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**THESIS**

**RELIGIOUS DESECRATION AND ETHNIC VIOLENCE**

by

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December 2006

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**RELIGIOUS DESECRATION AND ETHNIC VIOLENCE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Desecration of religious places has drawn the attention of the world media, academics and policymakers on a number of occasions. The desecration of the Church of the Nativity, the cross-desecration by both Orthodox and Muslims of the Balkans, the desecration of the Sikh Golden Temple, the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha Monolith by the Taliban in Afghanistan and many others have attracted world condemnation. However, there has been little or no cross-sectional research or academic enquiry into the causes or impacts of desecration. The question of what constitutes desecration and what are the impacts of desecration are the subject of this study.

This study attempts to establish that desecration could be a factor for protest, rebellion and violence, often independent of political, economic and social factors. The study begins with a discussion about the concept of the sacred and profane followed by an analysis of what factors influence sacredness. Based on a historical perspective of desecration and pollution a causal relationship is established to explain why believers consider desecration to be a challenge and resort to protests, rebellion or violence. Finally, the hypotheses are demonstrated qualitatively, through a number of cases studies.

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# **I. IMPACT OF DESECRATION: FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY**

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, with the rise of religious terrorism, inter-religious, and anti-religious violence has been on the rise. News of damage, destruction, or desecration of religious places is common place. Assassination of religious leaders and lay workers takes place with sickening regularity. The rights of many hundreds of thousands of believers are violated. These acts of desecration and violation of the sacred have occurred in various contexts like the ethno-religious conflicts, including the former Yugoslavia, Sudan, the civil war in Afghanistan and now in Iraq, in religio-political violence in Israel, India, Northern Ireland and elsewhere. The offenders are occasionally individuals. More often groups perpetuate such acts, whether mobs, terrorist organizations, or people in authority like the police, military personnel or even governments.

Desecration of religious places has drawn the attention of the world media, academics and policymakers on a number of occasions. The desecration of the Church of the Nativity, the cross-desecration by both Orthodox and Muslims in the Balkans, the desecration of the Golden Temple of the Sikhs, the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddha monolith by the Taliban in Afghanistan and many others have attracted world condemnation. However, there has been little or no cross sectional research or academic enquiry into the causes or impacts of desecration.

For the purposes of this thesis, desecration is the profanation or violation of anything sacred. Notwithstanding the distinction made between desecration and violation in the Canon Law, for the purposes of this study I will be using these terms synonymously (Gulczynski, 1942, pp. vii–ix).

The importance and impact of specific conflicts and desecration during such conflicts has been a subject of academic analysis. However, no attempt has been made to generate systematic and general findings beyond recognizing the mobilization

potential of the violation of sacred space (Eaton, December 2000, pp. 1-7). Consequently, the questions ‘what constitutes desecration?’ and ‘what are the impacts of desecration?’ are the subject of this study.

## **B. THE FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS**

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the model developed by Ted Robert Gurr to explain ethnic conflict (Gurr, 1993, pp. 123-135). Gurr uses the relative deprivation model (Gurr, 1970, pp. 22-56) and mobilization theory (Tilly, 1978, pp. 177-192) to explain the cause of ethnic conflict. Gurr’s model could be broken down into three basic steps: 1) when subjected to discrimination an ethnic minority develops grievances; 2) The grievances in an ethnic group lead to mobilization of the group; and 3) the greater the degree of mobilization the greater the propensity of the group to indulge in political protests and rebellion. Gurr tests this model for relevance with regard to political, economic and cultural discrimination. However, he does not test it for measuring religious discrimination and religious grievances.

Jonathan Fox elaborated upon Gurr’s model and included the effect of religion on ethnic conflict. Using the Minorities at Risk database Fox established that the religious factor can influence the process that leads to discrimination and is distinct from other factors that cause discrimination. In effect, Fox posits that religion is a distinct and separate influence on ethnic conflict and not a mere reflection of general cultural differences (Fox, September 2000, pp. 423-450). Using Fox’s findings about religion being an independent factor in discrimination and grievance formation, this study will attempt to test whether the model developed by Gurr and Fox would apply to acts of desecration. In other words, can desecration be an exclusive factor for protest, rebellion and violence?

## **C. GRIEVANCE FORMATION**

The concept of the sacred is attribution of values and interpretations by the adherents of a religion. The sacred is not necessarily ‘good’ or ‘evil’. It manifests itself as the ultimate reality, the very source of the universe (Appleby, 2000, pp. 28-30). The concept of the sacred enables the adherents to understand the world around them and be able to function in it. This conviction regarding the sacred can be found in any religious group, be it the minority or the dominant group. Desecration is a direct challenge to the

belief in the sacred and a challenge to the very existence of the adherents. Therefore, it seems likely that such desecration would result in cementing cohesion of the group and would lead to grievance formation and conflict reactions (Fox, 2004, pp. 121-125; fall 2000, pp. 16-43).

**D. PROPOSITION 1**

The argument above leads to the first proposition that desecration increases group cohesion and causes individual or collective grievances among members of the affected ethnic group, be it a minority group or otherwise. Such grievance formation could lead to protests, rebellion and violence.

**E. PRECONDITIONING AND PRECIPITANTS FACTORS**

Gurr has postulated that grievance leads to mobilization which then results in conflict. However, to analyze the causes of conflict we need to differentiate between various factors that influence it. As explained by Martha Crenshaw, conflicts can be influenced by preconditioning factors and precipitate factors. Preconditioning factors are those that have influenced the conflict situation for a length of time. As per Gurr these preconditions are the cause for deprivation. On the other hand, precipitants are those factors that immediately precede the occurrence of protest or rebellion (Crenshaw, July 1981, pp. 379-399). Precipitants have been defined by Horowitz as “an act, event, or train of acts and events, antecedent but reasonably proximate in time and place to the outbreak of violence and casually related thereto” (Horowitz, 2001, p. 269).

Acts of desecration can be both preconditioning and precipitating. Desecration has caused long-standing grievances leading to a conflict situation as seen in the Israeli - Palestinian conflicts (Hassner, Summer 2003, pp. 1-33) and the Hindu-Muslim ethnic conflicts in India (Eaton, December 2000). There also are numerous instances when acts of desecration have been the precipitate factor in a conflict situation, for example, the theft of a relic from the Hazratbal Mosque in Srinagar, Kashmir led to Hindu-Muslim strife and 160 deaths and 600 injuries and was one of the causes of the second Indo-Pakistan war (Brines, 1968, p. 213). Similarly, a suicide attack by Tamil separatists destroyed Sri Lanka’s holiest shrine, The Temple of Buddha’s Tooth, leading to a violent military backlash against the movement and the Hindu population (Nicholson, February 1998, p. 1). Interestingly, both these incidents of desecration were perpetrated against a

dominant group. These dominant groups were not suffering from any other form of deprivation at that time. It would be safe to assume that the resultant reaction of the affected dominant group was influenced mainly by the desecration rather than by other factors, especially since the reaction was immediate and violent. This is where desecration is distinct from the factors considered by Gurr - political, economic and cultural - and that tested by Fox – religion. Desecration not only leads to violence with or without deprivation, grievance formation and mobilization, but can be independent and exclusive of other factors like politics and economic conditions.

#### **F. PROPOSITION 2**

This leads us to the second proposition that desecration can lead to an instantaneous violent reaction by the affected group without the process of deprivation, grievance formation or mobilization and in the absence of other influencing factors.

The two propositions above could be stated as the following testable hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1. Desecration, whatever its cause, leads to protests, rebellion and violence.
- Hypothesis 2. Desecration could act as an independent and exclusive factor and result in a violent reaction by the affected group without the protracted process of grievance formation due to deprivation and mobilization.

These hypotheses are largely in agreement with Gurr's model except on two counts. Firstly, they apply equally to the dominant group as to the minority group. Secondly, desecration may not always result in the group going through the complete process from deprivation through grievance formation to mobilization and violence.

#### **G. METHODOLOGY**

During the course of my research I have not come across any study of desecration as a social phenomenon. Therefore, this paper offers a preliminary set of ideas about the causes and impacts of desecration. The cases that will be discussed are only illustrative in nature and not necessarily a definitive proof of the hypotheses. The study begins with a discussion about the concept of the sacred and profane, followed by an analysis of what factors influence sacredness. The study of desecration or pollution by past sociological thinkers will then be discussed to bring out what constitutes desecration. From the above discussion inferences will be drawn about why believers consider desecration to be a

challenge and why they resort to protests, rebellion or violence. Finally, the inferences and consequently the hypotheses will be tested through analysis of a number of case studies.

## **H. SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS**

The thesis has been divided into seven chapters as follows:

- Chapter I. Impact of Desecration: Framework for Study.
- Chapter II. Concept of Sacredness.
- Chapter III. Mobilization Potential of Desecration.
- Chapter IV. Desecration and Indivisibility of the Sacred.
- Chapter V. Centrality and Exclusivity.
- Chapter VI. How Terrorists Exploit the Sacred.
- Chapter VII. Violence – A Product of Desecration.

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## **II. CONCEPT OF SACREDNESS**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Throughout recorded history, human groups have felt special attachment to places and things that they considered sacred. In fact, sacredness is a concept that is explained by those who explore the phenomenology of religion. The study of religion is thereby one means available to explain why men consider something as sacred versus others who do not. In this chapter I will trace the historical study of religion and focus on those studies which clarify the concept of sacredness. I shall thereafter briefly touch upon how sacred space or objects are created, and finally why the sacred is important to believers.

### **B. THE EVOLUTIONARY THEORY**

The initial theory explaining religion was based on evolutionary theory. It explained that the more heterogeneous present form of religion has arisen over time from a simpler and more uniform past. Tylor, a pioneer in the study of religion, was of the view that spirit worship and animism consisted the first form of religion. This spiritualism came into existence to explain bizarre phenomena like death, possession and dreams. The belief in a separable soul explained and made these phenomena understandable in terms of departure of the soul, soul invasion and the wandering soul. Thanks to critical questioning by more advanced thinkers, this belief developed into higher and more evolved forms like belief in spiritual being, polytheism, and ultimately monotheism, (Tylor, 1976, pp. 66-69).

### **C. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY**

The psychological approach to the study of religion was largely dominated by Freud's work. Freud's basic thesis was that religious rituals and beliefs are homologous with neurotic symptoms. He identified the distinct difference between the sacred (taboo) acts and objects as compared to the profane to be intense and of high seriousness. Freud attributed this marked distinction between the sacred and the profane to the projection of repressed wishes onto external objects. All other studies in this field were dominated by the Freudian premise that religion can be interpreted as the expression of unconscious psychological forces (Freud, 1950, pp. 67-69 and 85; Sills, 1968, p. 400).

Simple emotionalist theories have also been popular. These include the Awe theory and the Confidence theory. Awe theory is based on the notion of religious thrills experienced by human when brought face to face with cosmic forces. Confidence theory, on the other hand, deals with the notion of man's inward sense of weakness and his fears of death, disease and misfortunes. Religious practices, as per Confidence theory, are designed to overcome these weaknesses and fears by explaining them away, as in the doctrine of the afterlife, or by linking the individual to external sources of strength like prayers, sacrifices or ritualistic practices (Sills, 1968, p. 401). To view this phenomenon from another angle, as explained by Scott Atran in his book "*In God we trust*," experiment indicate that getting people to think about death increases their sense of religiosity and group cohesion (Atran, 2002, pp. 268-269)

#### **D. SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY**

The sociological approach was at variance with the psychological school, but was concerned with the same phenomenon: the unusual set-apart quality of the sacred as compared to the profane. In fact, the sociological school believed that religious rituals and beliefs reflect the moral framework of social arrangements, that the collective worship of consecrated objects like symbols, statues, pieces of wood or stone created a moral community upon which the major social unit rested and survived (Appleby, 2000, p. 8; Sills, 1968, p. 402). These objects may not have had any intrinsic value themselves but were a representation of the social identity of individuals and the group. Such objects acted to represent the rights, privileges, responsibilities and obligations implicit in the social order and the importance and overriding significance these had on the individual's life.

Emile Durkheim was one of the eminent social thinkers to elaborate on the concept of religion and its connection with the sacred. Durkheim stated that religion was the cement of society – the means by which men had been led to turn from their everyday concerns to a common devotion to sacred things. He argued that by wrenching men from their utilitarian preoccupation with daily life, religion had been the anti-individualistic and inspiring communal devotion to ethical ends that transcended individual purposes. He explained that religious phenomena emerge in a society when a separation is made between the sphere of the profane, the realm of everyday utilitarian activities, and the

sphere of the sacred, the area that pertains to the numinous, the transcendental, the extraordinary. An object is intrinsically neither sacred nor profane. It becomes one or the other depending on whether men choose to consider the utilitarian value of the object or certain intrinsic attributes that have nothing to do with its instrumental value, e.g., the wine at Mass, which has sacred ritual significance for believers who believe it to be the blood of Christ. Distinctions between the sacred and the profane are made by groups who band together in a cult and who are united by their common beliefs, symbols and objects of worship. Religion is an eminently collective thing. It binds men together, as the etymology of the word *religion* (from the Latin *religare*, “to bind together”) testifies (Appleby, 2000, pp. 8- 9).

## **E. THE ANALYSIS OF SYMBOLIC FORMS**

In symbolic approaches to the study of religion the myriad expressions of the sacred in primitive societies were accepted as they were. The major effort was to trace the forms these expressions took across the world and through time. The aim was to isolate the major class of religious phenomena considered to be authentic manifestations of the sacred. The main proponent of this approach was Mircea Eliade.

### **1. Sacred and Differentiation of Space**

Eliade affirms that holy space is significant and its recognition is not a matter of theoretical speculation, but a primary religious experience. Citing from *The Old Testament*, he quotes the experience of Moses when he is on top of Mount Sinai and is instructed “Put your shoe off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground” (Exod. 3.5). As per Eliade, sacred spaces are the centers where the heaven and earth meet. It is by these means man can access the divine world (Eliade, 1987, pp. 22 - 24). Sacred spaces have three important functions: 1) they are places where the believers communicate with their gods through prayer, movement or visual contact with an image of the divine; 2) sacred spaces are places of divine presence, often promising success, healing or salvation; and 3) they provide meaning to believers by metaphorically reflecting the underlying order of the world.

The sacred space, therefore, is a religious center for the faithful both spiritually and/or geographically. Mount Meru for the Hindus, the Temple Mount for the Jews, Mecca for the Muslims are a few examples of the cosmological and spiritual centers

where space and time began and will end, the axis connecting heaven to earth around which the earth revolves (Eliade, 1996, p. 375). Eliade explains that the sacred is distinctly different from the profane for believers and this concept of the sacred space is the very basis of all religious beliefs. This echoes Durkheim, “Since the idea of the sacred is always and everywhere separated from the idea of the profane in the thought of men, and since we picture a sort of logical chasm between the two, the mind irresistibly refuses to allow the two corresponding things to be confounded, or even put in contact with each other...” (Durkheim, 1965, p. 55).

## **2. How Sacred Space is Created**

Sacred space can be constructed, such as a mosque or a church, or it can be interpreted as sacred, as are mountains or rivers. Sacred space is often filled with forms, actions, and objects that convey religious meaning (Brereton, 1987, pp. 526-535). The sanctity of a sacred space may be communicated by the divine through a special sign, as was Mount Sinai, or a location may become holy due to a religiously significant event having taken place there, like the birth of a prophet or incarnate, like Bethlehem for the Christians or Ayodhya and Mathura for the Hindus. Some places may be sacred due to the presence of a relic like the Temple of the Buddha’s Tooth in Sri Lanka and the catacombs in Rome (Eliade, 1996, p. 367).

## **F. IMPORTANCE OF SACRED SPACE TO BELIEVERS**

The three parameters that explain the importance of sacred space to believers are the concept of indivisibility, centrality and exclusivity. These three parameters signal the attachment of a group to a sacred site and the value it attaches to maintaining its sanctity.

### **1. Indivisibility**

The first parameter - indivisibility of sacred objects, space or time connotes - the coherence and monolithic nature of the sacred. The sacred is demarcated by clear inflexible boundaries and cannot be subdivided (Hassner, Summer 2003). Indivisibility of sacred space, object and time does not only mean no physical division is possible. The indivisibility here means firstly, division of the sacred would lead to reduction in its value or would render it profane. Secondly, the sacred in question cannot be substituted or shared. Consequently, disputes involving the sacred or desecration of the sacred result in protracted and acrimonious feelings amongst believers. Threat or violation results in a

feeling of discrimination, real or perceived, making compromise difficult or even impossible. The dispute between Palestine and Israel due to their claims over the same sacred space is one classic example of indivisibility.

## **2. Centrality**

The second parameter, centrality, denotes the relative importance of the sacred space. While all sacred space is central, some is closer to the divine than are others. The centrality of a space depends on how important it is for the three functions of communication with the divine, the presence of the divine in that space, and the significance and the meaning of the space, as discussed earlier (Hassner, Summer 2003). In Islam, all mosques are considered to be central and sacred. However, in comparison to Mecca, towards which all mosques are oriented, other mosques are considered less significant. Centrality can be observed within a sacred space, too, as in Hindu temples, where the Sanctum Sanctorum is considered most sacred and no one except the holiest of holies (priest) are permitted entry. Due to the factor of centrality desecration is viewed with differing degrees of tolerance by adherents.

## **3. Exclusivity**

The third parameter, exclusivity, refers to the restrictions, prohibitions, and sanctions that are imposed on access to a sacred space. The type and intensity of monitoring and ensuring that the space is not infringed upon is also a measure of exclusivity (Hassner, Summer 2003). The sacred is considered exclusive and contact with it must be controlled and permitted only in a prescribed manner. Removing shoes in Islam and Hinduism when entering a sacred area, covering the head in Judaism and Sikhism, and the need to wash one's mouth in Shintoism are practices which, if not observed, would desecrate the sanctity of the sacred space. Similarly, religious codes also impose restrictions on the type of dress, behavior, and the kinds of activities that are permitted in the sacred space and time. Likewise, access to some sacred spaces is restricted to believers, such as members of a caste like Brahmins in Hinduism, or a particular gender as in convents or monasteries, or as Mecca is for Muslims. Failure to observe these rules is considered a desecration or sacrilege that can incur the wrath of the gods.

Centrality and exclusivity of the sacred space consequently, determine the potential for the sacred space to become a cause of conflict (Hassner, Summer 2003). The more central the sacred space is to the identity of the community, the more likely the community will respond violently to challenges to the integrity of that space. The more exclusive the sacred site is to the believers, the greater the risk that a foreign presence and misconduct will be construed as offensive acts. This phenomenon also would explain the reason for the varying degrees of tolerance and reactions ranging from extreme violence to placid inactivity when desecration occurs.

Tolerance in religion, as explained by Scott Appleby, can also be due to adherents belonging to one of the three broad orientations. The least tolerant are *exclusivists* who insist that there is only one way of interpreting the sacred. *Inclusivists* believe that there are many viable religious traditions and sacred elements, but one is superior and being more comprehensive tradition renders all others subordinate. Finally, the *pluralists* hold that truth is not the exclusive possession of any one community or tradition (Appleby, 2000, pp. 13-15).

#### **G. WHAT CONSTITUTES DESECRATION**

What constitutes desecration can be traced back to the assertion that religion represents the relationship between the community and its gods, who are believed to be benevolent and the saviors of society. The concept of godliness, in turn, leads to the distinction between religious behavior conforming to societal ethics and non-religious or magical behavior involving taboos. The term 'taboo' typically denotes non-religious conduct, especially concerned with pollution in contrast to holiness that protects sanctuaries, priests and everything sacred (Sills, 1968, pp. 336-337)

Durkheim, on the other hand, suggests that defilement or pollution is not religious in nature, but represents attempts by primitive man to explain the peculiar nature of the universe. His argument is based on the logic that religious behavior was an aspect of prescribed social behavior. Therefore, religious ideas do not refer to any ultimate material reality since religious objects and shrines only represent abstract ideas. Consequently, religious ideas are fickle and fluid. Danger arises when the sacred and profane inter-

mingle. Thus, relations with the sacred are always expressed through rules and rituals of separation and demarcation, and reinforced by the belief that the crossing of forbidden religious boundaries is fraught with danger (Sills, 1968, pp. 336-337).

Another explanation for defilement is more cultural. According to this school, defilement was synonymous with dirt which was defined by Lord Chesterfield as 'matter out of place'. The idea of dirt being matter out of place denotes two conditions: 1) matter is supposed to be in a particular order; 2) when matter is not in an order it becomes dirt. The psychological and cultural impact of defilement was benign actions of avoidance, or a more active rejection, or pressure to conform or correct the effect of defilement or desecration. Thus, desecration and taboos can be viewed as reflections of cultural perception, insofar as they clarify the form, reduce dissonance and restore order (Sills, 1968, pp. 338-339).

Rules regarding desecration and taboos are enforced by political decree, by sanctions ranging from trivial to severe to physical punishment of the transgressor. The main theme that can be deduced is the collective interest of the community in pressing for conformity to its norms. The only exception to this behavior is when deviation from norms comes from within the community and when it becomes inexpedient for the society to punish the offender (Anspach, 1992, pp. 11-13; Sills, 1968, pp. 338-339). This could be the explanation for members desecrating even the holiest of spaces and artifacts in the process of fighting a holy war and then being condoned by their brethren. The Golden Temple being desecrated by the Sikh militants in Amritsar and Muqtada al-Sadr's militia using shrines as shields in Najaf are examples of such acts.

### **1. Definition of Desecration**

For the purposes of this study desecration is defined as *the destruction, defacement, devaluation or defilement of sacred space, object or belief.*

## **H. INFERENCES FROM THE CONCEPT OF SACREDNESS AND DESECRATION**

The discussion on the concept of sacredness, the importance of sacred space to the believers and the construct of desecration leads to a number of inferences.

- The concept of the sacred and the profane and the distinct difference between them are of profound importance to believers. Sacred beliefs also develop the individual's sense of their overriding significance in his life. This is strongly suggested by the psychological and sociological analysis described above. We could, therefore, infer that any threat to the sacred would elicit strong reactions from the affected individual or group.
- The concept of sacredness in a group gives rise to collective worship, which creates a moral community upon which the major social unit rests and survives. Since religion is an eminently collective thing it binds men together. It could be argued that desecration of the sacred would consequently lead to greater cohesion and possibly mobilization of the group to protect, resist and use violence defensively against the desecration.
- The indivisibility of sacred space or objects renders disputes connected with them beyond compromise. Such disputes would more often than not be protracted and fraught with the danger of cross-desecration (a phenomenon wherein two groups desecrate each others' sacred sites, objects and symbols in retaliation or to avenge the desecration committed by the other) leading to grievance formation, mobilization and violence.
- Failure to observe rules to maintain the exclusivity of the sacred is considered desecration or sacrilege that can incur the wrath of the gods. The more exclusive the sacred site is to the believers, the greater the risk that a foreign presence and misconduct will be construed as offensive acts. Such offensive acts are likely to precipitate violence in the affected group.
- The more central the sacred space is to the identity of the community, the more likely the community will be to respond violently to challenges to the integrity of that space. The varying degrees of centrality explain the reason for the varying degrees of tolerance or even inactivity when desecration occurs.
- It could be argued that indivisibility; centrality and exclusivity of the sacred space determine the potential for the sacred space to become a cause of conflict and likewise help determine whether the violence is going to be precipitate or progressive from grievance formation to mobilization and finally violence.
- Taboos regarding desecration and other acts are enforced by political decree, by sanctions ranging from trivial to severe, or even by attacks on the transgressor depending on the severity of the desecration. However, desecration by a member of the community under special circumstances (e.g. defense of the site) is often tolerated and condoned under special circumstances like need to defend the holy site.

### **III. MOBILIZATION POTENTIAL OF DESECRATION**

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

In the second chapter I discussed the sacred and the profane and inferred that the sacred beliefs develop the individual's sense of their overriding significance in his life and that any threat to the sacred would elicit strong reactions from the affected individual or group. The second inference I drew was that desecration of the sacred could lead to greater cohesion and possibly mobilization of the group to protect, resist and use violence in defense against desecration.

In this section I will attempt to elaborate on these two points with a case study of the attack on the Golden Temple by the Indian Army. This case has been chosen as it has a historical background of ethnic conflict, in which all the factors – politics, economics, culture and religion - played a part in shaping the conflict up until the time desecration occurred to the Golden Temple, the holiest of Sikh shrines. Then it became a different fight. The contrasting reactions of the Sikhs, consequent to the desecration of the Golden Temple, is illustrative of my hypothesis that desecration, whatever its cause, leads to protests, rebellion and violence and secondly, desecration can act as an independent and exclusive factor and result in violent reaction *without* the protracted process of grievance formation due to deprivation and mobilization.

I will begin with a brief overview of the history and the ethno-religious development of the Sikhs. Next, the genesis of the Sikhs' self-determination aspirations will be traced leading up to the desecration of the Golden Temple. The military action at the Golden Temple and its aftermath will be enumerated, and finally the impact of the desecration will be highlighted.

#### **B. SIKH HISTORY AND ETHNO-RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT**

The genealogy of Sikhs can be traced to the ten gurus starting with the first, Nanak Dev (1469-1539), and the last, Gobind Singh, who founded the Khalsa Panth (Society of the Pure, marked by its system of baptism rituals and dress code) in the early eighteenth century. The religious traditions of the Khalsa Panth are all encompassing and include social, cultural, political and territorial identity of the Sikhs as a group (Tatla,

1999, p. 14). The Sikhs also have a strong value system based on egalitarianism, with spiritual authority vested in the holy book, Guru Granth. The Sikhs characterize themselves by their unflinching allegiance to the ten gurus and their teachings, the holy book Guru Granth, and their pilgrimage and congregation centers. The Golden Temple at Amritsar has been the foremost center of Sikh pilgrimage.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Hindus and Sikhs each embarked upon competing religious revivals. This resulted in communal lines becoming more distinct and antagonistic. The Hindus started the Arya Samaj (Aryan Society) movement and, in retaliation, the Sikhs started the Singh Sabha movement (1870-1919). The Arya Samaj movement was not political per se, focused mainly on linking Hindu religious values with modern life, but it did spread anti-Sikh propaganda in order to augment the Hindus' depleted strength. The Singh Sabha, on its part, focused on weeding out remnants of Hinduism from Sikhism. The main thrust of the Singh Sabha was about clear demarcation of Sikh communal boundaries and the defense of the Sikh religion from attacks by other religions (Deol, 2000, p. 73).

By the 1880s the question of Sikh identity had become a controversial issue, especially due to the challenges to the Sikh faith by the Arya Samaj. Group consciousness among the Sikhs and ethnic boundaries were etched more strongly by the use of the new vernacular print media (e.g. adoption of the Gurmukhi script by Punjabi printing presses). Clearly the aim of Sikh reformists was to retain control of religious practices and institutions. The control of Sikh shrines was taken over by the Akali Dal, a semi-military corps of volunteers formed in December 1920, which became the sole representative of the Khalsa Panth. From the perspective of the Akali Dal, Sikhs' religious and political interests are inseparable. The Akal Dal insisted that identity as a Sikh transcends all other identities and, consequently, Sikhs' loyalty to the central state would depend upon the state's recognition of the community as a collective group with historic "theo- political status." As stated by Deol, "The primary political objective of the Akali Dal was to safeguard Sikh religious liberty by maintaining and promoting separately the political existence of the Sikhs and securing greater political leverage for Sikhs" (Deol, 2000. p. 82).

### **C. GENESIS OF DESIRE FOR SELF DETERMINATION AND AFTER**

Ironically, the Sikhs are probably more privileged economically and socially than any other group in India. However, they have maintained the perception that they are disadvantaged. This perception dates back to the nineteenth century when both Hindu and Sikh elites embarked upon religious revivals, making communal lines sharp and antagonistic. In 1946 this perception manifested itself in a demand by the Sikhs for a separate Sikh state to protect their economic, religious, and cultural identity. This demand was made in the context of the partitioning of the country into India and Pakistan on religious grounds when the British decided to grant independence to India. However, the Sikhs finally gave up their demand for a separate State after Congress leaders promised that Sikhs would have a special status in independent India (Tatla, 1999, pp. 18-20; Deol, 2000, pp. 82-83).

In the late 1950s India undertook a massive reorganization of states, realigning territorial boundaries along linguistic lines (Deol 2000, p. 93). The Indian Government desisted from creating a separate state of Punjab on linguistic grounds to avoid security repercussions of having a Sikh state on the border with Pakistan. This led Akali Dal to initiate its first major movement in August 1950 to fight for Punjabi as Punjab's official language. However, many Hindu residents in Punjab rejected Punjabi as their native language. In 1966, this linguistic divide finally led to the creation of a separate state of Punjab, as desired by the Sikhs, after carving out the state of Haryana for the Hindi-speaking people of Punjab.

With the division of Punjab on a linguistic basis came the problem of sharing watersheds. In order to accommodate the needs of the states of Haryana and Rajasthan the Indian Government resorted to introducing unconstitutional provisions for how rivers in the region were to be shared. The Punjab Reorganization Act resulted in Punjab losing close to 75% of its riverine waters to the Hindu-dominated states of Haryana and Rajasthan (Singh, 2002, pp. 123-129). The dispute over water was aggravated by increasing marginalization of small farmers. The small farmers were growing increasingly dissatisfied with Government policy preventing free sale of agricultural produce. The government's attempt to cut price supports, control shortages, and the rising cost of agricultural inputs were all contributing factors to growing discontent.

On the social front, the most sensitive issue was that Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains were defined as Hindus in the Indian constitution (Deol, 2000, p. 106). On the political front, irritants included the dispute over the sharing of Chandigarh as a state capital by both Punjab and Haryana, the increasing centralization of powers, and the Congress Party's manipulation of regional elites to build up its electoral base. The impact of these problems resulted in the Sikhs believing that the Indian Government was attempting to target Punjab because of its minority religious status and break it economically.

Here we see how perceived grievances mounted over time, giving rise to individual, systemic, and ideological reasons for the Sikhs to potentially contemplate violent action. However, even these conditions did not lead to violent group action per se.

#### **D. RISE OF BHINDRANWALE**

In 1980, the Akali Dal did mobilize the Sikh peasantry in a bid for Punjab's autonomy. The initiative was centered on a combination of economic, cultural, constitutional and religious demands. The government responded with a campaign of manipulation and repression, justifying its actions in terms of saving India from dissolution (Weiss, 2002, p. 15). One way the Congress Party, then in power at the center, countered the Akali Dal was by extending support to a dissenting cleric, Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale.

Bhindranwale was then the chief cleric in the Damdami Taksal Gurudwara. Charismatic and with exceptional oratory skills, Bhindranwale had all the attributes of a revolutionary leader. With the central government behind him, he soon mobilized a massive following amongst Sikhs in and outside Punjab. Within three years, he became an extremely popular Sikh leader. Having gained adequate power, he then abandoned both the Congress and the Akali Dal to set his own agenda, seeking the emancipation of the Sikhs and the establishment of a separate country, Khalistan. To achieve this he instigated violence and encouraged murder of Hindus so as to ethnically cleanse Punjab. Soon a network of militant groups mushroomed and started spreading violence to other parts of the country. The movement, however, enjoyed only marginal support of the people and support from some opportunistic political leaders.

## **E. CONTEXT THAT LED TO THE KHALISTAN MOVEMENT**

The Sikhs had put forth their demands, which were mainly political and socio-economic, in a near peaceful manner. The aim was to create an environment in which national sentiments and aspirations of the Sikhs could find full expression, satisfaction and growth (Tatla, 1999, p. 27). To understand the rise of Khalistan it is important to comprehend two factors:

- Religion rather than nationalism remained the dominant bond among Sikhs, despite the consolidation of the modern Indian nation-state, and
- In Punjab, religion and politics have always been intricately intertwined. It was, therefore, easy for Bhindranwale to introduce, in a volatile political and socio-economic context, the factor of religion.

Bhindranwale invoked the Sikh concept of miri-piri, the notion that spiritual and temporal powers are inter-linked. He projected the image of the Sikhs being engaged in a great war between good and evil – a struggle for the Sikh faith, for the Sikh nation, and for the oppressed (Juergensmeyer, 2003. pp. 99-100). On June 4, 1984, the Indian Army attempted to arrest Bhindranwale and other Sikh militant leaders from inside the Golden Temple. This action by the Army in turn incited Sikh peasants to converge in the thousands on the holy city of Amritsar. The Army dispersed the crowd and attacked the Temple on Jun 4 in an operation called “Operation Blue Star” (Government of India, 1984. p. 57; Hazarika, July 1984).

## **F. CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO THE ATTACK ON THE GOLDEN TEMPLE**

Before going into the details of the attack on the Golden Temple by the Indian Army, it is important to consider the circumstances leading up to the attack. Bhindranwale had been inciting violence and secessionism for over two years. He was thought responsible for the murder of Punjabi Hindu press baron, Lala Jagat Narain, for precipitating a violent confrontation with Sant Nirankari (a rival Sikh group), for the mass killing of Hindus, and for other terrorist actions. As a target of retribution, Bhindranwale set up his HQ in the Golden Temple thereby effectively daring the authorities to violate the temple to capture him. Although this act on Bhindranwale’s part was itself a clear case of desecration, it was tolerated by the Temple authorities and the Sikhs at large and proved an unfortunate trap for the Indian Army. More about this will be discussed in Chapter VI.

As General Kuldeep Singh Brar pointed out during an interview to mark the twentieth anniversary of Operation Blue Star, the Sikh militants managed to gain total control of Punjab's machinery. There was a strong feeling that Khalistan was going to be established. If the militants succeeded in declaring the state of Khalistan independent there was a strong possibility of intervention by Pakistan and a repeat of what happened with Bangladesh. It is for these and other reasons that the Government of India and the Indian Army claim that the attack on the Golden Temple was an act of last resort. Thus, once the rural people moved towards Amritsar and the location of the Golden Temple, the government felt little choice but to move quickly. Hence, the Army was compelled to attack even though the day of the attack was Guru Arjan's martyrdom day (Brar, June 2004). According to the *White Paper* published by the Government of India after the attack, the army found weapons, ammunition, explosives, and arms manufacturing capabilities on temple grounds. Hence, concluded the report, "The action which the Government has had to take in Punjab was neither against the Sikhs nor the Sikh religion; it was against terrorism and insurgency" (Government of India, 1984, p. 26).

#### **G. THE ATTACK ON THE GOLDEN TEMPLE**

The Akal Takht had been heavily fortified by Bhindranwale and his militant group. Flushing them out was beyond the capabilities of the Police and consequently the Army was tasked to do the job. By June 5, the Indian Army was in position to attack the Golden Temple. The basic plan was to attack the Golden Temple and simultaneously attack forty other Gurudwaras all over Punjab.

On June 5 around mid-day the militants defending the Golden Temple were given an ultimatum to surrender. The militants, however, refused to comply. The Army then asked the pilgrims to leave the Golden Temple complex, but the pilgrims refused to do so. One version is that the militants did not permit the pilgrims to leave the complex. However, after persistent and repeated announcements, one hundred odd people, mostly old and sick, were permitted to leave the complex.

The Army finally launched the attack around 11 pm with infantry and, as described by General Sunderji, the overall forces commander, "We entered with humility in our hearts and prayers on our lips" (Mahmood, 1996, p. 80). To maintain the sanctity of the Temple the troops attacked without wearing their boots and were prevented from

firing, even in retaliation, towards the Harminder Sahib where the Guru Granth Sahib was kept (Brar, June 2004). Given intense resistance, tanks had to be brought in to support the attack and were used to destroy the militants' strong points.

The Temple was cleared of the militants on June 6. Over 150 militants were claimed to have been killed, but over 1000 pilgrims were also killed in the cross-fire. The Akal Takht was extensively damaged and the library burnt down, and with it some irreplaceable copies of Guru Granth Sahib, archives of documents from every period of Sikh history, and artifacts from the lives of the Gurus. The Golden Temple was desecrated as never before (Mahmood, 1996, p. 81).

#### **H. IMPACT OF DESECRATION OF THE GOLDEN TEMPLE**

The most important and visible impact of this unfortunate and unintended desecration of the Golden Temple was the alienation of the Sikhs. This fact has been eloquently documented by Cynthia Mahmood in her book, *“Fighting for Faith and Nation: Dialogues with Sikh Militants”*. Without exception, Sikhs in India and abroad denounced the attack, calling it the biggest insult to their religion (Hazarika, June 1984; Howe, July 1984). All strata of Sikhs, to include the general populace, the eminent, and even soldiers, felt affected. Students protested, including those as young as fifteen years old (Mahmood, 1996, p. 37); Ministers resigned, awardees returned national awards bestowed on them, and for the first time in post-independent India a small section of the Army comprised of Sikh soldiers mutinied (Markham, June 1984).

Sikhs of the world united as never before, mainly due to the desecration of the Golden Temple. Surprisingly, not many speak about the attack on forty other Gurudwaras during the same operation. This was clearly due to the centrality of the Golden Temple to the Sikhs, and more about centrality will be discussed in the next chapter.

Desecration of the Golden Temple likewise resulted in greater support for an independent Khalistan (Pace, November 1984). According to the distinguished journalist, Khushwant Singh, “Only a minuscule portion of Sikhs subscribed to Khalistan before the Temple was stormed...considerable Khalistan sentiment seems to have arisen since the raid on the Temple which many Sikhs, if not most, have taken as a deep offense to their religion and their sensibilities...” (Stevens, June 1984) According to Mahmood, the

danger of Sikh separatism had been magnified a hundredfold due to the attack on the Golden Temple and, in fact, this sparked the militant movement for Khalistan (Mahmood, 1996, pp. 41, 83 and 143). A different explanation for the intensification of separatism after the attack was that the Sikhs viewed the desecration of the Golden Temple as an attack on their 'spiritual home', necessitating a sanctuary like Khalistan for survival (Mahmood, 1996, p. 143)

Militancy in Punjab gained virulence as exemplified by the assassination of the Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, by two of her own Sikh body guards, to avenge the attack on the Golden temple. Soon thereafter, Harchand Singh Longowal, the Chief Minister, was shot and General Vaidya, the Chief of the Army during Blue Star, was assassinated. Independence of Khalistan was declared in April 1986 and a formal military organization was established transforming the militant organizations of the Khalistan movement into a definable force (Mahmood, 1996, p. 143).

"Blue Star was not the end but the beginning of the battle..." and, as per Kushwant Singh's comments, Blue Star gave a fillip to the terrorist groups (Mahmood, 1996, p. 83 and 95). Violence for years to come was justified as revenge for the attack on the Golden Temple.

## **I. ANALYSIS OF THE CASE**

The first observation one can make is that, consequent to the desecration, Sikh reactions pointed to the importance of the Golden Temple both individually and collectively. This clearly underscores the significance of the sacred to individuals' sense of the significance of their identity, such that any threat to the sacred is than bound to elicit strong reactions from affected individuals, and the group.

The second important deduction from the case study is that desecration of the Golden Temple resulted in a widespread and near unanimous reaction of anger and anguish among Sikhs, thereby lending them coherence and transforming them into an ethnic group. As has been elucidated, the Sikhs were suffering from political, economic, cultural and religious deprivation for centuries, but were never galvanized to exhibit such cohesive feelings. It was only after the desecration of the Golden Temple that cohesion

and unanimity of feelings and sentiments occurred and unified the Sikhs. Therefore, it could be argued that desecration should be treated as an independent factor which leads to unification and greater cohesion in the affected group.

The third observation is that despite suffering major losses of leadership, the militants in Punjab only became more virulent and dangerous. The assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Chief Minister Longowal, and General Vaidya are clear indicators of this fact. It could, therefore, be argued that while desecration may not have been the sole cause of militancy, it contributed significantly to heightening militancy post- Blue Star.

Similar reactions to desecration were observed when Muslims violently protested the publication of the offensive cartoon of Mohammed the Prophet in the Danish newspaper, Jyllands-Posten on September 30, 2005. The protests became violent in many countries, including in Asia and Africa. This reaction was itself reminiscent of the reaction of the Muslim world to the book “*Satanic Verses*” by Salman Rushdie and the fatwa issued for his death. Interestingly, imams from Gaza to Auckland have demanded execution or amputation for the cartoonist and his publishers.

In his excellent book “*Terror in the Minds of Gods*,” Mark Juergensmeyer has eloquently explained the phenomenon of what he terms ‘satanization’ of the foe. He claims that when an opponent rejects one’s moral or spiritual position and has the ability to completely destroy one’s community, culture, and population then the enemy becomes satanic and is to be considered a cosmic foe. The satanization of the enemy is aimed at reducing the opponent’s powers, with the goal in turn, of discrediting and belittling him and in the process asserting one’s own superiority (Juergensmeyer, 2003, pp. 185-187). This argument also helps explain the reactions of believers in the face of acts of desecration. From believers’ point of view, the sacred is far more significant than they themselves are. Small wonder, then, that they resort to demonizing those responsible for desecration. Such demonization and delegitimization not only permit, but essentially demand violence to reduce the enemy’s powers.

A final important observation is that the Golden Temple was first desecrated by Bhindranwale and his militant group. The fortification of the Temple Complex and use of

firearms and the occupation of the first floor of the Akal Takht were clearly contrary to the tenets of Sikhism. While much is made of the desecration caused by the Indian Army, one never hears any protest from any Sikh about the desecration by the militants. Possibly this is due to the fact that this transgression was committed by members within the community and it quickly became inexpedient for the society to punish the offenders.

An important question that then arises has to do with the intent of the militants in using the Golden Temple. One possibility is that the Temple was selected as a defensive position to take advantage of the presumed immunity of religious places from attack. Possibly, the intent was to either prevent an attack by the Indian Army or, if that were to fail, to achieve victory through defeat - using the attack on the Sikhs' holiest shrine to instigate a revolution.

## **IV. DESECRATION AND INDIVISIBILITY OF THE SACRED**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Indivisibility is an important attribute of sacred space, as discussed in Chapter II. Perceptions of indivisibility of the sacred are a consequence of the core values and spiritual needs the adherents attach to the sacred. This is clearly seen in cases where sectarian rivalries have led to competitions and disputes over a common sacred space. Examples of such disputes are seen in the case of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem where the Syrians, Copts, Armenians, Greek Orthodox, and Roman Catholics compete for control; the dispute between the Jews and the Muslims over the tombs of Abraham, Isaac and others; the turbulent dispute over the Temple Mount in Jerusalem; and the case of the dispute over the site of the birthplace of the Hindu religious King Ram, referred to as the Ram Janamabhomi-Barbri Masjid issue.

Disputes over such sacred space have been the cause for cross-desecration, attacks and counter-attacks on religious symbols. These disputes have brooked no compromise, lasted for protracted periods and have led to mobilization, grievance formation and unspeakable violence. In this chapter I will discuss the cases of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and the Babri Masjid in India. Both these cases clearly depict the importance of the indivisibility of the sacred and the impact of desecration in perpetuating and intensifying violence.

### **B. WAR IN THE HOLY LAND OF JERUSALEM**

The city of Jerusalem is holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. It has been fought over in myriad wars and conflicts and desecrated many times over mostly due to conflicting religious claims. However, all three Abrahamic religions revere Jerusalem as “the place where heaven and earth meet.” It is no wonder Jerusalem is considered the ultimate pilgrimage site for followers of these three monotheistic faiths. Yet, because the Holy City is indivisible and evokes such passion in those who long to claim her as their own, disputes over Jerusalem remain unresolved and continue to spark violence. While territorial claims and counter-claims for Jerusalem have been made for centuries, the feud over the Temple Mount is of particular interest in determining the problem of indivisibility in resolving disputes over sacred space.

The Temple Mount, also called the Noble Sanctuary (al-haram al-Sarif) by the Muslims, is a hotly contested religious site in the Old City of Jerusalem. It was the site of the first “Temple of God” built by Solomon in the tenth century BCE and destroyed by the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. The Second Temple of God was built after the return of the Israelites from the Babylonian Captivity. This Temple was desecrated by the Roman general Titus, when he entered it after taking Jerusalem in 63 BCE. According to Judaism, the Temple Mount is also to be the site of the third and final temple to be rebuilt. At the same time, the Temple Mount is the site of two major Muslim religious shrines, the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa Mosque. As the holiest site in Judaism and the third holiest site in Islam, the Temple Mount is one of the most contested religious sites in the world (Israel Foreign Ministry, 2006).

### **C. HISTORY AND TRADITION OF THE TEMPLE MOUNT**

According to Jewish belief, God gathered the earth from the Temple Mount and formed it into Adam. It was here that Adam - and later Cain, Abel, and Noah - offered sacrifices to God. According to the Bible, the Temple Mount is the place where Abraham fulfilled God's test to see if he would be willing to sacrifice his son Isaac (Genesis 22:1-18; the Koran, Sura Al-Saffat 37:102-110). The Bible recounts that Jacob dreamt about angels ascending and descending a ladder while sleeping on a stone. The Talmud says that this took place at the site of the Temple Mount, and Jewish tradition has it that the rock on which Jacob slept is the one in the Dome of the Rock. According to the Bible, upon the cessation of a plague, King David purchased a threshing floor, owned by Aravnah the Jebusite (2 Samuel, 24:18-25), on which to erect an altar. He wanted to construct a permanent temple, but as his hands were “bloodied” he was forbidden to do so himself, so the task fell to his son Solomon. This Temple of God was destroyed twice and what remains is the Western Wall (also called the Wailing Wall) of the Temple Mount which has, for all practical purposes, become the holiest site at which Jews pray. Many Jews often leave written prayers addressed to God in the cracks of the wall (Israel Foreign Ministry, 2006).

Muslims claim the Temple Mount as the location where Mohammed arrived after a miraculous journey riding the winged steed Al Buraq, to take a brief tour of heaven with the Archangel Gabriel, as mentioned in the seventeenth Sura of the Koran. As per

the myth, Mohammed ascended a silver ladder from atop the “Rock” to heaven. It is also believed that when Muslims first entered the city of Jerusalem under the leadership of Caliph Umar ibn al Khattab in 637, the ruins of the Temple were being used as a rubbish dump by the Christians inhabitants, perhaps in order to humiliate the Jews and fulfill Jesus’s prophecy that “not a stone would be left standing on another.” Caliph Omar (a contemporary of Mohammad, who had died a few years earlier) ordered it cleaned and performed prayers there. According to some sources, he also ordered a mosque to be constructed at the spot, upon which site the Al-Aqsa Mosque was built several decades later (Runciman, 1951, p. 3).

After the Muslim conquest of this region, the Temple Mount became known to Muslims as al-Haram al-Sarif (the Noble Sanctuary); it is traditionally regarded by Muslims as the third most important Islamic holy site, after Mecca and Medina. The Temple Mount is the holiest site in Judaism.

#### **D. VIOLENCE OVER DIVISION OF THE TEMPLE MOUNT**

The first modern instance of violence involving the Temple Mount was in August 1929, when a large-scale attack on Jews by Arabs rocked Jerusalem. The riot, in which Palestinians killed 133 Jews and suffered 116 deaths due to actions by British troops, was sparked by a dispute over use of the Western Wall of the Temple Mount. But the roots of the violence lay deeper in Arab fears of the burgeoning Zionist movement, which aimed to make at least part of British-administered Palestine a Jewish state.

After the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, Jerusalem was divided into East and West Jerusalem. Two decades later, Jerusalem was unified when it all fell under Jewish control after the 1967 Six Day war. Realizing the explosive situation that could arise if the Jewish population of the world descended on al-Haram al-Sarif, the Israeli government legally and religiously prohibited Jews from visiting or praying on the former site of the Temple Mount. While most Jews opposed this law, they obeyed the religious ruling (Hassner, 2002, p. 30), though Rabbis who opposed this prohibition soon gathered strength and encouraged radical Jews to plan the construction of the third Temple and the destruction of the mosques on the Temple Mount.

On August 21, 1969, an Australian, Michael Dennis Rohan, set the Al-Aqsa mosque on fire. Rohan was a reader of 'The Plain Truth' magazine published by the World Wide Church of God. He had read an editorial in the June 1967 edition of the magazine about plans to rebuild the Temple on the Temple Mount. The article implied that the mosques would have to be removed to make way for the new Temple which would in turn be destroyed for Jesus to return as the Messiah, according to prophesy. This prompted Rohan to set fire to the Al-Aqsa Mosque to hasten the building of the Temple and return of Jesus. The Arab world blamed Israel for the incident and Yassar Arafat constantly used it as the foundation of his attacks on Israel. The Islamic Conference, for example, was born in a worldwide surge of Muslim outrage over the burning of the Al Aqsa Mosque and the belief that Rohan was a pawn in a Zionist plot (Washington Post, August 21, 1969).

On October 8, 1990, a confrontation developed between Muslims and the Jews at the Western Wall. The Jews, numbering near 30,000, were pelted with stones by over 2000 Muslims. A major battle ensued, leading to the death of seventeen Muslims and injury to over 150. This was the beginning of violence on the Temple Mount on a large scale as none had occurred since Israeli's triumph in 1967 (Hassner, 2002, p. 31).

One of the three main reasons the negotiations at Camp David in 2000 failed was the dispute over the Temple Mount. Although offered much of East Jerusalem, the Palestinians were not satisfied with the proposal for "custodianship" over the Temple Mount in place of complete sovereignty. To the Jews, giving complete sovereignty of the Temple to Palestine would mean losing a bond with both the Mount and the attached Western Wall, which was unthinkable (Pressma, 2003, p. 19). On September 28, 2000, Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount to emphasize Israel's claim of sovereignty over it. The Muslims claimed that Sharon came with "thousands of Israeli soldiers" and defiled a Muslim holy place. The visit became the pretext for instigating large scale demonstrations and finally led to what is known as the Al-Aqsa intifada. Sharon's visit was conducted during normal hours when the Temple Mount is open to tourists. Palestinian youth, numbering around 1500, shouted slogans in an attempt to inflame the situation. Though the disturbance was limited during Sharon's visit, mostly involving stone throwing, the violence escalated during the remainder of the day, leaving 28 Israeli

policemen injured, three of whom were hospitalized. On September 29, Palestinian Arabs staged large scale demonstrations and threw stones at police at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Police retaliated, using riot control measures, to disperse the demonstrators, killing four persons and injuring approximately 200 (Christian Science Monitor, October 16, 2000, p. 8).

In order to reduce tension and prevent further loss of life, on October 7, 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak authorized the temporary withdrawal of a small contingent of IDF border policemen who had been guarding the site of the Tomb of the Patriarch Joseph in Shechem in Samara, the town the Arabs call "Nablus." Within two hours of the Israeli evacuation, Palestinians entered the Tomb compound and systematically destroyed everything, which reduced the site to rubble (Palestine Facts, Israel 1991 to Present, Camp David 2000). The Palestinians became increasingly violent towards Israeli soldiers, settlers, and other Israeli civilians throughout the occupied territories. With time, the Al-Aqsa intifada developed into the worst period of violence in Israel's history, lasting over four years and leading to nearly 1000 dead and over 4000 injured.

Of late, both Israelis and Palestinians have been complaining about construction and excavation on and underneath the Temple Mount. It is feared that this could lead to the destabilization of the retaining walls of the Temple Mount, of which the Western Wall is one, and/or damage to the Al Aqsa Mosque. Both sides feel the other is attempting to cause the collapse of each other's sacred sites (Schanche, February 1, 1981).

In March 2005, the Southern wall of the Temple Mount was found to have been the target of vandals. The word "Allah" in large Arabic script was found newly carved into the ancient stones. The vandalism was attributed to a team of engineers and laborers from Jordan and Palestine in charge of strengthening that section of the wall. The discovery caused outrage among Jews the world over (israelnationalnews.com, March 31, 2005)

#### **E. OBSERVATION ON THE TEMPLE MOUNT INDIVISIBILITY**

The first fact that is clearly evident is that both the Jews and the Muslims have deep religious attachment to the Temple Mount. What is interesting, however, is that both the Muslims and the Jews seem to understand and respect the other's religious claims. Yet despite this mutual respect a negotiated settlement still eludes them.

The second fact of importance is that the Temple Mount is equally central to both Jews and Muslims. The degree of centrality makes the problem of indivisibility even more intractable.

The problem of the Temple Mount first surfaced in the early twentieth century when the Zionist movement started. It was often the source of animosity between Muslims and the Jews, leading to violence and cross- desecration. The dispute has not been resolved and continues to be an impediment in any form of negotiated solution.

Because this dispute has remained unresolved for such a protracted period it has led to deprivation, real or perceived, mobilization and grievance formation by both the Muslims and the Jews. While most unresolved issues are political and relate to problems of self-determination for the Palestinians, the only issue that clearly eludes any potential for political compromise seems to be the indivisibility of the Temple Mount given its sacred, and thereby, religious inviolability

#### **F. THE HINDU'S FIGHT FOR RAM JANAMABHUMI**

Ayodhya is considered the birthplace of Lord Ram, the seventh incarnation (*avatar*) of Maha Vishnu, the protector of mankind and one of the trinity of Hindu Gods, the other two being Shiva and Brahma. Ram later went on to rule the Kingdom of Kosala with its capital at Ayodhya. Five of the Tirthankaras (including the first, Sri Rishabh Dev, the founder of Jainism) were also born in Ayodhya. The city of Ayodhya is also important due to its historic links to Buddhism, with several Buddhist temples, monuments and schools of learning having been established by the Mauryan and Gupta kings. During the Mugal invasion, Ayodhya was conquered and pillaged. Some believe that Babri Masjid was built in 1528 by one of the Mugal emperor Babur's generals, Mir Baqi. Mir Baqi allegedly destroyed a temple built by the Hindus to commemorate their king, Ram, and built the mosque on the site of the destroyed temple. As proof of this are

the fourteen pillar-stones with Hindu temple ornamentation used in the construction of the mosque (Lal, 2001, pp. 119-123). The mosque built by Baqi was initially called Masjid-i Janmasthan (“mosque of the birthplace”). It was later renamed Babri Masjid, after King Babar.

#### **G. THE IMPORTANCE OF AYODHYA TO HINDUS**

Ayodhya has been cited by Tulsidas, the saint-poet who wrote the Hindu religious epic Ramayana, as the birthplace of Ram, the most revered Hindu deity. It has also been mentioned by other scholars like the Tamil Alvars, and is claimed in the Atharva Veda to be a city built by Gods and to be as prosperous as paradise itself. Ayodhya is considered by Hindus to be one amongst their six holiest places and has been described as such in the Brahmanada Purana. It has been an important place of pilgrimage for Hindus for centuries, and much of the Hindu way of life and teachings are derived from the religious epic Ramayana, based on the incarnation of Ram and his fight against evil.

It is believed that King Vikramaditya first built a temple at the birthplace of Ram in the fourth century A.D. The existence of this temple is mired in controversy and even archeologists have differing opinions about its existence (Tambiah, 1996, pp. 246-248). Notwithstanding the claims and counter-claims, what is important is the fact that the Ram Janmabhumi is one the most sacred places for Hindus.

#### **H. CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS**

The Muslims and the Hindus of Ayodhya worshiped in different sections of the same building until the first Indian war of independence in 1857. Muslims thereafter constructed an enclosure in front of the Mosque and forbid the Hindus from entering the inner courtyard. Hindus consequently constructed a platform in the outer courtyard. In 1883 Hindus sought permission to construct a temple on the raised platform, but were denied permission by the British (Bacchelta, 2000, pp. 255-284).

The Hindu-Muslim rift became more pronounced as the years went by and communal riots became a frequent occurrence. Prominent among incidents people still cite was damage to the outer wall and one of the domes of the Masjid during a riot in 1934. Later, during the partition of the country into India and Pakistan in 1947, Ayodhya was excluded from the status quo agreement regarding holy sites. As the

dispute over the site could not be resolved, the Government of India imposed a ban on both Hindus and Muslims from entering the Masjid and placed it under guard (Hassner, 2002, pp .28-29).

At midnight on December 22, 1949, idols of Lord Ram and his consort Sita “miraculously” appeared in the Masjid courtyard. On the following morning a large crowd of Hindus demanded to be permitted to offer prayers inside the mosque. The Muslims, considering the presence of the idols in the mosque to be unacceptable desecration, retaliated and a major riot ensued. By mid-1950 the Hindus had managed to obtain permission to worship Ram’s image once a year to commemorate the appearance of the image of Ram in his birthplace. Over the years Hindu nationalism started gaining ground and radical Hindu organizations charged the Congress party (the party of the incumbent government) with following a secular dogma for gaining electoral support of the Muslims and Christians. The politicization of religion led to the revival of the dispute over Babri Masjid, and in 1984 Hindus called for liberation of the Ram Janmabhumi. When the dispute could not be resolved by the civil administrators the matter was taken to the courts with no decision forthcoming (Tambiah, 1996, pp. 246-248).

The Hindu nationalist organizations, taking advantage of the administrative and legal impasse, started demanding the right to worship inside the mosque. Soon the issue became an electoral issue for the Hindu nationalist political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). When the dispute showed signs of becoming a useful political issue the BJP started focusing on the Babri Masjid and instigated the fundamentalists to push for building a temple at the disputed site. In 1989 Hindus decided to lay the foundation for a grand Ram Temple. By 1990, thousands of sanctified bricks from all over the country were brought and a massive platform constructed as the foundation for the temple. All this while the Government, caught in a spate of ethnic conflict within the country, remained ineffective and incapable of resolving the Babri Masjid issue. The issue became explosive, with Hindu leaders and thousands of “Karsevaks” or “holy workers” being arrested. Many were killed and the mosque partly damaged (Crossette, October 30, 1990, p. A.3; October 31, 1990, p. A.1). In 1991, BJP made the building of the temple the main electoral issue among many others related to the Hindu-Muslim divide.

On December 6, 1992, during a prayer meeting on the newly constructed platform, volunteers demolished the Babri Masjid. Once the mosque had been razed to the ground the Hindus dispersed. The news of the destruction led to one of the most murderous Hindu-Muslim riots in the history of the country. It is believed that more than a thousand were killed in the riots. In Bombay, in particular, the rioting was very fierce with major violence erupting soon after the demolition of the Babri Masjid. Over 300 deaths were reported. In January 1993, a second riot resulted in a death toll of over 500. Next was a series of bomb blasts by Muslim fundamentalists targeting Hindus, which claimed another 300 people in March 1993 (Hamish, January 1993, p. 16).

The next major incident was the carnage at Godhara in Gujarat. On February 27, 2002, a train with volunteers returning from the Ram Janmabhumi was assaulted and the coaches in which they were traveling set ablaze. Over 400 Hindu volunteers died in the carnage. This led to riots and a massive Hindu backlash all over the country, particularly in Gujarat. Thousands of Muslims were brutally slaughtered and many rendered homeless. The bloodshed was compared by some to ethnic cleansing, with imputed support by the Government of Gujarat, which was known to have strong Hindu leanings (Edna, 2002, p. 12; Amnesty International Report, January to December 2002).

Violence and cross-deseccration continues to this day. After the Godhara incident came the deseccration of the Akshardham Temple in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, on September 24, 2002 where twenty nine people were killed and over 150 injured. The next major act of violence was the attack on the Sankat Vimochan Temple in the holy city of Varanasi on March 7, 2006 and the cross-deseccration of the Jama Masjid in Delhi on April 15, 2006.

#### **I. OBSERVATION ON THE RAM JANMABHUMI INDIVISIBILITY**

As in the case of the Temple Mount, it is evident that the religious sentiments attached to the Ram Janmabhumi for the Hindus and for the Babri Masjid for the Muslims is pronounced. The sacred space for the people of these two faiths overlap, yet indivisibility of the sacred is of paramount concern to both religions.

Clearly, the Ram Janmabhumi is highly central to the religious sentiments of Hindus. At the same time, Muslims have a stake in the dispute as the issue is about the

destruction and desecration of a mosque. The mosque has a historic significance, but its centrality to Islam is not overwhelming for the Muslims. This is evident from the reactions of the Muslims in accepting the Hindus to pray in the same area and, at another point, permitting Hindus to construct a platform and install their deity there. Clearly, the more central the sacred space is for adherents of a religion the more exclusive it needs to be treated.

As in the case of the Temple Mount, recent violence involving Ram Janmabhumi-Babri Masjid can be traced back to the early twentieth century. It is with the nationalist politicization of religion for the purposes of stoking both symbolic and real claims that we see a rise in violence and cross- desecration. Notwithstanding its political dimensions, the dispute has not been resolved and continues to be a major cause of ethnic strife.

Initially the dispute was a cause for the Hindus to feel deprived of their most sacred place. This clearly led to mobilization of the Hindus within and outside the country, strong grievance formation that led to protests, rebellion and, at the slightest pretext, violence. While the reactions of the Muslims were not retaliatory to start with, the destruction of the mosque was a desecration that was not acceptable.

#### **J. OBSERVATION ON INDIVISIBILITY**

Both the case of the Temple Mount and the Babri Masjid dispute present classic problems involving the indivisibility of sacred space. It is also evident that these problems have existed over a protracted period of time and remain unresolved. In both instances the affected groups have been subject to a sense of deprivation which has mobilized them. The groups have indulged in desecration as an act of retaliation or, presumably, to protect their faith. One could, therefore, suggest that the indivisibility of sacred space tends to mobilize groups and make them uncompromising. This, in turn, makes disputes over sacred spaces not only difficult and potentially unsolvable but fraught with the danger of acute grievance formation, often then leading to violence and brutalities.

## V. CENTRALITY AND EXCLUSIVITY

### A. INTRODUCTION

Mircea Eliade, in his book *The Sacred and the Profane*, talks of the importance of a pole (*Kauwa-auwa*) sacred to the Australian hunter-gatherer Arunta tribe. It is believed by this tribe that the divine being created their ancestors and cosmicized their future territory. The divine being, thereafter, fashioned a sacred pole from a gum tree and ascended to heaven. This pole for the Arunta tribe is a cosmic axis around which exist the habitable areas, or their world. The pole also enables the Aruntas to be in constant communication with the divine being in the sky above. The pole is thus carried by this wandering tribe wherever they go, enabling them to always remain in their own world and in constant communication with their creator, consequently maintaining order in their world (Eliade, 1987, pp. 33-34).

Once, when the pole was broken, the entire tribe was so filled with fear of the calamities that were to follow that they wandered aimlessly and finally lay down and awaited death (reported by Spencer and Gillen as stated by Eliade, 1987, p. 34). The case of the Arunta tribe and their sacred pole is a classic example of how a sacred object can become central *and* exclusive. Its desecration can be deemed by the believers to be something catastrophic, akin to the end of the world or reversion to chaos.

In the preceding chapters the aspect of centrality was touched upon. It was noticed that centrality affected the indivisibility and the reactions of believers to desecration. In this chapter, the issue of centrality and exclusivity will be dealt with in greater detail to show the impact they have on reactions of believers to desecration or the threat of desecration. It will be demonstrated through a number of case studies that the more central the sacred space the more likely the community will be to respond violently to challenges to the integrity of that space. Similarly, attempts will be made to show that the more exclusive the sacred site is to believers, the greater the risk that a foreign presence and misconduct will be construed by them as offensive acts, which are likely to precipitate a violent response in the affected group.

## **B. TEMPLE OF THE TOOTH – SRI DALADA MALIGAWA**

It is believed that the Buddha himself sanctioned the worship of his corporeal remains as is recorded in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* (Trainor, 1997, pp. 59-67). The bodily remains of the Buddha were distributed among various states and each enshrined its relic in a funerary mound known as a stupa. The four canine teeth, however, were separately enshrined and worshipped. One of the canines was handed over to the King of Kalinga in Eastern India. The relic was venerated and worshipped until the fourth century A.D., when Hindu revivalism threatened this practice and the relic itself. Guhasiva, the King of Kalinga, fearing for the safety of the relic, sent it to his friend and fellow Buddhist, the Sri Lankan King Kirti Sri Meghavanna (Sri Dalada Maligawa official web site).

Successive kings and Buddhist monastic orders protected the relic for centuries. Over time a number of temples were constructed to house the tooth relic and the archaeological remains of these temples exist at a number of early capitals, like the world heritage sites of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruwa. The present shrine in Kandy is the last in a long historic succession of resting sites for the tooth. The relic not only has religious significance, but has become an important symbol to the Sinhalese nationalists. In ancient times, a king was considered unfit to rule if he failed to protect the tooth relic (Crossette, May 1985, p. A.9; The New York Times, January 26, 1998, p. A.3).

The majority of Sinhalese are Buddhist with less than thirty percent being Tamil Hindus, Muslims and Christians. The Buddhists have remained in power and the other ethnic groups have felt deprived from time to time. The ethnic tensions between the Sinhalese and Tamils are also historic. The last bout of major ethnic strife was in 1983. The conflict, however, has always remained ethno-political in nature with little or no religious rivalry in evidence. All this changed with the birth of the Liberation Tigers for Tamil Elem (LTTE).

The LTTE was founded in 1976 to fight for self-determination of the Tamils of Sri Lanka. By 1983, the LTTE was involved in armed conflict with the Sri Lankan security forces. To press home its point, the LTTE regularly resorted to terrorist activities, often stirring up the religious sentiments of the Sinhalese. The response of the

people at large, and that of the Government, has always been measured. None of the Tigers' atrocities resulted in anti-Tamil communal riots or anti-Hindu religious persecution. In 1985 the Bo tree in Anuradhapura, one of the most revered and historical Buddhist sites in Sri Lanka, was attacked and 120 *bhikkhus* (monks) and worshippers were killed in the incident. In 1987, 34 *bhikkhus* were cut to pieces by the LTTE; among them were many young student *bhikkhus* who were on a pilgrimage.

These acts of sacrilege resulted in strong protests and demand for stringent actions against the LTTE (Rathana, 2003; The Government of Sri Lanka, 1998). What needs to be noted is that while the LTTE was resorting to terrorism involving desecration of religious people and sites, these had limited centrality and exclusivity to the Buddhists. The attack and attempted destruction of the Tooth relic, in contrast, was altogether a different thing.

### **C. LTTE ATTACK ON SRI DALADA MALIGAWA**

On January 26, 1998, three LTTE suicide bombers crashed a truck laden with explosives through the gates of the holiest Buddhist shrine, Sri Dalada Maligawa. The blast killed 11 people including the bombers and injured 23 others. The whole nation was stunned and some Buddhist monks sitting in front of the shrine sobbed and prayed. One monk is reported to have commented, "You terrorists, kill us, eat us, but don't attack our shrine where Buddha lives" (The New York Times, January 26, 1998, p. A.3). This statement is an indication of the centrality of the shrine for the Buddhist of Sri Lanka in particular, and of the world in general.

Within hours, a fierce ethnic riot broke out and a crowd of enraged Sinhalese Buddhists burnt down a Hindu cultural centre in Kandy. The crowd also set fire to three vehicles. Similar riots followed throughout the country, but deployment of the army and other security forces prevented violence from escalating (The New York Times, January 26, 1998, p. A.3).

### **D. ANALYSIS OF THE DESECRATION OF SRI DALADA MALIGAWA**

The Tooth Temple, as it is otherwise referred to, has been declared a heritage site by UNESCO. It is the holiest shrine for the Buddhists of Sri Lanka much like the Kaaba

for Muslims and the Temple Mount for Jews. The Tooth relic is also closely associated with Sinhala nationalism and, consequently, the centrality of the relic and the shrine are accentuated.

The Sinhala Buddhists and the Tamil Hindus have engaged in ethnic friction and tension over the ages, but it had not manifested itself in religious intolerance. The violence associated with ethnic rifts has grown out of deprivation and economic grievances. Even desecration of the Bo Tree and the murder of Buddhist monks on a pilgrimage only evoked controlled violent reactions. The desecration of the Tooth Temple, however, precipitated instantaneous, religiously motivated and intense violence. The violence, therefore, could be attributed to the centrality and exclusivity of the Tooth Temple to the Sinhala Buddhists.

#### **E. CRISIS OF THE HAZARATBAL MOSQUE**

Kashmir in India is home to a confluence of many faiths and religions. The peaceful co-existence of these faiths is symbolized by the plethora of temples, mosques, churches and gurudwaras that are located in close proximity to one another and the fact that people have coexisted over the centuries in amity and peace. One such shrine of peace is the Hazaratbal Mosque – the most important shrine for Kashmiri Muslims. What makes this shrine so important is that it houses the sacred hair of Prophet Mohammed (Moi-e-Muqaddas).

The history of the mosque goes back to the early seventeenth century when Sadiq Khan, one of Emperor Shah Jahan's chieftains, laid out a garden on the west bank of the beautiful Dal Lake and constructed a palatial building there in 1623. The Emperor, during his visit, ordered the building to be converted to a mosque. During the reign of Aurangzeb, the Moi-e-Muqaddas (hair of the Prophet) arrived in Kashmir in 1699. To begin with, it was housed in a shrine in the heart of the city. The multitude of people thronging to see the relic necessitated moving the relic to a bigger holy place. The relic was thus moved to the mosque on Dal Lake. The mosque has been called Hazaratbal ever since the relic of the hair of the Prophet was moved into it. To Muslims of Kashmir, the hair of the Prophet brings them well-being and prosperity (Government of Jammu & Kashmir official website).

In December 28, 1963, it was reported that the sacred relic, the hair of Prophet Mohammed, was stolen from the Hazaratbal Mosque. The theft of the relic was inexplicable. The responsibility could not be attributed to anyone; the only truth was that the relic was lost. The news of the loss of the relic resulted in instantaneous expressions of grief and violence. The theft produced a rare demonstration of unity and unprecedented political turmoil. The population was gripped with unrelieved grief and anguish, some of which manifested itself as violence, and the countryside remained paralyzed for weeks (Lockwood, May 1969, p. 387). The impact of the loss of the hair was also felt in a much wider area, as evidenced by violence and rioting that took place in West Bengal and in neighboring Pakistan. A large number of people died and there was extensive damage to property. The violent reaction of the Muslims subsided only after the relic was recovered on January 4, 1964 (Morris, 1965, pp. 65-67).

It was reported in the New York Times of December 29, 1963 that “The police fired over the heads of a crowd of 100,000 Moslems in Srinagar, Kashmir, today to break up a demonstration over the theft of a strand of hair of the Prophet Mohammed who died in 632.” On December 30, 1963, the New York Times once again reported “Two massive processions of weeping and wailing Moslems moved slowly through the streets of Srinagar today to mourn the theft of a strand of hair believed to be from the Prophet Mohammed.” (The New York Times, December 29, 1963, p. 8)

#### **F. ANALYSIS OF THE HAZRATBAL CRISIS**

The first fact is that the actual perpetrator of the theft was not known. The reaction of the Muslims, however, was intense and immediate. The reaction of the believers could be attributed to the centrality and exclusivity of the sacred hair of the Prophet. The believers were incensed by the desecration with disregard to the mode of desecration. The loss of the relic precipitated violence and the Kashmiris exhibited rare unity and solidarity. Such a reaction has not been seen in the wake of any incident before or since. The intensity of the reaction could be due to the exclusive position and significance the relic holds for Muslims of Kashmir.

#### **G. KORAN DESECRATION CONTROVERSY**

Controversy over the desecration of the Koran erupted when, on April 30, 2005, Newsweek magazine published an article citing the admission by an unnamed US official

that the Koran had been desecrated in the Guantanamo Bay detention camp. The report provoked international protests and anti-US demonstrations with over 17 deaths in Afghanistan. The article by reporter Michael Isikoff was later retracted by Newsweek. Defending its reporter and the story, Newsweek stated that neither it nor the Pentagon had any idea the story would lead to deadly riots (Democracy Now, July 6, 2005).

Prior to the report of desecration of the Koran by Newsweek, a number of similar reports had emanated from various sources, but the Newsweek report was the first to acknowledge an inquiry by the US government itself. The Newsweek report claimed that a senior government official had stated that he had seen a confidential investigative report detailing incidents of religious abuse and desecration of the Koran. The issue came to the notice of the Islamic world when a popular member of the Pakistani Parliament, Imran Khan, commented adversely about the desecration during an interview, and stated, “This war on terrorism is self-defeating if, on the one hand, you (Musharraf) are demanding that we help them and on the other hand, they are desecrating the book on which our entire faith is based” (Hertzberg, May 30, 2005).

Earlier, similar complaints had been voiced about desecration of the Koran. In 2003, The Washington Post reported that numerous detainees released from Guantanamo complained of Koran abuse, including allegation by some that the guards flushed their Koran down the toilet (Mintz, May 14, 2005, p. A.16). The BBC reported on December 30, 2004 that former prisoners maintained that American soldiers used to tear up copies of the Koran and throw them in the toilet bowl (BBC News, May 27, 2005). The Philadelphia Inquirer reported that prisoners were physically and psychologically abused and their Koran desecrated (Philadelphia Inquirer, January 20, 2005, p. A.6). Likewise, The Miami Herald reported that the guards stomped and kicked the Koran and cursed Allah (Miami Herald, March 6, 2005, p. A.1). According to The L. A. Times, the guards made military dogs pick up the Koran in their mouths (Serrano, May 22, 2005, p. A.1).

To Muslims, the Koran is the most central and exclusive component of their faith. The main importance of the Koran to the believers is that the Koran is the commandment of the one true God. The dominant view among theologians is that God created the Koran and it contains His spoken words to the Prophet Mohammed. Muslims consider the

Koran to be a physical proof of Islam and when the Koran is recited a holy atmosphere is created involving God, the world, truth and peace. When reciting the Koran, the sound is such it renders the immediate space sacred, and the moment powerful (Encyclopedia of the Orient).

Reports about desecration of the Koran, therefore, elicited strong, unified and violent reactions from the entire Muslim world. Many anti-American protests took place, and in many areas they turned into violent riots. In Afghanistan, one such demonstration resulted in the death of 15 people. The BBC reported that anti-American sentiments were intense and a political science undergraduate, Ahmad Shah, reportedly told the AP News agency “America is our enemy and we don't want them in Afghanistan ... when they insult our holy book they have insulted us” (BBC Online News, May 12, 2005). Protesters in Egypt, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon and Malaysia demanded the US apologize and punish those responsible. As reported in the BBC News of May 27, 2005, during rallies on a single Friday:

- Several thousand people chanted anti-US slogans in Egypt's capital, Cairo, and also in the Mediterranean port city of Alexandria, closely watched by police.
- In Lebanon, sit-in protests were held across the country with people chanting “America is the biggest Satan.”
- In Pakistan, demonstrators in Islamabad, Quetta and several other cities burned effigies of US President George W Bush.
- In Jordan, protesters in the capital, Amman, denounced US policies.
- In Malaysia, several hundred people protested outside the US embassy in Kuala Lumpur (BBC Online News, May 27, 2005).

#### **H. ANALYSIS OF THE DESECRATION OF THE KORAN**

News about the desecration of the Koran may not have been expected to elicit such a strong reaction from the Muslim world. What was not take into account, however, is the fact that, to Muslims, the Koran is the most central, exclusive and sacred part of their faith. In fact it is a physical proof of Islam or, in other words, the very essence of the existence of the faithful.

The violent reaction to the desecration of the Koran was not influenced by political or economic factor. It could be argued that the cause of the unanimous expression of religious sentiment, and the instantaneous and violent reaction, was precipitated by the desecration of the Koran alone.

#### **I. CARTOONS OF PROPHET MOHAMMAD INFURIATES THE MUSLIM WORLD**

The genesis of the controversy over the cartoon of Prophet Mohammad in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten can be traced back to an article published about the difficulties Kare Bluitgen faced in finding an illustrator for his children's book about the Prophet Mohammad. Jyllands-Posten sent invitations to around forty cartoonists to send their depictions of the face of Mohammad (Rose, February 19, 2006, p. B.1). In response, the newspaper received 12 cartoons and published them on September 17, 2005. Among the 12 cartoons was one that turned out to be highly offensive to Muslims all over the world, a cartoon of Prophet Mohammad. The cartoon depicts the Prophet Mohammad wearing a turban in the shape of a ticking bomb at the gates of heaven, arms raised, telling men who look like suicide bombers, "stop, stop, we have run out of virgins." Despite objections by Muslims, this cartoon and others were reprinted by newspapers in other European countries, resulting in unification of all sects of Muslims from across the world in protest against the desecration.

Initially, the cartoon controversy received only minor media attention outside Denmark. Within Denmark there were protests and demands for retraction of the offensive material. Danish imams protested and spread the news about the blasphemous representation of the Prophet to the Islamic world and also complained to ambassadors of Islamic countries. Eleven ambassadors of Islamic countries asked for a meeting with the Prime Minister of Denmark, which was denied, and the issue remained unresolved. The controversy escalated with the re-publication of the cartoons in major European newspapers in France, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Scandinavia (Financial Times, February 3, 2006, p. 16). The protests from Muslims intensified, as the re-publication of the cartoon grew to as many as 50 newspapers and periodicals, mostly in Europe, but also in the UK and US (Philadelphia Inquirer, February 4, 2006, p. A. 1).

After four months, Jyllands-Posten issued an apology, but it was too little and too late to assuage Muslim sentiments. The situation had become explosive all over the world, particularly in the Middle East and Asia (Benoit, B., February 4, 2006).

## **J. WHAT HURT THE MUSLIM RELIGIOUS SENTIMENT**

The representation of the Prophet and Allah is prohibited in Islam. Therefore, the representation of Prophet Mohammad, especially in a cartoon, was unacceptable to Muslims. The Koran prohibits idolatry, but does not explicitly prohibit pictorial art. The prohibition against pictures is, however, clear in the hadith, where it has been stated that those who paint pictures would be punished on the Day of Resurrection (USC-MSA Compendium of Muslim Text – Translation of Sahih Muslim, Book 24: Para 024-5270 to 5273).

In one of the most authentic and the first known biographies of the Prophet, compiled by Ibn Ishaq and later translated by Alfred Guillaume as the *Life of Muhammad*, there is an anecdote useful in explaining the issue of Islamic injunctions against idols and paintings:

When the apostle prayed the noon prayer on the day of the conquest, he ordered that all the idols which were round the Ka'ba should be collected and burned with fire...Quraysh had put pictures in the Ka'ba including two of Jesus and Mary (on both of whom be peace!)...The apostle ordered that the pictures be erased except those of Jesus and Mary (Guillaume, 1955, p. 552).

While Shiia and Sunni Islam have been known to be tolerant and to not strictly enforce the prohibition of pictures, the Wahhabis and Salafis are fanatical about prohibiting pictorial representations of any kind. The Taliban, when in power, banned television, photographs of any kind even in newspapers, and destroyed ancient Buddhist frescoes in the vicinity of the Buddhas of Bamyán despite strong international protests and condemnations.

The other noteworthy aspect of this issue is that, in Islam, insult to Prophet Mohammad is one of the most serious crimes. Some interpretations of Sharia state that any insult to Mohammad is punishable with death (Islam Q&A. Question #22809). In Pakistan, insulting the Prophet is punishable with death (VOA News, February 6, 2006).

The anti-cartoon protests, according to many Muslims, were aimed at the insulting pictures and not so much against pictures in general (Magdi, A., February 4, 2006). The insult was unspeakable as the cartoon not only depicted an image of Prophet Mohammad, but extended the caricature of Muslims as terrorists to the Prophet. The image, therefore, depicted Islam, its Prophet and Muslims in general as terrorists (BBC News, February 2, 2006).

#### **K. FALLOUT FROM THE DESECRATION**

Numerous demonstrations and protests against the cartoons took place worldwide. The first major violent reactions were the burning of the Danish and Norwegian Embassies in Syria, on February 4, 2006 (Vick, K., February 5, 2006, p. A. 15). The Danish Embassy in Beirut was also burnt, leaving one protestor dead (Middle East Times, February 6, 2006).

For over two weeks protests raged in Pakistan. In one case, 10,000 people gathered on the outskirts of the capital, Islamabad, to vent their anger at Westerners, Americans and Jews. In many cases, the demonstrations erupted into violent clashes with authorities (VOA News, Feb 13, 2006). In the UK and France hundreds of Muslims took to the streets in protest. In London protestors marched from the Regent's Park Mosque to the Danish Embassy with slogans like "Behead the one who insults the Prophet" (Benoit, B., February 4, 2006, p. 6).

#### **L. ANALYSIS OF THE CARTOON CONTROVERSY**

As was noted by the President of Pakistan, the cartoon controversy united the Muslim world (VOA News, February 13, 2006). The solidarity that emerged transcended political and sectarian differences and Muslims united in the face of injury to the most central and exclusive religious component in Islam, the sanctity of the messenger of God, the Prophet Mohammad.

The profaning of what Muslims revere as most sacred also precipitated protests and violence. The issue may have been aggravated due to politicization, but the reaction in the form of protests that only later led to violence were spontaneous reactions to the desecration itself. The reactions were similar to those witnessed after the publication of Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*, in which he fictionally depicted the Prophet Mohammad. In both cases the reaction was worldwide.

Compare this to the Babri Masjid demolition by Hindu fanatics - that issue was not central enough to elicit a world-wide Muslim reaction, as it only concerned a mosque in an obscure place in India, and a mosque which was in a state of disuse at that. In other words, centrality and exclusivity of the sacred make profound differences in the level of violence as well as in the degree of mobilization when we compare across cases.

#### **M. OBSERVATION ON CENTRALITY AND EXCLUSIVITY**

In all four cases discussed in this chapter, what was profaned was central (most sacred) and exclusive for believers. The reactions desecration provoked were spontaneous and immediate. The variation in the intensity and the time-lag between desecration and violent outbursts in some cases can be explained as the difference in levels of opportunity and the degree of social and political facilitation. The concept of social and political facilitation refers to the social and political environment, the habits and traditions of a society to support or impede violence. For example, the Buddhists of Sri Lanka reacted immediately and ferociously to the desecration of the Temple as the majority of people affected were Buddhist and they dominated the Government. The Buddhists, therefore, had both the opportunity and the support required to stage an immediate protest. In contrast, in the case of the cartoon controversy, the reactions of the Muslims gained momentum slowly. This could be attributed to the fact that the Muslims are not only in the minority in Denmark, but are immigrants with neither the opportunity nor the unrestricted support of the powers of the State.

Intuitively, we could deduce here that the centrality and exclusivity of the sacred has a direct bearing on the propensity for mobilization and violence in the affected group *when the sacred is desecrated*. The actualization of mobilization and violence is, however, dependent on particular circumstances and situations.

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## **VI. HOW TERRORISTS EXPLOIT THE SACRED**

The desecration of the sacred has the propensity to mobilize the faithful and lead to grievance formation. An affected group resorts to protests, rebellion or violence based on the indivisibility, centrality and exclusivity of the impugned sacred space or object. When the profanation is of the most central and exclusively sacred object or space, it precipitates violence without believers going through the normal process of perceived deprivation, grievance formation and mobilization. Desecration or the threat of desecration leads to increased cohesion in the affected group, protests and violence except when violence is non-viable due to lack of opportunity and/or political facilitation, as has been discussed in the last chapter.

The other exception to reactions to desecration is when a member of the group itself, intentionally or unintentionally, perpetrates the desecration, particularly when s/he does so to allegedly protect the faith. Then the group often condones the act. As explained by Sill, groups condone acts of desecration by a member of the group because it is inexpedient to take action against him or her (Sills, 1968, pp. 338-339). For example, when profanation is committed while fighting or killing an enemy of the faith, punishing the perpetrator becomes inexpedient. The tolerance of the group to desecration by its own members has important ramifications for war against religious terrorists. Terrorists exploit their ability to introduce the sacred in disputes with authorities and, in so doing, justify the use of religion, religious places and religious symbols. The authorities then face the double jeopardy of not reacting and letting the terrorists take advantage, or the authorities can take action and cause desecration, which then leads to alienation and a possible backlash.

In this chapter three such cases will be discussed wherein desecration of the most sacred was committed by members of the group, yet condoned by the faithful: the desecration of mosques by terrorists in Iraq, with particular reference to the use of the mosque of Imam Ali by Moqtada Al-Sadr; the fortification of the Charar-e-Sharief

mosque in Kashmir; and the Golden Temple in Amritsar, India. The aim is to examine the terrorists' use of sacred places and the impact this has on the people, the security forces and the terrorist themselves.

**A. DESECRATION OF MOSQUES IN IRAQ – PREDICAMENT OF THE COALITION FORCES**

The 2003 invasion of Iraq, code named Operation Iraqi Freedom, began on March 20. The stated objective of the invasion was “to disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, to end Saddam Hussein's support for terrorism, and to free the Iraqi people” (The White House, March 22, 2003). The Iraqi military was defeated, and Baghdad was captured on April 9, 2003. The fall of Baghdad ended major combat operations, removed Iraqi President Saddam Hussein from office, and ended the Baath Party's rule. Many Iraqis celebrated the downfall of Saddam by vandalizing his portraits and statues. One widely publicized event was the dramatic toppling of a large statue of Saddam in central Baghdad by a US M88 tank retriever, while a crowd of Iraqis cheered the Marines on.

While the coalition forces consolidated and attempted to restore order in Iraq, the reactionary Muslim cleric Muqtada al-Sadr was mobilizing his militia forces and using mosques for weapons storage. Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) spokesman, Dan Senor, briefing reporters, issued a statement that stockpiling of weapons in mosques and shrines was unacceptable and that places of worship were no longer to be considered protected places under the Geneva Convention once they were used for war-like purposes. During the same briefing, Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt of the US Army stated that US forces had earlier drawn fire from the minaret of a mosque in Fallujah (CPA Report, April 26, 2004). It was clear that Muslim militiamen and insurgents were using mosques for stocking weapons and also using them as weapon emplacements.

**B. BATTLE OF NAJAF**

The holiest site in Shiia Islam is the Imam Ali Mosque in Nazaf. Imam Ali, who is buried there, is revered as the founder of Shiia Islam. Close to the mosque is the Valley of Peace cemetery – the largest in the world, with perhaps 5,000,000 graves. In early April 2004, coalition forces laid siege to this holy city. Al-Sadr had fortified the Imam Ali mosque and was using the cemetery as cover from which to fire at the American and Iraqi forces. Clearly, al-Sadr was exploiting the centrality and exclusivity of Najaf and

the Imam Ali mosque in particular to ward off a direct assault by the American-led forces. Ambassador Lakhdar Brahmi, commenting on the stand-off in Najaf, warned of a disaster if American soldiers entered the city to hunt down the radical cleric al-Sadr (Arizona Daily Star, April 26, 2004). By mid-May it was clear that al-Sadr was maneuvering to get the American forces to damage Imam Ali's mosque. In the process he was causing untold desecration of the mosque and the cemetery (Babbin, August 16, 2004). During daily briefings of reporters Brigadier General Kimmitt commented:

It is clear what is going on, Muqtada's militia is attempting to use those red lines and use those religious shrines much like human shields. He is hiding behind those, fully understanding that we will treat it with respect and they will not treat it with respect. (Banusiewicz, May 14, 2004).

By August 14, the fighting in Najaf had claimed hundreds of lives. At the request of the Interim Iraqi Government a temporary truce had been declared. Meanwhile, thousands of anti-American protestors took to the streets all over Iraq, including in Mosul, Falluja, Karbala and Baghdad. While the American and the Interim Governments were being blamed for initiating the fight, there were no comments, let alone protests, against al-Sadr and his men for the desecration being caused to the holy city and the mosques (Chu and Sanders, August 14, 2004, p. A1).

The stand-off at Najaf was finally settled with the intervention of the Ayatollah Sistani. As per the withdrawal plans, al-Sadr and his men were permitted to leave the mosque without having to surrender or give up their arms. The agreement also called for the withdrawal of American and all foreign forces from Najaf (The New York Times, August 28, 2004). The Americans have faced similar problems elsewhere when faced with local militia desecrating mosques and using them as fighting positions (Rhem, November 11, 2004). Worse, while the American forces have been accused of disrespecting the sanctity of mosques, the militants have never been questioned or admonished for desecrating the sacred (Jihad Watch, October 12, 2004).

### **C. ANALYSIS OF BATTLE OF NAJAF**

The battle of Najaf clearly demonstrates that the desecration of the sacred by a member of the group did not lead to protests or rebellion by the group. While the desecration of Imam Ali's mosque by al-Sadr occurred in the process of fighting for his

group, this was not a case of fighting for the protection of the faithful or their faith as such. The fact is that al-Sadr could have used any other part of the city to fight the American-led forces. This strongly suggests that al-Sadr consciously used the mosque to exploit its exclusiveness and centrality, knowing that damage to the mosque by the American forces would lead to greater cohesion and violent protests by the Shiia, not only in Iraq but all over the world. This was clearly a win-win strategy for al-Sadr as the American forces would have lost even if they were successful in defeating al-Sadr's militia in the battle.

#### **D. GOLDEN TEMPLE REVISITED**

In Chapter III, I described how the desecration of the Golden Temple, the holiest of Sikh shrines, caused a sense of alienation and betrayal among most Sikhs within India and throughout the world. The Golden Temple episode also involved deliberate desecration of their holiest site by Sikhs themselves.

Sant Bhindranwale, the founder of the Khalistan movement, was the Chief Cleric of Damdami Taksal, a Sikh seminary. This Sikh seminary is a well established complex with an elaborate infrastructure and modern buildings in a place called Chowk Mehta, approximately 25 miles from Amritsar, the city of the Golden Temple (Mahmood, 1996, p. 75).

In 1983, when Bhindranwale was under threat of arrest due to his militant activities, he shifted his headquarters to the hostel complex outside the Golden Temple. Due to increased threats, both from the authorities and rival political factions, Bhindranwale shifted to the first floor of the Akal Takht and fortified it (Kundu, 1994, pp. 46-69, Mahmood, 1996, p. 89). According to the White Paper on the Punjab agitation, the militants were using the Golden Temple and other shrines for stockpiling weapons (Weiss, 2002, p. 20). That the Golden Temple was desecrated by the militants became obvious to witnesses, as the fortification of the Akal Takht was clearly visible, and could have been observed by the pilgrims who visited the shrine (Mahmood, 1996, p. 89). Significantly, Bhindranwale occupied the first floor of the Akal Takht, the shrine where the holy book, the Guru Granth Sahib, is stored at night. In accordance with Sikh tenets, no one can be above the Granth Sahib. Members of the Sikh religious committee were also within the temple complex and witnessed the profanation of the temple (Brar, June 3,

2004). Nevertheless Sikh religious authorities and the Sikh community itself remained silent about this unspeakable sacrilege (Brar, 1993, pp. 126-127). The Temple was attacked by the Indian Army on June 4, 1984. Prior to assaulting the fortified Akal Takht, the Army attempted to get visiting pilgrims to leave the complex. However, the Punjab police maintained that the militants prevented the pilgrims from doing so and used them as human shields (Brar, June 3, 2004).

Meanwhile, Sikhs reacted sharply and violently to the attack on the Golden Temple by the Indian Army. Sikhs felt that the sanctity of their shrine had been destroyed (Hazarika, 1984, p. A2). They were alienated, deeply hurt and injured, and the attack on the temple led to increased violence and secessionism.

#### **E. ANALYSIS OF DESECRATION OF THE GOLDEN TEMPLE BY MILITANTS**

What becomes evident on closer examination is that Bhindranwale and his militia shifted into the Golden Temple to exploit the sanctity of the shrine and gain immunity against an attack by the security forces. This is apparent from a statement made often by Bhindranwale, "If the Indian Army attacks the Golden Temple, the foundation of Khalistan will be laid" (Mahmood, 1996, pp. 82-83).

A defensive battle could have been fought from Damdami Taksal or any of the built-up areas which abound in and around Amritsar city, but Bhindranwale chose the Temple not only for its religious exclusivity, but for its administrative facilities and sources of water and food (Brar, June 3, 2004).

It could be inferred that Bhindranwale exploited the exclusivity and centrality of the Golden Temple for Sikhs' religious sentiments fully aware that as a community they would mobilize against the government if the Golden Temple were attacked. Bhindranwale, in effect, provoked the authorities to violate the temple in order to capture him (Weiss, 2002, p. 19).

The security forces were at a severe disadvantage as they were left with a Hobson's choice of desecrating the temple or letting Bhindranwale and his militia carry on with their terrorist activities with impunity.

Compounding this was the fact that the Sikhs then maintained a double standard when blaming the Army for the desecration of the Temple while ignoring the profanation by Sikh militants. This could be attributed to the fact that desecration, while it generates a cohesive violent reaction on the part of believers, often has to be condoned when committed by members of the community. This may be especially true when members resort to profanation with the defense that they are protecting the community, the faith, or both.

#### **F. BURNING OF THE CHARAR-E-SHERIEF**

In Kashmir, Charar-e-Sherief is the town of the holy shrine of Hazrat Sheikh Noor-ud-Din Wali. Born in 1377 AD, this sufi-saint was a personification of the Hindu-Muslim culture of the valley and is considered to be the patron saint of Kashmir. It is believed that within two days of his death in 1438, at Charar, 900,000 people gathered at the mausoleum. The king of Kashmir Zain-ul-Abdin Badshah had a shrine constructed at the site of the mausoleum that then became famous as Dar-e-Kashmir. A wooden structure of central Asian architecture, the shrine housed artifacts like some 600-year-old Persian and Kashmiri carpets, scrolls, ancient objects of veneration, some antique copies of the holy Koran, and precious cut-glass chandeliers. Kashmiris considered the shrine to be one of their holiest places and, over time, it developed into an important pilgrimage site not only for Kashmiris, but for Muslims from all over the world.

The modus operandi of militants in Kashmir is to leave their mountain hideouts in winter, and find sanctuary in villages in the lower reaches of the valley. By the end of 1994, reports were received by the security forces that militants had started sneaking into Charar-e-Sherief. By the end of December a few hundred were reported in the town. Soon, the militants started engaging the security forces with small arms fire and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and harassing the villagers. By the second week of January 1995, the situation worsened and the Indian Army, with some central police forces cordoned off the town to prevent the militants from being reinforced (Kashmir Information Network, 2001).

The militants in the town were identified as belonging to Harkat-ul-Ansari, a group led by Mast Gul, a Pakistani mercenary. Fearing an assault by the security forces, the militants occupied the Dar-e-Kashmir shrine. They fortified the shrine and used IEDs

and other booby traps to defend themselves, which resulted in some of the residents who lived close to the shrine abandoning their houses for fear of a clash between the security forces and the militants. The militants were, however, never questioned or pressured by the people to stop desecrating the shrine. Nor were they asked to vacate it.

By the end of February, to prevent any damage by the militants to the sacred shrine, the security forces offered them safe passage, but the offer was rejected. The Army was now compelled to lay a siege and cut off electricity and water to the shrine complex. After two months of stand-off, on March 8, 1995, in retaliation to the Army's actions, the militants set fire to houses in the vicinity of the shrine, resulting in over 800 being gutted (Kashmir Information Network, 2001). The residents, fearing a major clash between the opposing forces, vacated the town. Two days later, at 2:20 am on March 10, the militants opened fire with automatic weapons and set the shrine ablaze. In the intense battle and the confusion of saving the shrine from the fire, 20 militants were killed while a large number, including their leader Mast Gul, made good their escape (Burns, May 11, 1995, p. A11).

The news of the desecration of the shrine resulted in people coming out in the thousands, protesting and blaming the security forces for these gruesome acts. Defying a curfew, angry crowds burnt down over 120 government buildings and a number of Hindu temples throughout the valley. The unrest soon spread to other parts of the state. The irony is that the burning of the shrine was attributed to the security forces who had shown restraint right from the beginning of the stand-off. While they had the ability and the wherewithal to storm the shrine, the security forces instead displayed patience for over two months, and even offered safe passage to the militants. Notwithstanding these facts, the militants were not once criticized or pressured by Muslims to desist from either occupying or desecrating the shrine.

#### **G. OBSERVATIONS OF THE CHARAR CARNAGE**

In this case, too, the first fact that is evident is that the occupation of the shrine by the militants was clearly a violation of Islamic tenets. The desecration was blatantly and clearly obvious to local residents. None of them, however, objected to the desecration at any point. While this could well have been out of fear, even protection by a large and powerful force like the Indian Army did not evoke adverse comments about or objections

to the militants' profanation of the shrine. When the shrine was set ablaze, people tended to instead blame the Indian Army even though they were witnesses to the complete event. The Army was, in fact, well away from the shrine and even had offered safe passage to the militants in exchange for the safety of the Shrine.

The militants, many of whom were from the local area, knew well the significance of the shrine. Their occupation of the shrine can therefore only be attributed to their exploiting the centrality and exclusivity of the shrine and daring the security forces to desecrate it.

#### **H. OBSERVATION ON EXPLOITATION OF THE SACRED BY MILITANTS**

The three case studies share some common features when it comes to the desecration of sites by members of religious groups themselves: 1) the militants use the sacred to gain an unfair advantage over security forces and dare them to desecrate the sacred; 2) this use of the sacred is done to allegedly protect the faith, community or gain some other collective benefit like self-determination; 3) the use of the sacred by members of the group may itself be a desecration; 4) such desecration by group members is often condoned by the community and accepted as the cost of protecting the faith; and lastly, 5) any act by the authorities which results in further profanation of the sacred is strongly resisted to the extent that force and violence are used.

## VII. VIOLENCE - A PRODUCT OF DESECRATION

In his paper “*Fighting Insurgency on Sacred Ground*,” Ron E. Hassner narrates an incident in Najaf when a U.S. platoon en route to the house of a local Shiia leader was surrounded by an angry mob of 200 residents. The locals assumed that the soldiers’ intended target was the nearby mosque of Imam Ali. The locals are reported to have commented “In the city, okay. In the mosque no” (Hassnar, 2006, pp. 149-166). This anecdote is not only an example of the pervasive and global phenomenon of conflict over sacred space as described by Hassner, but a classic example of the impact of desecration or the threat of desecration and its propensity to generate violence. In summation of this study some issues that have been raised during the course of the study deserve further elaboration.

### A. DEVIATION FROM GURR’S MODEL OF MINORITIES AT RISK

This study attempted to follow Gurr’s model, to include religion as an independent factor as elaborated by Fox. It was hypothesized that violence due to desecration followed Gurr and Fox’s model with the exception of: 1) not always following the cycle of deprivation, grievance formation, and mobilization; and 2) the affected group not always being the minority group. If we take the cases of the Temple Mount and the Ramjanambhumi-Babri Masjid, we see that both classically follow Gurr’s model of deprivation, grievance formation and mobilization leading to protests, rebellion and violence.

In the case of the Golden Temple, the Sikh response follows Gurr’s model, but only up to a point. Notwithstanding the century old perceived grievance felt by the Sikhs, never were the Sikhs united or mobilized as they were when the Golden Temple was desecrated. The resultant cohesion and violence of the Sikhs after the attack on the Golden Temple could, thus, be attributed to the desecration, as all other factors relating to political, economic and ethnic disparities existed previously and never brought about such solidarity or violence. On the other hand, it may be countered that this case does not prove the exception to Gurr’s model since violence was experienced even before the attack on the Golden Temple and so the impact of desecration on ethnic violence is at best blurred.

In the cases of the desecration of the Dalada Maligawa (The Tooth Temple), the Hazaratbal Mosque, the Koran at Guantanamo Bay, and the cartoon of the Prophet Mohamed, we see that the violence was instantaneous and spontaneous. No other factor seemingly influenced the reaction of the affected group. The affected group did not transit through the stages of perceived deprivation, grievance formation or mobilization. The affected group was not always the minority group. Here we see how violence generated by desecration can deviate from Gurr's model.

## **B. PRECIPITANTS AND PRECONDITIONING FACTORS**

While this study used Gurr's model as a departure point, the concept of precipitants and preconditioning factors was also introduced. The concept of precipitants was introduced to explain instantaneous violent reactions to desecration. The question arises, however, as to why some violence, consequent to desecration, is attributed to preconditioning factors as in the Temple Mount case, while others are attributed to precipitants as in the case of the Tooth Temple? This cannot be definitely assessed. One explanation could be that conflicts that have religion and the sacred as one of the independent variables, tend to remain unresolved for protracted periods as was brought out in the discussion on the indivisibility of the sacred. In these conflicts cross-desecration is a norm as was seen in the case of the Temple Mount and Babri Masjid. Other examples are the cross-desecration of the sacred in the Balkans and in the religious wars in Northern Ireland. In all these instances the conflicts have been protracted enough that they can be fitted to Gurr's model, especially since ancient hate, symbolism and irresolvable ethnic conflicts have also been involved. On the other hand, desecration leading to precipitative violence is explicable since profanation or the threat of profanation is highly inflammatory and provocative given the preeminence of the sacred to believers.

The next issue for which there may be no definitive answer has to do with why in some instances of desecration the reaction of the believers is non-virulent or even passive, while in other instances it is explosive and violent? The virulence of reaction to desecration was explained as being dependent on the degree of exclusivity and centrality of the sacred, the factors of political facilitation/ resources available to the faithful and

the orientation to religion being exclusivist, inclusivist or pluralist. The other explanation for the varied reaction to desecration has to do with the quality of the precipitants and the environment. As stated by Horowitz:

There is a trade off between the precipitants and the environmental conditions supporting the use of violence. What the underlying conditions may lack in conduciveness to disorder the precipitants may possess in provocativeness. If so, a highly inciting act may produce a riot even in what otherwise appears to be tranquil times; and in tense times or a supportive environment, a smaller incident may trigger a big riot. Conversely, an unsupportive environment, may be shattered by a precipitating event of such magnitude that the initiators of violence feel that they cannot let it pass unanswered (Horowitz, 2001, pp. 268-269).

### **C. THE HOW AND WHY OF DESECRATION**

That desecration occurs because there is something to desecrate is an intuitive truism. In this study an attempt has been made to explain how man has experienced the holy and the sacred since the dawn of civilization. Various groups have felt special veneration for the sacred and often attached overbearing significance to it. Paradoxically, one of the results of identification with the sacred and the attribution of profound importance to the sacred has made it vulnerable to attack. When communities fall into estrangement the sacred becomes an easy and attractive target of violence or vengeance.

Violent acts in contempt or anger result in desecration, occupation or even destruction of the sacred. As posited by Scott Atran, often the sacred is introduced into disputes transforming them into sacred values and rendering the dispute beyond resolution (Atran, 2006). The use of the holy and sacred for military purposes has also been a common feature. This phenomenon has been particularly exploited by terrorists in the recent past. One of the major reasons Al Qaida gives for resorting to terrorism is the desecration of the holy land and profanation of Islam. The cases of the Imam Ali Mosque, the Golden Temple, and the Charar-e-Sherif have been discussed. Other famous cases are the desecration of the Church of the Nativity and the desecration of the Tomb of the Patriarch under the rationale that the Israelis were using the Tomb for military purposes.

This study has attempted to study desecration as a causative factor for violence. The study is important as desecration is a factor which can: 1) increase group cohesion and influence mobilization; 2) cause individual or collective grievances among the affected group, be it a minority group or otherwise; 3) cause grievance formation that could often lead to protests, rebellion and violence, particularly if ancient hatred or other preconditions exist; 4) cause instantaneous violent reactions; 5) cause violence even in the absence of other influencing factors like political, economic and ethnic factors. The study of desecration is important not only to mitigate its impacts, but as a predictive and analytical tool for modulating activities that might inadvertently rally groups via their intense religious attachments to the sacred and the holy.

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