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REPORT ON COMMUNAL RIOTS IN CHANNAPATANA

There were communal riots in many towns of Karnataka during October 1990. They were preceded by riots in Ramanagaram, known as the Silk town of the state, 50 kms away from Bangalore on September 2, 1990. Tension has been stoked in this town by the Ganesh festivities followed by Ramjyothi processions. These riots had lead to the death of 7 persons, scores were injured and properties worth lakhs lost. A team that consisted of Prof. Basheer Hussain and Prof. Hasan Mansur had visited this town on September 11, 1990. They listened to the accounts of riots given by members of Hindu and Muslim communities and the version of the police and went round the town to see places subject to vandalism. From there, they proceeded to Channapatna, thirteen kms away and talked to some people there who felt the tension of the riots in Ramanagaram but were assuring themselves there would be no fall-out in their own town.

There was a clash in Malebennur in Chitradurga district on September 27, Kanakagiri in Gangavathi Taluk of Raichur district and Bijapur witnessed clashes on September 28, with the advent of the Ramjyothi processions.

Riots broke out in Channapatna on October 3, 1990 which left many dead, properties destroyed and the contagion spread to the villages. The climax was in Davanagere on October 5, when a Ramjyothi procession ran beserk, the police opened fire leaving eight dead and many injured. Riots broke out in villages around Kolar also.

In the wake of these wide-spread riots Justice V.M. Tarkunde, Adviser to Citizens of Democracy and Shri N.D.Pancholi, its General Secretary authorised Sri S.R. Hiremath, Prof. Hasan Mansur and others to investigate causes of riots in Karnataka and to prepare reports suggesting remedial measures to control them. A team of C.F.D. (K) spent two days in Davanagere on October 23rd and 24th, met people of both communities, interviewed officials of the local police and went round the town to see the havoc caused by the riots. A report was prepared and the Press was briefed on the findings.

The C.F.D. (K) team that went to Channapatna on December 31, 1990 consisted of Ms. Yasmin Yusuf Siwani, Sri. Raju and Prof. Hasan Mansur. This team visited the scenes of looting and burning on K.T. Road, Kote area, Petechere, Harijan Colony, Muslim Block in front of the railway station and Thattakere. They talked to some victims of the riots. They interviewed the editor of the only daily in Kannada 'Bayalu Seeme' Shri S. J. Rame Gowda and they acknowledge the information and assistance given by him regarding the riots. Members of the Raitha Sangha co-operated with the team in the course of its investigations, thanks to the initiative taken by its leader, Prof. Nanjundaswamy.

Channapatna is a small town about 63 kms from Bangalore. It is famous for its silk filatures and has a hoary tradition of making colourful toys. The population is about 83,000, out of which about 33,000 are Muslims. Some of the latter are prosperous because of their investments in silk filatures and the toy industry, but the majority of Muslims as in any other part of Karnataka are most backward

economically and socially. The poor among them are confined to an area called Dayira. Most of them are engaged in rolling beedis and others in manual labour.

Channapatna has a history of occasional skirmishes between Hindus and Muslims, but this was the most serious incident upto date. As stated earlier, this town as many other places in Karnataka had felt the impact of Ganesh and Ram Jyothi festivities and these had generated great tension. The killing, looting and arson, a month earlier in Ramanagaram added to the provocations here. All the pent-up feelings of both the communities surfaced and broke out in violence.

The actual cause of the riot was the alleged teasing of a Muslim girl by a Hindu boy. This agitated some Muslims who complained to the police. The latter pacified them saying that they had registered their complaint against the boy and action would be initiated shortly. Not satisfied with this the crowd insisted that the accused should be handed over to them for instant justice. Rightly the police refused to let the people take the Law into their own hands. But the crowd grew restive and moved towards the Government Junior College for girls and armed with staves started attacking and looting shops and nearly two hundred huts were badly affected.

Of the sixteen dead, eleven got burnt to death when huts were set on fire and the rest died of injuries. There were rumours that people were killed and dumped into the local tank; but the police denied the report. Rumours were rife and afloat and they caused immense damage.

A few kilometres away from Channapatna is a village called Muhammad Khan Doddi. Almost all the inhabitants belonged to the minority community. This village was attacked and except for three R.C.C. houses, thirty six houses were burned down. The victims alleged that the arsonists came from the villages around the place. Women and children living there were sheltered by villagers of Bewoor by members of the other community and were later sent to Channapatna. Luckily no lives were lost.

The police force in Channapatna as admitted by the authorities was inadequate to cope with the riots. They had to summon the trainees from the Karnataka State Police Training School nearby to assist them to restore order. Platoons of Karnataka State Reserve Police arrived from Bangalore later. The local police had neither the number nor the resources to maintain vigil in town and the affected villages around.

There were no firefighting to put down the fire started by the arsonists. Fire tenders had to be summoned from Bangalore to attend to cases of arson in Channapatna and the villages nearby.

Day and night curfew was imposed starting on the night of October 3, till October 7, and thereafter night curfew remained enforced till November 3, 1990.

There were instances of people saved by the members of the other community; in one instance a handicapped woman was saved from a burning hut.

When the Central Reserve Police Force was inducted into Channapatna to maintain law and order, there were indiscriminate arrests, mostly of innocent people in towns and villages. Later most of them were released when found innocent.

The Silk market employing many people was closed from October 4th to 20th, causing a loss of thousands of rupees. Work in Silk filatures, mortar-making, toy making and other spheres was badly affected. Dabba shops selling tea, beedies, etc, were at a standstill. As many as fifty people selling lottery tickets were without a job. In a word, economic life of thousands was badly hit and the worst affected were the very poor of both communities.

Those who suffered losses were 323 in number, victims of trouble were 1878, houses completely burnt were 171, wooden shops burnt were 107 and houses partially

burnt were 267. In villages 55 huts were fully or partially burnt down. 63 people in town and villages suffered mild injuries. There were losses of coconut, mango, sugarcane and ragi crops destroyed by incensed mobs of villagers. The total loss of properties was estimated to be around 3½ crores of rupees.

The compensation paid on October 5, was as follows:

For the dead: Rs. 3.20 lakhs

For the injured: Rs. 60,000/-

For loss of sheds: Rs. 2.85 lakhs.

Among the victims were poor dalits living in Petecheri, Thattekere and Harijan Colony.

Those who looted shops were motivated neither by faith nor religiosity, but solely for the love of thieving; most of these were anti-social elements.

By October 9, an uneasy peace has returned to Channapatna. Though Dayira solely inhabited by Muslims and Patanhadi looked normal, no Muslim stirred out to work, in particular they dare not go into villages selling or buying things. People were in town from villages on business and a few shops were open.

There were instances of Muslim families safeguarded by activists of Raitha Sangha in Thotanhalli and Nagenahalli. There was one noble instance of Shri Huchaveerappa of Dyavarapatna sheltering Muslims for which he had to pay dearly. His 10 year crop of 185 Mango trees were cut down by the incensed co-religionists, each tree costing Rs. 10, 000. But he did not regret the good deed of saving human lives and thought these were more precious than the trees lost.

On October 18, the Chief Minister visited Channapatna, and raised the compensation for the dead, from Rs. 20,000 to Rs. 50,000 for each person.

There was a sensational case of an alleged dacoity on October 21, where the inmates of the house were severely thrashed and robbed of gold and silver. The police registered a case of dacoity, while the inmates claimed that it was communal in nature. The local B.J.P leader openly charged that 'Muslim Goondas' were responsible for it, adding to the tension that had been gradually easing. The miscreants have not been traced so far.

The total dead numbered 18 and the injured 63. Rs. 2,500 was paid to each injured person.

For fully burnt out properties compensation paid - Rs. 65.11 lakhs

For partially burnt out properties compensation paid - Rs. 26.79 lakhs

Total: Rs. 91.90 lakhs

In Channapatna, 36 cases were filed and 148 people were arrested. In the villages around, 23 cases were filed and 148 arrested.

After this investigation, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. There was a failure of police intelligence to foresee the outbreak of riots in spite of riots that had broken out a month earlier in nearby Ramanagaram.
2. These riots are the likely outcome of the fallout of Ramjyothi observance in the district and the general climate of suspicion, fear and hatred arising out of the Ramjanambhoomi/ Babri Masjid issue.
3. There was an absence of leadership in both the communities or incapacity to control their followers.
4. There was abysmal failure on the part of the national political parties to avert the tragedy.
5. There was paucity of forces of law and order and failure to augment the same to meet the contingency.
6. The charge that some members of the ruling party had a vested interest in instigating riots to get rid of the Chief Minister needs to be examined.
7. The local unit of the BJP was unabashedly communal having stoked the fires earlier in Ramanagaram, by segregating dalit workmen and issuing provocative handbills attacking the minority.
8. The poor were the worst affected and the majority were Muslims and some dalits. The former were at the receiving end in terms of loss of lives and properties.

The C.F.D. (K) suggest the following measures:

1. A sitting judge of the High Court of Karnataka constituting the Commission of Inquiry be named to probe into these riots.
2. Systemic and serious efforts be made to bring to book the culprits responsible for the riots.
3. Adequate compensation be paid for loss of life, limb or property. The team witnessed many burnt huts and shops yet to be rebuilt.
4. To ferret out the truth about the role of a section of the ruling party alleged to be behind the riots.
5. Voluntary, non-political secular groups to take initiative to bring together estranged communities and a citizens' peace committee on a permanent basis to promote understanding among all sections of the people.