celebration of *Iftar*. Not only women, but also men of different age groups joined the celebration to the point that the food turned out to be insufficient. Thus, more was prepared and offered and the party went on for more than four hours, bringing together people who, according to my interlocutors, would normally avoid sharing food and eating together. In that sense, they felt they had played a role in dismantling some of the social boundaries, creating a community space based on the importance of sharing food which, according to one of the participants, is "a very personal feeling of creating a relationship because you overcome taboos"[306]. The participation of different people from the neighbourhood in the *Iftar* celebrations was narrated by the group of women as a story of unprecedented coming together of people who would normally remain separated across socio-economic and religious lines. The space created by cooking, sharing food and celebrating together regardless of the "official" community boundaries shows how the everyday life can become a space for changing practices of religious celebrations, across socio-economic and gender lines.

At this point, it might then be worth asking to what extent "official narratives" are ready to acknowledge the political dimension of initiatives which challenges the master politics of difference in everyday life practices. Why would family feuds between politicians/land speculators become breaking news of "communal" politics, while large-scale celebration of *Iftar* regardless of, or better, across gender, socio-economic, age and religious differences in the same neighbourhood remain laudable but "private" initiatives with no resonance in the "official" discourse?

[306] Conversation with a women's group, 14 June 2011, Chandrayangutta, Hyderabad.

8.3 CONFLICT AND THE SPACE OF INTERFAITH RELATIONS: A PERSPECTIVE

This thesis is meant to guide the reader through a narrative of interfaith relations configured as a social space of domination and social polarisation and at the same time potentially transformative. The focus on the city of Hyderabad has allowed for a further contextualisation of the dynamics of interfaith relations, offering a perspective on processes of becoming "riot-prone", "communally-sensitive" and their implications for the structuring of social relations. In that sense, Hyderabad is the context in which reflections on the social space of interfaith relations have unfolded through conversations, interactions, encounters and observations in different spaces and circumstances. In the process of shifting between different perspectives, I have grounded my angle of analysis on two intersecting, organising principles of social relations, gender and socio-economic positionings. The multidimensionality of interfaith relations is the starting point for understanding conflict narratives as constitutive of and constituted in a wider social order.

The process of exploring the discourse of communalism starts as an analysis of its meaning and implications as both an analytical and socio-political paradigm. In so doing, it digs into its articulations as a discursive form, contextual to relations of power in a social order defined by a Brahminical ideology. The conflict narrative of communalism is therefore located within the discursive landscape of Indian secularism, nationalism, majority/minority relations as structuring and naturalising forms of domination and social polarisation. In that sense, the communal paradigm is a narrative of homogenisation and differentiation, unfolding in processes of configuration of relations of power in society across gender and socio-economic dimensions.

The perspective offered in this work runs through different themes which I have considered constitutive of the politics of the religious community, all along the research, in fieldwork and in the reading and writing processes. This work aims at offering a perspective on "communal conflict", drawing from feminist contributions to understanding issues of power, from existing studies on Indian nationalism and approaches to conflict analysis, and personal experiences in engaging with the text and context of interfaith relations in the urban setting of Hyderabad. The narrative proposed focuses also on the way in which the idea of conflict is often conceptually restricted as a "given" of social reality which needs to be resolved. It presents a reflection on how such

a perspective might in fact hinder an understanding of conflict narratives as integral to a social order, thus reproducing certain dynamics of power and veiling multiple social tensions articulating possibilities for a change in the paradigm of the language, the form and the practices of social relations. The argument proposed in this work regards conflict as a narrative of social interaction that, in certain circumstances, can conceal behind a language of separation and violence the complexity of power relations unfolding across multiple dimensions and the reproduction of forms of super/subordination in society.

The specificity of the examples discussed in this conclusive chapter is meant to deepen the perspective on the tensions between the persistence of conflict narratives through the reproduction of forms of domination and social polarisation on the one hand, and multiple pushes for social change on the other. This chapter explores some actions taken within the social space of interfaith relations in Hyderabad that attempt to challenge certain practices of dominance and hostility inherent in the communal paradigm. These social practices play on the gender and socio-economic boundaries that contribute to justify and legitimate a discourse of communalism along relations of super/subordination. They provide an imaginative angle from which a discourse of communalism can be transcended if contextualised and deconstructed in its different and intersecting dimensions. At the same time, they show how some paradigms of domination tend to reproduce themselves through and despite the very attempts at changing practices of interfaith relations.

In that sense, the narrative proposed in this thesis aims also at sharing with academics and practitioners in conflict-related fields a reflection on what is regarded as the main conflict/peace paradigm, what comes to feed the "official" conflict narrative and what is made (in)visible within such discourses. In the process of exploring the different themes and examples in this work, I have found it useful to draw from different disciplinary fields in order to situate them conceptually within a framework that acknowledges the multidimensionality of interfaith relations, beyond the politics of communalism. This process has translated into a reflection on whether a change in perspective from the official conflict narrative to the social order in which it is reproduced might actually reveal a space of interfaith relations in India which transcends the Hindu vs. Muslim paradigm, cutting across multiple socio-economic and gender positionings, relations of super/subordination and social tensions and containing

a potential for change inherent in the very text and context of domination and social polarisation.

In that sense, this work also integrates a reflection on the way in which certain sites of contestation might unfold into a paradox of both countering the official conflict narrative and containing the seeds for the reconfiguration of certain discourse of domination and social polarisation. From the perspective of this thesis, awareness of such tension is a fundamental aspect for representing the social order of conflict and its reproduction instead of limiting the view to the most visible social categories and their mutual (hostile or peaceful) relations. The choice to regard gender and socio-economic differentials as crucial dimensions of narratives of communalism has provided a framework for exploring interfaith relations as part of a social order and not as constituting a self-standing space defined by either conflict or harmony. The intersection between gender and socio-economic dimensions thus identifies some of the axes of separation, along which power relations are structured in a hierarchical way, and then naturalised and concealed through the different discourses of difference, conflict, secularism, nationalism, violence, tradition analysed throughout this work.

Exploring and exposing the processes of configuration of "communalism" as discourse and practice within the Indian context, and in particular with reference to social dynamics in the city of Hyderabad, has been a research journey which has entailed a shift in perspective. That change has happened as a process of engaging with the topic of this research, the contexts and the multiple points of view to which I have been exposed. In that sense, the approach elaborated in this work stems from an intellectual and emotional engagement with the discourses and practices in the social space of interfaith relations in Hyderabad, and a commitment to represent social relations through, within and beyond the paradigm of Hindu-Muslim conflict. It is an approach that, instead of proposing solutions, offers a representation of conflict narratives not as abnormalities, but as constitutive of and constituted by a social order. From the perspective of this research, the stativity of a communal paradigm both analytically and socio-politically, participates in and at the same time conceals the processes of reproduction of a Brahminical social order. Thus, transcending conflict narratives also means to gaze at and offer a perspective on the relations of power, their reconfiguration and the multiple tensions that unfold through and despite their articulation in the text and context of social relations.

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