

CFD Report on
COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN DAVANAGERE
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Davanagere, a major city in the central part of Karnataka witnessed an unprecedented communal violence during October 5-12, 1990. The communal violence began on Friday October 5th, the day before Ram Jyothi relating to the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi controversy arrived in town and reached a peak with 3 firings during the time Ram Jyothi was in town and continued thereafter leaving 17 persons dead, over 70 persons arrested, property worth lakhs of rupees damaged or looted or burnt and over 400 arrested. The Govt. hospital had never experience the kind of challenge that so many persons with bullet injuries, stabbing and acid throwing, rushing to the emergency section continuously especially on Saturday October 6th. The Ram Jyothi, which is part of the efforts Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to mobilize the people from various parts of the country for the proposed beginning of the construction of the Rama temple at the place of the present Babri Masjid in Ayodhya by dismantling the Masjid in its place.

In response to the unprecedented communal violence Justice V.M. Tarkunde, the former President of the Citizens for Democracy (CFD) and Shri N.D. Pancholi asked a team of 6 leading members of CFD and others in Karnataka to investigate into the recent communal riots in Karnataka by visiting the affected areas. The team who live closer to Davanagere one of the worst affected cities during the recent communal riots in the state and has not witnessed such communal violence in its history visited the town twice. With the help of local concerned people who had gathered information about the rights extensively and many of whom participated in the Peace March or have served in the hospital or have been direct witness to the communal violence, the team has been able to piece together a chronological picture of the unprecedented communal violence that has rocked this otherwise peaceful city. In addition the team also met the authorities with the petty shop owners and others who lost their properties either due to burning, looting or damaging otherwise. In addition, the team has held extensive discussions with leaders of the various communities and also with many poor people from the affected areas of Davanagere who moved out to their relatives or have some haven't due to fear of their lives, being burnt alive in their house and other threats.

The chronological picture that emerges is as follows:

1. Peace Committees: The police were apprehensive and were expecting some trouble because the two events-Id Milad (Mohammad Paigambar Jayanti), on October 3rd and the Ram Jyothi on October 6th were happening rather too close and with the determination of both Committees to celebrate these events of a grander scale was a serious cause of worry among the police. This was especially so because both Hindu and Muslim communities had been following the tradition of the Communists to have bunting decorations at major circles with banners and other decorations.

The CPI B.N. Metagudmath said "Apprehending problems we made extra efforts to involve the community leaders well so that they can co-operate with the authorities in maintaining peace. We first called peace meeting of only Hindu leaders on September 25th and only Muslim leaders on the 26th and a joint meeting of both on the 30th. They all co-operated and agreed to maintain peace together".

The DSP R.C. Hattiholi further added "Since the two events Mohammad Paigambar Jayanthi and the Ram Jyothi was so close and a major cause for

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- clashes could be the removing of decorations in time after the first event for allowing decorations for the second event to be placed. We brought this issue in the Special Peace Committee meeting on October 3rd and leaders of both communities agreed with us and assured that the decoration of the first events will be removed by 4th night of the first event. In this, specially the Muslim community leaders were to help if there was any difficulty”.
2. Paigambar Jayanthi:- The Paigambar Jayanthi procession on the 3rd went very well. Preparations on a much grander scale than Davanagere had ever seen and the leaders of both communities participated actively.
A leader of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad said “The successful procession of the Paigambar Jayanthi on a grand scale made the Hindus especially the youth to ensure that the Ram Jyothi procession on a grander scale and an element of competition set in; The Hindu youth were able to mobilize the financial and other support effectively and preparations for very grand decorations and a procession of Ram Jyothi covering almost all places of Davanagere-say 20 to 25 kms route was planned meticulously and widely publicized.
 3. Hindu Yuva Shakti:- The organizations called “Hindu Yuva Shakti” which has been in existence for a few years was spearheading the whole thing with the boys from, rich and upper middle classes moving around on scooters and other two wheelers. They have also been able to mobilize youth from the many poorer sections of the city for the celebrations of the Hindu events like Ganapathi Jayanthi and this time they were able to galvanize vast sections of the poorer people for the Ram Jyothi yatra. The VHP and the RSS were instruments in the organizing of the Hindu Yuva Shakti.
 4. Tension Building Up: By the evening of the 4th and especially the 5th February, the tension had started building up; the initial skirmish started with the non-removal of decorations of Paigambar Jayanti from some places in town and the Hindu boys trying to force the Muslims to remove the same. Some Muslim leaders like President of Municipality of Davanagere Saikh Ahmed adds: “Yes, there were some places where decorations were not removed but we, as per the assurances given to the Peace Committee went to such places and persuaded Muslim youth to remove the same; For example, near Azad Nagar police station, I personally saw the remaining decorations from earlier event removed and decorations for Ram Jyoti were placed and I participated in this task and Pooja was made afterwards.” Similarly, other Muslim leaders like Shri. K. Abdul Rabsab (normally called “Rabsab”) also confirm cooperation of Muslim leaders and in fact, further add that “As per the Peace Committee meeting on the 5th, ten leaders each of both communities went in a mini-bus organized by the police to all the places and called on both the communities especially the youth to cooperate and maintain communal harmony. Further, we all had agreed for being with Ram Jyoti from the start around 6 a.m. on Saturday, the 6th and be with it until the procession was peacefully over”.
 5. Events taking ugly turn fifth night: The events started taking ugly turn by the late evening of 5th; Most leaders of both communities do agree that small skirmishes started with the non-removal of decoration bunting and flags in some places like Hounsabhavi circle and near Shanti theatre and Ganesh temple. However, some leaders do like Shaikh Ahmed, Municipal President assert; I personally went, as the agreement in the Peace Committee meeting to the circle near Azad Nagar

police station and requested Muslim youth to remove the decorations; Even though some Muslim youth objected, we persuaded them and allowed putting up of Ram Jyoti decorations and Pooja was done; Then only I left the place". The over enthusiastic Hindu youth had put up buntings, flags and saffron topis in most places including a cap on Devaraj Urs statue.

6. The police confirm: The rumours about clashes, burning of shops, stabbing, etc. spread fast and there was tension in most places. People started gathering in several places and we had difficulty in dispersing them.

Then started widespread burning of shops especially "dubba" shops belonging mostly to the Muslims as these are spread in several parts of town and isolated. For example, fruit and juice shops near Vidyarthi Bhavan, the scrap sale shops, the pan and beedi shops in most places were burnt out. In some places where there was a Muslim shop in between Hindu shops, it was looted rather than burnt."

While several people ascribe these incidents to the building up of tension due to non-removal of buntings, etc. some persons seriously suspect the designs of Hindu Yuva Shakti, the RSS and the BJP spreading hatred against Muslims. Both Hindu and Muslim citizens interviewed confirmed that the Hindu youth belonging to the elite class were traveling in several localities on the 5th night and shouting slogans like "Hindu Virodhigalige Dhikkar" (Down with haters of Hindus) which built up the tension further resulting in the Hindu youth burning the shops belonging to the Muslims systematically in a planned manner as it were.

7. Ram Jyoti procession banned: The Revenue and Police authorities realizing the increased tension and communal violence decided to ban the Ram Jyoti procession planned for the 6th; this put the organizers who were prepared for a large scale procession in difficulty. The VHP, BJP and RSS leaders met immediately and decided to press for the permission for Ram Jyoti procession. They all met at 10.30 AM at the Math of Sadyojyothi Swamiji under the Chairmanship of Swamiji and decided to press for permission for the procession. These leaders included Athani Kotresh, Andanur Kotrabasappa, Athani Veeranna Valvakannar, Shankaranarayan (Convenor of Ram Jyoti Kar Seva Samiti) Somanath, Kini and Y. Mallesh.

They all went to the police and revenue authorities and pressed for the permission. Some even said that we will undertake the procession even if you do not give permission. The authorities ultimately relented and agreed to give permission on two conditions: (1) There would be new route for Ram Jyoti procession avoiding high tension especially Muslim areas; The new route given was from Betur Road to Venkateshwar Circle to Bamboo Bazar (via BDO Office) to Chetana Hotel to Ram and Co. circle to end at Beeralingeswar temple; This was a much shorter route than the previous elaborate route (2) The leaders to give an undertaking that they will be with the rath yatra and ensure peaceful procession to the best of their capacity. All leaders which included names mentioned earlier and also some Muslim leaders present like Shaikh Ahmed, Municipal President signed the undertaking; Shaikh Ahmed also confirms that the Sadyojath Swamiji about joining the Ram Jyoti procession and asking for joining the meeting. While all these negotiations were going on, the police confirm that there was continued arson and looting going on in various parts of town on the 6th morning, especially burning of shops in isolated areas i.e. Muslim shops in Hindu areas and vice versa.

8. Alert Police: The police confirm that they were prepared well in view of anticipation of trouble in terms of adequate police force and all key authorities like the Deputy Commissioner (DC), the Superintendent of Police (SP) and Deputy Inspector General (DIG) of Police being in town right from the 5th itself. There were four DSP's being in charge of different areas with SP and DIG and revenue authorities (Judicial Magistrates) Tahasildar, A.C. and D.C. were readily available for any major decisions like firing. On the 5th, there were ten KSRP (Karnataka State Reserve Police) units and also there CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) units. Even 15 days later, on the 23rd, there are still 2 KSRP units and one CRPF unit in addition to the local police force of over 200.

9. First Firing: Even as the negotiation for relaxing 144 section and allowing Ram Jyoti procession to go through a limited route were going on, the DSP Hottiholli confirms the first firing that took place near Azad Nagar Police Station where he was in-charge. He said "There were mobs of people coming from different directions who were burning shops, houses indiscriminately and started throwing stones at police. To protect public lives and property we had to resort to firing. Tahasildar was present with him on the spot when firing was ordered and three persons received bullet injuries, one of whom succumbed to the injuries and died later."

10. Second Firing: Again, the DSP confirms, "Around 2.30 or so, a huge crowd was coming from Mehboob Nagar area which was going towards the procession area. The unruly mob started throwing stones to the police. Some had lethal weapons like 4-5 iron

11. Third and Major Firing: The Ram Jyoti procession started moving from Betur road towards the Venkateshwar circle where it was to turn towards the Bamboo Bazar. Many persons present in the procession confirm that there were at least 30-40, 000 persons present in the procession. The Hindu boys on two-wheelers were in front of the procession and the buntings, saffron flags and caps were seen everywhere. When the Ram Jyoti procession came near the Venkateshwar circle and was to turn towards the Bamboo Bazar, many Hindu boys and two wheelers and several others insisted that the Ram Jyoti should move towards Azad Nagar, as per the original route and not as per revised route allowed by the authorities. While some persons say that the leaders present insisted to follow the allowed route and failed to prevail on the overenthusiastic youth bent on moving towards Azaad Nagar area, some others say that the so called leaders who had given assurances for maintaining peace for limited route allowed were nowhere to be seen.

The police were, however, insisting on the processionists to follow the route allowed and not move towards the already sensitive Azad Nagar police station where firing had taken place earlier. As this discussion on the route was going on, the overenthusiastic youth made the Ram Jyoti rath move towards the Azad Nagar police station (around 3 p.m.) and the police opened fire and all hell broke loose as several persons with bullet injuries fell to the ground. The firing left five persons dead on the spot and over 25 sustained bullet injuries. According to one police officer at the site "If the firing was not done, the mob would have moved with the rath towards Azad Nagar area and would have left at least 500 dead."

12. Harrowing tales of the wounded:

When the CFD team visited the Govt. Hospital to see the wounded persons on October 18, 1990, most bullet injured persons was highly critical of the police and their indiscriminate firing. Vithoba Jyoteppa (30) who received serious bullet injuries (the bullet had passed through neck and tongue causing most injury and complicated operation) and could speak with great difficulty expressed: "There was no tear gas; no lathi charge or firing in air or any warning. The police just opened firing without caring for human lives when people were not expecting it. The noise of the firecrackers near Ram Jyoti added to the confusion. Before we knew it, bullets had pierced our bodies sometimes breaking bones. When encountered the bullet gets splintered when reaches bone or any obstruction and we were to the ground profusely bleeding. And in most instances unconscious in a few minutes". Another person Salim Jamalsab Doddamani (24) who received bullet injuries in the earlier firing at 11.30 on Saturday, the 7th, was most shaken by the experience and appeared very weak. He said "I had gone from the house to see my mother who had gone to wood depot. The policemen just did not care and were firing indiscriminately. Another person Rashid and I received serious bullet injuries and both were bleeding profusely. Rashid was not as lucky and succumbed to the injuries and died a little later. When I was taken to the hospital I was filed up like a bag on the other wounded. However police had to make stops to drop some fellows whom they had arrested before. I was taken to the hospital and I was half conscious and was afraid to bleed to death; thanks to some volunteers who donated blood and very prompt care of the doctors in the Chigteri Hospital I am alive now. I do not want to live in this City. I would rather go to a peaceful village. How does my family survive when I am the oldest and lying the hospital and feeling physically so weak."

The story of a young boy, Basavaraj Veeru Pakshappa Karadennavar (10) of Giri Theater area slum is heart touching. His mother Parvathemma with very sad eyes attending her son in the hospital said "My little boy had just gone outside on Saturday around noontime or so. As he did not return soon we were looking for him and someone

told us that he had received some injury from the police action and was lying unconscious and he was picked up by some person and taken to his sister who put some water on his face when he became conscious and she put turmeric on the wound, the boy kept groaning with pain all night and his father took the boy on the bicycle early morning around 6 O' clock towards the hospital. But some trouble makers beat his father and took away his bicycle. Then the father with fear for life returned home with the boy. When the pain persisted he finally took the boy the next morning to the hospital and came to know it was bullet injury after X-ray was taken and had to operated.”

There are such harrowing stories of everyone ion the hospital including stabbing and acid injuries. Moreover, almost all the injured persons either bullet or stabbing or acid throwing are from poorer segments whose livelihood has been seriously affected by these incidents. The miscreants encouraged by the rich and powerful boys from elite areas were involved in mischief. Noor Ahmad (28) who runs a small *bidi* shop in Batli layout was beaten by 10-12 hooligans on Old Baitur Road on Monday 8th around 2 a.m. when he had stopped for recess outside after returning from his sister's place and his two fingers were chopped off by sickle and Nagaraj (18) who was learning how to drive auto was by near Azad Nagar cross and a group of boys beat him causing head injuries. Both Noor Ahmad and Nagaraj said, “We did not provoke anybody in any manner; some people were kind enough to get us to the hospital.”

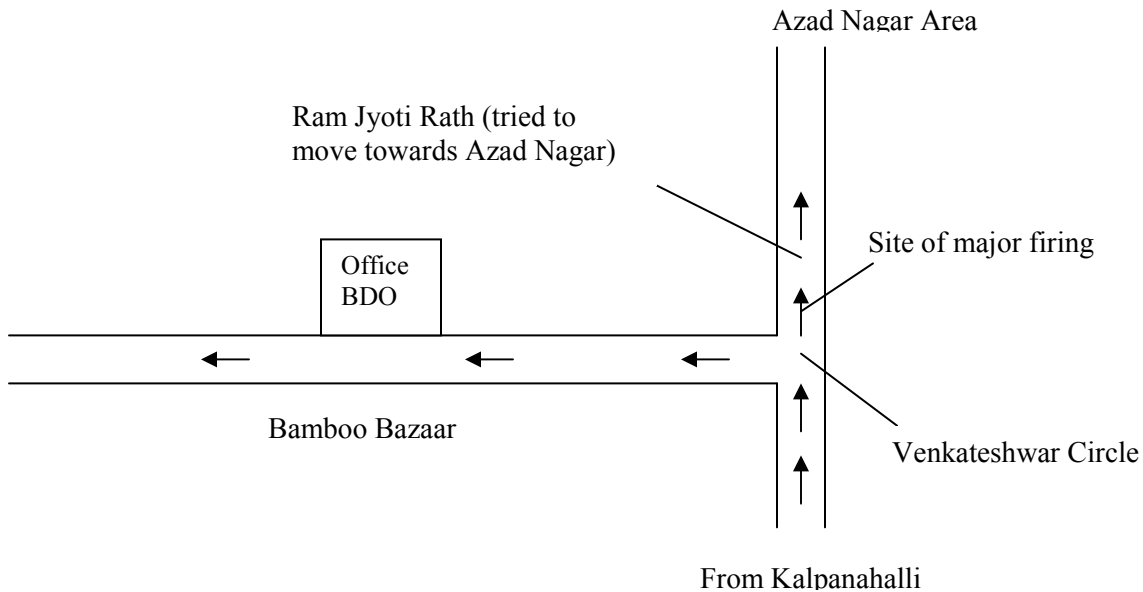
13. Highhanded behaviour of police and home guard

Even though police had tried their best, Davanagere witnessed continued arson and looting on a smaller after the major incidents on the 5th, 6th and 7th. However what has not been reported in the press is what many community leaders alleged as highhanded behaviour of police and home guard, sometimes bordering on community hatred. Several respected Muslim leaders reported that after burying the dead according to religious rituals, they thought that things would be quiet but the reign of terror was unleashed by the Home guard and police who went into many houses in Chamarajpet, Narasimharajpet, Azad Nagar, Ahmed Nagar, Basheja Nagar, Mehboob Nagar and arrested persons indiscriminately beating them up if they protested and even snatching wrist watches. H. Abdul Gafoorsab (66) narrated his own personal experience when police entered into his house in Chamarajpet and beat his 3 sons, Mustaq Ahmed (22), H. Mohammed Iqbal (35) and Nissar Ahmed (30) and arrested them without any charges and the incident occurred around 11:30 AM, Wednesday 10th. There are incidents of this kind and highhanded behaviour of police mentioned by many including some members of the Hindu Yuva Shakti.

14. Arrests and release

In all there were 406 persons arrested in connection with these incidents. 6 persons were released on the 18th, 350 were released on 20th and 6 persons on the 22nd. 44 persons are still in police custody.

(1) The scene of major firing on the 6th at 3 PM



II Reasons for the Communal Violence and Conclusions

From discussions with a cross-section of people affected and others, leaders of the community and government authorities, the following appear to be major reasons and some resulting conclusions:

1. The systematic hatred being spread against some communities e.g. the RSS and BJP helping the Hindu Yuva Shakti who roamed around chanting provocative slogans like "Hindu Virodhigalige Dhikkar (Down with haters of Hindus)" and excessive zeal and abusive language for removal of buntings and flags by the Muslims; ofcourse the Muslim community also has some elements of similar kind; From the talks with leaders of both communities, it appeared that Muslim leaders had done a greater job of containing their youth. It is this attitude that began the skirmishes on the 5th night resulting in unprecedented communal violence that Davanagare has ever seen in its history.
2. Lack of sustained local initiatives for communal harmony: There has not been any serious attempt jointly by the leaders of Hindu and Muslim communities to maintain communal harmony by systematic and ongoing efforts to bring both the communities especially the youth closer and understand each other better and be sensitive to some religious sentiments. The Peace Committees initiated by the police and revenue authorities are too sporadic and inadequate to create lasting good feelings and understanding between the two communities.

It is this serious failure on the part of both communities and lack of courage of conviction atleast on the part of most leaders to be present at the critical hours of firing and influencing the youngsters to maintain that resulted in the communal violence.

3. The police have not made serious attempts to win the confidence of both the communities especially the younger elements. They have only resorted to use of force which is counter productive in situations like this; the highhanded behaviour of atleast some police and Home guards have aggravated the situation further. The police having resorted to firing directly without tear gas, lathi charge and warning shots in the air, have created deep feelings of resentment against the police in the mind of the injured and families of those who died, in particular, and the police in general. The indiscriminate firing has caused greater injuries to innocent people.
4. Role of political parties: It is the unmistakable belief of most people that all political parties especially the BJP have contributed to the situation leading to communal violence. It was specifically pointed out that almost all political party leaders with a few exceptions were there at the Ram Jyothi Rath Yatra and most of them disappeared when the firing took place, and did not try to do something positive in that difficult moment.