Preface and Acknowledgements

Two separate events revived and introduced a spate of work on communal riots in India. The first political event which was shaped in late 1980s and reached its peak in 1990s was the mobilization of the majority community by the Bharatiya Janata Party for the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. This mobilization which reached its peak with L K Advani's rath yatra resulted in mass scale rioting in most parts of North India. The movement or mobilization culminated on 6 December, 1992 with the destruction of the Babri Masjid. Another tragic event which urged scholars to concentrate on the subject was the riots in Gujarat in 2002 where thousands of people from the minority community were killed from February to March 2002. These events along with the changing political discourse of the country where the Bharatiya Janata Party based on its agenda of creating a Hindu state had taken firm ground prompted researchers to focus once again on subjects related to religion and state, secularism and communalism.

Just before I began working on this subject, in February 2005, the Justice Nanavati Commission of Inquiry submitted its reports on the 1984 anti-Sikh riots to the Union government. The recommendations of the Commission on the reasons for the anti Sikh riots, the functioning of the State machinery during riots and justice for the victims of communal riots urged me to further explore the explanations by similar commissions on the above issues. These explanations by commissions of inquiry were given on particular incidents of riots and the question that came to me was whether these explanations added in any way to the vast literature on communal riots in India. What is the purpose of the bulk of work in the form of reports produced by inquiry commissions on communal riots? Why are commissions of inquiry established and how have they dealt with communal riots, the question of state accountability and justice for victims in their reports? A detailed reading of the report of commissions of inquiries, suggested that the primary objective of establishing and appointing such commissions was to bring forward the correct facts related to communal riots. This work essentially seeks to understand how the different issues that emerge during the inquiry into communal riots have been approached.
by the inquiry commissions. Through the analysis of the functioning of inquiry commissions, the attempt has been to critically understand the State’s discourse on communal riots and whether such a discourse has sufficiently tried to address the problem of communal riots.

Arriving at these set of narrow questions and answering them was certainly not easy. This involved a thorough reading of the literature on communal riots and the various explanations provided for the occurrence and non occurrence of riots. The research and reading of so many reports of inquiry commissions and then narrowing the research to four case studies was a tedious and time taking process. A considerable amount of time and energy along with resources were utilized in acquiring not only the reports of the four commissions of inquiry taken as case study for this work, but also on finding the affidavits, police reports, first information reports and statements used by inquiry commissions to arrive at their conclusions and recommendations.

The fellowship granted by the University Grants Commission in the form of Junior Research Fellowship provided the financial assistance required to undertake this work. The idea for this work could not have emerged without the discussions that I had with my supervisor and Ph.D. advisor Prof. Gurpreet Mahajan during the time of writing the synopsis. Further, shaping and sharpening the arguments of this work was possible because of the comments, thought provoking critical review that came from Prof. Gurpreet Mahajan who has been extremely cooperative, supportive and full of patience during each stage of this research.

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After almost five years of labor, I hope this work would bring new insights to the functioning of judicial inquiry commissions in India and more significantly kindle a debate on the contemporary understanding of the linkages between communal riots, state accountability and justice.