

TRANSFORMATION OF INTERPERSONAL RIVALRY TO INTER-ETHNIC RIOT: A STUDY BASED ON RIOT IN MAWANELLA 2001

S. Gunasekara¹⁴¹ & H. Epa¹⁴²

Correspondence: dinetputa2009@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

A rumor is one important means of mobilizing force for conflict and also work as a justification for resorting to violence. The problem of the study is increasing the density of the ethnic riot by rumors. The overall objective of the study was finding out that how rumors pave the way to expand communal rivalries to inter-ethnic riot. Specific objective was how rumours pave the way to expand communal rivalries to inter-ethnic riot in Mawanella. The present study is an exploratory which describes the ethnic relations and rivalries in the ethnic township of Mawanella, Sri Lanka. It is based on both primary and secondary data. Tools were employed to collect data, the discussion with key informants and others in face to face contact in the process of data collection and observation. The study revealed the findings as follows. Through pre – riots, an attempt had been made to arouse ethnic sentiments. An ethnic crowd are not known to each other personally and imaginary. So, a threat aimed at a member of the same ethnic group that they belong to is considered as a threat at them. The attempt made by the pre-riot rumors had been to cater such emotions. By the present emotion revealed, what could be interpreted is, that riot leaders of both Sinhalese and Muslim communities, have made an attempt to support. Particularly, by the relevant rumors concerning the religious statues and the religious priesthood, it looks like an attempt to adopt religious fervor as an instrument to retaliate. In analyzing the nature of the various rumors spreading during the post-riot situations, it looks like a design to continue the stressful conditions without a break. Rumors are fabricated by the spoilers in the conflicting situation; they were politicians, extremist religious leaders or robbers and thieves. The conclusions of the study are Rumors are structurally embedded in the riot situation and they facilitate communal violence, in many ways, because they are satisfactory and useful to rioters and their leaders, and efforts to counter rumors to misdirected and it promote either involvement or none involvement. Rumors are employed by both sides to mobilize the members of ethnic communities to face real or imagined damages for the people as a community and the cultural symbols of the community by the said to be an enemy community.

Keywords: ethnic riot, rumors, revelries, community, violence

Introduction

This paper focuses on: transformation of interpersonal rivalry to inter-ethnic riot by the rumors. Rumors are very common phenomenon related with human behavior. The discussion regarding the history of rumors is as old as human history. Many fields such as economics, political, social and cultural can be impacted by the rumors. Sociology and Social Psychology mainly concern on rumors. Social

¹⁴¹ Department of Sociology, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka.

¹⁴² Sri Lanka Foundation, Sri Lanka.

psychology, more elegantly, uses the Latin word rumor (rumour in British English), which means sound, voice, or gossip. In social, economic, political, cultural and scientific communication, rumors indicate news that is presumed true, that circulates without being confirmed or made evident. The scientific history is briefly described of rumors starting from the period of ancient Rome, throughout the II World War and the Internet era, up to today. Rumours can be affected both positive and negative way of human and social life. The impact of colonial rule on ethnic relations is well known and affected. The colonial intervention is based on a civilization mission. So, they had resorted to statistics to measure the progress of the subjugated people. Further, they had categorized the inhabitant in colonial territories on their archaic identities. This is a crucial calculation on part of the colonial rulers because they can use those information to strengthen the divide and rule policy. Portuguese, and the Dutch did not demonstrate a friendly attitudes on Muslims particularly on their historical hatred on them. For an instance, in the 19th century, the Dutch have limited commercial activities by the Muslim only along the “Moor Street”. The problem of the study is increasing the density of the ethnic riot by rumors. The overall objective of the study was finding out that how rumors pave the way to expand communal rivalries to inter-ethnic riot. Specific objective was how rumours pave the way to expand communal rivalries to inter-ethnic riot in Mawanella.

Social psychology additional elegantly, uses the Latin word rumor (rumour in British English), which suggests sound, voice, or gossip. (Rosnow, R.L., Fine, G.A., 1976) In social, economic, political, cultural and scientific communication, rumors indicate news that's likely true that circulates while not being confirmed or created evidently. The history of rumors is as old as human history. Even in remote antiquity, rumors, gossip, and hoax were always in circulation – in good or bad faith – to influence human affairs. Rumor is a common phenomenon of society. Rumour has been defined by several scholars. According to Webster rumour has defined as “talk” or “opinion widely disseminated with no discernable, source” or a “current statement or report without known authority for its truth (Webster, 1992). Generally, rumour extends beyond a small group, conveys information that is neither that is neither authenticated nor able to be authenticated, and relate to the larger group. The trustworthiness of society was existed by public in various manners. Spreading rumors is one way to destroy all that work in no time at all. Normally it is concerned regarding rumors in our daily lives. Scientifically it was started to study in the period of II World War in 1940 decade. With this period various rumors spread in society and many social psychologist wanted to understand this phenomenon. As a result of this enthusiasm several social psychologists were conducted studies (Knapp, 1944; Allport, Postman 1947). They have assumed that rumors are harmful because they deliver false information; that is why they must be fought to preserve the social order.

According to Allport and Postman rumors are propositions of faith on specific (or current) topics that pass from person to person, usually by word of mouth,

without any evidence of their truth. Although in history, rumors are usually communicated from person to person by word of mouth, in contemporary world the media have a key role in their spread. We assume that the rumor is sufficiently attention-grabbing so individuals learn it once speech somebody knowing it. According to literature (Shibutani, T.1966) rumours can be spread in to two various patterns. Those are Push model and Pull model.

Riot can be seen as a planned production by an individual or groups. Riot viewed as a spontaneous event rather than pre planned production, and are commonly viewed as illegitimate- justified only under context of self-defense. Deadly ethnic riot are mixture of “hyper vigilance and circumspection” (Horowitz, Barsalou, 2002,)

Riot do not occur accidentally like fires form a shouldering flame nor are they meticulously planned and coordinated from beginning to end. Rather they are dramatic productions, street theatre performances that are mean to appear spontaneous but that involve many people in a verity of roles and actions that include inciting the interest of the audience, the dramatization and enlargement of incidents in to a fit subject for a performance, and finally, the production of the event (Brass 2003)

According to some literature, To be continued a riot there should be two characteristics. Those are “(a) There is violence and (b) two or more communally identified groups confront each other/members of the other group at some point during the violence” (Horowitz, Donald 2001). According to this definition it can be identified a crucial feature. That is rioters from one communal group attack members of another communal group.

According to Paul Brass has defined an ethnic riot as “an event involving large numbers of massed persons from opposing ethnic groups engaged in assaults on persons, lives and property” (Brass, 1997). On the based on the definition, it can be understood few features of ethnic riots. First, although it is difficult to define how many people are necessary to count as “large” numbers of people want to continue the riot. It should be Brass’s definition rules out routine violent crime in which the attacker happens to have a different ethnic identity than the target. Donald Horowitz was a luminary academician in the field of the riots. Donald Horowitz offers a similar but slightly narrower definition of an ethnic riot as “an intense, sudden, though not necessarily wholly unplanned, lethal attack by civilian members of one ethnic group on civilian members of another group, the victims chosen owing to their cluster membership” (Horowitz 2001). Horowitz adds the term “sudden” to differentiate rioting from violence involving higher levels of organization and advance planning, such as civil or interstate warfare. Most importantly, Horowitz emphasizes the logic of deliberate targeting— participants in ethnic riots do not simply happen to fight along ethnic lines but explicitly seek out members based on their ethnic identity, often going to great lengths to ensure that their victims are in fact members of the opposing group

The Theory of Rumor Transmission

It is often assumed that rumors become embroidered in the telling or that they become enlarge like a rolling Snowball. This is the misconception, though we certainly find many insertions and circumstantial detail. They seem to occur only in the interest of sharpening. Elaboration which serves neither the purpose of coherency nor emphasis main point of the story, seldom occur- never in our experimental occurs. Whether this rumor “Snowballed” in the process of transmission, it depends on the perspective used in interpretation. “Snowballing” suggest increasing enlargement aimed implies that details are retained as new ideas are superimposed. Viewing the entire phenomenon as a Gestalt of interrelated rumors, probably derived from a common origin and differentiated in to a profusion details, the phenomenon, does appear to have grown like a snowball (Neubauer, H.-J. 1999). Certainly there was an accumulation of details; whether any were completely lost in the course of transmission and elaboration is not known.

Rumor Nets and Rumour Patterns

Implicit in the discussion of single and multiple interactions is the idea of two different kinds of rumors patterns. In the first type, the chain, the rumor moves from person to person in a serial manner in a series of single interactions. At each point there is an interaction between one person who knows the rumor and one who does not. In the second type of rumor pattern, the network, many people here the rumor, the network; many people here the rumor from more than one source. A multiple interaction network might look like this. In this network rumours can be spread more speed rather than snow balling transmission that mentioned in above theory. The way which spread rumours can be shown as following way (Boardia, P. and Rosnow, R.L. 1998).

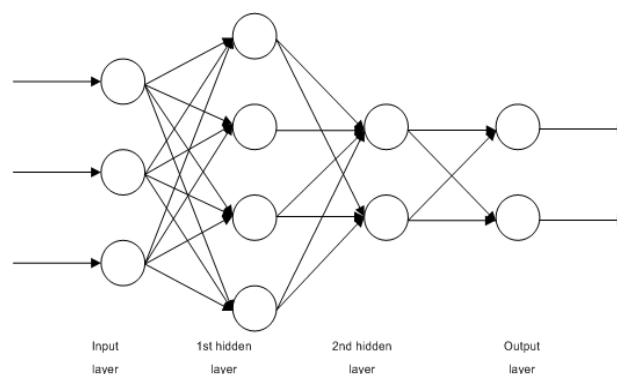


Figure 01: Rumour MNet: Source: G.W. Allport and L. Postman, *The psychology of Rumour*

In community level rioting, these types of patterns had been occurred. Same rumor has changed patterns from chain to network and back to chain as it pros greases. The characteristics of the community through which the rumor is spreading cause structural predispositions toward the formation of either serial chains or multiple interaction networks.

The Conspiratorial Theory

Conspiracy theories simply defined as “the conviction that a secret, omnipotent individual or group covertly controls the political and social order or some part thereof, circulates solely on the margins of society” (Fenster, 2008). The theory emphasizes that rumour is manipulated or controlled artificially as part of an organized effort. Proponents of this theory similarly grant that rumour is deliberately planted in situations where there is a strong divergence of interests. Rumour, in such situations, is employed to advance or consolidate an individual's position. The objectives of this may involve winning new converts, finding out information or defeating the opposition by discrediting, demoralising or dividing it. An avalanche of techniques, ranging from deliberate mis-representation of facts, the exploitation of existing beliefs and values and the manipulation of the media are often tactfully employed.

Methodology of the Study

The Research mainly based on qualitative data. According to Nachimas, using qualitative data can be consider as effort to read a social reality through a scientific lens. Bryman argues that qualitative research has features that are inductive view of the relationship between theory and research, stress the understanding of the social world through an examination of the interpretation of the world by its participants and implies constructionism (Bryman, 2018). Qualitative data thereby is a tool to understand the power of rumours, impact of social organization on human behavior and power of social symbolism. As an example, in this study, the ethnic rivalry has shaped by rumours to expand as ethnic riot. Mainly the study used qualitative data and some quantitative data was taken by the researcher based on literature what are consisted data regarding the research field. Further the secondary data brought from books and research papers that written by various authors and researchers respectively. The study used the purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is especially exemplified through the key informant technique (Bernard 2002, Garcia 2006, Gustad et al. 2004, Jarvis et al. 2004, Lyon & Hardesty 2005), wherein one or a few individuals are solicited to act as guides to a culture. Key informants are observant, reflective members of the community of interest who know much about the culture and are both able and willing to share their knowledge (Bernard 2002). The main purpose of the select this type of sapling, was gaining more data regarding

field from respondents who have sound awareness. The following table has shown the population division of Mawanella area at that time.

Table 01: Depicts the population ratio of Sinhalese and Muslims population living within the Mavanella urban area

Ethnic Group	Sinhala	Muslims	Total
Ganethenna	782(11.0)	409(2.2)	1191
Beligamma	1726(15.7)	173(2.2)	1893
Mavana	1106(15.7)	215(2.7)	1321
Higal oya	5(0.07)	3423(43.5)	3428
Kiringa deniya	-	2669(33.9)	2669
Rankothdivela	496(7.10)	909(11.9)	1405
Mavanella	1371(19.5)	62(0.7)	1433
Uthuwankanda	1541(21.9)	-	1541
Total	7021(47.2)	7866(52.8)	14881

Source: Mavanella Regional Secretariat Division, 2000

Discussion:

Whenever a rumor is passing through a community or a group, individual gets it different ways. Some individuals will have heard the rumor once, some will have heard it more than once, and other will not hear it at all. The amount of repetition a rumor gets will depend on the situation. Some rumors are more worth repeating than others and some even though they are interesting and valid rumors are embarrassing to repeat. Leaving aside the particular characteristics of the particular rumor two group level variables operate to promote or retard the spreading or repeating of rumors: the structure of the group or public through which the rumor is spreading, and the involvement or interest the group has in the topic.

Ethnic riots are not new phenomenon in Sri Lanka. Before the independence from British Rulers, we could see number of ethnic riots in Sri Lanka. Mawanella riot in 2001, is a huge ethnic riot in Sri Lanka. The main reason for the riot was rumour and those rumours had widely spread at the time of riot. According to the theory of rumour transformation, it could be identified that these rumour has explored as a snowball. According to responses, it could be identified that before the riot, both

ethnic groups have spread rumours to build ethnic consciousness before the riot in Mawanella. This paved the way for the rumors. There were many rumours at the situation in Mawanella which were not relevant to what were really happening. They become quickly circulated, so Sinhalese crowds from other areas attempted to enter the town. However, before the rioting stage had got started both sides had launched a movement to create an opposing mental attitude over each other community. Priority given to some people of both Sinhalese and Muslim communities have resulted in creating a mere individual dislike, which had framed the necessary environment to promote a broad – based communal riot. On the morning of 02nd May, when the riot had started, various rumours had circulated, with the Mavanella town. The reflection on what is said by the respondents to the questions by the researcher clearly indicates that rumours had played a role of mobilizing the people for community course in the context real or imagined threats by the said to be enemy of the community.

Push and Pull models were used by these two groups when they spread rumours and grabbed rumours. In the push model, only nodes that know the rumour contact neighbors to inform them. This model has been used to transmit information and rumours in their own community. In contrast, to capture the effect of rumorse, they have used pull model. The rumours played a role in converting a personal rivalry to a communal rivalry. Before the riot, in Mavanella on the 02nd May, 2002, the news that spread among the Sinhalese community was that the Muslim community was getting ready, in an organized manner. They have summoned youth from other areas, where large crowds of Muslims live, such as Gampola and Akurana. Such rumours have succeeded in motivating ordinary Sinhalese crowd to promote to get involved in it, to organize them, and through these rumours to be aware of the Muslim community creating danger for them. According to this news report, it is quite obvious that the Muslim Community has publicized this as a well – planned attempt, aimed at the Sinhalese community.

On the April 30th confrontation, which directly influenced the earlier issue, whai was happened in Gampola riot in 1915, the Muslim community was forcing the police to take into custody the Sinhalese thugs involved in it. And this request to bring them under law was carried out as a protest in an organized manner, without interruption. During the period of time mentioned above, publicity was given to the effect, that about hundreds of swords of the same length had been brought from an area outside, and that they had been distributed among the Muslims secretly. It was to aim an attack on the Sinhalese community. There was also a rumour to the effect, that at the confrontation which took place on 02nd of May, 2001, two Muslims had died from the police attack, and that one of them had been living in Mavanella and the other was from either Gampola or Akurana.

Other rumours have spread by Sinhalese to develop ethnic consciousness of their community in particular area. One of them was on a Buddha statue located in the center of the Mavanella town. The rumour ran as follows: Muslim crowds had

attacked the Buddha statue, and after breaking down the head, urinated on it. They had tied it with a rope and dragged along the road. And also the Sinhalese spread another rumour as the Muslims have destroyed two Buddhist statues in Mawanella town area. In real scenario there is a Buddhist statue in this area in that period. But certain rumours that had spread earlier had not a vestige of truth in them. They could be identified as mere outcomes of imagination.

As a result of this rumour, both of the parties began to set fires. The reason to do so was the rumours spreading around. In this manner, exaggeration made this confrontation very alarming. What happened due to this is that the Muslim shops in areas close to the towns such as Beligamma, Ganetanna etc. were destroyed by fire. More Sinhalese crowds similarly came from the direction of Menerigama, Hingula, and Morawaka. From the opposite direction, Sinhalese crowds arrived from areas like Hemmathagama and Aranayaka. News reports of this type have been conveyed to areas around Mavanella through three wheeler drivers and telephones.”

Apart from rumours related with Buddhist statues, another rumour has been created by the majority, saying Venerable Kehelpannala Chandraloka ‘Himi’ or Thero, who was the high priest of the Keraminiya Temple, had been dragged along the road after being subjected to an assault by a violent Muslim party. However, owing to this type of rumours spreading, the environment necessary to create a mental attitude expressing disapproval of the actions of the Muslims immersed in the minds of the Sinhalese Buddhist community living close to the Mavanella town.

Similarly, another rumour that spread about while the riot was being continued was that two Sinhalese young women had been raped by the Muslim crowds. Yet another rumour that went around was that the Beligamma Temple had been set on fire. The ideas generally spread by these rumours were concerning the destruction of temples, assaulting Buddhist priests and raping of Sinhalese young women. Rumours of this nature had provided good support to the attempt made by the Sinhalese thugs, who created this riot to develop it methodologically as an ethnic issue.

On analyzing the rumours spreading around on occasions before the Mavanella riot, while the riot was going on and after the riot, the following facts were revealed. Through pre – riots, an attempt had been made to arouse ethnic sentiments. An ethnic crowd is an imaginary community. They are not known to each other personally. But since as commonly shared cultural traits handed down from earlier generation are accepted, there exists a strong affinity among them (Anderson, 1981). Therefore, a threat aimed at a member of the same ethnic group that they belong to is considered as a threat aimed at them. The attempt made by the pre – riot rumours had been to cater such emotions.

By the present emotion revealed, regarding the riot, what could be interpreted is, that riot leaders of both Sinhalese and Muslim communities, have made an attempt to support. Particularly, by the relevant rumours concerning the religious statues and the religious priesthood, it looks like an attempt to adopt religious fervor as an

instrument to retaliate. In analyzing the nature of the various rumours spreading during the post – riot situations, it looks like designing to continue the stressful conditions without a break. Personal Rivalries got transformed into communal rivalries in societies where the ethnic relations have become a conflicting political issue. The tension among the different communities over their basic needs and the inability of the colonial and post-colonial regimes to find a constitutional policy and subsequent policies in the sphere of culture, religion and economy has contributed to view each other community as enemy other.

Related to the above is that the political entrepreneurs from the very beginning has marketed the issues of ethnicity in their struggle for power and accruing benefits through post in the national government, regional and local government. The move for the demand for an urban council by the Muslims and opposition to the proposal can be viewed from this angle.

Everyone will be equally vulnerable to attack once a riot breaks out. When state authorities are unable to maintain public order, poor people in particular are vulnerable once a riot trigger occurs. Unlike wealthier people, who have access to alternative security measures than those ostensibly provided by the state, such as private security guards or high compound walls, poor people need to organize to defend their families and property during the chaos of an ongoing riot. As such, conditions of poverty serve as a powerful motivation to fight before one is attacked by members of the other group. That said, given the risks involved in joining a riot, one might still prefer to stay home, while others go out and defend the neighborhood from attack.

Findings

Such rumours have succeeded in motivating ordinary Sinhalese crowd to promote to get involved in it, to organize them, and through these rumours to be aware of the Muslim community creating danger for them. The reflection on what is said by the respondents to the questions by the researcher clearly indicates that rumours had played a role of mobilizing the people for community course in the context real or imagined threats by the said to be enemy of the community. The rumours played a role in converting a personal rivalry to a communal rivalry. Rumors are powerful instruments of mobilizing gangs in and around the collective identities. This also helpful for the initial wrong doers undergo unnoticed without being taken into the book. Ethnic conflicts are always multi-causal. In addition to the above situation of the reality, one activist on the hardcore Sinhala Buddhist Party has resorted to this rumour and used to propagate their ideology. This clearly shows that a rumored story once created can be used by political entrepreneurs. The spread of riot made a religious issue an ethnic conflict and made many people belonging to both ethnic groups undergo intense stresses. Similarly, their lives and properties had been destroyed. The emerging chauvinistic nationalism and political exploitation of the ethnic sentiments had caused to spread the conflict to the other areas quickly. This

riot also had marked the departure point of ethnic and religious unity under the colonial regime and it had worked as a precursor for the rest of the riots in the future. It also had marked the starting point of disunity.

Conclusion

Rumours can be used mass mobilizing instrument and rumors have increased dysfunctional emotions, aggressive behavior, lack of trust and enemy mentality among communities. Economic and Political factors have been powerful instrument of mobilizing gangs in and around the collective identities. All most ethnic riot committed due to hidden economic and political factors.

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