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COMMUNAL RIOTS IN MAHABOONNAGAR TOWN AN INVESTIGATION REPORT  
OF THE 'HYDERABAD EKTA' TEAM

INTRODUCTION: On the 17th and 18th of June, 1985, all newspapers published from Hyderabad carried reports on communal clashes in Mahaboobnagar town, in which three persons were stabbed to death and another two seriously injured. This was followed by the imposition of a 36-hour curfew and thereafter clamping of section 144 in the affected areas. Hitherto, organised violence of a communal nature involving mobs was by and large confined to the twin cities. This is one of growing instances of mob violence that took the shape of a "communal riot" outside Hyderabad. Earlier in the year such incidents have occurred in Tandur, Karimnagar, Nalgonda, Sangareddy and other district town areas that were relatively tension free until now.

Hyderabad Ekta views this development with serious concern, as this is an indication that the virus of communalism is spreading in the state.

A fact-finding team consisting of Mr.M.A. Khudoos and Mr.N. Uday Bhaskar of the Hyderabad Ekta visited Mahaboobnagar on 30th June, 1985, and the following is a report on their visit and conclusions arrived at.

Back-ground History: Mahaboobnagar town has been traditionally a stronghold of the Jana Sangh and the RSS. The RSS had established 'Vyayam Shalas' in many areas of the town, where local youth were trained in 'street fight tactics', among other things. Thus, the Jana Sangh and later the BJP, had over the years developed a strong grass-roots level cadre. However, at the top, a corresponding growth in leadership was lacking, as the leaders confined themselves to local politics and Municipal Council elections. Thus the cadre, finding no other avenue, started providing muscle power to whichever political leader who was willing to utilise their services. It is said that at present, a significant portion of support to the ruling Telugu Desam Party comes from these elements.

Among the students, ABVP has a strong base, while the various leftist groups are quite weak. Among the Muslims, there is some support for the Indian Union Muslim League and the Jamaat-E-Islami, but the majority of the well-to-do muslims are supporters of the Congress-I. It is in this background that one has to view the emergence of communal tensions in the town.

Communal animosity between the majority Hindus and the Minority Muslims, dormant for a long time, came to the fore for the first time in 1978, when a stone throwing incident was reported, probably as an aftermath of the infamous Rameeza Bee incident.

The First Major Incident: In 1981, an ABVP activist named Narasimhulu was murdered by a group of people alleged to be muslim goondas. In the court case that followed, 'Hospital' Raju was a key prosecution witness. An attempt was made on Raju's life by a group of goondas, and in the skirmish that followed, Raju stabbed and killed one of the assailants by the name Badr.

An interesting and some what tragic fact is that in personal life, Badr and Raju were close friends, who belonged to the same volleyball team, and had together represented the university in volleyball.

Nobody has been booked and charge-sheeted in either of these cases of murder, due to lack of evidence.

The Boipally Gate Incident of 1983: About a year after the killing of Badr, a group of people came armed with sticks, lathis and knives to the Boipally gate area in the outskirts of Mahboobnagar Town, allegedly looking for a group of Badr's followers. They could not locate the persons that they were looking for, who fled from the area earlier. The group then attacked and stabbed two bystanders on the streets who died later in the hospital. The local people identified one of them as Munasser, fruit vendor. The identity of the other person could not be ascertained.

The Murder of Krishna, Town Secretary of the BJP: In June 1984, the Town Secretary of the BJP was assaulted and killed by a group of unidentified people. Several people were arrested, but no case was registered against anybody due to lack of evidence.

The BJP and RSS took out a procession and held a public meeting in which they declared that they would take revenge on the murderers of Krishna within one year.

Prelude to the present Incident: A few days before the clashes, a group of muslim youth had gone to the house of a notorious goonda named Shanker, who was at that time under police custody. The crowd had allegedly shouted obscenities and hurled stones at the house, and were dispersed by the police. In this

connection, an FIR was filed and warrants for the arrest of some muslim youth were issued.

Mr. Vijay Singh: the local sub-Inspector of Police, had gone to the Madina Masjid area of the town in search of these persons. He entered the Madina Masjid with his constables in full uniform including shoes at the time of the afternoon 'namaaz' and tried to break into the group of people offering 'Namaaz' when the people protested, he is reported to have said, "I will not allow this place to become another Golden Temple". As the argument prolonged, people grew violent and Vijay Singh was beaten up inside the Masjid.

He went out of the Masjid threatening dire consequences. After this incident, it is reported that he was seen hobnobbing with local goondas and Hindu communal elements.

THE INCIDENTS ON THE 16th & 17th OF JUNE:

(A) The Veeranna Pet - Madina Masjid Area: Veeranna Pet and Madina Masjid area are adjoining localities separated by a railway gate. Both the localities are predominantly inhabited by the lower middle class people and workers. Veeranna Pet is a predominantly Hindu area while Madina Masjid area is inhabited mostly by Muslims.

On the evening of 16th June, a group of Muslim youth were playing volley ball on the Madina Masjid side of the railway track. All of a sudden, a group of men armed with sticks, knives and daggers rushed in from Veeranna Pet side of the railway track, and attacked the volley ball players.

A local youth by the name of Mohammed Khwaja (23 year old), who is a welder by profession, was stabbed in the scuffle, and he died a few days later in the hospital.

He had been the main supporter of his family, and he had gone to Bombay a few months ago to seek employment there, and he had returned home just a few days before, to celebrate 'Idd' at home. He was not known to be connected with any political party or communal group.

The Tirumala Deva Gutta Incident: Within a few minutes after the Madina Masjid incident, a group of people armed with knives, sticks, etc., attacked some persons who were coming out of a traditional Ramzaan feast after the 'Iftaar'. In the skirmish, one person was killed, and two people seriously wounded.

Kalil Ahmed, the person who was killed, was a postman living in the Madina Masjid area. His father is the 'Peshi Imaam' of the Madina Masjid.

Mohammed Zameem, who was seriously wounded, and is now recovering, is a watch repairer by profession. Habeeb, the other injured person, is also a watch repairer.

The Thirumal Deva Gutta area is adjoining the Fire Station about a Kilometer away from Veeranna Pet. Unlike Veeranna Pet and Madina Masjid area, in this locality, the residents belong to both the communities. The RSS has been running one of its 'Vyayama Salas' in this area. The BJP secretary Krishna, who was killed in 1984 belonged to this area. The local people say that on the day of the incident, the street lights in the locality were off, even though they were in working condition. They could not identify whether the assailants came from outside, or belonged to the same locality.

The Boipally Gate Incident: The same locality that witnessed the killing of two people two years ago, was the scene of another stabbing incident in which one person was killed.

Abdul Wahab, a sixty five year old vendor of herbs, medications, etc., known as 'Chouda Pudi', was found on the road side, with several stab wounds, by some milkmen in the early hours of 17th June. The previous evening, he had gone to Boipally village, about 4-5 Kms from the gate, to sell his 'Chouda Pudi'. It is believed that he might have been stabbed while he was returning home.

However, it is not clear whether this incident has any connection with the communal clashes that took place elsewhere in the town. Mr. Qadri, Secretary of the wakf board feels that this must have been a case of robbery, which was deliberately being given a communal colour.

Reactions of the Local People: In each of the affected areas, we had talked to the residents of the locality, small merchants and tradesmen, hoteliers, etc. By and large, people of both the communities expressed their desire for peace. Both Hindus and Muslims were all praise for the Superintendent of Police, Mr. Nayak, who had initiated several steps towards restoring normalcy.

Besides imposing a 36-hour curfew in the entire town of Mahaboobnagar, Sec.144 has been enforced every night since the clashes in the affected areas. On the S.P.'s initiative, peace committees with members belonging to both communities have been formed in each of the affected areas. Peace meetings are being held regularly and local VIF's are making 'Padayatras' of the localities.

All the shops in Mahaboobnagar town have been ordered to close down by 6 p.m. every evening. Cinema timings have also been changed, so that the second show is now over by 10.00 p.m. in the evening.

On the other hand, most muslims have expressed serious displeasure regarding the role played by Vijay Singh, the local SI of Police. They say that he is responsible for the entire trouble, as he had hurt their religious sentiments and behaved in a rash manner inside the Madina Masjid.

According to Mr.Sami, a Democratic Telugu Desam Party Councillor, those who were killed were neither rowdies nor were they connected with any communal organisation. Yet the attacks were made in a planned manner, which showed that the idea was to terrorise the muslims in the town.

Mr. Anjaiah, a Hindu resident of the Madina Masjid area, felt that it was only a few people who were involved, but that this is causing a polarisation of the communities.

A local B.Ed., student of the Madina Masjid area felt that the reasons for this growing tension were basically vested interests of Right Parties.

Some of the residents said that in the last four years, at least ten people have been killed, yet not a single person has been punished so far. Even though some people are arrested every-time, very often they are not the real culprits and they are soon released. They say that in such a situation, taking the law into their own hands seemed to be the only way, as now they were sure that nothing would be done to them either.

People say that they are now afraid to even walk alone in the streets in the evenings. Many a time, they have to cross each

others localities on their way home after work, and they view each other with suspicion.

Another aspect that has come out repeatedly during the discussions especially with the muslims is the political patronage of the known communal elements of the area.

Erra Satyam, a notorious goonda, and alleged leader of the gangs that were involved in the recent clashes, is related to the local TDP MLA, Mr. P. Chandra Sekhar. Erra Satyam's gang reportedly provides the main muscle power for the TDP.

"Hospital" Raju, whose name was earlier mentioned in connection with the killing of Badr, is a christian, but he has identified himself with Hindu communal elements. He is supposed to be the right hand man of Erra Satyam.

Sankar, another well known goonda, the attack on whose house started the whole trouble, is reported to be the hench man of Mr. P. Rama Chandraiah, a local BJP councillor.

On several occasions, Vijay Singh, the SI was seen talking to these people.

It is said that after the clashes, the representatives of the Muslim community had represented to the Peace Committee for the transfer of Vijay Singh from the locality. Transfer orders were issued, but were subsequently revoked, allegedly due to political pressure.

Mr. P. Chandra Sekhar, MLA from Mahaboobnagar and former Law Minister of the state felt that things normally started with very minor incidents. He said the major problem was the spreading of rumours by some vested interests. He says that he is not aware of the background of the Madina Masjid incident where Vijay Singh broke into a group of people offering 'Namaaz' as he was not in town on that day. However, he says that law and order do not come under his purview. He says that one "has" to accept the police version, even if it may be known to be incorrect.

Mr. Chandra Sekhar says that he is not aware of any scheme for paying ex-gratia compensation to the victims. If such a scheme exists and if the concerned people approach him, he will take up the matter with the Chief Minister, he says.

Since unemployed youth gathering into gangs in hotels seem to be the major problem, he feels that a law should be enacted where in no two people should be allowed to meet in a public place for more than 10 minutes.

The team had also met members of the Mahaboobnagar unit of the Quami Ekta Committee at the house of its convener, Mr. Ramachandra Reddy. Mr. Reddy says that though disturbed conditions existed in the town just before the Id, the Quami Ekta, along with the district administration, were successful in containing the violence and restoring normalcy very soon.

Some of the members of the Committee said that the manipulation of youth but politicians should be stopped. They feel that corruption and immorality in the hierarchy of administration should be stopped.

Mr. Qadri, one of the members, said that communal harmony and national integration were "matters of the heart" and that they can not be achieved with force.

CONCLUSIONS: A look at the history of the events that led to the recent riots in Mahaboobnagar shows that a pattern is discernible behind the incidents, as in the case of most of the so called communal clashes.

A systematic pattern of group rivalries, making political capital out of religious sentiments, deliberate rumour-mongering to fan communal passions, giving a communal colour to such common-place incidents as fights over cinema seats, eve-teasing, etc., involvement of local power elites, and so on, can be clearly seen in this case.

Increasing degrees of polarisation is even now taking place between the two communities in the town, and political patronage and a division of people into "our people" and "their people" is giving currency to this rift among the people.

However, the situation has not yet reached an impasse where "civil War" would seem inevitable as alleged by some people. Most people have expressed a sincere desire for the return of normalcy, as the present situation of tension is affecting their every day life.

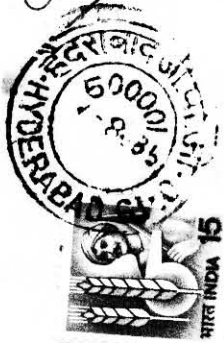
Several people have volunteered to start working on the lines of "Hyderabad Ekta" to promote communal harmony and maintain peace in the town.

In conclusion, one feels that much of what goes on in the name of communal riots is a power game of few people, in which innocent people are very often the victims. This inhuman game of politicians should be exposed for what it is and it is the duty of all secular organisations to bring about among the people an awareness of these issues. All democratic and secular-minded people have also got an active role to play in assisting in the formation of voluntary secular organisations in all affected areas as well as subsequently in providing legal and other help, such as following up on payment of ex-gratia etc.

In the light of these conclusions, Hyderabad Ekta demands that the state and local authorities should take up the following issues immediately.

1. Immediate release of ex-gratia relief to all affected families;  
and
2. Bringing the culprits known to be involved to book.

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