

AURANGABAD RIOTS : AN ANALYTICAL VIEW

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I

In order to understand communal violence in Poona, Aurangabad, etc., one has to understand the way in which the Shiv Sena is aggressively trying to penetrate the interior of Maharashtra and capture its municipalities, gram panchayats, etc. Mr. Bal Thackeray has been saying, "If there can be an AIDMK chief minister in Tamil Nadu and a Telugu Desam chief minister in Andhra Pradesh why not a Shiv Sena chief minister in Maharashtra? Maharashtra's regional identity too, must strongly and aggressively assert itself."

However, empirical reality does not easily fit into an ideological mode. Had it been so, Hitler and Bal Thackeray would have been ruling the world. So the Shiv Sena has to find other, more amenable means to capture power. Maharashtra, unlike the southern states, does not feel its identity threatened *vis-à-vis* the states of the north, at least not so strongly. Thus regional identity alone cannot help the Shiv Sena achieve its ambition of having a Shiv Sena chief minister in Maharashtra.

In fact the regional chauvinism against the south worked for a while in Bombay. Soon Mr. Thackeray discovered that his anti-south campaign in Bombay had lost its edge. In fact he sulked in isolation for quite some time during the mid-seventies. Some political commentators had even written him off as a spent force. Mr. Thackeray, however, was looking for an opportunity to assert his importance once again.

He got this opportunity when the Hindu revivalist movement began to emerge in the early eighties, after the episode of conver-

sion to Islam, of some Harijans in the Meenakshipuram district of Tamil Nadu. Mrs. Gandhi, who too had begun to cultivate Hindu votes in the post-emergency period, exploited this episode politically and lent subtle support to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Mrs. Gandhi, of course, was not a leader of a communal outfit but was only shrewdly exploiting Hindu sentiments for her ballot-box victory.

The Shiv Sena and its supren o have had a strong communal orientation right from the beginning. The Shiv Sena had played a significant role in the Kosa and Bhiwandi riots in the late sixties and early seventies. Only at times was its anti-Muslim tirade overshadowed by its anti-south tirade. Recently, of course, it has been unabashedly indulging in anti-Muslim propaganda. No more anti-south outbursts.

The Sena's communal rebirth took place around the mid-eighties, 1984 to be precise. After sulking in isolation for a long time it decided to 'champion the Hindu cause'. It tried to create a united Hindu front in a meeting at Chowpatty, in April 1984. This meeting was followed by country-shaking riots in May 1984, from Bombay to Bhiwandi, the highly industrialised belt of the country. It created absolute havoc for the minorities. Swords in hand, the Shiv *sainiks* were roaming the streets of Bombay, Thane and Bhiwandi, with of course, the police looking on helplessly.

The Sena adopted the same strategy for penetrating the interior of Maharashtra. Its ambitions soared high especially after it captured the Bombay Municipal Corporation in the 1985 elections. Wherever the Sena tried to gain entry, it did so by causing communal conflagration. Thus a series of riots took place in Panvel, Nasik, Amravati, Aurangabad, etc. Wherever it opened its branch, communal violence followed. The Sena presently has its sights on municipalities and gram panchayats. It is trying to win these elections by inciting communal passions. It tried to do this in the Aurangabad Municipal Corporation elections.

Here it is necessary to mention the demographic and other changes which have been taking place in Aurangabad, to understand the genesis of the riots. Marathwada was earlier a part of the old Nizam state. It was naturally ruled by the Muslim elite with a section of the Hindu elite playing a dominant part. The understanding between the two elite had helped maintain the

precarious communal balance which, of course, was upset by the *Razakar Tehrik* on the eve of Partition. The Hindu resentment of Muslim domination began to surface. The situation worsened as the initiation of development schemes in Aurangabad during the sixties started to bring about social and demographic changes. Its first manifestation came with the riots of 1968.

One must understand that with economic development, a power shift occurs in society and this shift causes, as is quite natural, a lot of friction, which often manifests itself in caste and communal form. Since the early sixties Aurangabad has been undergoing rapid transformation, bringing about a shift in the balance of power. The Muslim population has been reduced from 45% to about 30% in the district. Industrialisation has brought non-Muslim outsiders to the town. It is interesting to note that while in Bhiwandi, Malegaon, etc., the Muslim population has increased due to emigration of weavers from U. P. (which created communal problems), in the case of Aurangabad it is just the reverse. Here the Muslim population has gone down both in number as well as in significance, which is partly the cause of the communal problem.

During the Nizam state it was the Muslim feudal class which ruled. With industrialisation in Aurangabad, it is the Hindu businessmen and industrialists who enjoy power. Most of these industrialists and businessmen have come from outside. The Muslims have been reduced to penury for two reasons: firstly, they have not been able to economically adjust to a commercial and industrial economy; they remain grounded in a feudal economy. Secondly, they have been unable to secure proportionate employment in new business and industrial setups. Even the non-Muslim locals are not getting adequate employment in these new ventures. The share of the non-Muslim locals in new jobs is said to be around 4%, though according to Mr. Govind Shroff, a noted Gandhian leader, it is not more than 2%. The local Muslims are even worse off.

As a result of this, a section of Muslims has taken to anti-social activities which has created a stereotype in the minds of the Hindus. In the mind of an average Hindu, a Muslim in Aurangabad is equated with a *goonda*, an anti-social person. It is interesting to note that in a CIDCO constituency, a CPI candidate, who had, for years, worked for the workers, lost the election to an unknown Sena candidate. When some workers in the area were questioned

as to why they did not vote for Comrade Dr. Bhalchandra Kango who had served them so long, they reacted sharply and said, "Anyone can get us more wages and D.A. but only the Shiv Sena can save us from the Muslim *goondas*." Even the industrial workers have been made to think like that. What about the others? It must make us sit up and think seriously.

The Muslims in Aurangabad are on the periphery of the economy. Even the 11% *mahars* in the town are better off, educationally and employmentwise. Most of the Muslims are rickshaw drivers (90% of the rickshaws in the town are driven by Muslims), coolies, vendors, cycle and stove repairers and peons in the offices. There are hardly any Muslims in the higher posts, either in business or in industries. In contrast to this, their leaders are quite well off either due to some business or criminal activity. This contrast is very sharp and is felt by the poor Muslims. Some of the leaders are notorious criminals. They have political ties. Javed Hasan is alleged to be a *matka* 'king', and is a supporter of the Congress-I. He is the brother of the Muslim League leader, Mr. Taqui Hasan who was elected deputy mayor with the support of the Congress-I. Mr. Javed Hasan was denied a ticket and hence he contested independently and won with a handsome margin. He defeated the Congress-I candidate who was a Dalit. One must also take into account the fact that the population of Aurangabad has greatly increased. Today it is more than five lakhs. An increase in urbanisation has led to more crime (Muslims having a larger share in this sphere) and a greater nexus between crime and politics. Gang rivalries play their own part.

II

The Shiv Sena registered its entry into the town in 1985, in its characteristic style, by pushing up communal tension. During the Municipal Corporation elections, it was determined to increase its political influence, if not emerge completely victorious. Although its aim was limited, it was totally surprised by the results, which gave it a tremendous boost. It had fielded nonentities, mostly the youth. Many of them were *bhangis*, *matangs*, *kumbhars*, *malis* and *chamars* and others, among whom a large number were rickshaw

drivers, vegetable vendors, basket-makers, etc., who could hardly afford to spend on an election campaign. There were, among its candidates, three Marathas and two Brahmins. However, there were no *mahars*. *Mahars* fought separately under the leadership of Prakash Ambedkar.

It is important to note here that the unemployed youth are greatly attracted by those organisations which provide them with opportunities, both for action and leadership. Most of the communal organisations are making use of this fact, be they the extremists of Punjab or the Senas like the Hindu Sena, Adam Sena, Bajrangbali Sena or Ali Sena. The Shiv Sena's overwhelming membership comprises such unemployed youth. It is interesting to study the list of Shiv Sena candidates, for the Aurangabad elections. Why did it give tickets to low caste candidates such as *matangs*, *chamars*, *kalals*, *bhangis* etc? Probably because it wanted to convince low-caste 'Hindus' that it was their champion too, and not only of upper and middle-class Hindus. Also, no established political party gave any importance to these low castes. The Shiv Sena would not have got much support from the upper-caste leaders anyway, who had already carved out their niches. Thus by giving tickets to these low castes the Sena achieved a double purpose: it attracted young blood for its party and also appeared as a champion of low-caste Hindus.

The Sena used militant Hindu ideology for winning the municipal elections. There were several reasons for this. It definitely wanted to carve a Hindu constituency for itself. It could hardly compete in secular issues with other established secular parties. As it is, even in Hindu militancy it had to compete with established communal parties like the BJP, the RSS, etc. Without its unrestrained Hindu militancy people would not have preferred it to the others. The expression of Hindu militancy by the Shiv Sena was so unrestrained that the president of the BJP, Shri L. K. Advani was compelled to express his disapproval of it. There was another reason behind the use of militant Hindu ideology: the Sena's candidates were mostly of low-caste origin. How could they win legitimacy in the eyes of Hindus except through the use of a militant Hindu idiom?

Lastly, it must be said that this is now the game being played by all the parties, secular or communal. The elections are now lost

or won on caste and communal considerations, not on people's issues. And, those with a criminal background can do it much more openly and unscrupulously. That is why both the Shiv Sena and the Muslim League which had fielded many candidates with criminal backgrounds resorted to such tactics so freely in the Aurangabad elections.

III

As the whole election campaign was based on communal propaganda and vote-bank concept, there was bound to be communal tension. Bal Thackeray openly thundered that the Congress had converted Aurangabad into a Muslim vote-bank. (The MLA was a Muslim, Mr. Motiwala). The Congress had given tickets to twenty-two Muslims out of sixty seats which in fact was roughly in proportion to their voting percentage (which was about 38%). Bal Thackeray said that he would retaliate by converting it into a Hindu vote-bank. Tempers were frayed by such blatant and unabashed propaganda. On the other side of the fence, the Muslim League too was appealing to the Muslims to vote for it, on the basis of religion. In fact a leaflet is said to have been distributed in the name of *Ittehadul Muslimin*, appealing to all Muslims of Aurangabad to vote only for Muslim candidates, whatever party they belonged to. The Shiv Sena made maximum possible use of this leaflet. It distributed a Marathi version of this pamphlet among the Hindus, asking them to vote only for those representing Hindu interests, i.e., the Sena candidates. The Marathi pamphlet was published by *Marmik*, the Sena mouthpiece.

However, Mr. Shahbaz Rafiq of *Aurangabad Times* expressed his doubts about the genuineness of the pamphlet on two grounds: there was no such organisation in Aurangabad as the *Ittehadul Muslimin*, in whose name the pamphlet was issued. Secondly, the pamphlet did not carry names of any Muslim leaders on it, which made its authenticity questionable. Whatever the truth, it did create a lot of hot air and polarised the voting on communal lines.

Then there came the victory rally by the Sena on 10th May which was addressed by its chief, Bal Thackeray. According to intelligence reports, the rally was attended by more than twenty

thousand people. Others claim an even greater number (fifty thousand). Mr. Thackeray is reported to have said the following in his speech: "The Congress has turned Aurangabad into a Muslim vote-bank. I have turned it into a Hindu vote-bank. The Hindus need not fear now." It was quite a provocative speech. However, the sense of jubilation soon turned into a sense of frustration for the *sainiks*, as the Congress, the Muslim League and the Dalits (e.i., Ambedkarites) joined hands to elect a Congress mayor and a Muslim League deputy mayor. This anti-climax was most explosive in its consequences.

It was wrong on the part of the Congress to have coveted the mayor's post and that too by wooing the Muslim League. To genuinely attend to Muslim grievances is one thing but to ally with a communal organisation like the Muslim League for a political motive alone, is quite different. When it (i.e., the Congress) did so, it should have anticipated what was in store and taken preventive measures.

The then Chief Minister, Mr. Chavan, did anticipate such trouble as per his own press statements but completely failed to take any preventive measures. Not only was the police force in the town not strengthened, but on 16th May, an SRP platoon was actually removed for Id *bundobust* elsewhere. This was done despite warnings of danger by the Congress-I party MLA, Mr. Motiwala and others. It was a most unthought of step which the administration would regret later. Many responsible people told our researcher, Mr. S. Insaf, that if the administration had been alert, and had so desired, the riots could have been certainly prevented. But it was not to be.

IV

The inevitable happened at last on the fateful day of 17th May, just a day before the Muslim Id. A large crowd gathered outside the court where a petition challenging the election of the mayor was coming up for hearing. An alert administration would not have allowed such a huge crowd to gather there, specially when tempers of the Shiv *sainiks* were frayed. Also, right outside the court, Mr. Chagan Bhujbal, the Sena leader notorious for his com-

munal outbursts, was threatening that the whole city (of Aurangabad) would burn if the judgement went against them (i.e., if the mayoral election was not set aside). But something quite unexpected happened: the hearing was adjourned for a week.

The unruly Sena crowd went berserk and started towards the city, burning rickshaws and shops. On the first day itself, five persons were stabbed fatally (four Hindus and one Muslim) and one hundred and thirty-six were injured, of which eighteen were Muslims. The fact that the casualty figures for Hindus were high too, clearly shows that the Muslim anti-socials had also made full preparations. It was also alleged by our source of information that men of Mr. Javed Khan, the Congress dissident, wreaked havoc on their political rivals. The places where Mr. Khan's opponents had put up posters supporting his rival, were attacked.

The police clamped curfew at about 1.15 p.m. i.e., within two hours of the outbreak of disturbances. But curfew was of little avail. Arson and loot continued almost unabated. The *Lokmat Times*, a local English daily wrote, "Arson, stone-throwing and stabbing incidents took place with lightning speed and even before one could realise what was happening, the entire city was in the grip of fear and panic. Marauding groups of people appeared in many areas and went about stoning cars, scooters and other vehicles...". The affected areas were Baujipura, Jinsi, Kaiser Colony, Chistiya Colony, Indiranagar, Sector N-7 in CIDCO, Lota Karanja, Shahganj, Mulumchi Bazar, Gandhi Chowk, Roshan Gate, Kasari Bazar, Aurangpura and Gulmandi. Mobs belonging to the two different communities clashed in Rangar Galli, throwing stones at each other.

Stabbing incidents took place in Jijamata colony, Nehru Bhavan, Juna Bazar, Khara Kunwa, Rangar Galli, Kaiser Colony and Jinsi. In all, eighty-five persons were stabbed. The injured were admitted to the Government Medical College Hospital. Also, a cloth shop, a house, two godowns behind Mohan cinema in Sarafa Bazar, a religious place in the same area, a country liquor shop in Lota Karanja and a rickshaw in Pan Dariba, were set afire on the very first day. According to the police sources, the mob also tried to burn the houses of Javed Khan (the Congress dissident), Taqī Hasan (who was elected deputy mayor) and Mr. Gangwal. These

houses were located in old Aurangabad. According to the fire brigade sources, eleven cases of major arson took place, which included shops and houses.

The Chief Minister, Mr. Chavan and the Central Home Minister, Mr. Buta Singh reached Aurangabad to review the situation. As the situation was serious, the Chief Minister issued orders to shoot at sight. However, in view of Id, curfew was relaxed from 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. on 18th May, to enable Muslims to offer Id prayers. But when the Muslims were coming back after prayers, disturbances started again and the police fired, killing five Muslims. The police, however, asserted that only three were killed in the firing. While the police maintained that it fired to disperse an unruly crowd, the Muslim sources asserted that the police fired on a peaceful crowd which was returning from the Id prayers. Only a thorough judicial inquiry could have brought out the truth. The police also opened fire in Roshan Gate, the Nizamuddin Chowk, the Kaiser Colony and the Kokanwadi areas to disperse violent mobs. This took the toll up to 11 persons in two days of mayhem in the city. Again an indefinite curfew was clamped from 11 a.m. onwards and over six hundred persons were rounded up until the 18th evening.

Riots broke out on 19th May in Paithan, fifty-five kilometres from Aurangabad, and in a village called Bidkin. Both in Paithan and Bidkin, violence broke out in reaction to what had happened in Aurangabad, and was directed against the Muslims. In Paithan, according to the police sources, seven persons were killed in various stabbing incidents and nine were injured. The police had to fire three rounds to disperse a violent mob but no one was killed. There was panic among the Muslims in Paithan. In Bidkin, twenty-five km. from Aurangabad, one died of bullet injuries and two were injured in violence. The violence in Paithan apparently started after a dead body was discovered near the cinema house. Six houses were set on fire and thirteen shops were burnt. The shops belonged to the minority community. Arson took place in Kavasani, Narala, Rangar Halti areas and a shop was looted in the Indiranagar slums.

The outbreak of violence in Paithan was quite unexpected. Apparently Id was celebrated there with traditional gaiety, with Hindus and Muslims greeting each other. This clearly shows that

the mischief was masterminded by non-locals with a view to inciting hatred and creating a rift among Hindus and Muslims. The Vice-President of the Paithan Municipal Council, Mr. Prashad Dhande and the Youth Congress-I leader, Mr. Ibrahim Pathan alleged that Mr. Pannalal Papidwal, Mr. Balu Ghule and Mr. Kamlakar Wanole had instigated the people to violence and demanded stern action against them. However, according to Mr. Chandrakant Ghodke, the MLA from Paithan, it was the third incident of violence in Paithan in two years and it was nothing but a reaction to the violence in Aurangabad.

Incidents of violence took place in Jalna too, which is a flourishing business centre in Marathwada. The Shiv Sena tried to hoist its flag near the Jama Masjid and tension mounted on 19th May. Violence broke out on the 20th, in which two persons were killed and forty-five injured. Weapons like knives, swords and wooden sticks were used for the attack. The Sena hand was obvious in the Jalna riots. When the Sena district chief, Mr. Shivaji Chothe was asked to comment on this, he simply said that he had been out of station at the time of the riots.

Thus it would be seen that the round of violence in Marathwada was mainly a political strategy of the Shiv Sena which was trying to exploit Hindu sentiments for its own ends. It was a highly dangerous trend in Maharashtra. Unfortunately there was no single leader of vision who could check this trend. S. B. Chavan, who otherwise was non-communal, was paralysed with dissidence in his own party and lacked the courage to take any action against the Sena chief. It is a pity that the Chief Minister of a state was afraid of taking action against the head of a communal outfit which was doing an immense amount of damage to secularism in the country.