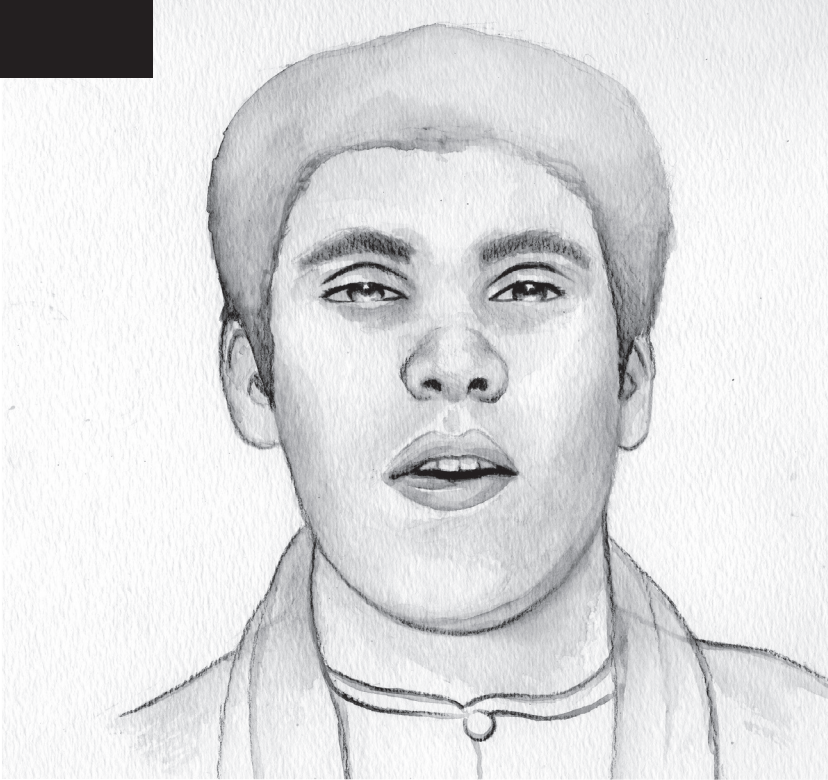


# ROHAN LAMBORE



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# **AN ERA OF VOLATILE TRANSITION: UNCOVERING THE HINDU-MUSLIM TENSION IN MUMBAI, INDIA**

## **Introduction**

“If this city is to move forward into a less communally tense and more promising future, then it seems that only God can help us reach there.”<sup>1</sup> This insight from one of Mumbai journalist Sandeep Unnithan’s numerous city-wide interviews ironically sheds light on a rather most talked-about and touchy subject within one of India’s most rapidly growing hubs today. The consistent problem of inter-religious tensions (Hindu-Muslim) within Mumbai seems to be at the discussion table for practically every urban planner, elected official, police officer, philanthropist, and even common citizen who convenes to address the city’s progress. With a metropolis population of just under 20.5 million<sup>2</sup>, Mumbai has emerged as the fourth most populous city in the world and is one of the most densely populated. More illustratively, the size of the Muslim minority within the total population of the city is around 18.6%, while Hindus represent around 67.4% of the inhabitants. The religious cleavage is thus supported by a social and civil disparity within the population of Mumbai itself, which makes addressing the Hindu-Muslim strife all the more challenging. With numerous, overwhelmingly promising statistics—at least in the areas of infrastructure and economic development—one thus finds it hard to believe that problems such as inter-religious tensions are shrouded in the highly visible success of the city within the last two decades. Yet, this pressing issue continues to persist, and many scholars believe this conflict serves as a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to Mumbai’s continued urban progress.

Interestingly, recent literature on the subject has cited a plethora of causalities for this communal volatility: economic strife, political corruption, ethno-cultural differences, and even generic ideological disparities.<sup>3</sup> Superficially, these elements seem potent, but nevertheless there seems to be an underlying factor that describes the current Hindu-Muslim volatility within Mumbai. This brings in the discussion

of the effects of modernist-postmodernist ideologies on the communal tensions, which is essentially the driving force behind this analysis. Modernist theory essentially denotes the modern development of industrial societies, and the rapid growth of cities, with many elements overlapping the concepts of Westernization, urban comprehensiveness (i.e. standardized application), and widespread disregard of resident or public opinion.<sup>4</sup> Postmodernism, by definition, rejects modernism in that it advances diversity within the urban environment, heightens the awareness of social differences, and deconstructs the uniform applicability of planning that modernists once posited.<sup>5</sup> The paper will thus argue that the ongoing, communal volatility between Hindus and Muslims within the city of Mumbai is a direct side effect of the current transition from a modern to postmodern urban environment, which is best illustrated by the tangible socio-economic differences between both religious groups.

### **Methodology**

I will first briefly employ a historical lens to analyze the specific effects of modernism on the city, specifically during the 1990s, which saw the worst of the inter-religious tensions. Modernist ideas here include the creation of a master plan for the city that was spearheaded by a central authority, as well as the idea that such a form of urban planning can provide the greatest good for the most amount of people. The period that followed, 21<sup>st</sup> century Mumbai, will be the main section of my analysis, as the various postmodern elements and their side effects that have been adapted to the prevailing modernist ideology are discussed. The driving example here will be what I find as a reinvention of indigenous (historically important) aesthetics into the urban environment of the city, as well as Mumbai's central desire to address the needs of the various groups living within the urban area. Here I argue that the specific socio-economic cleavages which emerged from this transitional phase help to illustrate how this shift in ideology contributes to inter-religious tensions between Hindus and Muslims. Because the transition between modernism and postmodernism inevitably establishes a Hindu superiority over the Muslim population, tensions result, which creates an "inherently vicious cycle within the urban atmosphere of the city."<sup>6</sup> Connecting to this discussion, the last section of the paper will very briefly focus on the future of the city in terms of its physical, social, and civil progress amidst such ideological transitions as well as deep inter-religious strife. Thus, by

analyzing this specific side effect of the transitional phase of Mumbai's current urban environment, I believe that one can better understand the paramount obstacle that lies in the path of the city's overall progress.

### **Essential Information and Terminology**

An analysis of the rather complex issues involved in the Hindu-Muslim tension within Mumbai warrants a prior understanding of the social, civil, and economic features of the city as well as more detailed definitions of the applicative models of modernism, the modern-postmodern transition, and postmodernism. The demographics of the city, including both the ethno-religious and socio-economic elements that define the urban environment, help to shed light on the basic issues which surfaced long before the modern-postmodern transition began to affect the city. Mumbai currently ranks in the top ten internationally for both population and population density, as the urban hub houses just under 20.5 million people over an area of 16,851.5 square miles, leading to an astonishing 53,600 people per square mile.<sup>7</sup> In other words, Mumbai represents itself as an urban area in which individuals are in close contact with one another at any given time. As mentioned before, demographically the city is about 67.4% Hindu, 18.6% Muslim, and 14% Buddhist, Christian, Sikh, and other minorities.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the largest ethno-religious minority within the urban fabric is the Islamic population which resides in the city. Linguistically, the city represents an indigenous vibe that also lends a hand to the underlying communal tensions, as the official language has always been Marathi, the state language of Maharashtra (of which Mumbai is the capital). Because of the racial and ethnic diversity throughout the urban area, the unofficial languages are Hindi, Urdu, and English, which are essentially trademarks of other large Indian cities. Unemployment stands at 14%, while over 60% of the urban population resides in the numerous slums dotting Mumbai.<sup>9</sup> The literacy rate within the hundreds of slum and slum-like dwellings is over 69%, making them the most literate in India. Interestingly, over 70% of the Muslim population residing in the city lives within these urban slums, which negatively contributes to the modern-postmodern effects on the communal tension within the area.<sup>10</sup> For the purposes of nomenclature, those who live in or are originally from Mumbai are known as "Mumbaikars," while those who live in or are originally from the state of Maharashtra are known as "Maharashtrians." Such terms will frequently arise in this analysis and

thus familiarity with both will help with the understanding of their context. Less specifically, Mumbai has been categorized as a “world city,” where a multitude of races, religions, ethnicities, and cultures collide, allowing for a uniquely diverse urban fabric.<sup>11</sup> Information technology companies, large banks, family owned restaurants, world-class shopping malls, and a plethora of temples, mosques, and even museums are just some of the sites that dot the city, allowing for a truly inclusive environment both socio-civilly and economically. Thus, at the ground level, the infrastructure of Mumbai seems much like any other urban megalopolis. But at a deeper level, the works of modernism and postmodernism are certainly showing their true colors.

*“Since the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan, relations between the sub-continents have faced numerous sour patches.”*

It is also important to mention that there exist numerous preexisting conditions surrounding the ongoing tensions between Hindus and Muslims, many of which are pan-Indian issues.

Since the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan, relations between the sub-continents have faced numerous sour patches. With the ongoing military and political stalemate in the conflicted Kashmir region of North India and the influx of Muslim refugees from both Bangladesh and Burma, the interreligious strife is built around the constructed notions of political and social domination within the Indian society.<sup>12</sup> Four wars have been fought between India and Pakistan over Kashmir and Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan), and with communal tensions taking the form of protests and even riots, the Hindu-Muslim relationships are also a question of national identity and loyalty to one’s homeland. It is also interesting to note that differences do exist among various age groups and socioeconomic sectors of the both the Hindu and Muslim populations within India. In most cases, mutual tolerance is apparent and potently influential in each group’s socio-cultural development. Nevertheless, Mumbai, which has arguably seen the worst side of Hindu-Muslim strife, continues to face the challenges of this interreligious clash, which can be attributed to the transition between modern and postmodern urbanism.

But what exactly are the applicative elements of modernism and post-modernism directly related to the specifics of Mumbai’s communal ten-

sion? For the sake of this analysis, modernism includes two vital points: the establishment of a master plan which includes a central authority of some kind, and the principle that the greatest good must be done for the greatest number of individuals. Both of these elements of modernism are intrinsically woven into the section of this paper which focuses on the beginnings of the communal tension, or the time period between 1985 and 2001. This phase serves as the basis for the current urban turmoil within Mumbai,<sup>13</sup> as it weaves both of these principal modernist elements into Mumbai's urban routine. The postmodernist elements that apply to the argument then include: an administrative focus that addresses the issues of the marginalized groups, and the reintroduction and solidification of indigenous aesthetics into the urban environment. Here, the Muslim population serves as the marginalized or oppressed group, while the various infrastructural elements help to "relay social, cultural, and ethno-religious traditions that are of historical importance to the city."<sup>14</sup> Thus, the transitional phase or the modern-postmodern period is essentially the clash of the two modern and two postmodern elements, which is what allows the conditions surrounding communal tension between Hindus and Muslims in Mumbai to rapidly deteriorate.

Theoretically, a final idea that also helps to better understand the fundamental issues which characterize the religious volatility within Mumbai are the three urban elements proposed by Joel Kotkin in *The City: A Global History*, which he argues should be inherent in any city. He proposes that the urban environment of the city should include: "a sense of sacredness, the ability to provide security, and the animating role of commerce."<sup>15</sup> These three ideas are also interwoven into the discussion of Mumbai's communal tension, as questions such as "What does it mean to be a Mumbaikar?," "Is Mumbai truly a secure city?," and "What is the threshold for the commercial prosperity of the city?," are all analyzed. Including such elements from Kotkin's thesis allow us to truly understand the Hindu-Muslim volatility from all angles. These three fundamental ideas provide for a more thorough understanding of the origins, ongoing problems, and even future projections of the communal way of life within Mumbai. Thus, with such parameters set in place, one can better understand the following section of this analysis, in which the specific effects of modernism on the city will be discussed. Through this historical lens, a foundation will be set that will ultimately

shed light on the origins of the modern-postmodern transition of the city, and its ultimate effects on the communal tension within Mumbai.

### **Troubled Beginnings: A Modernist Mumbai (1985-2001)**

The source of the Hindu-Muslim communal tension within Mumbai dates back to a period in its urban history that was fueled by the enveloping force of modernism, which essentially set the foundation for the turbulent transitional period that would soon follow. The political, socio-civil, and economic infrastructure was built around the two core elements that the modernist school forwards: a master plan which includes a central authority, and the idea that the greatest good must be done for the greatest number of people. An individual who many people even today believe “transformed the city for better or for worse” dominated this specific point in history.<sup>16</sup> The man behind such an urban revolution was Bal Thackeray, a politician, activist, and for some, a reincarnation of “a savior who would fight for Mumbaikars and Maharashtrians until his dying day.”<sup>17</sup>

Bal Thackeray represented a unique and highly effective method of urban restructuring that dated back to the 1947 Partition, in which the republic split into three separate political entities: Pakistan, East Pakistan, and India. His role essentially came into the limelight during the years following the ethno-religious turbulence of the post-World War II era in Mumbai. However, for the purposes of this analysis, the period between 1985 and 2001 serves as the most important phase in his career. Thackeray, until his death in 2012, was the leader and president of his self-founded political party, Shiv Sena. His presence garnered millions of followers across the urban area, and the majority of his supporters considered him to be “a divine figure” who watched over the city.<sup>18</sup> Shiv Sena developed its principal pillars around two main goals that essentially upended the existing infrastructure and replaced it with a modernist approach.

First, it proposed the establishment of a citywide plan that would reorganize the urban core of the city through “an extremely nationalistic social, civil and economic centralization.”<sup>19</sup> Effectively, at the center of this plan was Bal Thackeray, who served as a parallel government within Mumbai. Thackeray was the leader of this extremist movement that kept

every politician, police officer, and administrative official in check by essentially establishing himself as the city's chief. His modernist master plan consisted of an extremist policy that essentially banned any Muslim from participating in the urban way of life. Thus, this population could not start businesses, participate in the religious and cultural social life in the city, mix with the Hindu Maharashtrian inhabitants, or even vote in the political elections. Thackeray also banned Muslims from entering the city, believing that with "their high birthrate, they would easily outnumber the Hindu population."<sup>20</sup> In other words, through this master plan he preached ethnic nationalism and Hindu extremism, and believed that Mumbai should only consist of those who were indigenous to the land before "the Muslim invaders arrived hundreds of years ago."<sup>21</sup> He served as the central authority, acting as the primary enforcer of this plan, and from 1985 to 2001, he ruled Mumbai with a nationalistic iron fist.

The second pillar of Thackeray's Shiv Sena party consisted of his numerous employees effectively attempting to reach out to the largest number of people and to provide them with most of the benefits within the urban environment. This mirrored the modernist idea of achieving the greatest good for the greatest amount of people. Through this principal, Shiv Sena and Thackeray were able to gain immense legitimacy and were thus able to effectively direct the administration and law enforcement sectors of Mumbai with "invincible effectiveness that subjected the city to racial and ethno-religious transformations."<sup>22</sup> At the surface, this policy of citywide benevolence may seem politically, socially, and civilly promising. However, there was a catch. Thackeray, Shiv Sena, and numerous followers only wanted to provide the greatest good to the greatest number of indigenous Hindus and Maharashtrians, effectively excluding the rising Muslim population from participating in the political party's various projects. Thackeray reached a helping hand toward his own, but shunned those who needed his attention the most.<sup>23</sup> Hindus across the urban area were thus granted special privileges: lower tax rates, easy entrance into employment and business startups, lower-priced education, multiple city-wide holidays during the year to celebrate the plethora of cultural and religious festivals in the Hindu calendar, and affordable better-quality municipal amenities (housing, water supply, sanitation). Thus, his policy of widespread benefits for the



entire population of Mumbai was exclusively allotted to Hindus, and specifically to Maharashtrians. The Muslim population was simply not a part of Shiv Sena's plan for the urban progress, and thus their personal deprivation in all aspects of city life was essentially "not of concern to Thackeray and his hordes of supporters" during the 1985-2001 phase of Mumbai's history.<sup>24</sup>

Admittedly, Thackeray justified his party's extreme interpretation of modernist ideology by relating his actions as both a method of revenge and a tool for socio-economic and civil progress throughout the urban area. He justified his policies by consistent addresses to his followers in which he claimed that he was excluding the Muslim population because of the atrocities that they committed during the 1947 Partition of India. He also felt that the Hindus of Mumbai would be in harm's way if he granted the Muslims "full access to every urban amenity."<sup>25</sup> In other words, he did not want Hindus to lose jobs, housing perks, or a sense of cultural and religious belonging because of the orthodox Islamic inhabitants of the city. Thus, he only wished to include his own people (ethnic Maharashtra Hindus) in his plan to provide the greatest benefits for the largest number of people. Thackeray, his Shiv Sena party, and its millions of supporters unfortunately employed policies and engaged in actions against the Muslim population that would ultimately result in widespread communal bloodshed and even terrorist attacks during the rather turbulent 1990s Mumbai.

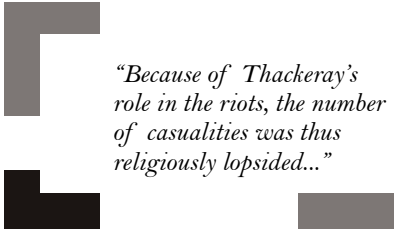
### **The Result: Communal Bloodshed and a Failing Modernist City**

The consequences of the modernist ideology that had gripped the city prior to the most recent turn of the century revealed its brutally undesirable face merely seven years after Thackeray and Shiv Sena had begun to institute an anti-Muslim master plan. On December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1992, Hindu extremists in the North Indian state of Uttar Pradesh destroyed the historically important Babri Masjid Mosque after both social and political fallouts within the region.<sup>26</sup> As a result, Hindu-Muslim riots exploded across the nation, and with Mumbai enveloped by an inter-religiously tense environment, naturally, it saw the worst of the violence.

From mid-December, 1992 to mid-January, 1993, Mumbai was essentially completely consumed by unimaginably horrific communal

riots. Each corner of the city became a killing field, with the worst of the violence occurring in the poverty-stricken slums that dotted the northern region of the urban area. Hindus and Muslims alike slaughtered one another for one month, using almost anything they could find as weapons, and in many instances resorting to total war strategies (coercive rape, setting fire to houses, and robbery/looting of businesses). Bal Thackeray and his supporters, however, played their role carefully, as they took advantage of the incessant chaos and made it a point to “assist in exterminating as many Muslims as possible through their political, police, and socio-civil networks.”<sup>27</sup> Thackeray thus was essentially unstoppable during the communal clashes that lasted through the greater part of January 1993. When the conflagration finally came to a close after thirty days of terror that included a multitude of human rights abuses (police brutality and genocide-like executions), over 900 individuals had perished, more than half of whom were Muslims.

Because of Thackeray’s role in the riots, the number of casualties was thus religiously lopsided, and he and his supporters believed that Mumbai would be able to “progress without check in the coming years.”<sup>28</sup> Modernist plans therefore had culminated in an ethno-religious tragedy that in the eyes of those affected, seemed socially, politically, civilly, and even economically irreversible. The master plan had thus entailed this spontaneous final solution that was certainly radically different than any interpretation forwarded by Le Corbusier, the renowned urban planner who essentially allowed the ideology to flourish. Surveys conducted across the city of Mumbai in the months and years following the communal riots illustrated the true, underlying effects of such widespread bloodshed and hatred: “Hindus and Muslims alike were



*“Because of Thackeray’s role in the riots, the number of casualties was thus religiously lopsided...”*

devastated, not everyone supported Thackeray [...] perhaps there is no going back from this terrible deed.”<sup>29</sup> Millions backed away from the Shiv Sena, claiming that they did not want to be associated with bloodshed in any form. Unfortunately, Thackeray and his supporters deemed those who were disloyal to the Shiv Sena in the immediate aftermath of the riots as outsiders. They were essentially considered political, so-

cial, and cultural outcasts who were not “true” Maharashtrians. Thackeray and his followers thus became the subject of much investigation in the months following the violence, as both police officials and local/state political figures who had initially supported him and Shiv Sena began to reconsider their loyalty. This process of political and socio-civil de-legitimization was reinforced after the 1993 Mumbai Bombings that ripped through the city, killing more than 255 people.<sup>30</sup>

March, 1993 proved to be yet another violent and chaotic chapter in Mumbai’s modernist urban history, as Islamic terrorists detonated a series of thirteen bombs across the area, in order to seek revenge for the widespread attacks on Muslims that had ensued merely two months prior.<sup>31</sup> Originating from Pakistan, the perpetrators of the attacks justified their actions by claiming they were operating for both the sake of jihad and to avenge the hundreds of Muslim deaths during the communal riots of early 1993. These tragic events allowed for a slow, but ultimately effective urban ideological revolution, as Thackeray and his Shiv Sena party began to lose much of their legitimacy due to the vicious cycle they had essentially created with their anti-Muslim policies during the last fifteen years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From a theoretical standpoint, planners and policymakers alike saw the long lasting effects of his actions, and thus modernism was categorized as a failing strategy for the city as whole, as it had been radically distorted in order to fulfill the racially extreme and ethno-religiously radical views of the Shiv Sena party.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, at the fundamental level of urban development, Kotkin’s elements were also affected, as his critical elements of sacredness, security, and commerce had all become questionable within the political, social, and civil infrastructure of Mumbai post-1993. The inherent urban identity or the ability of each resident to have a sense of belonging and call themselves “Mumbaikars” became all the more controversial. Ethnic and religious discrimination and communal hatred thus obscured the social fabric of the city, as Hindus and Muslims alike simply did not understand “if they truly were part of the greater Mumbai community.”<sup>33</sup> Security, of course, had been compromised, and the inter-religious tensions were consistently turbulent, with small scale clashes occurring even in the five to seven years after the 1993 horrors. The internal safety of the urban area was thus at a minimum or simply nonexistent during

these years, which ultimately affected the commercial economic sector of the city. Each element of Mumbai's growing economy was severely hurt by communal riots especially in the immediate years following, as the general levels of fear and mistrust between the two largest ethno-religious groups of the city were unimaginably high.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Mumbai became a status quo of social, civil, and economic deprivation, which, if in any other city, would have meant complete urban disaster. Thackeray and his Shiv Sena party, though declining in popularity for many of the city's inhabitants, were still "in power" and had an effective hold over the political, social, and civil realm of the city. However, as the 21<sup>st</sup> century became visible on the temporal horizon of Mumbai, the urban environment began to shift, as Thackeray and his much smaller following began to refocus their strategy away from the sole exclusion of the Muslim population. With its fewer numbers, Shiv Sena became more specific in its strategies and thus began a city-wide campaign against a small ethnic group known as the Biharis, who originated from the North Indian state of Bihar, and did not constitute a large portion of Mumbai's population.<sup>35</sup> Their ideology became even more conservative and narrow-minded, which essentially served as a cue for the local and even state government to intervene and employ a new, transformative policy for the entire city. Thus, the transition from modernism to postmodernism began to show at the turn of the century, as Thackeray began to slip into a more behind-the-scenes role, paving the way for a revived, unique Mumbai that was nonetheless more volatile than one could imagine.

### **Transitional Turbulence: The Modern/Postmodern Urban Environment (2001-Present)**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century provided the Mumbai Municipal Corporation (MMC), which consisted of the mayor and other high ranking political and law enforcement officials who harbored a deep desire for urban redevelopment as well as a shift away from Thackeray and Shiv Sena's extreme nationalistic policies. They combined their vision for a more progressive and integrated Mumbai with the state government's (which was headed by the Chief Minister and his cabinet) idea for a citywide transformation and essentially tried to restructure the social, political, and civil environment of the city.<sup>36</sup> Their efforts included widespread disapproval of Thackeray and Shiv Sena's policies and actions, and mil-

lions lobbied in the national capital, New Delhi, in order to force the Indian government to outlaw the extremist and radically racist ideology that had ruled Mumbai for so many years. Protests were conducted, petitions were filed, and millions hoped to move toward a more progressive and successful Mumbai, whose environment they hoped would serve as an emblem of communal unity and sustained diversity throughout even the international community. This urban revolution, which began in 2001 and is still an ongoing process, basically consists of a postmodern adaptation that would more or less apply two of its principal elements to a highly modernist Mumbai. The idea was not to demolish the modern ideology that had empowered the urban policy and planning sector of the city, but rather to reorganize and apply a more progressive approach to the already existing foundation. This transitional phase between modernism and postmodernism within the urban area consisted of what the new emerging authority believed would be “a change for the better [...] which could ensure the city’s progress especially during the peak of globalization and its pivotal side effect: modernization.”<sup>37</sup>

The first postmodern strategy employed within Mumbai consisted of an abolishment of the master plan with its central authority (Bal Thackeray), and the immediate institution of a more bureaucratic system that focused on the marginalized groups’ (i.e. Muslim) needs and wants rather than simply doing the greatest good for greatest number of people. This highly progressive and openly liberal idea was met with widespread praise by not only the entire political, legislative, and economic sectors of society, but also the millions of individuals who had been consistently brainwashed by the radical modernist ideas of Thackeray and Shiv Sena.<sup>38</sup> This first postmodern method consisted of a rather complex plan that essentially sought to renew the deeply deprived Muslim population for the sake of socio-economic renewal, and civil progress that would create a more balanced urban society that would prove to enrich the successes of the city as a whole in the future. However, it must be noted that the shift from a highly centralized plan that revolved around a master plan was fundamentally different than the hierarchical bureaucracy attempting to replace it. Essentially, the MMC was divided into multiple departments each with a specialized focus within the urban environment.<sup>39</sup> Each would address the specific issues that were ongoing in the city, such as housing, sanitation, transportation, security, and even

ground-level commercial elements (businesses and trade). What made the system postmodern, however, was that their efforts were primarily focused on the marginalized population of Mumbai at the time, which for the purpose of this argument, were the Muslims inhabitants. The idea here was to rejuvenate their living conditions in every way possible, and the MMC essentially addressed the concerns and problems that were most easily solvable first. Thus, housing, sanitation, and transportation became their main focus, as they believed that this would eventually create a chain reaction that would improve the security and economic facets of the urban infrastructure.<sup>40</sup> As previously stated, throughout the modernist period of Mumbai, and even today, millions of the city's Muslim dwellers lived in slum-like conditions that essentially lacked all the basic amenities for life (running water, sewage, electricity). The plan was to restructure these sprawling, poor areas, and transform them into more humane and habitable environments for the sake of strengthening the weakened Muslim population. The logic here was to introduce a new standard of living for the completely marginalized population that had incessantly suffered during the Thackeray era. By assisting the Muslim population, which was and still is the largest religious minority within Mumbai, both the MMC and its supportive Maharashtra government hoped that "communal unity would be redefined for the better."<sup>41</sup> Thus, urban planning and policy was redirected to a less centralized, more bureaucratic structure which sought to better the everyday lives of the deeply marginalized Muslim population, which served as the first half of the postmodern strategy within the city.

The second pillar of the postmodern element that was (and still is) being applied to Mumbai's urban infrastructure is the reinforcement of indigenous aesthetics into the city that "relay social, cultural, and ethno-religious traditions that are of historical importance to the city."<sup>42</sup> This facet of the more progressive and liberal approach that planners and policymakers were attempting to employ was primarily focused on the strengthening of landmarks or areas across the urban area that were (and still are) deeply revered by the population that called the city home long before the communal tensions even began to surface. Predictably, this group was the indigenous Hindu Maharashtra, who lived in the city prior to the "Muslim migration centuries ago."<sup>43</sup> The specific buildings, temples, museums, and historical monuments that they have held sacred

for what seems like eternity were not the center of attention during the Thackeray modernist period. Because Shiv Sena and its leader essentially focused the large majority of their political campaigns around the urban area specifically targeting the Muslim population, they did not care much about the general aesthetics of the city. They believed that these specific elements did not carry as much political and social weight as a clear socio-economic superiority over the Islamic minority, and thus they focused on improving the living, learning, and consumption facets of the Hindu and Maharashtran urban society within Mumbai. Inevitably, the little improvements made to the cultural, traditional, and religious land-



*“...the MMC as well as the state government believed that such a plan would be a turning point for Mumbai...”*



marks of the city were completely damaged or even destroyed during the communal riots and subsequent terrorist attacks of 1993.<sup>44</sup> Thus, the urban planning and policy sector of the city decided to reinstitute the aesthetic restoration program within

Mumbai, and plans were made to rebuild and restructure numerous Hindu temples, historic museums, cultural and religious statues, and architecturally symbolic monuments and buildings. Designers and architects were consulted on a war footing, as a large movement for art and culture began to develop as a direct result of the postmodernist ideology. The rationale behind such an idea was that the postmodern system within the urban area would act as a two-pronged approach: the bureaucratic system would appease the marginalized Muslim population, while this rejuvenation of aesthetics into the city would address the wants and needs of the Hindus who longed for a strengthened sense of identity and belonging after their disillusionment with the extremist modern ideology. Thus, the MMC as well as the state government believed that such a plan would be a turning point for Mumbai, in that it would achieve a healthy ethno-religious balance between the majority and minority populations, and that it would allow for social, civil, and economic progress after a horrific decade of communal bloodshed and hatred.<sup>45</sup>

However, with a population so large, and with the ethno-religious divisions historically tense within the urban fabric of the city, the transitional modern-postmodern system in Mumbai was, and still is, unable to alleviate the city's underlying communal tensions, but instead dra-

matically worsens the volatility between the Hindus and Muslims. The influence of postmodern ideas on an already fractionalized modernist urban environment was thus ineffective in bringing about the change that so many had desired.<sup>46</sup> The ongoing instability between both religious groups seems to be directly stemming from the MMC and state government's adaptation of postmodern ideas onto a modern urban environment, which essentially has created transitional turbulence around Mumbai. The ongoing communal tensions are quite severe, and the modern to postmodern phase's effects are best illustrated by the social and economic disparity between Hindus and Muslims who reside within the urban area.

### **The Result: Deep Socio-Economic Divide/Rebirth of Communal Tensions (Current Issues)**

Analysts and scholars who concluded that the 1990s were unimaginably horrific for Mumbai in terms of the socio-civil, political, and economic turmoil of the urban environment have admitted that "the ongoing volatility between Hindus and Muslims is slightly worse."<sup>47</sup> This statement is certainly justifiable by the complex influences that the modern to postmodern transition has had on the city. Currently, the primary and most tangible effect is the visible socio-economic differences that exist between the two religious groups, which have served as a complementary element to the powerful rebirth of the communal tensions throughout the urban area. Thus, at the turn of the century, planners and policy-makers who embraced the postmodern elements that existed within their "double-edged urban rehabilitation approach,"<sup>48</sup> failed to see how their ideas would make the situation worse, and the effects of their strategies are still evident today.

Superficially, the idea of a highly bureaucratic municipal system that would replace the extremist Thackeray ideology was perfect for Mumbai at the time, but many failed to see that the urban society within Mumbai was and still is deeply divided along inter-religious lines because of its turbulent history. Addressing the needs of the marginalized Muslim population thus serves as a rather idealistic plan that simply failed to follow through due to the underlying ethno-religious tensions that simply resurface when the MMC tries to employ its programs. Local activists,



civil workers, and even police officers who initially began to adapt the postmodern strategies became wary of the large-scale Muslim deprivation that had occurred during the Thackeray era, as well as the visible successes of the Hindu population throughout the urban area.<sup>49</sup> As administrative officials from around the city and even state worked towards improving the conditions within the slums and other poverty-stricken areas of Mumbai, an overwhelming fear began to overcome them, which is what helps to fuel the lack of effort on their part even today. As the impoverished Muslim population of the city continues to suffer due to poor housing, educational opportunities, business resources, and basic amenities of everyday life, the Hindu-led MMC and state government is simply too scared to help. They believe that with their assistance, the Muslim groups that have long been deprived due to the modernist period will become strengthened socially, civilly, economically, or even worse, politically.<sup>50</sup> Employees of the MMC and state government responsible for addressing the marginalized needs and wants are thus frightened at the idea of a Muslim renewal, and urban rejuvenation that would allow them to parallel the success of the larger and more dominant Hindu population. The various departments that were created during the modern-postmodern transition therefore are rather ineffective in assisting the Muslim inhabitants out of poverty and into an overall, more sustainable quality of life. Thus, as the population continues to rise on a monthly and even weekly basis, more and more Islamic city dwellers are moving into the massive slums of Mumbai, unable to afford the more expensive housing and standard of life their Hindu counterparts have access to.<sup>51</sup> Sameera Khan, a noted urban economist who surveyed a medium-sized slum that contained both Hindus and Muslims and then compared her data with the broader demographics of the city, perhaps best illustrates this fact. Her results are compiled in Table 1, which illustratively shows the deep disparity between the two opposing religious groups currently residing in the city.

This data shows the clear differences between the Hindu and Muslim populations within Mumbai, as Khan later concluded that such results were paralleled across numerous other slums she surveyed throughout the city. Thus, economically, the two religious groups are in drastically opposing positions within the urban fabric of the city, and the postmodern strategy that initially served a method to unify both groups and solve

| <b>Religion</b> | <b>Group 1<br/>(most poor)</b> | <b>Group 2</b> | <b>Group 3</b> | <b>Group 4<br/>(least poor)</b> |
|-----------------|--------------------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Hindu</b>    | 415 (32%)                      | 600 (46%)      | 712 (54%)      | 753 (57%)                       |
| <b>Muslim</b>   | 858 (65%)                      | 639 (49%)      | 474 (36%)      | 441 (34%)                       |
| <b>Other</b>    | 36 (3%)                        | 70 (5%)        | 126 (10%)      | 115 (9%)                        |

Table 1. A table showing the deep disparity between religious groups currently residing in Mumbai.

the communal issues actually exacerbated the problem by further entrenching the differences. Fear and paranoia thus overwhelms much of the Hindu population today, and the MMC and state governments mirror such concerns. Unfortunately, this creates a vicious cycle of ethno-religious division within the urban environment.

As the bureaucratic postmodern system created economic and social differences between the Hindus and Muslims of Mumbai, the second pillar of the ideology worsened the situation by adding an even more divisive urban element: the strengthening (or introduction) of indigenous aesthetics. By putting a focus on the restoration or new construction of various temples, monuments, and buildings that are significant to only the Hindus, the MMC and its supporters only added “fuel to the fire that was burning within each Muslim resident.”<sup>53</sup> Because the Thackeray era had instilled a longing for recognition and identity for the Islamic inhabitants of Mumbai, the special attention given to the Hindu aesthetics within the city angered and frustrated the marginalized minority. Those that were affected by the lack of attention given to them by the ineffective bureaucracy thus were enraged, as they felt neglected and forgotten. Furthermore, many of the planners and architects who were behind the rejuvenation of indigenous elements into the urban infrastructure of Mumbai claimed to have acted out of “deep Islam-o-phobia.”<sup>54</sup> They believed that the Muslim population would be ‘itching for revenge’ after the 1993 horrors, and thus, they sought to solidify the Hindu presence throughout the city. Mosques, Muslim monuments, and other sites of religious, socio-cultural, or traditional significance were completely neglected in the postmodern strategy involving

urban aesthetics. This proved to be detrimental to the communal divide, as Hindus became culturally, religiously, and socially more potent than their Islamic counterparts, who were struggling to extricate themselves from the modernist-era deprivation. Thus, this second strategy, which is still an ongoing process, offered a powerful social element that added to the economic disparities between the Hindus and Muslims within Mumbai.<sup>55</sup> The Hindus therefore have a tangible sense of superiority over their Islamic rivals in each sector of the urban society, especially socially and economically. Tensions between both groups consequently have reached their highest peak since the 1993 Mumbai Riots, which to millions of residents across the city is of growing concern in a variety of ways.

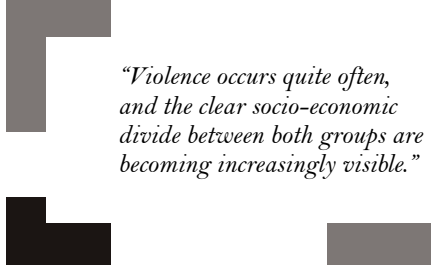
The current situation involving the deep socio-economic divide between Hindus and Muslims in Mumbai is pervasively volatile throughout the urban area, which naturally has coincided with extremely high levels of inter-religious opposition. Thus, the communal clash between both groups has been effectively reborn, rather than eliminated, which is directly attributable to the “ideological transition of the urban environment.”<sup>56</sup> It is therefore important to remember that the causality behind this current situation is the postmodern elements that have been applied to a deeply modernist city that essentially results in a turbulent urban phase that has far-reaching effects, including the socio-economic cleavages between both groups, as well as the complementary communal tensions that “currently envelop the city.”<sup>57</sup> The ideological shift between modern and postmodern policy and planning within Mumbai has produced consequences that have placed the city on edge and its inhabitants at the mercy of the very-visible inter-religious hatred as well as clear socio-economic dominance of the Hindu residents. Thus, it is no surprise that analysts and scholars argue “Mumbai is on the brink of another widespread riot that could exceed the horrors of 1993 ten-fold.”<sup>58</sup> Sporadic clashes between both groups occur rather frequently and many Muslim groups have taken to streets in protest of their currently dismal state of affairs within the urban fabric. Those who convene in the city’s large plazas and markets claim they have not been demoralized by the ineffective MMC and their clear negligence of their social, civil, and economic identity throughout the years. Instead, they argue they are getting stronger with each passing day, and many have even proposed that a counter-attack is certainly on the immediate horizon.<sup>59</sup> Local, state,

and even national political officials are thus deeply concerned about the communal tensions that are ongoing in Mumbai, as within the last few years, protests and small-scale clashes have resulted in a small number of casualties but nevertheless widespread urban disarray. The police, as well as many of the civil activists who work alongside the political and administrative figures of the urban area, are calling for action to be taken in order to avoid a violent explosion that would surpass the 1993 chaos.

The atmosphere in Mumbai is still rather volatile, as the communal issues between Hindus and Muslims continued to be exacerbated by the ongoing modern-postmodern transition. Violence occurs quite often, and the clear socio-economic divides between both groups are becoming increasingly visible.<sup>60</sup> Unfortunately, internal and external elements separate from the ideological transition make the situation even worse. Perhaps the three most hampering issues that directly affect the current volatility within Mumbai are transnational terrorism, widespread corruption, and violent regional unrest. All of these severely limit individuals who wish to address and resolve the communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims and “push for a more successful urban future.”<sup>61</sup> Such problems produce challenging obstacles that urban planners, policymakers, and even citizens must overcome.

### **Contributing Factors: Terrorism, Regional Unrest, and Corruption**

Transnational terrorism occurs in almost every large democracy in the world, but perhaps no city has seen quite the level of violence that Mumbai has experienced within the last decade. The specific actions of Islamic jihadist terrorists have not only resulted in widespread death and destruction within the city, but they have also severely affected the communal tensions between both Hindus and Muslims residing in the urban area. The problem lies not only in the attacks themselves, but also in the far-reaching influences they have on the underlying inter-religious opposition struggling to overcome ideological changes, as well as the



*“Violence occurs quite often, and the clear socio-economic divide between both groups are becoming increasingly visible.”*

forces of globalization and technological modernization.<sup>62</sup> Since 2001, Mumbai has seen eight significant attacks that have claimed 471 lives and injured thousands more, and as technology and communication have both improved dramatically since the turn of the century, the attacks have become more frequent and fatal. In each instance, the terrorist attack is in the form of an explosive, which is either detonated by a timer or individually by hand. Four attacks occurred in the first half of 2003 alone. The deadliest attack occurred in the summer of 2006, in which seven bombs ripped through the commuter trains in the city killing hundreds. The latest event occurred in the summer of 2011, in which three bombs exploded in all corners of the city, essentially putting Mumbai on edge for months. However, prior to that, in November of 2008, the most extensive terrorist attack to date occurred over a span of three days within South Mumbai. It was nicknamed “India’s 9/11,” which consequently led to city’s categorization as “a safe-haven/target-city for Islamic terrorism.”<sup>63</sup>

One thing that contributes to the communal tensions is the fact that all the attacks were carried out by the Pakistan-supported Lashkar-e-Taiba (LTE) or the Indian Mujahedeen, both of which are Islamic jihadi-terrorist groups. This worsens the attitude of the Hindus, who therefore have more legitimacy in focusing on Hindu rejuvenation and strengthening within the urban environment, rather than addressing the more extremist factions within the Muslim population, who seek violence rather than reconciliation. Thus, a vicious cycle is induced, in which Islamic terrorists frustrate and upset the Hindu-dominated MMC and government, who then neglect the Muslim population, which then leads to a larger support for jihad and attacks within the city.<sup>64</sup> The irony behind the situation, however, is that within these attacks Hindus and Muslims are equally affected, which makes them non-discriminatory in nature. Nevertheless, the communal tensions are certainly affected, which only worsens the scope for urban progress in Mumbai.

Regional unrest shares many similarities with the effects of transnational terrorism on the communal relationships within the city, and throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century, its influences have become more visible. The logic here is that across the various states within India, Hindu-Muslim tensions periodically flare up, especially in the North and North-

east regions, which then creates communal clashes and protests within Mumbai.<sup>65</sup> Government forces that clash with Muslims in other parts of the nation are therefore responsible for the inter-religious heat experienced throughout the urban areas hundreds of miles away. The idea of a vicious cycle or chain reaction exists, which only leads to a renewed fear of Muslims (and vice versa) within Mumbai and deepens the socio-economic cleavages between the opposing religious groups. The far-reaching effects of the regional unrest across India therefore categorize Mumbai as “a time bomb,”<sup>66</sup> as Hindu violence against Muslims (and vice versa) in other parts of the country trigger violent protests and riots across the urban area. Here, yet another external element exists within the issue of communal tensions, which inevitably makes the challenges more complex and harder to solve.

The final obstacle that contributes to the difficulty local, state, and national authorities have in addressing the communal tension within Mumbai is the prevalence of corruption. This problem exists in all sectors of the urban society including the civil (police, city employees), political (local and state-elected officials), and economic (small and large businesses alike). Everyone from “the mayor of the city to the public maintenance worker has a hand in the pot of money and greed.”<sup>67</sup> Bribery is omnipresent, and many crimes regardless of the severity are settled over money, which leads to a chain reaction resulting in increased greed and heightened corruption. Therefore, corruption does not allow for an efficient or productive way to address the needs and wants of the marginalized Muslim population in the city, or for an organized manner in which to institutionalize the indigenous aesthetics within the city. Corruption in Mumbai essentially revolves around one cardinal rule: If I am to make money, my fellow citizen must eventually lose money.<sup>68</sup> It is a zero-sum game within the urban environment, as no two individuals can simultaneously prosper through corruption. The communal tension therefore worsens because planners and policymakers do not have considerable monetary or material incentive to work, because they believe their efforts will ultimately succumb to forces of corruption when all deals are finalized. Because Hindus are predominantly the individuals making the decisions, this eventually trickles down to the Muslim population, which inevitably suffers the brunt of the corrupt atmosphere within the city.<sup>69</sup> Thus, much like the terrorism element, a vicious cycle

ensues, which ultimately results in social, civil, and political negligence against the minority Islamic group. Consequentially, anger and frustration follow, which exacerbates the already tense environment.

These detrimental external and internal forces that have currently worsened the ongoing communal tensions within Mumbai serve as the principal side effect of an ideologically transitive urban atmosphere undergoing globalization and technological modernization simultaneously. Predictably, Kotkin's thesis also becomes part of the greater analysis in light of the multitude of challenges the city is facing. Sacredness, or a sense of identity and belonging, continues to be a very controversial topic for Mumbaikars as a whole, as the deep socio-economic cleavages cause the dominant Hindu population to "question whether or not the Muslim inhabitants really have the right to call Mumbai home."<sup>70</sup> This is directly related to both the security and commerce elements that Kotkin outlines, as each of the three ideas essentially affect the other. Security, of course, is jeopardized, as terrorism, communal clashes, and violent protests continue to be a problem. The economic sector of the city is thus deeply affected, as business, small and large, simply "do not wish to have their profits destroyed by the inter-religious problems."<sup>71</sup> Both elements ultimately tie back to the question of social, civil, and political identity, or sacredness, which illustrates how each are intrinsically connected with one another.

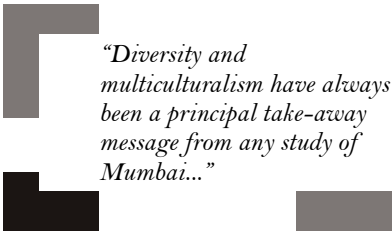
Thus, the final pressing questions that remains are: What should be done about Mumbai? How shall urban planners and policymakers utilize the city's strengths (of which there are many) and join hands with local and state authorities in order to ensure the success of the city in the immediate and far future? The answers to these questions might just be part of the solution to this urban area's "communal crisis."<sup>72</sup>

### **A Plan for Success: Mumbai's Future**

As grim as the current situation within Mumbai may seem, the city certainly has a plethora of social, economic, and civil strengths that should certainly be at the forefront of discussions regarding the city's communal, as well as general, progress in the coming years. The city serves as the financial capital of the nation, as well as one of the largest tourist hubs in South Asia.<sup>73</sup> Businesses are flourishing, education op-

portunities are outstanding, and job markets and housing markets are reaching their peaks. In order to preserve such high points, however, the city must address its core problem of communal conflict, which only seems to be worsening as the postmodern ideology begins to completely mask its modernist predecessor. Perhaps utilizing its more positive elements is the place to begin on the road to peace, and ultimately, social and civil progress. Urban analysts as well as a variety of scholars from other fields propose rather insightful ideas that certainly could help overcome the city's communal issues. Each presents a unique viewpoint that seems to "address many of the ailments" induced by the ongoing modern-postmodern shift.<sup>74</sup>

A starting point for change could be achieved if the urban planners, policymakers, and politicians within Mumbai realize that their actions are not strengthening the city, but are in fact weakening it. Many local and state authorities are in denial about the tense communal environment, and thus do not find that action is necessary at all, which is a "serious urban detriment [...] especially considering the high volatility that currently envelops the city."<sup>75</sup> To amend this, those who are in charge of making the important decisions within Mumbai must assure that Muslims are incorporated into the economic and social sector of the city, as they are very beneficial to the informal economy as well as the international appeal of area. Diversity and multiculturalism have always been a principal take-away message from any study of Mumbai, so efforts must be made to ensure the livelihood of this element. Furthermore, "not every Muslim hates every Hindu and vice-versa [...] and not every Muslim supports Islamic extremism/terrorism."<sup>76</sup> The local and state officials, primarily those who are Hindu, should utilize this feature in order to promote communal unity and achieve some sort of common ground between the two religious groups. Finally, there must also be some sort of attitudinal change within the urban infrastructure of Mumbai. Planners and policymakers should work with the postmodern ideas being adapted into the modern urban environment rather than to delegitimize them for the sake of "ethno-religious and/or socio-economic superiority."<sup>77</sup> Thus, the



*"Diversity and multiculturalism have always been a principal take-away message from any study of Mumbai..."*



population must essentially change its mindset as a whole, which could then lead to a more progressive and liberal plan of action within the urban environment. However, as is the case with any large, growing megalopolis, numerous obstacles exist, which could impede any of the solutions previously listed. Mumbai is experiencing not only high levels of corruption and terrorism, but also an exorbitant population crisis that only worsens the effects of the two former elements. By 2020, experts believe that Mumbai's population could reach "upwards of 28-30 million people," which naturally serves as an urban detriment in light of the ongoing communal and ideological issues within the city.<sup>78</sup>

We can only hope that the social, civil, and economic agents of this powerfully unique world-city find the ideal balancing act which may lead to success during the many years to come. Evidently, much work is yet to be done, as a plethora of problems exists in each realm of the urban society within Mumbai. However, by working alongside one another and utilizing the modern-postmodern transition to the best of their ability, the residents of this urban hub can surely begin to overcome the deeply rooted communal tensions as well as its many side-effects that continue to plague the area. Put best by an anonymous blogger, "Mumbai is unfortunately both the city of dreams and nightmares, and its future is in God's hands." Ironically, it seems that God, here, is the source of many of the problems rather than the solution. Perhaps only time can tell.