

Sangh Parivar and Communal Riots

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In an attempt to hide their culpability in communal riots, the BJP often argues that more communal riots have taken place under Congress regime as compared to their regime. The argument is fallacious as the Congress has ruled the country and various states much longer than BJP. Secondly, Congress ruled state governments are practically throughout the length and breadth of the country. Therefore one is comparing longer term of the Congress in wider geographical area with shorter term of the BJP. It is like comparing apples to oranges.

However, more important point is the BJP spokespersons' attempts to obfuscate and invisibilise the real role of the BJP and the *Sangh Parivar* attached politicians in raising the communal temperature of the country by incessantly polarizing every possible issue on communal lines. Since its inception, the RSS has used communal violence as a tool to strengthen its organization, as indeed the Muslim League orchestrated communal violence in 1946 and used it as a tool to achieve its objective of Pakistan. The RSS continuously propagates that Hindus are in danger and / or injustice is being done to the Hindus. In the pre-Independence era, Jinnah did a similar propaganda and saw every action of the Congress with a jaundiced eye and interpreted every measure to be anti-Muslim. Followers of Hindutva ideology continuously propagate that all terrorists are Muslims even though the proposition is false to their own knowledge. Advani's *rath yatra* similarly propagated distorted history and falsehood about existence of Ramjanmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya; claiming the temple to be on a precise spot which was birth place of Ram; that the temple was demolished by Babar; that Babri Masjid is a symbol of subjugation of Hindus by Muslim regime. As Jinnah unfortunately succeeded in persuading a section of influential and propertied class Muslims that they would not get justice in united India, followers of Hindutva ideology similarly have succeeded in convincing a section of upper class and upper caste Hindus that indeed their interests are inimical to those of the Muslim community (as if the community is undiversified and share same interests), that Muslims are anti-nationals, polygamous, a bunch of criminals, violent, etc. etc.

Communalists, like the followers of Hindutva ideology, ratchet up tension between the two communities over an issue which may seem insignificant and even routine, e.g. the murder of two *mathadi* workers in Mumbai in January 1993. Shiv Sena ratcheted up the issue and through its news paper *Samna*, continuously propagated as if the routine sounding murder amounted to huge injustice on the entire Hindu community. Even before investigation conclusion was drawn that Muslims are guilty and that entire Muslim community was guilty of the murder. Or take the recent Muzaffarnagar communal riots. The riots occurred under the SP regime. However, the SP is at the most guilty of omissions – of allowing the “Jat Mahapanchayats” to take place with the attendees armed with deadly weapons in a charged atmosphere where communally inciting speeches were likely to be given and were given. The riots were not a natural reaction to the incident of killing of Sachin and Gaurav, who in turn were killed as they Shahnawaz. Attempts to create communal tensions were going on much before even before the incident. The incident of murder of Sachin and Gaurav was used to ratchet up tensions by widely circulating a fake video of an incident that happened in Pakistan. The BJP MLA is alleged to have done that. The fake video inflamed the sensations and emotions and mobilized the people to Jat Mahapanchayat who could then be incited to take revenge leading to communal riots. There would have been no riots without the

circulation of the fake video; without the Jat Mahapanchayat; without collecting and distributing arms; without mobilizing funds for movements of the emotionally charged crowds and without pre-marking the targets to be attacked during the riots. Whom would you hold more culpable for the riots – the SP govt. for their omissions or the planner, organizers and executioner of the riots in Muzaffarnagar?

Of late, routine inter-religious love affairs are declared by the Hindu Nationalist forces to be “love jihad” without an iota of evidence or truth in it. Continuously repeating the falsehood umpteen times using the media and pamphlets escalates the conflict between the two communities. The other issues that have been utilized to ratchet up the communal conflict are a cow being shooed away by a hawker, who happens to be a Muslim, or non-payment of a hotel bill or by insisting on a particular route for a religious procession, deliberately playing loud music near places of worship during religious processions etc.

Eruption of a riot takes place, according to psychologist Sudhir Kakar after a considerable degree of tension between the two communities has been built up by communal organizations. Riot is then bursting of a boil, the eruption of pus, of ‘bad blood’ between Hindus and Muslims which has been accumulated over a few days and even weeks in a particular location. In riot prone cities like Ahmedabad, the boil is more like a festering sore. Besides the ultimate cause, a riot has immediate tension and precipitating incident. Immediate tension occurs when religious identities come to the forefront because of a perceived threat to this particular social identity. For example constant propaganda that injustice is meted out to the Hindus in “their own country” or that minorities are being appeased in the country that belongs to Hindus. The threat may be a constructed one based on collective distortion of the meaning of a real event, which makes them act as Hindus or Muslims. Demonstration of this religious identity on part of one community causes, as a response, the other community to mobilize based their religious identity. This spiral of perceived or misperceived threats and reactive counter postures raises tensions between the two communities. During the period of tension, religious identity of the individual is heightened and they increasingly think themselves as Hindus, or Muslims or Christians. When group salience becomes high, the individual thinks and behaves in conformity with the stereotypical characteristics of the category ‘Hindu’ or ‘Muslim’ rather than according to her or his individual personality dispositions. Thus social identity dominates in the period of social tensions and individuals conform to their stereotypes leading to homogenization and depersonalization. The tension is also constituted of strong effects and emotions and raw passions.

Rowena Robinson in her book – *Tremors of Violence – Muslim Survivors of Ethnic Strife in Western India* – reproduces the text from leaflets of *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* openly circulated after Gujarat Violence in 2002 and signed by the state general secretary Chinubhai Patel “We will cut them and their blood will flow like rivers. ‘We will kill Muslims the way we destroyed Babri mosque’. This is followed by a poem ‘[t]he volcano which was inactive ... has erupted. It has burnt the arse of *miyas* and made them dance nude. We have untied the penises that were tied till now. We have widened the tight vaginas of the *bibis*...’

To measure communalism of a political party based merely on number of riots or number of casualties during the communal riots under their regime, as the BJP spokespersons persuade us to do, will therefore lead us to fallacious conclusions. The source of communal attitudes is equally culpable for the riots that take place.

This is not to argue that Congress led Governments are not culpable whenever riots take place under their regime. The culpability of the ruling party may be of different nature. The

culpability of the administration is that of omission, i.e. failure to take timely, appropriate and necessary actions to prevent riots when there are early warnings of the riots as the tension is being ratcheted up over incident of ordinary nature. The culpability is compounded further if there is a failure to control riots immediately after it breaks out by immediately arresting the communal *goondas*, imposing curfew and using minimum necessary but effective force on rioting mobs. However, in the case of Gujarat 2002 riots, the interest of planners and conspirators of the riots culpable for offence of commissions and the interests of the ruling regime committing the offence of omissions and commissions became identical.

The Inquiry Commissions Reports on Communal Riots:

The Inquiry Commissions appointed to give their reports on the causes of riots have, after properly appreciating the evidence before them more often than not, blamed the communal organizations following Hindutva ideology and having Hindu Nationalism as their political goal. If Congress led regimes were blamed for offences of omissions, the Commissions also blamed the sister organizations of the then Jan Sangh and now the BJP. Let us look at the observations of some of the Inquiry Commissions very briefly for the lack of space.

The Raghubar Dayal Commission appointed to give its findings on the causes of communal riots in Sholapur, Maharashtra, in September 1967 observed that the Hindu Maha sabha and Muslim league were active in the incident, as they wanted to use the incident for their political purpose.

The same commission was appointed to study the communal disturbances in Muzaffarpur, Bihar, between 13 to 15 October, 1967. The Commission found that Jan Sangh, Hindu Mahasabha and other communal minded Hindus were involved in the agitation and had contributed to communal tensions just before the Jaganath temple incident. Jana Sangh workers were found to be participating in riots. According to the Commission, the Jan Sangh workers and communal minded persons created trouble and spread rumors.

The D. P. Madon Commission, investigating Riots in Bhiwandi, Jalgaon and Mahad, in the year 1970 found that the following organizations were operating in Bhiwandi which fomented communal tension in the said places:

- 1) The Bhiwandi Branch of the All-India Majlis Tameer-E-Millat,
- 2) The Bhiwandi Branch of the Shiv Sena,
- 3) The Bhiwandi Branch of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh,
- 4) The Bhiwandi Seva Samiti,
- 5) The Rashtriya Utsav Mandal.

The Madon Commission found that Bal Thackeray, made a communal speech about Bhiwandi and its Muslim inhabitants at a Shiv Sena meeting held in Thane on May 30, 1969 in the course of which he referred to Bhiwandi as a second Pakistan and said that such shameful incidents were taking place in Bhiwandi that he was ashamed to speak about them in the presence of ladies.

The Madon Commission further found that the news of the Bhiwandi disturbance and exaggerated rumours were circulated in Jalgaon, inflaming the communal passions of the Hindus against the Muslims. As the tension heightened, an ordinary quarrel which took place at the 'Pan' shop at the Rath Chowk between a Muslim and some Hindus at about 2.45 pm on May 8, 1970 triggered off the riot.

The Madon Commission also held the communal activities of the Jalgaon City Branch of the Jan Sangh and the Shree Ram Tarun Mandal managed by the Jalgaon City Branch of the Jan Sangh responsible for the communal riots in Jalgaon in the background of impending Municipal politics. Stones were thrown on the Jumma Mosque situated in Maniyar Wada usually at the time of the night prayers to heighten tensions.

To briefly recall in the previous issue we argued that more riots may have taken place under the Congress regime, the Sangh Parivar and the Hindutva followers have greater culpability. We also examined the observations of the Raghubar Dayal Commission and Madon Commission pertaining to the role of Sangh Parivar during the riots in Bhiwandi, Sholapur (Maharashtra) and Muzaffarpur (Bihar). We examine observations of some more Inquiry Commissions below.

The Joseph Vithayathil Commission appointed to study the communal Riots in Tellicherry on 28th December 1971, observed that the underlying cause of the riots was the propaganda carried on by Jan Sangh against the Muslims league after the league became a partner in the government that the league was taking undue advantage of its political power in the state created a general feeling among the Hindus that they would not get justice in the hands of police in cases in which Muslims were on the opposite side. The Vithayathil Commission further observed that the statements made by the politicians contributed to the cause of the disturbances. The Jan Sangh and the R.S.S were always attacking the Muslim league. A part of their Political propaganda was that the league was interfering in matters of administration.

Jitendra Narayan Commission appointed to give its findings on Jamshedpur riots on 11th April 1979 records its findings that the communal passion aroused amongst the Hindus by the intractable and domineering attitude of the Hindu Communalist over the question of the route of the Dimna Basti Akhara procession which expressed itself in various overt acts was the pivotal cause of the riot that broke out in Jamshedpur during the Ramnavami Festival 1979. Militant communalist Hindus were demanding that the procession be permitted to pass through the disputed Road No. 14 a narrow road largely inhabited by Muslims along its sides with a mosque on its way. The Commission further records that the RSS played their role in this matter, motivated by the long-term political objective of gaining strength for their political wing, simultaneously with propagating their doctrine, by arousing the communal sentiment of the large majority of Hindus. A leaflet was circulated in the name of Shri Ramnavami Akhara Samity, which emerged as a call to the Hindus in the name of the religion, to force the procession through the prohibited route whatever the consequence may be.

The RSS challenged the secular concept of life as enshrined in the constitution, noted the Commission. Shree Balasaheb Deoras the then Sar Sanghchhalak (Chief) in his speech at the Regal Maidan on 1.4.79 said that in Arab countries the Hindus were not allowed to construct Hindu temples but here in India where the Hindus are in great majority the Muslims and the Christians were not only free to raise the mosques and the churches but they were free to propagate their religion.....'. The Commission squarely blamed RSS for the riots stating that the R.S.S had raised evocative religious issues there by rousing communal passion and recommended that holding of meetings of communal organizations such as the RSS and the Jamat-I-Islam be prohibited.

Justice V. S. Dave Commission looked into the communal disturbances in Gujarat in the year 1985 which followed the anti-reservation agitation. Simultaneously, it was being propagated that mosques and shrines of Muslims in Ahmedabad were built on Hindu monuments, and the

proverbial last straw on the camel's back was refusal by Muslims to close their shops on the call of bandh on March 18, 1985 which had marked the start of communal riots in Ahmedabad.

It will be relevant to mention here that there had been several pamphlets issued by Hindu organizations and Muslim organizations. Some have been attributed to VHP and the circulars issued by Navrachna Nirman Samiti led by the ABVP. A perusal of the pamphlets showed that they tend to increase the gulf between sawarnas and backward classes and Hindus and Muslims. The captions of the said pamphlets had been quoted while dealing with the role of press. Similarly, the Muslim organizations distributed pamphlets every effort was made to incite the people of rival sections and rival communities. Thus, the press and the pamphlets contributed too much to the fanning of the riots and the course of riots.

Justice Malvankar Commission appointed to look into the communal riots in Umapur (District Beed) opined that the immediate cause behind the riot was that on May 10, 1986 at about 6.30 p.m. when Shiv Sainiks came to Abdul Hamid Chowk, they first garlanded the Ganesh Idol and then went to Shri. Gaulum Gaus who was selling milk at Dudh Katta. They demanded money and he gave them Rs. 20. After some time again, some people including Rajendra Bagul, Shyam Kankaria and others demanded money but he refused. At that time, they assaulted him and Gulam Gaus fell down unconscious. There was a scuffle between Sakil and Javed on the one hand and some Shiv Sainiks on the other. In that, Sakil and Javed were assaulted and were chased by a Hindu Mob. Immediately after this incident, Hindus & Muslims started pelting stones at each other. A few more incidents where Shiv Sainiks abused Muslims, they had removed the wooden poles of the compound of Muslims and had thrown them in the bonfire on account of Holi.

L K Advani's *rath yatra* left a trail of communal riots behind – some say, 3000 riots as provocative speeches were made during the *rath yatra*. **Shri R H Heera Man Singh** Commission found that arrest of Shri. L.K. Advani in the State of Bihar on 23.10.1990 started communal incidents in parts of Ranga Reddy District and twin cities of Hyderabad & Secunderabad. The riots went on from October to December 1990.

During the 1992-93 communal riots in Mumbai, the Congress Government found itself helpless, more than responsible for the communal riots. The Chief Minister Sudhakar Rao Naik was twiddling was wholly unprepared for the demolition of the Babri Mosques and its aftermath. Turning to the events of the January 1993, the **Justice B N Srikrishna** Commission's view was that "though several incidents of violence took place between 15th December and 5th January 1993, large-scale rioting and violence was commenced from 6th January 1993 by Hindus brought to fever pitch by communally inciting propaganda unleashed by Hindu communal organizations and writing in newspapers like *Samnaa* and *Navaakal*. It was taken over by Shiv-Sena and its leaders who continued to whip up communal frenzy by their statements and acts and writings and directives issued the Shiv Sena *Pramukh* Bal Thackeray. The attitude of Shiv Sena as reflected in the *Time* magazine interview given by Bal Thackeray and its doctrine of 'retaliation', as expounded by Shri Sarpotdar and Shri Manohar Joshi, together with the thinking of Shiv Sainiks that Shiv Sena's terror was the true guarantee of the safety of citizens', were responsible for the vigilantism of Shiv Sainiks. Because some criminal Muslims killed innocent Hindus in one corner of the city the Shiv Sainiks 'retaliated' against several innocent Muslims in other corners of the city."

The Commission further observed that “from 8th January at least there is no doubt that the Shiv Sena and Shiv Sainiks took the lead in organizing attacks on Muslims and their properties under the guidance of several leaders of the Shiv Sena from the level of Shakra Pramukh Bal Thackeray who, like a veteran General, commanded his loyal Shiv Sainiks to retaliate by organised attacks against Muslims”.

Justice B N Srikrishna appropriately observed that the Ayodhya Controversy was heating up where the *Hindutva* leaders were strongly appealing to the Hindu sentiments of the people. L.K. Advani’s Rath Yatra, which started from Somnath Temple, was on its way to Ayodhya, wherein it gathered a huge crowd along with it. On 6th Dec, 1992, the worst day in the post partition era, Babri Masjid was demolished and it sparked off what were the bloodiest days Mumbai had ever witnessed before. Shiv Sena organized celebration rally as the news of demolition of the Babri Masjid percolated on 6th December, the day of demolition.

Conclusion:

Justice Ramanad Prasad (Hon’ble Chairman), **Justice Ram Chandra Prasad Sinha** and **Justice S. Shamsul Hasan** (Hon’ble members), of the 5 member Commission of Inquiry appointed to look into the 24th October 1989 communal riots in Bhagalpur made some pertinent observations – “We have set out extensively various factors which attributed to the ultimate outbreak of the communal disturbances. There were sufficient indications since more than a year before the commission of the riot. From what we have stated above, atmosphere of suspicion and hatred had been created between Muslims and Hindus of Bhagalpur in the sphere of the communal hatred, political aggrandisement and religious fanaticism and unjustified misunderstanding. The District administration as we have said, suffered from culpable amnesia deliberate indifference and patent communal bias, incompetence in not anticipating the riot. Lack of impartiality in the District Administration also compounded the problem.”

These observations broadly sum up the respective roles played out by the administration and the communal forces. Communal forces convert incidents of ordinary occurrence to build communal tensions and hold the entire community responsible for the incident in question. The build up goes on for days, and sometimes for months. Without the build up, there are no communal riots. It is here that *Sangh Parivaar* is culpable. Paul Brass suggests that an *institutionalized riot system* have been created since independence in certain regions, particularly in north and western states in India, which can be activated during periods of political mobilization or at the time of elections. Communal violence is far from being spontaneous occurrences. The production of a riot, Brass argues, involves calculated and deliberate actions by key individuals, like recruitment of participants, provocative activities and conveying of messages, spreading of rumours, amongst other specific activities. There are frequent rehearsals until the time is ripe and the context is felicitous and there are no serious obstructions in carrying out the performance. If the Congress party is guilty, it is for overlooking the existence of *institutionalized riot system* in various towns and cities of India. The Ramanand Prasad Committee aptly brings out the failure. Each riot and thereafter failure of the criminal justice system to punish the guilty strengthens the riot system and the organisation that nurtures and sponsors it. Communal disturbances produce communal divide where there is none and deepen and widen the prejudices where they exist. Post communal disturbances, the RSS and the *Sangh Parivaar* work continuously to deepen the wounds and turn it into a festering one. Over the years the *Parivaar* has developed and perfected its institutionalized riot system. The riots too have become more lethal and destructive from minor and localized and urbanized incidents to regular cyclical events that can be sustained

for over 72 hours and in case of Nellie, 1983 take lives of 3000 innocent citizens, Gujarat, 2002, that continued for over a month and caused loss of about 2500 lives and Kandhamal that was sustained for more than a month in a rural theatre killing 70 people.

There is no gainsaying that more communal riots under the Congress regime as compared to the BJP regime is a proof that Congress is communal. The BJP's double standards are exposed when they refuse to take any responsibility for riots that occurred under their regime, particularly under Modi in Gujarat in 2002. If the BJP is not to be blamed for the riots under their regime, how can the Congress Party be termed as communal on the basis of number of riots that occurred in their regime? Modi refuses to offer even regrets, let alone take the blame for the riots. On the contrary he uses the metaphor of "*kutte ke pilley*" (puppies) for the survivors of the 2002 pogrom. This is not to say that Congress is exactly secular.

It is only sustained effort for justice along with efforts to build peace that we shall overcome this deadly virus and build peaceful India with meaningful development – but that is herculean effort to counter the prejudices and communal attitudes – not an impossible goal. The journey begins from realizing the true culprits and obstacles in the process.

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