

One of the sites of bomb blasts in Bombay

Safety is Indivisible

The Warning from Bombay Riots

Madhu Kishwar

It is unfortunate that our political leaders, industrialists and opinion makers have responded to the tragedy of the bomb blasts that shook Bombay in March, as well as to the earlier riots of December, 1992 and January, 1993, in their usual irresponsible manner. Instead of mourning the dead, our political and business leaders are mostly concerned about the negative impact the bomb blasts and the riots will have on foreign investments. Never mind if the lives of the people of this country are safe or not; never mind that hundreds of thousands of people lost their source of livelihood in the repeated riots and massacres instigated by our political leaders. All they seemed concerned about was whether the investments and profits of the elite who enter into collaborations with foreign corporations are safe.

So far there is no definite evidence of who is behind the blasts. Even if we were to accept the version that the bomb blasts were indeed the handiwork of Pakistani intelligence in collusion with certain Muslims in the Bombay underworld, the self-righteous indignation of our political leaders is rather misplaced because the Indian government has been involved in somewhat similar activities over the last couple of decades: injecting terrorism into the politics of Punjab and Kashmir to destroy the ruling parties' political opponents, getting RAW, the Indian government's own intelligence agency, to train the terrorist outfit, LTTE, for insurgency operations in Sri Lanka.

However, even more important than finding out who are the culprits is to recognise the various deadly flaws in our security system. The smuggling of such huge quantities of

sophisticated, powerful explosives into the country, without the intelligence agencies being either aware of it or able to intercept the flow, points to their utter incompetence. Their failure to do their job might well be due to the involvement of top political leaders and police officials with weapons smuggling. The smuggling of drugs and guns has for a long time been carried out with powerful political patronage. Men like Dawood Ibrahim, who is being accused of involvement in the bomb blasts, are known to be protégés of powerful Congress politicians such as Sharad Pawar.

The bomb blasts highlight one simple fact: when the state machinery is hijacked by criminals, it loses its ability to perform the most elementary of tasks expected of it — to provide security of life to its citizens. They also give us a message of warning:

safety, like health, is indivisible. Just as the elite of India cannot hope to stay healthy on the strength of Bisleri water bottles and air conditioners as long as the general water and air are not clean for all, likewise Hindus cannot hope to be safe as long as their leaders encourage violence against the Muslims, with active participation of the police and paramilitary forces.

It is unlikely that we will ever know the real truth behind the bomb blasts. The tendency of our government is to shroud everything in secrecy and feed the citizens on half truths and lies to suit the interests of those in power. The anxiety and fear generated by the bomb blasts are likely to be exploited by our rulers for further dividing Hindus from Muslims, and to cover up what happened during the Bombay riots of December, 1992 and January, 1993, following the demolition of Babri Masjid on December 6. It would be suicidal not to realise the full implications of that violence because it demonstrates how large sections of the government became indistinguishable from criminals. The police joined the hoodlum brigades and murdered and raped many hapless victims, looted thousands of Muslim homes and shops, and burnt houses and drove thousands out of their homes.

In one sense, there is nothing dramatically new about these massacres. They are part of a continuing process, similar to the riots in Bhiwandi, Sitamarhi, Meerut, Ahmedabad and Bhagalpur. However, there are some new and noteworthy developments:

- The scale of violence and the extent of brutality is escalating with every new outbreak.
- The politicians who instigate these massacres are becoming increasingly brazen about their participation in it.
- The police and paramilitary forces do not feel the need to maintain even a facade of neutrality or of

pretence concerning their expected role as keepers of law and order.

- The riots are not carried out by *goondas* and anti-social elements alone. The middle classes and other supposedly respectable sections of society are actively supporting and even joining the murderous brigades.

- The violence is no longer confined to poor bastis. It is beginning to engulf elite areas as well.

- Women, and even young girls, are taking an active part in violence and hate campaigns.

- In recent years Hindu-Muslim riots are acquiring overtones of ethnic cleansing, similar to what was attempted in parts of India at the time of partition — that is, hounding hundreds of thousands out of their homes, forcing them to flee as refugees in their own land. According to one estimate, during the January outbreak of violence, 2,15,000, people fled the city of Bombay for their villages or wherever they could find shelter. Most of those who fled were Muslims.

Almost all the shops and business establishments in the Hindu majority areas belonging to Muslims were destroyed. One could count on one's fingertips the few that survived. So well planned was the targeting of Muslim homes and shops that in almost all cases the neighbouring Hindu homes and shops stayed intact.

This issue concentrates on the nature of violence in Bombay and Surat even though riots took place in several other cities as well. The reason for picking out these two cities for somewhat detailed reporting is that even though neither of these two cities has a history of continuous Hindu-Muslim tension, as some other cities like Ahmedabad have had, yet the violence was most ferocious in these two places.

The Surat report has been put together mostly on the basis of

interviews with Muslims in refugee camps, together with what the authors from Surat witnessed or heard personally.

The Bombay report could not cover the entire city. A comprehensive report detailing what happened in each area of this sprawling city would require a much bigger and longer investigation than we could manage with our limited means. We have focused on a certain select area of Bombay, around a predominantly Muslim basti called Behrampada.

As for the rest, we have relied on eyewitness accounts of Hindus in different parts of the city, who personally saw incidents of violence; accounts of victims of violence, some of them in refugee camps; accounts by social and political workers who are doing relief and rehabilitation work among the victims and have, therefore, close knowledge of what happened. All this does not constitute a systematic study of the Bombay riots but only an attempt to delineate the patterns of violence and some of the characteristic features of the riots in Bombay.

The December Riots

The impression created by the press, including supposedly secular papers, is that the riots that followed December 6 were caused by Muslim mobs getting violent as they came out to protest against the Babri Masjid demolition. But if one closely follows the pattern of violence in different cities, one finds these were not really Hindu-Muslim riots.

Bombay witnessed two rounds of violence — the first one happened soon after the demolition of Babri Masjid, starting December 7, and the second one in early January. As far as the December killings are concerned, there is a widespread agreement about the nature of killings. When the news of the demolition of Babri Masjid reached Bombay, Muslims in some areas came out on the streets to mourn

and protest. In Muslim majority areas they called for a closure of shops as well. Their anger was targeted against the government for having failed to protect Babri Masjid after repeated assurances to the Muslim community that the structure would not be allowed to be demolished. To demonstrate their anger against their “betrayal” by the Congress government, they burnt or attacked some government property such as bus stops and stoned buses. They also burnt an effigy of Narasimha Rao.

This form of protest — that is, burning and damaging buses — though no doubt stupid, is a standard and routine practice of all protesting groups. Students routinely burn and damage buses every time they have a real or imagined grievance. During the anti-reservation agitation hundreds of buses were burnt in Delhi and elsewhere while the police looked on. Even in agitations led by trade unions and political parties, bus burning is considered a “normal” form of protest because state transport buses are the most visible and easy-to-target form of government property. In this case, because the protestors happened to be Muslims, police responded with brutality and a determination to kill.

For instance, in Delhi’s Jaffrabad area, on the morning of December 7, about 20-25 young Muslim boys came out on the streets, asking people to close their shops and went to the neighbourhood school, demanding that it be closed. The police stationed outside the school beat up these boys. In retaliation, these boys burnt two buses, a scooter and some old tyres. They first asked all the passengers to get off the bus; so there was no loss of life. Yet the police responded with firing — no lathi charge, no tear gas, not even *hawai* fire to disperse the protesting mobs. They fired to kill. The local Congress (I) leader, Jamal rushed out to ask the police who had given them the order to fire. DCP Deepak Misra aimed his



A mosque in the backdrop of a massive fire

gun at him. A young Muslim boy who thought Misra was going to fire at Jamal, pushed aside his gun. This boy was immediately shot dead and Misra hit Jamal on the head, saying: “Who are you, a *dada* of this area?” At this point a Muslim boy snatched a wireless set from one of the policemen and threw it in the nearby *naala* (gutter). That gave the police the excuse they needed to go berserk. Three Muslims were killed in the firing and several injured. The police let loose a misinformation campaign saying that the Muslims had attacked the police and killed a policeman as well as snatched a police gun, forcing them to fire at the mob. Subsequent enquiries by various independent groups have revealed that no policeman was killed in Jaffrabad. Nor is there any record of the supposedly missing gun. Yet the recovery of this gun became the pretext for the police conducting large scale “search” operations in Muslim homes, which actually meant looting Muslim property, beating up and arresting any number of Muslim men and young boys, locking them up in police stations and subjecting them to

regular beatings and torture. Dozens of homes were set on fire in neighbouring Seelampur where Muslims live as a minority in predominantly Hindu neighbourhoods. The police led the riotous mobs in looting Muslim property and setting their homes and shops on fire and killing Muslims by firing at the victims rather than at the rioters.

In Bombay, too, the murder of four policemen, supposedly by Muslim mobs in Deonar, was used to justify large scale violence against the Muslim community as a whole.

However, physical attacks on policemen by Muslims was not a large scale occurrence. The general pattern was that young Muslim boys, mostly in the age range of 16 to 25, came out to protest, burnt some bus stops and tyres, stoned buses, shouted anti-government, anti-police slogans and the police retaliated with bullets.

It is noteworthy that in most places the Muslims did not attack or kill any Hindus. Nor was Hindu property destroyed. In fact, they did not even raise slogans against the BJP or Shiv Sena, as they were

protesting primarily against the government.

According to official figures, about 300 Muslims were shot dead by police bullets in Bombay alone following the anti-demolition protests by Muslims on December 7. At this time the violence was police versus Muslims, and in some areas Muslims stoned the police in retaliation against the firing.

Even though many Muslim lives had been lost and they were angry at the police, yet things quietened down after the first round of killings in December till a fresh wave of violence engulfed the entire city of Bombay. This was very different in character from the first one, and was more like a series of planned pogroms led by the Shiv Sena and Sangh parivar in Bombay and assisted by the police.

The January Riots

Around January 2, the Shiv Sena started a city wide campaign, saying: 'Till such time as the Muslims do not stop the use of loudspeakers in mosques for *azaan* and squatting on streets outside the mosques for the Friday *namaaz*, we will also do *maha aartis* on the streets with loudspeakers.' Many people in Bombay say: 'When that happened, we knew they were preparing for a big riot.'

The issue of *namaaz* on the streets, which has been seen as an instance of continued "provocation" by the Muslims, has two dimensions. It is not as if every street in Bombay is blocked all of Friday by Muslims for their *namaaz*, as is often made out to be. Nor is it a deliberate act of the Muslims to annoy the Hindus. The *namaaz* spills out on the streets because most mosques, especially in crowded areas like Bhendi Bazar, are very small and cannot hold all those who come for *namaaz*, causing a spillover on to the streets. In recent years the growing divide between Hindus and Muslims and the consequent siege mentality has led

to an increasing religious fervour among the Muslims. Thus, many more turn up for the Friday *namaaz* than was the case some years ago. Hence, a larger spillover on the streets in recent years, causing inconvenience to fellow citizens. However, the *namaaz* is no more than a 15-minute affair and the Muslims do nothing other than offer prayers at these gatherings. There have been no instances of Muslims abusing Hindus during the *namaaz*. But the *maha aartis* started by the Shiv Sena are a different fare altogether. Firstly, its purpose is not religious at all. The *maha aarti* is more like a political meeting in which local Shiv Sena leaders give provocative speeches with slogans like: "Send these *landias* (a pejorative term for a circumcised male) to Pakistan". The idea is to mobilise anti-Muslim sentiment and have an abuse hurling session against the Muslims.

The Shiv Sainiks arbitrarily decided which area was to have *maha aartis* on which particular day of the week without any reference to religious significance whatsoever. Everywhere it would be a two-hour long affair. In the months of January and February it was common for Shiv Sainiks and their Hindu supporters to pelt stones at Muslim homes and shops as they dispersed after the supposed *aartis*. In some instances, there were full fledged attacks on the Muslims including stabbings. The *maha aartis* started in south Bombay, spread to central Bombay and then moved towards the suburbs. Every single day of the week, Shiv Sainiks would have their *maha aarti* in this or that area, even during curfew times. In non-curfew areas, traffic would be diverted with full cooperation of the police for the long duration of the *aarti*.

After the start of the *maha aartis* in the first week of January, a spurt of stabbing incidents were reported from different parts of the cities in which

both Hindus and Muslims died. This was a hidden riot on a relatively small scale with both Hindus and Muslims indulging in stray murders of the other community. Suddenly a well organised wave of anti-Muslim violence swept virtually every locality of Bombay city. The government releases as well as press reports made it out that it was triggered off by three incidents attributed to the Muslims. These were:

- An alleged attack on a roadside Hindu temple near the Muslim majority area of Behrampada in Bandra East, causing damage to the Ganesh idol during the night of January 6.

- The burning down of a *chawl* inhabited by four-five Hindu families in a Muslim dominated area of Jogeshwari, leading to the death of some Hindus on January 6.

- Stabbing of two Hindu porters working at the Bombay docks on January 7.

When these incidents first occurred, the mass media—both private and government-owned, including the secular "liberal" press, projected them as provocative acts by the Muslims and presented the ensuing violence as a natural reaction. The entire Bombay press, especially Marathi papers, went hysterical in their coverage of these three incidents, making the work of the Shiv Sena, Sangh parivar and their allies only too easy.

However, a few days later some sections of the liberal press themselves came up with an expose that the Jogeshwari incident was not exactly a communal attack by Muslims and that it had other dimensions. A Hindu builder called Shetty had purchased that property and was interested in getting the tenant families of that *chawl* evacuated. They happened to be Hindus surrounded mostly by Muslim families. Shetty is supposed to have offered *supari* (in Bombay parlance it means money offered to criminals for

getting illegal work done) to some miscreants and got the *chawl* burnt down.

There were no eyewitnesses to say who had set fire to the *chawl* because it had happened at night. Yet even before the police carried out a proper investigation, they supplied the story to the press that some Muslims had burnt the *chawl*. Since this was a Muslim majority area, this story was assumed to be authentic. Initially, all newspapers carried the police version as a prominent front page story, thus creating the impression that the Muslims were responsible for instigating the wave of violence that swept Bombay.

The story told by Muslims and confirmed by some Hindus of Jogeshwari is as follows: On the night of January 7 (*jumma* day), in a nearby area a young Muslim boy was shot dead by the police. He had gone to enquire after his aunt after news of riots in that area. While returning home, he was killed by a police bullet. People came running from that neighbourhood into the Muslim majority area of Jogeshwari, shouting, "Irfan has been shot dead." Lots of Muslims from Jogeshwari ran in panic to find out what happened. This was after 11.30 p.m. In the meantime this *chawl* was set on fire. Children from Jogeshwari went screaming to inform their parents about it. Given how closely built these houses are, there was great panic because it would not take long for the entire settlement to be engulfed by fire. So the neighbouring Muslim families ran back and put out the fire and rescued some of those trapped inside. But seven people (some reports say, four) got burnt to death. They were all in one room and someone had bolted the door from outside. The police arrived after the fire had been extinguished by the local people. Only one room out of six was burnt down completely, while one was partially damaged. Others were left largely untouched.

But all the surviving families abandoned the *chawl* and fled the area.

This incident was used to justify large scale violence against Muslims all over Bombay in which hundreds or maybe a few thousand were brutally killed, including little children and women, thousands rendered homeless and destitute. According to government figures, about 600 people were killed in the January round of violence. But independent witnesses say the number could be anything between 2,000-4,000. Muslim homes and shops all over the city were systematically looted and burnt. Many women were gang-raped and many brutally done to death later. The accompanying stories describe the horror of the manner in which Muslims were systematically targeted.

In the hysteria whipped up by newspapers, and Shiv Sena-Sangh parivar propaganda, following the Jogeshwari incident, hardly any newspaper thought it worthwhile to notice or bring to the attention of its readers (not even those that established the connection with a Hindu builder having paid some *goondas* to get this job done) that this was a solitary instance of violence on a Hindu family in that neighbourhood

and that most Hindus continued to live in that area as well as run their shops. I met half a dozen Hindu families living right near that *chawl* who testified that they were safe and had not faced any threats to leave. I also saw a number of Hindu owned shops continue to carry on with their business. This is in sharp contrast to how Muslims were treated in predominantly Hindu areas—literally beaten and torched out of their homes. In January and February when I visited Bombay twice, only a microscopic number of Muslims had been able to continue staying in their own homes. Even well known film stars and artists like M.F. Husain were forced to leave their homes.

Parvati Shankar Dhanavade, who stays near the burnt *chawl* and has lived in that area for about 55 years, said: "Barring a couple of Hindu families which left this area following riots in the city, all Hindu families continue to stay here, including our own *mohalla* where there are six-seven Hindu families. When the riots were going on in the city, our children would go and sleep in our Muslim neighbours' house and Hindus and Muslims together would keep all night vigil." Another old woman who lives alone, said: "We were very afraid that



The havoc caused in a poor slum by bomb blasts

riots would spread out to the Jogeshwari area. I used to spend nights in the house of our Muslim neighbours. We are somehow able to pull through the day. But *raat nahi beet paati*. We keep awake all night because the police always comes in at night and drags out and arrests young Muslims boys. So we are petrified at night.”

I asked her why was she, a Hindu, petrified of police arrests? Have they arrested any Hindus? She said: “So what if Hindus are not being arrested? They are our neighbours after all. There is no man in my house. So I feel especially afraid and also feel very bad when Muslims are arrested. We keep awake till about 4 a.m. and then I come back to my house and go for work to clean utensils and wash clothes in people’s homes in Prabhavati. They recently arrested a Muslim woman of my neighbourhood in the middle of the night simply because she lives near the burnt *chawl*. Her husband is a very fine man (*seedha aadmi hai*). He never gets involved in quarrels. She is the mother of five small kids and her arrest is really unfair (*najaiz*).”

This sentiment was echoed by several other Hindus. In a few muslim majority areas like Nagpada, Hindus were attacked. But these were stray incidents. By and large, muslims did not try to drive Hindus out of their neighbourhood. The responsible among community leaders of the Muslims probably realised that violence against them would be worse if they drove out Hindus from their areas. In Muslim-dominated areas, Hindus and Muslims seemed to intermix freely. Muslims would insist I go and see for myself and talk in private to Hindu families to verify that Hindus were indeed safe in their neighbourhoods. But in Hindu-dominated areas, there were usually no Muslims left and the Hindus, instead of feeling regret about the hounding out of Muslims, mostly had

vicious things to say against them. Most of them were determined not to allow Muslims back into their neighbourhood.

The Muslim families of Jogeshwari say: “If a crime has been committed, we are not opposed to the police doing a thorough investigation and arresting the real culprits and punishing them whether they are Hindu or Muslim. No one who is *shahrparast* and *sakunparast* (has a sense of citizenship and desire for peace) will want that the guilty should remain unpunished because a criminal or terrorist has no respect for human life and will not care for the well being of his own community either. But the police has no business to arrest innocent people and terrorise all Muslims by supporting killings of Muslims. They always come in the dead of night, beat up and drag people out of their homes and have arrested innocent people, including heart patients and young boys whose exams are very close. If Muslims of Jogeshwari wanted to burn Hindu homes, why did we not burn the hundreds of those homes of Hindus

which would catch fire far more easily than that one *chawl*? That house was made of bricks and, therefore, far more difficult to bum. Even at midnight you can see Hindus of our area stroll around without fear. We continued to inter-mix with each other and also helped each other during this time of crisis.”



When the state machinery itself gets into the act of systematic misinformation, it is difficult even for the supposedly secular press to stay non-partisan and ferret out the truth. Even in normal times, the press is used to accepting government and police information handouts as news and publishes them mostly without any attempt at confirming and evaluating facts independently. During abnormal times, as in widespread riot situations, newspapers are so overwhelmed by having to keep track of so many fronts, that even those few papers which believe in doing some amount of independent investigations, end up carrying a lot of information and biased reports being provided routinely and promptly by the police



A burnt and broken mosque at Wadala

authorities who are either hand in glove with rioters or willing to turn a blind eye to their crimes.

One key feature of the misinformation campaign was to project Muslim-dominated areas as mini-Pakistans, as dens of Muslim fundamentalists and anti-national forces. It was made out as if these areas had regular factories for manufacturing arms where huge quantities of sophisticated weapons from other Muslim countries, notably Pakistan, had been smuggled in for the purpose of destabilising India.

Throughout this period, the police was routinely raiding Muslim bastis and commercial establishments but they never claimed to have recovered anything other than crude weapons and petrol bombs. During the entire December and January violence, there was only one instance where Muslims used an AK 47 gun.

My first exposure to the full implications of this misinformation campaign came at the time of the Meerut-Malliana anti-Muslim riots of 1987 when I had gone as part of a team of **Manushi** women volunteers to Meerut to put together a report of what had happened. We were repeatedly warned by both the jawans

of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) and the Hindu residents of Meerut not to enter Muslim majority areas such as Hashimpura or Gadda, saying that no Hindu ever came out alive from there. We were told in graphic detail how some women journalists who had some days ago been adventurous enough to venture in, were gangraped and cut up into pieces.

Having had the sinister experience of anti-Sikh propaganda during and after the riots of 1984, we did not heed their advice in Meerut. Far from Muslims attacking us when we went to Hashimpura or Islampur, we were deeply moved to see the extent of openness and the warmth of their welcome because we came to listen to their version as well. In sharp contrast to this, Hindus were aggressively hostile to us if they got to know we had visited, or talked to Muslim families. The motive behind this rumour campaign was obvious: to completely cut off all communication channels between Hindus and Muslims — by drawing out Muslims from Hindu majority areas and by making Hindus fear going anywhere near a Muslim majority area or where they are in large

clusters.

Thus they succeed in making large sections of the press avoid talking to Muslims, thereby making their own anti-Muslim propaganda appear as facts. This would be a common experience of anyone trying to do an impartial investigation into any of the recent anti-Muslim riots. We give below a report prepared by Flavia and others of *Mashwara*, a legal aid centre in Bombay, which documents how this propaganda worked to isolate residents of Behrampada in Bombay — another one of those alleged "mini-Pakistans", and the process through which the victim community came to be projected as the criminal aggressors. Flavia's account is followed by eyewitness accounts by some of the Hindu residents of Bandra East whom I interviewed.

I interviewed several families in, Behrampada and managed to talk to a few Hindu families as well in buildings of Bandra East bordering Behrampada. It was pathetic to see how frightened and paranoid the Hindus had become even though none of their homes had been damaged. The families living in those buildings had not suffered any loss

... *Contd. on page 24*

Behrampada

A Besieged Basti

By

Flavia Agnes

During historical moments, insignificant names are suddenly thrown up and become household words. In the recent riots which dealt a severe blow to the cosmopolitan image of Bombay, one of the names which shot into prominence was that of Behrampada, a hitherto unknown and insignificant Muslim basti on the edge of Bandra station. The basti received adverse publicity as the den of Muslim criminals and Behrampada became a name to be feared and shunned.

Were the communal riots which followed the demolition of the Babri Masjid solely responsible for this or were there other factors operating behind the veil of communal hostility? This article places the insignificant basti within the context of economic developments and political manoeuvring in the area and tries to explore the various factors which might have contributed to Behrampada acquiring such notoriety during the recent riots.

The December Riots

On the morning of December 7, 1992, there was police firing at the entrance of Ahmed Zakaria Nagar on

Anand Kanekar Marg (AK Marg). Pandey, an old Hindu resident of Behrampada who runs a cold drink stall at the gate of Ahmed Zakaria

Nagar, gave a first hand account of the initial attack.

A mob of Shiv Sainiks approached Behrampada with stones, sticks and

bottles at around 9 a.m. He was alarmed and immediately pulled his shutters down. But the mob came and banged on the shop. Pandey was scared and asked them to go away. They replied that they would break his shop if he did not provide them with empty bottles. So Pandey opened the shutter and gave them a crate of soda water bottles. There were a few policemen present but they did not control this mob.

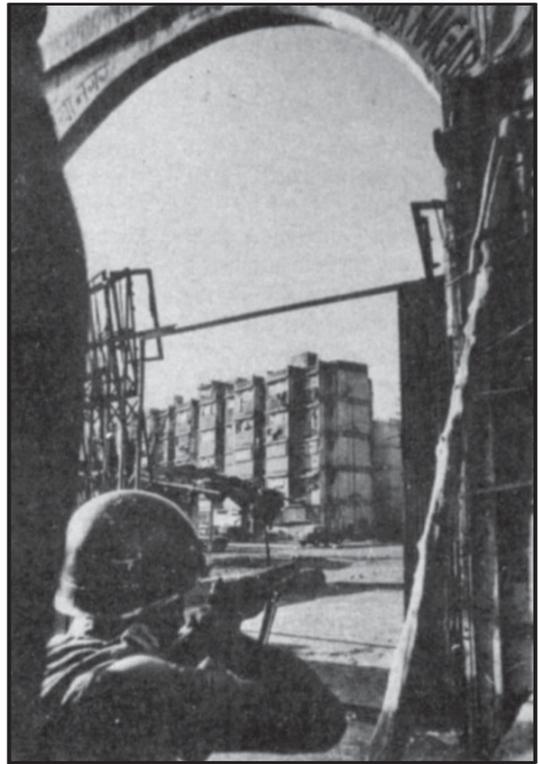
Youngsters from Behrampada also came out on the road and tried to repel the attack by resorting to stone throwing. The Behrampada people claim that the police accompanied the Shiv Sena mob which came to attack the basti. When there was stone throwing on both sides, the police signalled to the Shiv Sena mob to retreat and opened fire on the Muslim boys. One person died on the spot and another died 15 days later.

Nargis Sayyed, another eyewitness, states as follows: "There was a lot of tension in the area. I went out on the road and I found a group of boys from Behrampada standing on the road. A few had sticks in their hands. I saw police officers, among whom was Inspector Lade. Since I know him personally, I crossed the crowd and went ahead and started speaking to him. He told me, 'Nargis, control this mob.' I said, 'Yes sir, give

me a minute,' and started pushing the boys behind. There were many police officers and beyond them a group of Shiv Sainiks with bottles, stones and lathis. While I was trying to push the boys back, one elderly Muslim who had a stick in his hand tried to push me and go ahead. While I was controlling him, a bullet went past me and hit Dilshad. He fell down before my eyes. With this the Muslim boys ran into the basti."

The police did not fire teargas shells or resort to lathi charge nor did they warn the crowd before firing. Immediately, Dilshad was carried away in a police van. He was operated upon and the bullet in his brain was removed on the night of December 7. But he died in the intensive care unit of the hospital 15 days later.

The first phase of firing took place between 9 and 10.30 a.m. at various places along AK Marg on the edge of Behrampada. Many innocent persons who were going about their routine morning chores were injured and there was total panic. After the firing, the police entered their homes, dragged people out, damaged their property and arrested many persons. The basti was terror stricken. With the fear of arrest, most injured persons were hiding in their homes and were not treated at a

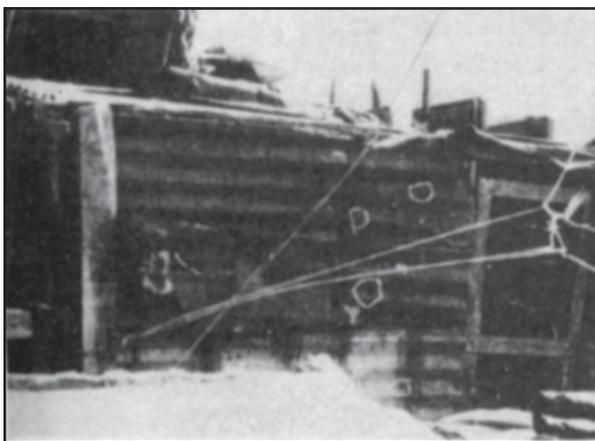


Police open fire at Behrampada

public hospital. When the government declared compensation for injured persons, treatment in a public hospital was made a prerequisite for eligibility. So, many genuine cases could not avail of the compensation under this scheme.

On December 8, the police again entered the basti from the north-eastern end of Behrampada near the LIG and MIG buildings and fired on the basti. One of the casualties was a 50-year-old woman who was fired on at close range. When the police entered the basti and started firing, the women had come out with raised hands to plead with the police to stop firing. Salma Begam, 64, who runs a *zari* business close to the gutter where the firing took place, is an eyewitness to the incident. She gave the following statement about the incident:

"When I heard continuous firing, I came out along with a group of women. We thought that if we pleaded with the police they would stop firing.



Bullet marks made by police firing on the house walls of Behrampada

Strategic Importance of Behrampada

Bandra East is divided under the jurisdiction of two police stations — Nirmal Nagar and Kherwadi. The area under Nirmal Nagar is a long and narrow strip between Bandra, Khar and Santacruz stations on one side and the Western Express highway on the other. This is predominantly a slum area, starting with Behrampada at Bandra and extending over Navpada, Jai Hind Nagar, Subhash Nagar, Shantilal Compound and so on, and ending with Golibar at the Santacruz end. Some land was developed by the Maharashtra Housing Board (MHB) for low income housing schemes during the 70s. There is also a small cluster of six-storey buildings called the New Middle Income Group (New MIG) colony which houses the middle class.

During the '80s there was further development and some of the marshland around Bandra was developed for government complexes. Offices of Maharashtra State Electricity Board (MSEB), Oil & Natural Gas Commission (ONGC), Indian Oil and the magistrate's court came up in this area. Recently a train terminal has been constructed for outstation trains at Bandra East.

The road which connects the station to the highway is called Anant Kanekar Marg (AK Marg), which is the main access road from the station to the government offices and the housing complexes.

The jurisdiction of Kherwadi police station is across the highway. This is a more affluent middle class residential area and the marshland was developed by the housing board for low, middle and upper income groups. The Maharashtrian intelligentsia—artistes, writers, journalists and architects — live in the high income housing complexes which are known

as Kala Nagar,

Sahitya Sahavas, Patrakar Nagar, and so on. There are a few bastis on the land which have not yet been developed. One of them is a predominantly Muslim basti called Bharatnagar.

Beyond the high income residential colonies, a new government complex has recently been developed. Many government offices were shifted from south Bombay to this complex during the last three years. One of the newly constructed buildings which houses India's latest technology computer is called the 'Intelligent Building'. This has the claim of being an architectural wonder. There are plans to shift the diamond market and the wholesale cloth market to this area shortly.

When all the proposed schemes are completed, the area will become the midtown commercial centre and ease the pressure on south Bombay, the present commercial centre of the city.

Except for pockets such as Behrampada, Navpada and Bharatnagar, the residential areas are predominantly Hindu with a strong Shiv Sena influence. Bal Thackeray lives in Kala Nagar, one of the upper middle class complexes. The local Shiv Sena MLA, Madhukar Sarpotdar, who was arrested for inciting communal passions during the 1984 riots, wields a strong influence among the Maharashtrian youth. The trade unions of the government offices are also dominated by the Shiv Sena.

The Muslim basti of Behrampada has a Congress(I) Corporator. The surrounding areas have women corporators from the Congress (I) and Republican Party (RPI). The MP for the area is Sunil Dutt, also from the

Congress (I).

Behrampada, which starts just after the Mahim creek, is a sprawling basti spread over 10 acres of land, parallel to the railway tracks between

Bandra and Khar stations. At the south end of the basti is AK Marg, at the north end, the four-storey LIG build-ings, and on the east side is the six-storey New MIG complex.

Behrampada was inhabited during the '50s and '60s, prior to the developments in Bandra East. The older residents of Behrampada vividly describe the process by which the marshland was converted into solid ground. Jamiat bi, a 70-year-old woman who is one of the early settlers, says that there were only four huts in the early '50s when she came here to stay. One belonged to a Christian, another to a Hindu and the remaining two to Muslims. They filled up the marshy land with their own hands, bringing mud from far away places. As more huts mushroomed, reclaiming the land became a collective effort. Slowly through their efforts the worm-infested, stinking, slimy marshland was turned into habitable, solid ground.

There was neither electricity nor water taps nearby, nor a decent approach road. So when the first water tap came into the basti during one of the election campaigns, the significant moment is recorded for posterity by naming the street 'Nullwali Gulli'.

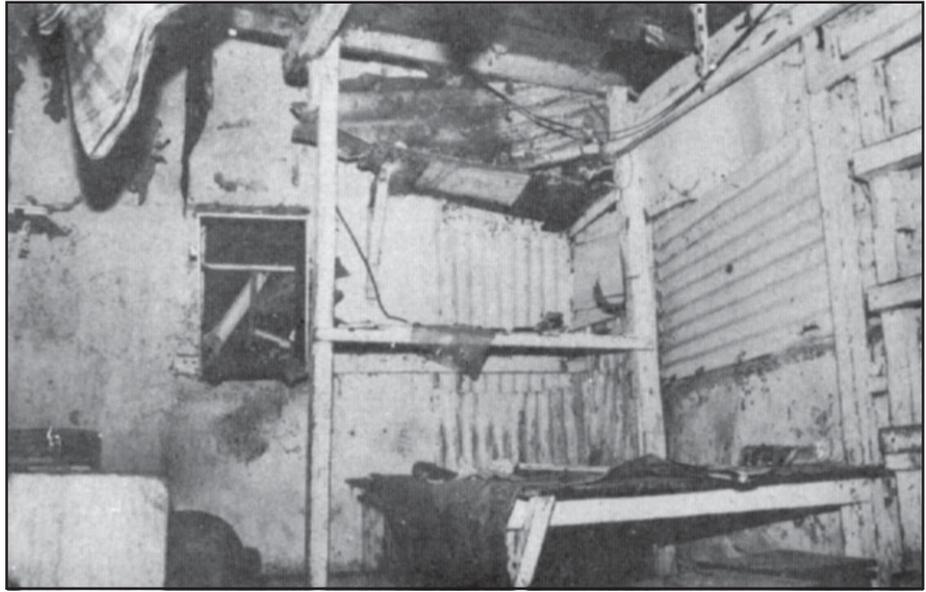
As the ground turned solid, the temporary structures were converted into *pucca* houses of brick and mud. Shops and establishments grew in the area. Several Muslim artisans came and started their traditional crafts of block printing, *zari* and embroidery

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And we were certain that the police would not fire at a group of elderly women. Neelam Banu was standing next to me. She raised her hands and requested the police to stop firing. Suddenly two policemen came on a motorbike. A police inspector was driving and another constable was sitting at the back. They came to the gate of Behrampada, fired three-four rounds and left. I ducked to save myself. One bullet fell on the ground in front of me and the rest whizzed past me. I was dazed and for a minute I closed my eyes. When I opened my eyes, I could not see Neelam next to me. Frantically I started calling out to her. Suddenly I saw a corner of her *dupatta* floating in the gutter. I put my hand in the gutter and caught hold of her hand.”

“I called two young boys and pulled her out from the gutter. Her face was full of blood. Someone brought water and I washed her face. I could see a deep bullet injury on the right side of the forehead. She was still breathing. But within minutes she died. We placed her body on a *chaddar*. I, along with the other women, went to the police van and informed them that a woman had died. The police said that they would not come inside Behrampada, but we must hand over her body to them immediately and peacefully, without causing any commotion. We did not call the young boys to help us because of the fear that the police might arrest them. Four of us women — three Muslim and one Hindu — carried the body to the police van at the gate. Not a single policeman came and helped us to carry the body.”

When riots broke out in the city on December 7, the Bombay police was totally unprepared to meet the



Houses destroyed by a petrol bomb in Behrampada

situation. They had not made any preparations to meet the eventuality of the demolition of Babri Masjid at Ayodhya. Their own inadequacy and lack of personnel resulted in the police using the minimum ammunition to control the rioting mobs of Muslim youth. So in most cases they decided to strike terror by shooting straight at the rioters rather than waste the ammunition by firing in the air. Even mild protests of stone throwing were countered by the police by opening fire, resulting in heavy casualties within the Muslim community.

On the night of December 10, the police entered the basti and started a combing operation. Newspapers reported that the police had recovered knives, choppers, chemicals, crude guns and petrol bombs from Behrampada. But there was no mention of such combing operations either at the Shiv Sena branch offices or the terraces of the LIG or MIG buildings from where most of the attacks on the basti were organised. Behrampada is a closed basti, walled and hemmed in from every side. So it was possible to seal it and do a careful combing operation. But the attackers from LIG colony had enough avenues

for running away or places to hide their ammunition. One Shiv Sena supporter confided: “To be on the safe side we never keep the weapons in our homes. We leave them at the *shakha* office.”

Incidents in Kherwadi Across the highway, in the Muslim basti of Bharatnagar, 12 Muslim boys died in police firing on December 7 and 8. According to police records, one was 24 years old, another was 22 years and the rest were less than 21 years. After extensive interviews, the following story could be reconstructed. At around 9 a.m. on December 7, the Muslim boys from Bharatnagar burnt a bus and a scooter. They also forced the shopkeepers to close down their shops. The mob stoned the police force and according to police reports 20 policemen were injured in stonethrowing. Immediately, the police opened fire and two people died and 24 persons were injured. By then the elders of the community, both men and women, gathered and prevented further damage. They prevailed upon the young boys that at any cost peace must be maintained in Bharatnagar.

The next day, December 8, again the police opened fire and 10 persons

work, readymade garments, costume jewellery and carpentry. Today the area has electricity, water taps, common latrines, a ration shop and telephone connections.

So in a span of 40 years, the marshland slum was elevated to the status of a proper working class basti -with a sprinkling of the lower middle class. But the developments were unplanned, effected through local efforts. The basti grew around open gutters, narrow alleys with naked electric wires hanging precariously overhead. Today the conveniently located basti is so densely inhabited that sunlight hardly filters in. Behrampada has a population of around 50,000 out of which about 12,000 are Hindus. There is also a significant number of Christian families in the basti.

During each election time promises were made to renovate Behrampada under the slum improvement scheme and make it into a low income housing complex. Such

developments had taken place in Khernagar, the basti adjacent to Behrampada. When Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister, visited the area, she laid a foundation stone for the development scheme. Three buildings were constructed under this scheme and were named Ahmed Zakaria Nagar during the '80s, but since then there has been no progress whatsoever. The residents bitterly state that all the promises have remained on paper, to be renewed during each election campaign to capture the basti votes. In spite of the let down by the ruling party, the predominantly Muslim basti has remained a strong Congress supported base.

So while Behrampada was neglected, the residents witnessed the surrounding areas growing into well-planned residential and commercial complexes through government efforts. Due to these developments in the area, Behrampada has become strategically located prime land and

there is a lot of pressure to evacuate the basti. The railways have claimed that part of the land belongs to them and have planned a development scheme around the newly constructed train terminus. They have served an eviction notice on part of the basti. But the local leaders claim that the land belongs to the collector who has issued ration cards and photo passes to them, legalising their tenements. The disputed issue is pending before the Supreme Court. But the eviction notice served on a section of the residents has been used extensively in the campaign against Behrampada.

In spite of the Muslim majority, there has been no communal violence within Behrampada. The residents are united to fight the impending eviction which is an immediate issue of survival for them. Hence, contrary to the myths and the negative campaign, much of the violence in the area has not been in Behrampada but in the surrounding areas. □



Photo: Soumitra Ghosh, Courtesy: Observer

The police targeted the muslims even through they were the victims of mob violence

died and 12 were injured. There are two versions of the events of that day. According to Muslims from Bharatnagar, a huge mob of Shiv Sainiks led by Madhukar Sarpotdar, the local MLA and Ashok Shinde, the *shakha pramukh*, entered the basti. They were accompanied by police officers from Kherwadi police station. At their instance the police opened fire. The firing continued at regular intervals between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m..

According to the police, they opened fire when a Muslim mob came to attack them. But when

asked to provide us with details of police injury due to the mob attack on December 8, they could not furnish us any particulars. So on record it could not be established that the police opened fire when they were attacked.

Sheikh Mohammed, a resident of Bharatnagar who witnessed the incident, states: "There was terror and panic everywhere. We were hiding in our homes. When the firing would stop we would come out and get the injured inside the homes. We could not take them to the hospital because we were scared that as we ventured out we would be fired at. So we started removing the bullets ourselves. I have five-six such bullets with me."

The police fired indiscriminately and even women cooking in their own homes received bullet injuries. Bismillah Khan, a 50-year-old social worker from the community, said that finally around 500 women came out and pleaded with the police to stop firing. According to her, the women were fully prepared to risk their lives in order to save the massacre of



Curfew-bound Behrampada

young boys. "Already 12 dead bodies lay before us. We could not take it any more."

The same day there was large scale looting and arson which resulted in huge loss of Muslim property in the middle class residential complexes. In the shopping complex behind Kala Mandir bus depot, every single Muslim shop was burnt. None of the shops which were burnt had obviously Muslim names. The names

were inconspicuous: Friends Hair Dressing Saloon, King's Tailor, Diamond Xerox Centre, Rajdhani Bakery and so on. So it is quite apparent that the burning was the handiwork of the local middle class youth who knew who owned which shop.

The flames from the Rajdhani Bakery could be seen far and wide for several hours. There was no burning of Hindu property by Muslims. Even while burning huge shops, great care was taken not to destroy the adjacent Hindu shops. According to eyewitnesses, the rampage went on for four hours.

There was no police intervention to save the Muslim property although the Kherwadi police station is just 100 yards away from the shopping complex. Surprisingly, while 10 boys had been killed in police firing in Bharatnagar, at least on record, there was not a single Hindu or police casualty that day. In the shopping complex where property worth lakhs was destroyed, the police did not even attempt a lathi charge to disperse the

Police Statistics (December)

Table 1: Deaths due to police firing

Date of Firing	Nirmal Nagar	Kherwadi
7.12.93	5	2
8.12.93	3	10
9.12.93	2	
Total	10	12

Table 2: Religionwise break-up of deaths due to police firing:

Muslims	21
Hindus	1
Total	22

rioters on the rampage. They just stood by and watched. When an eyewitness, a Hindu, tried to ask a policeman to do something, the policeman replied, "Why are you bothered? No Hindu property will be destroyed. Don't worry." The fire brigade arrived after the looting, burning and arson was over.

The Mandir Incident

As per press reports, the initial provocation for the riots came from the Muslims on December 7. They are supposed to have attacked a roadside shrine on AK Marg opposite the magistrate's court, about 100 yards away from Behrampada. The mandir incident is shrouded in mystery.

A friend and I passed through AK Marg on December 7, between 10.30 a.m. and 12 noon, oblivious of the fact that riots had broken out in the city. We noticed that the window panes of some of the buses parked at the Bandra station were broken. AK Marg was strewn with glass pieces. There were also patches of blood on the road. A group of Muslim women had gathered near the Ahmed Zakaria Nagar gate and we could hear voices crying: "*Mere ladke ko maar diya.*" (They have killed my son). We also noticed the curious glances of people near the shrine opposite the magistrate's court. There was tension in the area. But there was no apparent sign of attack as the exterior of the shrine was intact and there were no glass pieces near the shrine.

Later, through news broadcasts we heard that a mandir in Bandra East had been attacked. We did not connect the news reports with the road side shrine opposite the court. But subsequently when we visited the area after the riots had cooled down, we realised that the news reports had referred to the same structure which



The mutilated Ganesh idol

we had minutely observed on the morning of December 7. This made us probe deeper into the mandir incident.

Through subsequent enquiries we found out that the mandir had not been attacked by a mob, but that some miscreant had beheaded the statue of Lord Ganesh during the night of December 6. There are no eyewitnesses to this incident and it is only inferred that Muslims attacked the shrine. This was used as an excuse by the Shiv Sena mob to attack Behrampada on the morning of December 7. The identity of the miscreant is not known. But even assuming that it was a Muslim, the stealthy act of an individual, at the dead of night, cannot be termed an attack by one community on another as it was made out in news reports.

The site of police firing, which is 100 yards away from the mandir and just outside Behrampada, indicates that when the police opened fire, the residents of Behrampada were outside their own basti. So this corroborates the version of the Behrampada residents that the police opened fire when they were in the vicinity of their own basti, while defending an attack by the approaching mob.

The subsequent events and the media campaign against Behrampada raises the question whether the alleged attack on the mandir was a deliberate move by vested interests to incite communal violence and discredit Behrampada.

The mandir itself has a history and is linked to the developments in the area. According to local residents, the mandir was initially a Sai Baba shrine. But after the magistrate's court was shifted to the area three years ago, several *Vivaha Karyalayas* (marriage offices) sprung up on the pavement opposite the court adjacent to the Sai Baba shrine where quick marriages by affidavits were performed by unscrupulous dealers for couples in a hurry. An idol of Lord Ganesh was installed next to the Sai Baba idol to invoke the blessings of Lord Ganesh on the newly wedded couples and to give the marriage an aura of a sacrament and legitimacy as in a proper Hindu marriage. Soon it seemed more lucrative to have a Ganesh mandir than a Sai Baba shrine. So Sai Baba was relegated to the background and Lord Ganesh took over the shrine. This was a disputed issue between the members of the managing committee of the shrine. But the riots and the controversy over the beheading of the statue brought an end to the dispute, as the temple was taken over by the Shiv Sena supporters to spearhead the campaign against Behrampada.

After December Riots

The alleged attack on the mandir received wide publicity. Notices were put up outside *shakha* offices and the Shiv Sena organised a drive in the city to rebuild the allegedly damaged mandir.

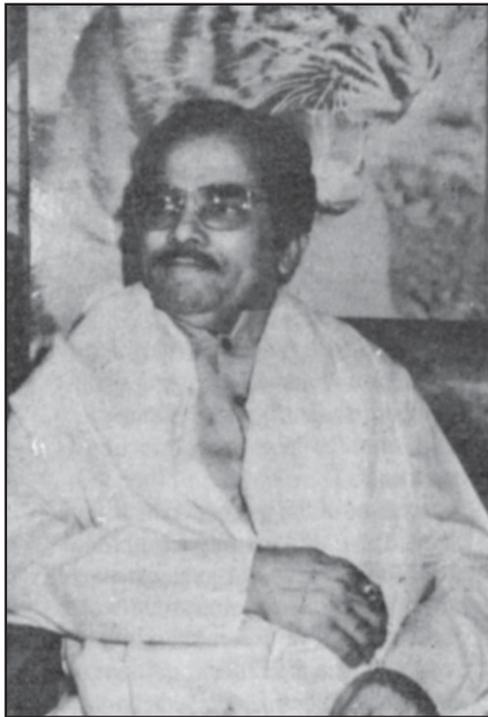
Before relief work could be started in the area, the renovation was well

under way. In the process, the mandir was converted into a conspicuous and imposing structure, almost double its original size. Some Muslim leaders in the area volunteered to donate the Ganesh statue in order to ease communal tensions and ensure peace and harmony in the area. They also suggested that the installation of the statue should be a community action in which both Hindus and Muslims should participate.

This offer was rejected by the Shiv Sena leaders. On December 27, a huge procession was taken out to install the new statue. Provocative and abusive slogans against Behrampada were raised by the processionists. Some of the slogans were: *'Behrampada me rehna hai to Ram ka naam kehna hoga.'* (If you want to stay in Behrampada you will have to say the name of Ram) and *"Landya log Pakistan jao"* (the circumcised should go to Pakistan).

The procession was taken out when the city was still in the grip of communal tension and on this ground permission for peace marches had been denied to secular groups. According to senior police officials, even when Section 144 CrPC (ban against assembly of more than five persons) is in force, death, marriage and religious processions cannot be banned. A fresh attack was averted through the intervention of some peace loving citizens who prevailed upon the police to have strict *bandobast* to protect the Behrampada basti and themselves stood by to monitor the security arrangements.

The renovated mandir was lit up with coloured lights and loud-speakers blared throughout the day, broadcasting *aarti* schedules, *bhajans*, film songs and provocative slogans and abuses. The speakers were placed near the Behrampada

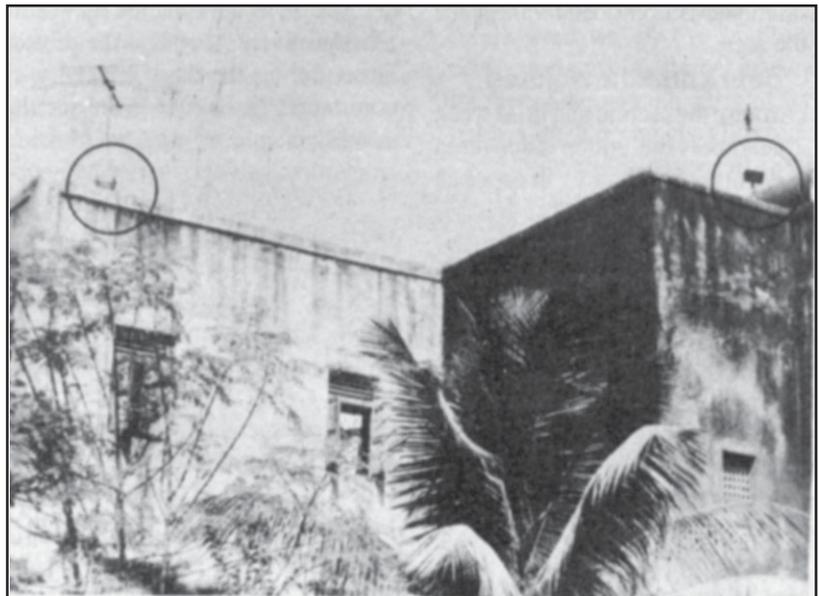


Madhukar Sarpotdar, "hero and saviour" of the Hindu middle class

entrance. *Maha aarti* began to be performed twice a day, once in the afternoon which was organised by the Shiv Sena dominated unions of ONGC, MSEB and Indian Oil during their lunch break, and once in the

evening. Shiv Sena MLA, Madhukar Sarpotdar, would attend these *aartis* and make abusive speeches against Behrampada residents during the *aartis*. Right from December 8, the area was under dusk to dawn curfew which would start at 7 p.m. But according to Behrampada residents, strict curfew was enforced only for them while the residents of LIG section could move about freely in their area during curfew hours. Minor incidents of stone throwing kept occurring

at the edge of LIG building No 30. According to the residents of LIG colony, the first provocation for the attack came from Behrampada and they only retaliated. But facts show otherwise. Shiv Sainiks had installed floodlights on the terrace of building No 30, making the basti an easy target. Behrampada residents state that each night the police and the Shiv Sainiks assembled on the terrace of building No 30 and hurled petrol bombs and stones on the basti, especially during the curfew hours. But there were no casualties



Focus lights on the terrace of building No. 30

from these attacks.

An important incident which occurred around this time was the murder of a Muslim peace committee member by people of his own community. Gulab Sheikh, a 70-year-old-man, was killed after he had accompanied Sarpotdar on a day-long “peace march” in the Bandra area. The incident did not take place in Behrampada but in a nearby basti, Navpada, where Sheikh lived. A few days later, the culprit was shot dead by the police. According to Behrampada residents, this incident was due to personal rivalry. But according to Sarpotdar, this incident is an indication that the Behrampada people do not want peace in the area.

Behrampada Isolated

Around the second and third week of December, the police discovered five decomposed bodies in an open *nalla* (marshy stream) just outside the Bandra station on AK Marg and three bodies in the safety tank of a public latrine at the edge of Behrampada on AK Marg. One of the bodies was identified as that of a Muslim police constable from Nasik who was in Bombay on official duty. The others were of Hindus. No one knows when and where these people were killed.

The community leaders from Behrampada denied that the basti residents could have done such a thing as the area was under curfew and there was strict police and army patrolling on AK Marg right from December 7. They also state that there are enough public latrines within the basti to hide dead bodies and they didn't have to use the latrine on the roadside to do this. But in spite of the denial, the incident caused a lot of embarrassment to community leaders as it could not easily be explained away. The incident also provided the fuel for Shiv Sena to unleash a campaign against Behrampada as a threat to Hindu safety and hence the necessity for evicting its residents.

Some of the rumours which were spread during this campaign through the Marathi press and created panic in the minds of Bombayites were: . Behrampada is a den of criminals, anti-nationals and illegal immigrants from Bangladesh and Pakistan who are a threat to Hindu (read national) safety; that there is a factory which produces arms; that dead bodies are strewn in the bylanes of Behrampada; that any Hindu who dares to pass through the main road—AK Road—will be pulled into the basti and cut into pieces.

Absurd as the rumours may seem retrospectively, they had the desired effect during the days gripped with communal hostility. Even secular minded people as well as Muslims from other localities started believing them to be facts. Overnight ‘Behrampada’ turned into a household word. The basti aroused a lot of curiosity. Groups of people would stand on the railway bridge and point it out to each other. In fact, one began to get scared to utter the name of Behrampada freely in local trains as it would arouse suspicious looks from fellow travellers. The busy and bustling Bandra station wore a deserted look. The residents from the housing complexes across the highway alighted at Santacruz station and travelled back to Bandra through the highway.

The trade unions of ONGC, MSEB and Indian Oil wrote to the home minister to evacuate the basti and widen the road so that the white collar office goers were secure. The other side of AK Marg is a marshland, which has sufficient scope for being developed for the purpose of widening the road. The middle and upper class housing complexes, schools, colleges and hostels of Bandra East signed a memorandum against Behrampada. A door-to-door signature campaign against the basti was carried out in the area, demanding evacuation of the basti. According to

Shiv Sena supporters, minister Babanrao Pachpute attended a meeting organised by them and assured them that the basti would be evacuated.

The campaign had a demoralising effect on the basti. The milkmen would not deliver milk, the gas company would not deliver gas cylinders, the BMC workers would not clean the garbage. The artisans living in Behrampada were idle as they would not get work orders. Employed persons missed work and their names were struck off from the musters. People in the basti would not dare venture out, not even to the banks situated in the LIG colony or to the main vegetable market across. But worst of all, the children could not attend schools situated in the LIG area. Even the school bus taking children to English medium schools west of Bandra station stopped visiting the area. The basti was under a total siege, with the basti people afraid of venturing out, the outside world afraid of venturing in.

Relief and Rehabilitation

Soon after the riots, Nirmala Niketan, College of Social Work, assigned its young students to carry on a survey to assess the damage and facilitate quick implementation of the relief schemes declared by the government. We, at *Mashwara*, coordinated this activity along with other social work agencies in the area. In the process of carrying out the survey, young students, mostly Hindus and Christians belonging to the upper and middle strata of society, entered Behrampada around December 15.

They met many injured people who were hiding in their homes, afraid of approaching the police station to record the injury. Affected people from surrounding areas had also taken shelter in Behrampada. They also noticed that there was no Hindu-Muslim tension in Behrampada and

that there was hardly any damage to any property inside the basti. The survey was conducted precisely at the time when rumours against Behrampada were spreading in the city. This social interaction helped to bring an element of normalcy to the basti.

On December 30, 1992 a meeting was held at the collector's office in Bandra East to discuss the problems of relief work. The meeting was attended by Vijay Sinhe Mohite Patil, who was assigned to monitor the relief work. Muslim leaders from the community, Shabana Azmi and two of us from *Mashwara* were present. The Muslim leaders raised the issue of the procession on December 27 and provocative slogans which were raised during the installation of the new idol. We wanted an explanation from the minister as to why permission for such a provocative procession was given.

At that moment, Madhukar Sarpotdar, who had just walked into the meeting, raised his voice and very threateningly told us not to interfere with local politics. He said that we should content ourselves with relief activity but we had no business to raise questions about the mandir, which was their internal matter. He also said that it was outsiders like us

workers who incited communal violence and that we had no business to enter his area. The tone of the MLA was menacing and in the wake of communal riots, the implications sinister. But in spite of it, the minister just looked on without a comment.

Fresh Riots in January

Before the relief work for the December riots could be completed, fresh riots broke out in the city. On January 6, 1993 when *Mashwara* had

organised a programme to distribute relief to traders whose shops were burnt, tension could already be felt in the air and many people did not turn up because of rumours of stabbing incidents in the area. By then the government had put up posters that people should not spread rumours and cause panic. We tried to prevail upon the local people that the rumours were false and normalcy was returning to the city. But the events of the following days proved them right. Official reports place the blame squarely on the minority community. Three incidents are stated to have triggered off the riots: the stabbing of two Mathadi workers at Masjid Bunder, stabbing of Hindus by Muslims in Nagpada and roasting alive of a Hindu family in Jogeshwari between January 5 and 6. But the Shiv Sena is not really blamed for continuing to whip up communal passions through *maha aartis* and stabbing some Muslims to death during this period.

The riots which broke out in January were far worse than the December riots. A correct estimate of loss of property to business establishments has yet to be ascertained. But the figure runs into crores of rupees. People saw dead bodies strewn on the busy streets of Dadar and Ghatkopar. Seventeen

decomposed bodies were recovered from the Worli gutter. The newspapers reported incidents of gangrapes of Muslim women. In one particular incident in Borivli, two women, a mother and daughter, were raped and the daughter was then set on fire. The Muslim community suffered heavy loss both in terms of life and property. The official death toll is 600. This does not account for several people reported missing. According to the Shiv Sena, the minority community was taught a lesson once and for all.

Bandra East was affected in the second riot also. There were incidents of looting, burning, stabbing and firing in the jurisdiction of Nirmal Nagar police station. Muslim houses were looted in the government quarters, bastis were set on fire in Shantilal compound and huge timber marts were torched. One woman showed us her palm with her fingers chopped off. Several women talked about their rape and molestation.

But those of us monitoring the situation in Behrampada heaved a sigh of relief as not a single incident of violence occurred in or around Behrampada during the days of heavy riots. But the media campaign against Behrampada did not cease.

Passions were whipped up by the mouthpiece of the Shiv Sena, the Marathi daily, *Saamna*, and another popular paper, *Navakal*, and rumours were spread in every area that truck loads of Muslim boys would be attacking the area at night. So even middle class areas organised night vigils to protect themselves.

During this frenzy, Sarpotdar approached the New MIG buildings and requested them to let the police and the Shiv Sena use their terraces so that they could be adequately protected from the onslaught



Tahir, aged 3 years, received a bullet injury on his knees

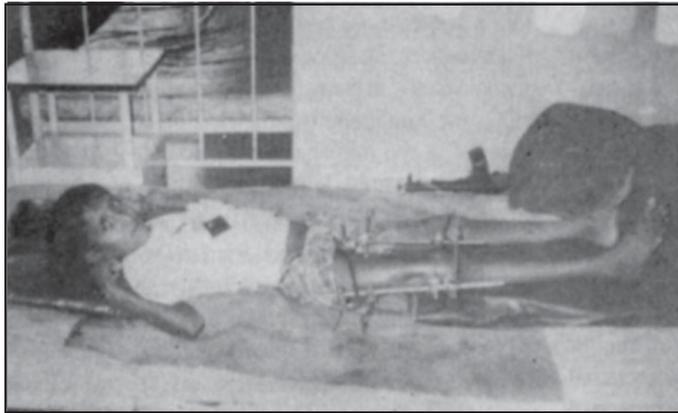
from the Muslim basti. While most buildings declined, a few buildings adjoining Behrampada yielded and opened up their terraces and compounds, which gave an added boost to the attack on the basti.

On January 11, the army arrested Sarpotdar for carrying unauthorised, arms including rifles just outside the New MIG

buildings. He was later released by the police. On January 12, he held a meeting outside Nirmal Nagar police station, which was attended by a huge crowd. In a provocative speech he exhorted the mob that not a single Muslim house should be left intact in the area. According to Muslim residents of Nirmal Nagar, the police stood by and clapped. Following the speech, mobs entered the housing complex, looted and burnt property and stabbed many people.

On January 14, he held a peace meeting at Kherwadi police station compound, which was attended by Ramdas Athavle, minister in charge of Bandra East area. In his speech, Sarpotdar stated that while he was willing to maintain peace, so long as Behrampada had arms there would not be peace in the area. The same night he was arrested again by the army for carrying weapons in his car during curfew hours.

Shiv Sainiks came out in large numbers and protested outside the police station, demanding his immediate release in spite of the curfew in the area. A large number of women supporters came out and lay down on the road, preventing the army from entering the area. Finally, the police released the MLA. Sarpotadar's supporters took



Bablu from Garib Nagar, aged 10 years, injured in police firing

out a victory procession in the night during curfew hours and fire crackers were burst to celebrate the occasion. The next day, on January 15, there were several attacks on the Muslims.

Two gruesome incidents occurred in the vicinity of Kherwadi, just 100 yards away from the police station. In the quiet and serene government complex, near a bus stop at around 2 p.m., a taxi was stopped. The driver was a Muslim and there was one Hindu passenger and two Muslim passengers. The taxi was stoned and the driver and the Hindu passenger were hurt but the driver managed to escape with the Hindu passenger. But the Muslim passengers were dragged out and stoned and after they became unconscious, kerosene was poured on them, and they were set ablaze. One person died on the spot and the other

two died subsequently. There are many eyewitnesses to this incident. The incident occurred on a road parallel to the highway. Between the highway and the road where the burning occurred is the government complex of gazetted officers. And yet the incident could go on without any intervention.

Around the same time, 50 yards away, buses going to Bharatnagar were being stoned by a mob at the bus stop. So two buses did not stop here and proceeded straightaway. But the third bus stopped. Six Muslim passengers were dragged out and stoned. Three managed to escape, two who were injured ran for their lives and fell down quite a distance away. But one person who was hurt on the head fell down and fainted. As he lay unconscious, the mob poured kerosene and torched him.

While the man was burning, the women activists of Shiv Sena threw stones at them. A woman who approached the *Mashwara* legal aid centre for her personal problem, shared this information with her advocate. "We have to do this as we are a part of Shiv Sena," she confessed.

Sunanda Patil, the local corporator, gave the following statement: "I knew that the incident was taking place. I came out there three times and asked the mob to disperse. Then I came in and called the police. I must have phoned the police at least 10 times. But the police did not come. I wanted to intervene but I was afraid. As a lone woman I could not achieve much in the face of the mob fury. So I came back. Then a group of young children came running and told



Shabana, aged 10 years, injured in police firing

me that they had set the man on fire. I could not believe it. I did not think that they would do this. I thought they would just stone him and leave him there, I ran out. His body was in flames. I brought water and put out the fire. When the whole incident was over, finally the police arrived on the scene. The man was alive when he was taken to the hospital. He died the same night.” Sunanda Patil holds the Kherwadi police solely responsible for this incident.

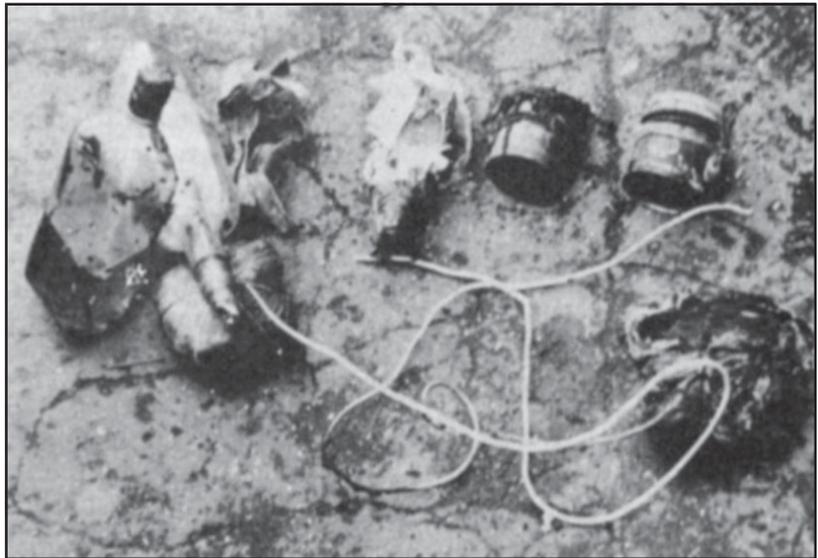
When the police inspector in charge, Musale, was approached for an explanation about the conspicuous absence of police force at the scene of the crime, he said that they were busy in Bharatnagar and they arrived on the scene as soon as the police control room informed them about it. But surprisingly, there is no reported incident of violence in Bharatnagar on that day.

Attack on Namaazis

While the gruesome incidents in Kherwadi never reached the press, Behrampada made headlines with the news that a 3,000-strong mob of *namaazis* attacked a middle class complex — the New MIG colony. Al-though this was the major story in all newspapers on January 16, each paper gave a different ver-sion depending upon which point

with stones, sticks and guns and the police and the army opened fire on this mob. But there were other reports which state that petrol bombs were thrown at namaazis at around 1.45 p.m. and the *namaazis* ran belter skelter and were seen to be wav-ing their hands frantically as if to say, “Don’t open fire, we do not have weapons.”

Sounds of police firing could be heard from the Bandra station from 2 p.m. to 3.30 p.m.



Bombs thrown in Behrampada

Police fired from all four sides around Behrampada and bullets hit people as far as 500 feet away from the mosque, the scene of the incident. Adjacent to the railway tracks there is an unauthorised slum which has recently

come up, called Garib Nagar, where as the name suggests, the poorest of the poor stay. Only women and children were in the basti as the men had gone for the *namaaz*.

The police fired at the group of women and children who had come out to plead with the police not to fire as the men were yet to return from the *namaaz*. Shabana, a 10-year-old girl, received bullet injuries on her shoulder and thigh. Bablu, a 10-year-old boy, received injury on his leg. He is still in the hospital with a steel rod in his leg. The bullet pierced through the abdomen of a 55-year-old maid servant, Zeenatunnisa, who is still in the hospital. Abida, another woman who was breast feeding her 10-month-old baby, received a bullet injury on her thigh.

As per police reports, three persons died and 14 were injured. Among the dead was a 60-year-old man who was climbing the staircase to his house. When the injured were rushed to Bhabha Hospital, the hospital refused to admit them.



Baba Amte celebrating Republic Day with Muslims of Behrampada

Sunil Dutt, the local MP, rushed to the hospital on hearing the news and through his intervention helped in admitting the injured in nearby hospitals.

Journalists who were present in the area reported that glass pieces and empty bottles on the road between Behrampada and the LIG/MIG colonies bear testimony to the attack by the *namaazis*. But a Hindu resident of building No 28 who had witnessed the scene, testified as follows:

“At around 1.40 p.m., I was in the balcony and noticed that boys were throwing petrol bombs from my building at the *namaazis*. Immediately, the *namaazis* scattered and started running helter skelter. Soon afterwards, a group of 20-25 Muslim boys came with bottles and tubelights. One had a crude gun in his hand. On the LIG side a hundred boys gathered with sticks, bottles and tubelights. A few also had revolvers in their hand.” She prefers to remain anonymous as she is scared of being identified.

The police version is that they opened fire when the Muslim mob attacked them. The Muslims ask, “Why would we throw a petrol bomb during the *namaaz* time when only Muslims are out on the streets?” They say that a partisan police started shooting the Muslims indiscriminately without resorting to lathi charge or teargas in order to strike terror among Muslims. Countering the charge that they attacked the

New MIG colony after the *namaaz*, they state: “Ask them to show you their window panes which were shattered by our bullets or stones. Ask them who was injured.”

The police entered the basti and started combing operations. Around 41 boys from the area were arrested. According to Majid Memon, a criminal lawyer who handled the bail applications in the detention cases, the charge sheet mentioned that around 5,000 Muslim *dangekhors* assembled around 1.30 p.m. to prepare for an attack on the middle class colony. The court did not accept this allegation as it was obvious that the congregation had assembled for their routine Friday *namaaz*.

The following day, the police control room reported that a huge haul of firearms, petrol bombs and ammunition was recovered from Behrampada. Even the arms and

ammunition recovered from the adjacent alleys and in the compound of LIG and MIG build-ings passed off as ammunition from Behrampada. The police refused to show any *panchnama* of the haul. The pictures released to the press showed that the ‘arms’ were kitchen knives, hockey sticks and bottles filled with petrol, which are termed ‘petrol bombs’. There was one crude gun. When questioned, the police admitted that the firing in the area could not have been done with the crude gun which was recovered.

Efforts to Dispel Myths

Following this incident, some of us approached leading dailies and requested them to convey the true picture of the basti to the outside world. Journalists from various newspapers visited the area, interviewed the residents, particularly minorities in the basti—the Christians



Burnt out houses in Behrampada

and Hindus and also traders and artisans—in order to dispel the myth that Behrampada was a den of criminals and all Hindus had been driven out from there. But immediately there was a counter campaign. Some newspapers withheld the report. One paper which had a positive story, the next day published a counter version given by the trade unions of ONGC and others. The residents of New MIG wrote letters to the editors of newspapers that their names were being deliberately maligned through malicious, false and irresponsible reporting.

When the riots in the rest of Bombay were cooling down, Bandra East was still simmering. So local leaders in the area initiated a move to celebrate Republic Day within the basti to bring normalcy to the area. Prominent personalities from the field of literature and Marathi stage, as well as renowned social workers attended the function. Among them were Baba Amte, the renowned

Gandhian social worker, Satyadev Dube, Marathi stage director, Rohini Hattangadi, well known film and stage artiste, Dr Jhamkedkar, president of the entire MIG colony and Arun Naik, a literary figure. In a moving ceremony, thousands of children who had not attended school since December 7, 1992 participated in the programme. Following this, a programme was planned by the MIG (old) residents to work towards restoring the children's schooling. They approached the police station to ensure the

children's safety and some senior persons even promised to monitor the whole programme. Two days prior to the programme, on Saturday night, a bomb burst on one of the huts, causing a gaping hole. The residents were scared. But the social workers assured them that these were only stray incidents and they should overcome their fear of such attacks.

On Sunday evening, as Dr Jhamkedkar was walking along the deserted road which is the approach road to the school on the LIG side, a group of Shiv Sainiks accosted him and asked him what he was doing in this area. He replied that they were working towards bringing peace to the area. They replied, "What peace? Why don't you mind your own

business. There will be no peace without the consent of Sarpotdar." Unmindful of this warning, around 500 children were escorted to school on February 1, by a group of Maharashtrian volunteers from MIG (old) colony.

Huts Set on Fire

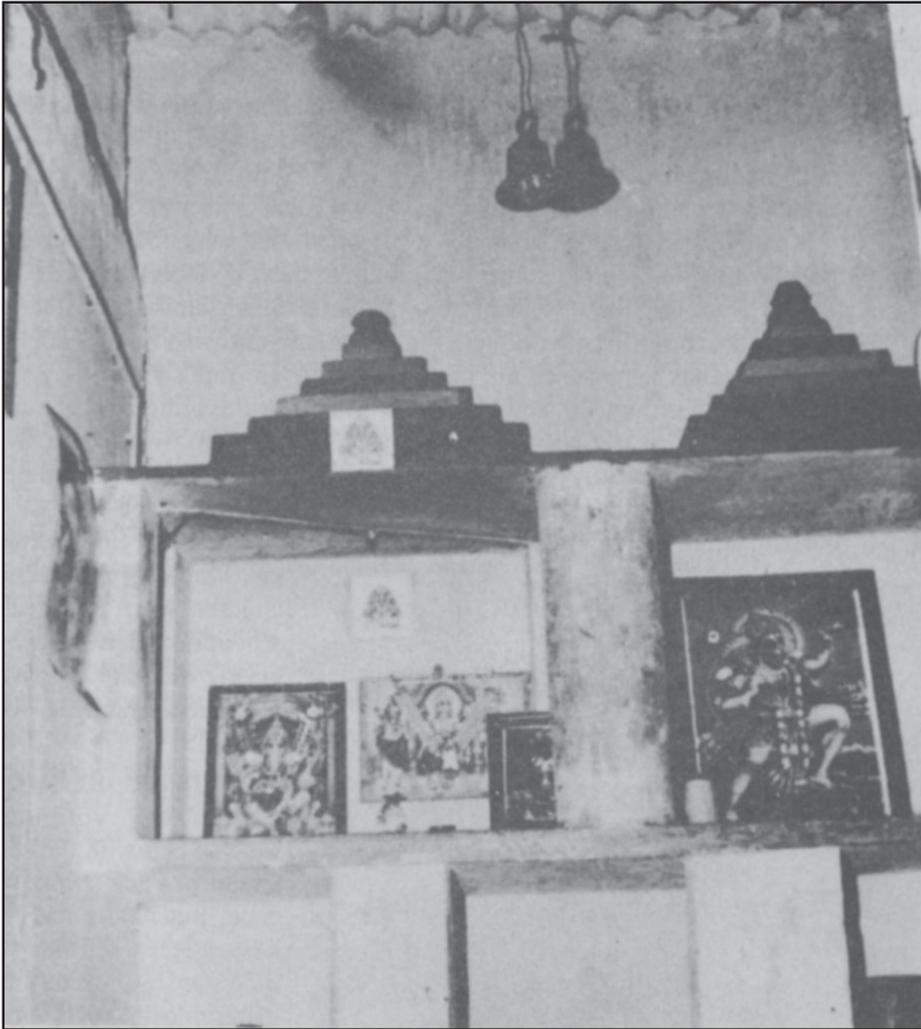
The volunteers went to bed with the satisfaction of a day's work well done. But hardly had they fallen asleep when they were awakened by the rude jolt of loud explosions of bombs in the area. The explosions continued from 11 p.m., the hour when the curfew starts, right upto 12.30 a.m., in spite of the presence of army and police patrol in the area.

The basti, which had survived without any loss of property during both the December and January riots, finally gave way. The attack came from two sides. Unbiased eyewitnesses from New MIG colony state that right from 10 a.m. Shiv Sainiks had gathered near the Ganesh temple. The policemen on guard had intermingled with riots the Shiv Sena mob. The first bomb went off at 10 minutes to eleven. The police started blowing whistles which, according to the eyewitnesses, was a signal for the Shiv Sena to start the attack. Rags filled with petrol were hurled at the huts.

A small Ganesh mandir inside the basti caught fire. A 25-year-old youth who ran to the roof to put out the fire was shot by the police from the terrace of LIG building. Immediately the electricity to the area was cut off. There was darkness everywhere. Just as the residents were groping in the dark, petrol



Hindu women freely intermixing with Muslim women in Behrampada during the riots



Inside view of one of the Hindu temples in Behrampada which had been protected by Muslims

was thrown across the wall and petrol bombs were thrown from New MIG end, which resulted in a huge fire. Fifty four huts were destroyed.

The fire spread as the fire brigade could not reach the area in time. The residents claim that the Shiv Sainiks and the police prevented the fire brigade from coming to their rescue. The fire brigade personnel admit that their vehicles were held up at the magistrate's court by the police. Only when the destruction was complete could the fire brigade reach the scene of the incident.

Perhaps it is just a coincidence that it happened to be the birthday of

Sarpotdar.

The LIG and New MIG people alleged that since these were illegal tenements, the basti people must have set the huts on fire in order to get a more permanent place or because of the greed for compensation. Another version was that this was the best way to stall off the eviction notice served on the basti. The explanation does not seem plausible as the residents on the south side of the basti near the railway terminal. The huts which were burnt are on the north side adjacent to the New MIG colony.

Some newspapers claimed that

while throwing the petrol bombs towards New MIG colony they must have accidentally dropped them on their own huts. Some claimed that the huts were vacant and this was a preplanned ploy. On the Behrampada side, words are not necessary. The razed huts and charred cinders of household articles — beds, vessels, sewing machines and children's school books — stand testimony to the mid-night attack.

Four days later, Sarpotdar was arrested under the National Security Act and was packed off to Nasik. Again women of Shiv Sena came out in large numbers for a *rasta roko*, but this time tear gas shells were used to clear the road. After the arrest of their leader, the Shiv Sena campaign lost its thrust and cool down. The replacement of the then police commissioner, Bapat, by Samra as well as some more transfers have somewhat restored the confidence of the Behrampada residents.



The attack on Behrampada is largely motivated by the desire to wipe out this lower class basti on the pretext of ensuring middle class safety. The Shiv Sena wants to take the credit for achieving this task and wants to strengthen its political clout. Once the basti is shifted, the land prices in the area will soar and the middle class will gain. The Babri Masjid demolition and the ensuing tensions in the city provided the right environment in which a campaign against the Muslim basti could be carried out with a vengeance.

The basti has become an eyesore and has no place in the developmental scheme of the area. The basti people ask, "When it was a stinking marshland, why didn't anyone claim it? Then it was too expensive to develop it. But after we have shed our sweat and blood and reclaimed the land, we are not needed here. With great difficulty we have come out of our poverty. The government wants to push us back into poverty by uprooting us and dumping us in a godforsaken place far away."

The campaign could be sustained only with the active support of the middle class residents, the trade unions and the press. Suspicion and hostility against the minority community have been effectively used to spread rumours against Behrampada, which could so easily and widely be accepted not only in the city but nationwide.

The residents feel that theirs being a Muslim majority basti has saved their lives and property. In adjoining areas, the loss of life and property of Muslims has been far more. People have fled their homes, houses have been looted and burnt. Those who left their homes during the riots are scared to return home even today. Their homes have been taken over by the rioters. Measured in concrete economic terms, the relative loss to Behrampada has been far less as compared to places where they lived as a minority.

Will the survival of the Muslim community depend upon further ghettoisation and a sharp divide between the majority and the minority community? Will the Hindu minority within the basti, which is safe today, continue to be safe if the Muslim majority within the basti is held at a perennial ransom? On February 2, soon after the fire, newspapers reported incidents of some Hindus

being stabbed in the area. At the train terminal two Hindu sadhus were stabbed. An ONGC worker was stabbed the same day a few yards away.

Newspapers continue to report the recovery of crude weapons and home-made bombs. As every incident of Behrampada gets exaggerated, the home-made bombs, when reported, become 'a factory producing bombs with boys caught red-handed.'

Behrampada did not need much relief or rehabilitation. It is a self-sufficient, dignified basti. All it needed was to give it credibility in the wake of the adverse press campaign. The role of middle class activists like us has been mainly to facilitate normal social intercourse with the outside world and dispelling the negative reports about it. Press reports, social functions and programmes for rehabilitating school children have been efforts in this direction. But the first few days of such interaction have not been easy, with the activities being suspect both within the basti and outside. The timely intervention of Jhamkedkar, the president of MIG colony, to dispel the myths about the basti somewhat countered the adverse campaign carried on by Sarpotdar as it restored the basti in the eyes of the middle class intelligentsia in the area.

The riots have raised new questions which do not have an answer. Women have been used widely by both sides during the riots, mainly as buffers between the police and rioters and in some cases suffered the worst casualties. Many of the forms of protest popularised by the women's movement have been usurped by communal forces during these riots. Both sides led protest marches of women to the police stations. The Shiv Sena was able to mobilise a group of 500 women volunteers even in the middle of the

night, to demand the release of arrested persons.

Another disturbing factor is the use and access to weapons by the youth from each community. When communal tensions cool down, will the same weapons be now used for domestic feuds as has been happening in stray cases since the riots?

The trade unions, Dalits, social workers and student leaders, all played a significant role in these riots. In Chetana College in Bandra East, which has a reputation of being a progressive institution, on January 9 students celebrated 'traditional day' and a Muslim student dressed in traditional attire was stabbed. The Shiv Sena-dominated trade unions in the area played a significant role in organising *maha aartis* and road blocks and also carried on an effective media campaign against the basti.

Elsewhere in the city, marginalised sections of the Hindu community, such as Dalits and Tamilians, sided with the *Hindutva vadis* in the attack on the minorities.

In the wake of the organised communal fury, efforts of the secular forces were meagre and fragmented and hence failed to make a dent. They could not count on any other organised social movement.

This report is based on extensive interviews with both Hindus and Muslims and our involvement with relief and peace work. The information was then cross checked with police records and is supported by signed statements of eyewitnesses in some major incidents. The following persons have contributed substantially in compiling the report: Madhusree Dutta, Lavina Fernanandes, Audrey D'Mello, Aruna Burte, Neera Adarkar and students of Nirmala Niketan, College of Social Work. □

...Safety is Indivisible Testimonies of Some Hindus

by Madhu Kishwar

of life by attacks from Behrampada residents. Yet, they were petrified of talking not just to strangers but even to known people. I remember vividly how when Shama Dalwai, who has lived in one of the buildings neighbouring Behrampada for years, rang the door-bell of a neighbour's house in order to introduce me to them, the young daughter who came to the door only peeped out and wouldn't open the door to Shama, even though Shama knows the family well and this young girl is a friend of Shama's daughter. Apart from not wanting to let me, a stranger, into the house, she was visibly afraid of Shama, presumably because Shama is married to a Muslim. Some other families too were extremely reluctant to talk and when they did, gave only evasive replies.

In contrast, almost all Muslims seemed more than willing to talk to any Hindu who was ready to listen to their version. They also insisted on my meeting Hindus and Christians who live in Behrampada. Both the Hindus and Christians seemed relaxed with their Muslim neighbours but seemed as worried about their future as the Muslims if the plan to get the basti removed succeeded. Muslims showed me with great pride the Hindu mandirs within Behrampada which had stayed perfectly safe during this crisis period.

When a petrol bomb thrown from the Bandra side landed on the roof of one of the temples, it was young Muslims who rushed to extinguish the fire and saved the temple from getting damaged. The account of the basti people was corroborated by two Hindu families who had been witness

to the violence but wanted to remain anonymous for fear of reprisals. To quote Madan Bajaj (not his real name), a businessman living in a building directly facing Behrampada:

"What I saw the police do here is of the greatest danger to an independent nation. The local Shiv Sena MLA Sarpotdar went to one of our neighbouring buildings and told the residents there that one Inspector Jhende would be coming and they should give him permission to fire at Behrampada from the top of their building.

"They say that the Muslims gathered together at the time of namaaz and attacked the police. That is not what happened. The police needed an excuse to fire at Muslims. My daughter phoned a Hindu Maharashtrian friend of hers living in that particular building from which the attack was carried out. This friend said the Muslims were doing *namaaz* when the Shiv Sainiks threw bombs and stones on them from above. As a result of this attack, the Muslims ran helter skelter. There was general panic. The police gave out that the Muslims attacked the police. After this I saw the incident with my own eyes. About 8-10 Muslims were hiding in the *galli*. After all, if you harass someone too much, then he will retaliate to some extent. These few Muslims retaliated by throwing stones and soda water bottles. It is possible that one or two petrol bombs were also thrown. One of them had a country-made revolver. But on the other side were 150 Shiv Sainiks. And they were holding the policemen by the hand and saying 'Fire here, fire there.' Is the police under Shiv Sena control? Can we

afford to have the police protect one community and kill the other" Then what is the point of having a government? The government machinery is so huge, the military was also called. Did the government not have 25 intelligence people who were impartial and could have reported correctly who is attacking whom?

"In my view, anyone who can throw a bomb on someone while he is doing *namaaz*, must be a devil. None of our gods have ever said that one should throw bombs on a person of a different religion while he is praying. In the *Ramayana* there is the story of the *rishis* who asked Ram and Lakshman to protect them from *rakshasas* who were obstructing their *yagna* and prayers. But here the Hindus throw stones and bombs on people doing *namaaz*. I want to keep away from such a Hindu. For me he is no Hindu...

"I personally witnessed this. On December 6, after the mosque was broken, the Hindus of nearby localities were throwing petrol bombs etcetera on houses in Behrampada. That would lead to confusion and Muslims would come out in the *gallis*. After this the police would sound a whistle and the police would fire on the Muslims in Behrampada from three or four different firing points. They were firing on women and children. I myself saw a woman here die in the police firing. Did that woman have a machine gun?" In the whole of Bombay, only one machine gun was used by the Muslims from a mosque. And yet people say that Muslims got modern weapons from outside! It is well known that smugglers, both Hindus and Muslims, have acquired

machine guns and AK47 rifles. So one out of these reached somewhere and was used for the attack. But for the rest, *desi* revolvers, acid bombs and soda water bottles were used by the Muslims...

“After firing at the Muslim basti, the police would go to Behrampada on the pretext of searching Muslim homes — but actually to beat, kill, arrest and terrorise them further. Even if one were to accept for a minute the argument that the Muslims were attacking, one has to concede that Hindus were attacking as well because so many Muslims could not have died otherwise. Then why were Hindu houses never searched?

After this riot planning by Shiv Sena MLA Sarpotdar, the military

arrived here and arrested him because they found him moving around with lots of weapons in his car during curfew time. But the police released him soon after. The farce of apprehending him was repeated a second time. But even though it was curfew time, the Shiv Sainiks brought hundreds of women along who shouted slogans and gathered outside the police station to get him released. Following Sarpotdar’s release, for one whole hour, crackers were burst and a victory procession organised to celebrate his release...

“The curfew was only for the Muslims. Not for the Hindus. We could go out in our car...

“My wife and I go for a daily morning walk. Very recently we saw a

pau seller come into our locality on a cycle. He had come to see if these scoundrels needed bread since the supply was not available here due to the destruction of local bakeries. Right in front of my eyes, they broke his cycle and beat him up. The poor fellow ran for his life in that injured condition. Though I wanted to, I could not help him. There were just four or five hoodlums, but if I had intervened they might have broken my head as well, because I am no Bhim. I had two choices — either get beaten up along with him or kill my conscience and quietly return home...

“There are 28 families in this building. I found only one man among them who seemed to agree with my views somewhat. For the rest, most



Women of Behrampada complaining to the police

people think otherwise, including well educated people — architects, engineers. They keep repeating that 4,000 to 5,000 Muslims came to attack the Hindus with AK47s and machine guns when they could see from their houses above that there were 10 Muslims with no more than soda water bottles and at least 150 Shiv Sainiks attacking them with police help from above during curfew time...

“If I say all this to them openly, they will simply ostracise me and do everything more secretly. Already, I have seen that when I return from my morning walk and my neighbours are standing around the building talking to each other, they keep quiet when they see me...

“One of our neighbouring bakery owners who is a Muslim, calls me uncle. He came to our house at 11 p.m. some days ago. He said, “They have burnt my shop. I’m going back to my village.’ I told him, ‘Wait for a few days. Humanity may return.’ But if I was in his place, I would have also left out of fear. They had pre-planned it all. They selected Muslim shops and the Muslim *jhopadpatis* and burnt them. It may well be that they want builders of their community to benefit from this exodus. Hundreds of thousands of people have fled their homes in Bombay. In *jhopadpatis*, how can one survive the police bullet?

“There is just one Muslim family in this building. They are still here. We told them: ‘You stay here. Someone will have to walk over our dead body to make you leave.’ At this point his daughter, Ramani (not her real name), intervened to tell me the pressures on this particular Muslim family: “An educated and very well placed man who is supposed to be a good friend of this Muslim family said to their grown up daughter: ‘Is there no one in Behrampada (the neighbouring Muslim slum) who can protect you? Can’t you go away and stay for a few days in someone’s house?’”

“Ramani narrated some more of what she herself had witnessed in her neighbourhood: “On January 10, on Sunday, two Muslim boys were murdered openly at 11 in the morning in a nearby building. They were doing some painting/whitewashing job in a Hindu home. First the Shiv Sainiks went and discussed something with the police. Sometime later the police blew their whistle. Hearing this, about 150 Shiv Sena boys came down. They carried swords, rods, tubelights and so on. Just imagine — two of those Muslim boys versus 150 of these Shiv Sainiks. They beat them so badly that there was blood all over the floor. After that they hurled their bodies down on the road. One of them died immediately. The other one was bleeding. And what the police did was to position itself, aiming its guns at the two boys who had been battered and said nothing to the Shiv Sainiks. They washed the bloodied floor with water and cleaned it. After this the police car came and took away the Muslim boys — one dead, the other dying. Shiv Sainiks went back home as if nothing had happened. After this the curfew was imposed. But the curfew had no meaning. The police in this area eat, bathe and sleep at the homes of the Shiv Sena *wallahs*. They know the entire planning, confer with each other and decide the timing. They have a signal. That is, they blow one whistle to announce ‘action’. Then a second for readiness. And at the third whistle, they attack. And if the military is about to come around, the police tells these Shiv Sainiks to go home quietly.

“A Muslim family has been living for many years in the building opposite ours. One day a lone woman was at home with her daughter. The Shiv Sena men came and forcefully began to kick the door. The poor woman was obviously scared, but being spirited she screamed loudly from inside and did not open the door. The building people came and said:

‘She is our neighbour, don’t kill her.’ So those people went away. But they told the whole colony that they won’t let any Muslim stay here. So all the Muslims in the buildings in this colony have gone away...

“One Sunday morning, one poor fellow who used to supply chickens had come to our colony. There were about 150-200 chickens in his van. The Shiv Sainiks stopped and ordered him to take out all the chickens. After which they beat him mercilessly and took away his chickens and had a feast. Later it turned out that the chicken seller was a Hindu. They thought he was a Muslim. Who is to check them even if they attack other Hindus?

“One of the very active Shiv Sena boys of our neighbourhood came and told me one day: ‘You are not at all cooperative. We are ready to die for Hindus but you don’t protect us. You don’t let us pass through your compound in order to attack the Muslims.’ I kept quiet. He then asked me to buy a ticket for Rs 100 towards *Nirdhaar Nidhi* (protection fund), I said, ‘No, I don’t believe in all this.’ ‘Why not?’ he asked. ‘We are ready to fight and die for Hindus and you are not even supporting us.’ Maybe I am putting myself in danger by refusing to pay up. But this was something I couldn’t accept...

“Some days ago at about 8 p.m., one or two Shiv Sena boys came. They lit a fire on the road. They lit one piece of wood from that—it was not a petrol bomb—the wood was wrapped in cloth and dipped in kerosene. There is a Hindu building, No 30, at the corner here facing Behrampada. The Shiv Sainiks threw the burning wood towards it and started shouting loudly. The police was standing there while this was happening. They shouted loudly and the police went running. What did they try to show? That Muslims of Behrampada had attacked and tried to set on fire that Hindu building.

After this the police fired on the Muslims.

“After this, at 11.30 p.m. these people raised an outcry again and converged from all directions. They threw petrol bombs at Behrampada. The police fired on Muslims again, so that they could not even douse the fire destroying their *jhuggis*. But they managed somehow to douse the fire. Then a third time, at 2.30 a.m., these people enacted the same drama all over again. We were trying desperately to contact the fire brigade but could not get the number. Later around 3.30 a.m., the fire brigade and the military arrived. The police misguided the military that the Muslims had fired from Behrampada and thrown the petrol bombs and tried to set No 30 building on fire, when the truth was that the Shiv Sainiks had attacked. And you won’t believe the theatricals and *hungama* done by Shiv Sena people. We were trembling. The spectacle was frightening. And it seemed these Muslims would be finished that day. Their cries were coming from inside their homes: “Throw water here, we have been attacked, save us.’ You could actually sense these people’s suffering inside that *jhoadpatti*. If they made any attempts to douse the fire, the police would open fire at those who came out to do so. If they did not douse the fire, they would burn to death inside. I have a small daughter who woke up from her sleep and was crying and screaming hearing the commotion. She could sense that something terrible was happening. All the people at home were trembling. Mummy started getting loose motions.”

“From the way our neighbours reacted it seems their hearts are closed, their eyes too are shut. Here, in this building, everyone says, ‘Behrampada should be removed. We don’t need Behrampada.’ The truth is they have never troubled us.

“We have a common compound wall. The wall between Behrampada

and our building No 3, is common. All our cars stand here. Those people did not throw a stone here. If the Muslims wanted, they could have burnt our cars to ashes. They did not even touch them. They have never troubled us.

“In fact, there would have been a fire in our compound because petrol bombs were thrown on them by Shiv Sainiks and these petrol bombs fell in our compound. It was hell, you know. That day we couldn’t sleep. Couldn’t eat. But that building No 30 was never searched. No person in that building was interrogated...

“My sister-in-law had delivered in hospital and we were all there. There a young woman from Behrampada was admitted. Because of all this tension and fear she delivered in five months. And both her twins were born dead, There was so much fear in these poor people.”

I found the Hindus far more terrified though their houses had not been attacked. Savita, a young housewife in her 30s, says their entire life is hedged in by fear. “Even if kitchen utensils fall and make a noise, we jump with fear. I can’t go out of the house leaving behind our children alone.” She is one of the few who admits that none of the Hindus living in buildings bordering Behrampada have been physically harmed. She realises that houses in Behrampada have been destroyed. That is precisely what makes her terrified. What if the Muslims decided to take revenge? I ask her “Have they threatened you or done anything menacing to you so far?” She says: “No. In fact, they have been surprisingly nice. The other day a stone came and hit our window. I looked out and shouted to people in the basti, saying, ‘Please don’t throw stones at our house’. They said: ‘Sister, rest assured, no stone will come to you from our side. It must be some mischief monger elsewhere. We won’t let any harm come to you’.” But

Savita’s fear is how long will they stay restrained if the attacks continue from the Hindu side on the basti.

This is not to argue that Behrampada is an idyllic basti. Like all other slums in Bombay, this basti too has its own quota of criminals as well as people involved in trading drugs etcetra. But their proportion is perhaps smaller than the number of people involved in criminal activities among our MPs, M.L.A.s and ministers. The internal politics of Behrampada is as messy as anywhere else in the country.

The residents of Behrampada behaved with restraint because they realised they couldn’t afford to retaliate when Shiv Sena had the police on its side. Among others, an elderly Muslim, popularly known as “Uncle” in the basti, played an important role in keeping tempers cool within the basti. He is president of the local Congress district committee but was unable to get any help from the party bosses.

He kept the excitable Muslim youth under control, saying: “Look, the Shiv Sainiks can run away after throwing stones or petrol bombs at you. Their purpose is only to provoke you. But as soon as you come rushing out, they are gone and the police takes over and kills you with bullets. So why let them bait you like this? Their petrol bombs will burn at the most four-five *jhopdas* at a time if we quickly extinguish the fire. But if you retaliate they will not hesitate to reduce the entire basti to ashes.”

How Muslims were Tamed

The point of emphasising that the violence was far more from the Hindu side is not to suggest that Muslims are less inclined to violence, or that Muslims refrained from retaliation out of choice. Muslims are an easily excitable community. Had it been a direct battle between Hindus and Muslims, the outcome for Hindus would have been very different. In Dharavi, for instance, where there is a

sizeable Muslim population, the retaliation was fierce and many Hindu homes and shops were destroyed. They did not lag behind in the stabbing spree either. Given the fact that Muslims comprise a disproportionately large proportion of the Bombay underworld, their ability to wreak havoc is indeed enormous. However, criminals normally tend to be “secular” and thrive only with the protection of the police, which happens to be Hindu dominated. When that protection was withdrawn from the Muslim criminals and the police came to play an openly partisan role on the side of Hindu criminals organised by Shiv Sena, even Muslim *goondas* became fairly helpless. Men like Dawood Ibrahim could not even protect their own business establishments from Hindu mobs. In such a



A person of Behrampada looking at important papers retrieved from his burnt out house

situation, providing protection to fellow Muslims was out of question. That is perhaps what explains their trying to settle scores through bomb blasts which require surreptitious crime and not an open confrontation of the kind Hindu mobs could undertake.

Even in places where the Muslims did riot and retaliate to begin with, they had to give up their adventurism soon enough. Squatters Colony was one such Muslim basti with about 2,000 tenements since Muslims living in this area are economically much better off than in most other parts of the city. This colony carries a lot of influence among the city Muslims and acts as a political centre for the

Muslims. That is why the eyes of Shiv Sena were trained on this area.

After the police killings of Muslims on December 7, there was a real communal riot here, with Hindus and Muslims both attacking each other. A Hindu temple was burnt and the *pujari* was stabbed. There were numerous clashes leading to injuries on both sides. But by January, this colony of Muslims had been “taught a proper lesson” and completely immobilised. I visited this area with social workers Sanobar Kishwar and Tommy at the end of January. This small basti of Muslims, surrounded by Hindu areas, had been sealed off completely by strict curfew imposed by the army on the Muslims alone

while all around life went on as normal in the Hindu areas across the street. When we tried to enter the basti, the soldiers trained their guns at us and ordered us to leave immediately and literally chased us out.

The Shiv Sena had engineered a riot in the Squatters Colony on the 26th of January by organising a *maha aarti*. I quote from Sanobar’s and Tommy’s account since they had kept regular contact with this area:

“There is a road which separates Squatters Colony from Govindnagar, which are the Muslim and Hindu areas respectively. Govindnagar is situated on a hill. If the road between the two colonies had been policed and patrolled well, it is unlikely that anything would have happened. The *maha aarti* finished at about 8.30 p.m. on January 26 and soon after a group from among people at the *maha aarti* started raining

stones from atop, since Govindnagar is situated at a height. First came the stones, followed acid bulbs and petrol bombs. And this gang started coming down the hill. The militant youths among the Muslims were well prepared. They retaliated and drove the Shiv Sainiks back up the hill. This went on for 15-20 minutes and then the police came and repeated the same pattern as elsewhere in Bombay.”

“The policemen did not come from the centre of the road. They came along with the Hindu crowd and were also hit by stones. But throwing stones is not enough protection. The police moved into the Muslim basti, firing into the *gullis* at point blank range. A man by the name of Faqir

Mohammad, a 66-year-old-heart patient, was sitting at home on a *chatai*. Inspector Patil came down and tried to open the door of his house. The door did not open. He broke the window and shot this old man where he was sitting on the *chatai*. In this way, 36 rounds were fired. That is the official statement. Nine people were seriously injured, two were killed. All of those killed and injured were Muslims. Not one Hindu went to the hospital. These figures speak for themselves. But they will say that Muslims attacked Hindus. Before people like us could persuade one or two non-partisan reporters to

come and see things for themselves, by the next morning the police had made handouts and said that as one section of people at the *maha aarti* was going home, a 500 strong mob from the Squatters Colony attacked the former and after this the police had to intervene. Firing occurred in the melee and in that two people died.” The firing was followed by continuous intimidation, indiscriminate arrests and search operations. Thus the police had succeeded in taming this otherwise volatile basti.

Most Hindus justify their anti-Muslim sentiment by pointing to

irresponsible acts of Muslim leaders like Shahabuddin and other rabid fundamentalists. Ironically, this is precisely the time when Muslims are themselves turning away from their fanatic leadership because they see how their interests have been harmed by them. A government official involved with relief work, said: “In many of the Muslim refugee camps, Muslim men have come and told me, “*Sahib*, such and such is a *goonda*. He instigated trouble in our area. Please have him arrested”. If they were as communal as Hindus make them out to be, they wouldn’t be

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In the Name of National Unity

The Story of Seema Hakim

“The Koran exhorts them to lie in wait for idol worshippers, to skin them alive, to stuff them in animal skins and torture them until they ask for forgiveness. Our heritage enjoins repentance even if an ant is killed underfoot. The two cultures are polar opposites.”

So spake the Sangh parivar’s celebrated heroine, Rithambara, in one of her innumerable hate speeches against the Muslims. The propaganda of the Sangh parivar exhorts Hindus to give up their “cowardice” and strengthen the immense Hindu shakti into a fist. Seema Hakim is one of the many Muslim women in Bombay whose shattered life bears testimony to the kind of strength the Sangh parivar wants the Hindus to cultivate.

Seema’s husband was battered to death in front of her eyes, their house looted and destroyed and she herself was gangraped after being dragged and paraded naked in the entire neighbourhood. I (Madhu) met her in Dombivili police station along with some social workers of Bombay involved in relief and rehabilitation work. Before we reached, Seema had been subjected to several hours of interrogation and asked to identify her attackers. She came out looking like she had been through a torture chamber. When asked to see the statement police had recorded on Seema’s behalf, we were not really surprised to find that the FIR was

rather wishy washy. It neither mentioned all those people who Seema said she had named as her attackers, nor her gangrape. The report only mentioned her being paraded naked. It did not list all that was stolen or looted from Seema’s house. The police had recorded that the household stuff had been broken. The police had not got Seema medically examined either. The three social workers insisted that Seema be allowed to make a fresh statement in their presence. I took down her account almost verbatim while she was making her second statement to the police.

Seema, a 35-year-old Muslim

woman, is the mother of three children. She used to live with her husband, Shahid Hakim, in Charkop Ashiana Cooperative Society, Plot No 435, Sector IV, Room 3, Kandivili (west) Bombay. Shahid Hakim had a small business exporting readymade garments and costume jewellery to African countries. She was married to Shahid in 1988. She had earlier been married to a much older man who divorced her for some other woman. Shahid too had been married earlier but left his wife and took Seema as his second wife. He had no children from the previous marriage whereas Seema had three—two sons, and a daughter from her first marriage. But

Shahid had accepted these children as his own and these children stayed with Shahid and Seema.

In Seema's words: "On January 10, between 8-9 p.m., rioting broke out in Charkop. On February 11, Wasim, our landlord, told us that some young men were standing around our house saying, '*Yahan aaj angaar lagaana hai.*' (We are going to put this house on fire today). So Wasim advised us to leave the house. There were no more than four or five Muslim families in that area. All of them had left their homes and gone away. My husband was the president of the local Janata Dal unit. I was also a Janata Dal member. He said: 'Wasim is not an educated man. That is why he talks like that. Nobody is going to come and burn our *chawl.*' On the night of the 11th, my husband and I, along with our children, left Charkop to visit my mother-in-law's house in Malad. The next day, the ground floor of my mother-in-law's building was set on fire. So we stayed on with her. On January 14, my husband and I enquired from a local autorickshaw man about the situation in Charkop. We were given to understand that the trouble had subsided. We left our children with my mother in-law and went to Charkop around 4 p.m. by autorickshaw so that we could see our home. Shahid was carrying a lot of money because we had planned to go shopping for his Nairobi trip, after checking on our house. We saw that our one-room house was bolted from outside, but the lock we had put on before leaving on the 12th, was broken. We opened the door and found all our valuables were missing. These included a Sony TV, VCR, mixer, Rs 75,000 in cash and eight *tolas* of gold, some wrist watches, imported clothes and other valuables. The fridge was broken, so was all the crockery. The house had been ransacked. Old clothes were lying scattered all around.



Seema Hakim

"Even the fan had been stolen. My husband said to me: 'Seema, forget our valuables. Let's go back.' As soon as we came out of the door, we were surrounded by a group of 25-50 men.

They began to hit us. We pleaded with our neighbours to give us shelter, but no one let us find refuge in their house. They said: 'You are a Muslim and ours is a Hindu neighbourhood. *Mussalmanon ke saath aisa hi hona chahiye.* (Muslims deserve to be treated like this).'

"The houses of other Muslim families had also been broken. Even the roof had been blasted. Hindu women from our neighbourhood said to the gangsters: 'Beat them up, pierce their eyes.'

"There is a man called Rocky in our neighbourhood who is very friendly with the police. Policemen are forever visiting his house. He said: 'Muslims should be killed. *Bahut charbi hai inke upar.* (They have too much fat on them). What Saddam does, we should do to them.' After this our neighbouring women closed their doors."

"The men first attacked Shahid. I stood next to him and said, 'Hit me, don't hit him.' They said, 'You Muslims come with weapons.' We

pleaded, 'We have no weapons. We only came to see our house.'

"They had various weapons in their hands such as *guftis*, knives and *trishuls*. One of them started the attack by hitting Shahid with a *saria* (an iron rod). After that they all joined in the hitting. They were not our immediate neighbours. But they came out of the houses of our neighbours and had their support. The neighbours were watching. The people of our *chawl* were saying, 'We will not let Muslims live here.'

"Then they started hitting me as well. Shahid fell down when one of the mob hit him with a *gufti* and broke his head. Then they pierced two *guftis* into his stomach. One of them got hold of a little fire and began to burn my husband's face. The fellow who runs a cigarette shop in our neighbourhood was helping these fellows and even providing them with cigarettes to smoke through all this.

"Then they hit me with a *saria*. My eyes got blinded. At this point I heard them say, 'Strip her naked and then beat her.' With a knife they tore up my jumper (shirt) completely. Even the *salwar* got torn and it had half fallen off. My *dupatta* was also tattered. They again hit me with a *saria* and took off all the valuables. I was wearing a gold chain, two gold rings, four gold bangles, gold eartops and a watch. My husband was carrying Rs 15,000 in cash and a heavy gold ring. They took away all this as well. He was carrying all this money because he wanted to go shopping after checking the house.; He was to return to Nairobi on the 17th, just three days later.

"One of those men was being called Mama by the others. I don't know him personally but I can recognise him. He caught hold of my hair and dragged me all around the street. They paraded and dragged me naked around the neighbourhood for a couple of hours and then brought



Photo: Soumitra Ghosh, Courtesy: Observer

me back to our house. I looked around for my husband but I could not see him anywhere. They pushed me into our room and threw me down where our clothes were lying torn and scattered. I was hurt by the fall. They boxed me on my eyes and I passed out. They had fully removed my shirt while they were dragging me around the streets but my bra was still on me and the *salwar* was half down while they were parading me. While I was still conscious I had heard the man, who was being addressed by those men as Mama, say, 'Now you see what all we are going to do with you. We will do *zeenakhori* (rape) with you. Take off what remains of your clothes.' After which they boxed me on my eyes and hit me on my head with an

iron rod. They boxed me on my chest, kicked me in my belly. That is when I fainted.

"When I regained consciousness, I found that there was not a shred of clothing on my body. They had taken away even my torn clothes. My body was filthy. I was bleeding from my private parts. Even now the whole place is swollen and full of wounds. It hurts both inside and outside. I was in great pain when I regained consciousness. It was already dark. I found and wore a *salwar* and shirt from among the clothes lying scattered around. Very slowly I dragged myself out and saw a white car standing on the road. It had a Maharashtra number plate. I crawled along the walls and somehow reached

this car. A man was standing outside it and another sitting inside. I explained to them my predicament and pleaded with them to drop me to the nearby police *chowki*. They said, 'No, no, go away from here.' There was another aged man standing nearby. He told them, 'Take her to the main road and drop her off there.' These two men then took me and dropped me off some distance from the police station of Charkop. I saw a police jeep and another big vehicle and four constables standing outside the police post. I screamed '*Bhai saheb*, see what a condition I have been reduced to. My husband has been killed.'

"An elderly policeman had responded to my plea for help by

saying, 'Why did you go back to your house? You people deserve to be treated thus. (*Tum logon ke saath to aisa hona mangta hai*). You have too much *charbi* (fat) on you. Why did you go there to do *fasaad* (rioting)?' They refused me help, saying: 'We know nothing. Whatever you want to say, go report to Kandivili *thana*. Here is an autorickshaw. Take this and go.' They hailed an auto standing nearby and asked one of their men to go along with me. I came to this very police station. Here I was put in a police van with two-three policemen who took a round of that area. I was half conscious. They took me back to the area of rioting. They saw a dead body on the way. Then they took me to our neighbourhood. I kept sitting in the van. The policemen went and saw our house. One of the constables offered me tea. I refused. I was lying down. He too misbehaved with me." [Earlier Seema had indicated that she was raped by some policemen as well.] But while in the police station she seemed reluctant to talk about it and talked only of "misbehaviour". "He pressed my belly, he squeezed my hand and my breasts and insisted I should drink the tea saying, 'It will make you feel better.' So I drank the tea. I was conscious enough to know what was happening but had no strength to protest or do anything about it because I was feeling dizzy.

"Then the policemen took me to Bhagwati Hospital (a public hospital). I stayed in that hospital for three days. But for two days no one from my family could visit me. I was constantly passing out. (*Hosh mein aati, behosh hoti*): In that condition, even if I asked for water, they would not put a few drops of water in my mouth. On the third day, I screamed at the hospital staff, saying 'You do not even care to give me some water.'

"They gave me two injections for sleeping and gave me a prescription

but since none of my relatives were around, no medicines could be brought. They did not give me an internal examination [to check for evidence of rape]. They simply looked at the wounds on my chest, put me through some X-rays and wrote out a prescription. I said to them, 'Please change my pyjama. This one is filthy and it hurts me to sit or move in it' But they said: 'Keep quiet. If you need something call your family members.'"

"I was released on the 16th morning when my family arrived and they admitted me to Holy Cross Hospital in Bandra. They asked me who was to be the inheritor of Shahid and demanded that I bring my passport, ration card and *nikahnaama*. The ration card was lost or destroyed during the attack on our house. My mother-in-law has refused to give me the *nikahnaama*. But luckily I found a xerox copy. I don't even have Shahid's death certificate because my in-laws took that from the hospital."

"Even during my stay in the Holy Cross Hospital, they did not conduct any internal examination. I asked my *devars* (brothers-in-law) but they said: 'It is eight-ten days now since it happened. What is the point of a check up now? We have to go for our brother's burial and you are worried about your medical check up.'"

"Till then I was under the impression that my husband was also in Bhagwati Hospital but could not meet me on account of being badly injured. I got to know of his death much later. I stayed two-three days in Holy Cross Hospital. They had said two weeks' rest but I insisted on being released because I used to feel very nervous in the hospital. (*Mera dil ghabrata tha*).

"Today, when I was brought to this police station for investigation and identification, they kept questioning me about my previous

life: 'When were you divorced?' 'How many children did you have?' And all kinds of similar enquiries. I told them, 'Look, I have a *talaaknaama* of the previous marriage and a *shaadinaama* of my second marriage.' All I know is that my life revolved around my husband and two children."

"I had given all these details to the police the very first time, mentioning all those attackers whom I could recognise. But today when the police brought in people for identification, they did not produce either Mama or the cigarette vendor who was helping them and seemed to know every one of them well."



When I met Seema a second time a few weeks later, she was trying desperately to rebuild her life. She had been given cash compensation of Rs 30,000 in hand and Rs 70,000 that the government put in fixed deposit. The government had announced that women like, her who lost their husbands and homes would get another one lakh but that had not come through. In any case, all of that put together is far from enough in helping her rebuild her life, especially considering that going back to her old house is very risky because there was a small sprinkling of Muslims there to begin with and now there would be even fewer. As a widow she would be even more vulnerable. She had put both her children in a hostel outside Bombay run by a Muslim trust because she felt that given the atmosphere of that area after the riots they could not possibly grow up to be decent human beings. Her plea was that the government should provide her family an alternate home in a safe area and freedom from harassment by the police. She said the policemen kept calling her repeatedly to the police station and detaining her there for hours; pressuring her to withdraw her case of molestation against the police. □

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Loyalty Test

giving evidence against the criminal elements of their own community. But the Hindus today are demanding more and more stringent loyalty tests from the Muslims. They are making them agree to humiliating conditions as a price for being allowed to return to their original homes. Many were made to give written promises that they won't keep Muslim tenants or sell their homes to any Muslims when they quit." Muslims are expected to submit submissively to prove that they are not "traitors" to this nation. They are expected to give unconditional loyalty to the Indian state and revere its totems and symbols with a fervour not expected from Hindus.

Shaila Satpute of **Svadhara** poignantly describes the implications of what is being demanded of the Muslims: "The whole atmosphere is so vitiated that this year we have had to go to Muslim areas and encourage them to celebrate the Republic Day because they need to get a certificate of loyalty to this country and 'prove' that they are not 'traitors', Compare it to those days when in my days of youth, as members of Yuva Kranti Dal, we used to commemorate it as a Black Day saying the dalits and other downtrodden had not got their due rights in this Republic. I vividly remember the Independence Day of August 15, 1971. Our organisation was as usual observing it as a Black day. That night we had planned a *mashaal morcha* (torch light procession). I was barely 15 days away from child birth and I fought with my husband that I was going to join the Black Day march. He was worried for me because the police was expected to stop the procession and that could lead to a violent situation. He said, 'if violence break out, I'm not going to be able to protect you and bring you back safely home. I will

want to stay with the processionists.' Such was our spirit and enthusiasm in those days."

"But this year we had to go from area to area to tell Muslims: 'You must hoist the tricolour. You will then be taken as *deshbhakts* (patriots). Nobody will then abuse you.'" See how much our own politics is diluted. In our area, the Hindu localities had *sannata* (total quiet) but in Muslim areas, the Republic Day was being celebrated like Id. They had put on music children were wearing new clothes and carrying the national flag in their hands.

"The Muslims of Bombay have become very defensive. By celebrating 26 January they wanted to assert this is as much their country. I felt really sad that they are having to celebrate this despite all that has happened. What must they be feeling in their hearts? But they are not expressing it because they know if they mourn at this time, they will be called traitors..."

"Let me tell you of another incident this morning. Early in the morning I went for the Republic Day preparation to a slum area called Golibar. This was around 7.45 a.m. They were in a good mood as though to say, 'we will show you, how loyal we are to the country.' At the outskirts of Golibar where the Muslim majority area ends and the neighbouring Hindu majority area begins, there is a row of toilets separating the two localities. A 16 year old Muslim boy who is a cripple, had gone to use the toilet. His sight is so poor, he cannot even see properly. Some Hindu boys of the neighbouring area caught hold of him near the toilet and wounded him with knives and a sword. They broke both his hands and legs and injured him on the head as well."

"He fell down right there. This happened just as I reached. The police which was stationed all around had done nothing to stop this attack. After it was all over, they came, looked around and took away the injured boy

to the hospital. When I reached the spot, I found that a big crowd had gathered there. Their mood of celebration of a while ago had changed to anger and violence. They were very agitated at this stabbing and began to abuse. Seeing me there they said: Tai, you don't believe us? Go up on the roof of this nearby house and see for yourself.' I quickly climbed a ladder and saw a bunch of Shiv Sena boys running with weapons in their hands. Seeing me an obviously middle class Hindu woman, climb up like that they were really taken aback. I had my *bindi* on and my manner of dress indicated that I was not one of the slum dwellers. They quickly tried to hide their weapons and stood in a corner and started watching me. On the other side, there is some railway land with a wall around it. Behind this wall the railway policemen were standing merrily watching the whole show.

"They were at a height so they could see the whole thing how the young Muslim boy was cut up. I remember that scene vividly. Their guns were pointed at the Muslim basti, in my direction — not towards the attackers though they had been witness to the attack. Their calculation obviously was that the Muslims will get provoked by the stabbing. There will be chaos. Some will climb on to the roof tops and throw stones at the Hindu basti. That will give the police an excuse to fire at the Muslims. But my coming on the scene had upset their calculation. I yelled at them and said: 'Why don't you fire your guns. You have aimed them at me and the basti. If you have the courage, fire at me!'

"They did not fire but neither did they stop those boys. If they had wanted they could have arrested them, stopped them from running away by firing at their legs. But they did nothing. When I challenged them to fire at me, they put down their guns and began talking among themselves

and laughing at me.

"I climbed down and explained and begged the Muslims not to get provoked saying 'please do not take *fasad* today. This is all being done deliberately to malign you. Don't retaliate in any way.' They agreed. What else could they do? They are defeated and helpless. Their anger can only be suicidal. They said to me, 'Tai, we want *aman* (peace). But if these people go on acting like this, how can we have peace?' But on my request, they restrained themselves and avoided any further incidents." •

Even in normal times Muslims are despised and discriminated against and are consequently poor and ghettoised. Repeated spells of violence have led to greater destitution and marginalisation of the Muslim community. This is facilitating large scale criminalisation of the community. If they are not allowed normal decent channels of livelihood, many of them will have no option but to turn to crime as a survival strategy. This will spell disaster not just for the Muslims but for the rest of society as well.

Role of Middle and Elite Classes

During these riots, various factors came into play. The role of *goondas*, anti-social elements, the builders' lobby and political rivalries have often been mentioned as the causes of violence. Yes, they were all active. But only up to a point did they determine the course of events. No society can be taken over by *goondas* and builders' lobbies unless society gives its sanction to such a takeover by criminal elements.

In earlier riots, it was *goondas* who used to participate and indulge in killing and looting. And it would be easy to curb their activity by arresting them under the *anti-goonda* laws and put them under preventive detention for disturbing peace. Only those with a crime record needed to be picked up and everything would become normal. But in recent years, rioting is

not confined to *goondas*, even though *goondas* are no doubt active as well. Large sections of the middle and upper classes are participating in and actively instigating violence. A senior government officer narrated: "People, who in normal times are afraid to have a large-sized knife in their house, were throwing petrol bombs at the Muslims, burning people alive and taking a lot of perverse joy in it..."

"For instance, in Dadar, which is a middle class area, I saw a young Muslim gheraoed by a lot of respectable looking people, many of them bank employees. He was asked to do sit-ups and told: 'When you sit down you say *Jai Shree Ram* and when you get up, you say *Vande Mataram*.' And on the hundredth *Jai Shri Ram* he was knifed in front of everybody. I've never before seen such perverted joy in killing. It has often been said that unemployed youth Join in these riots to give vent to their frustration, but this time most of those who participated in rioting were employed people from the better off organised sector, including government employees and professional trade unionists. There was nothing chaotic about the violence. It was all done in an organised manner..."

"It is amazing how even the city elite are not only condoning but encouraging such behaviour. In Bombay, there is a colony called Kalanagar, where artists, writers, painters, intellectuals and the upper middle class -the supposedly sophisticated elite -live. They organise prestigious lectures on intellectual matters and *sangeet sabhas* and get a big audience. In this area, on January 12, I was driving in my car and a little ahead of me was a tourist taxi with two women sitting in the back seat. The taxi was asked to stop by two-three young men. They asked the taxi man his name. He probably uttered some Hindu name and they let him pass. The moment

the taxi man went a little further, they signalled, waving their hands to another group. Suddenly, about 25 men emerged from the other side with stones, lathis and knives in their hands and they blocked the road so that the taxi had to stop.

"This gang of men asked him his name again and without paying heed' to what answer he gave, they asked for his licence. From his licence papers they confirmed that he was a Muslim trying to pass off as a Hindu. Before he could say anything, someone pulled his pants down. And they started hitting him all over. He dropped down vomiting blood. Then some of them approached the two Hindu Gujarati women (one middle aged and the other a young girl) who were sitting in the backseat of the taxi and said to them; '*Mataji/behenji. Bambai ki haalat bahut kharab hai, aap aage mat jayiye. Abhi yahaan hamara ghar hai.*' One upper middle class looking man came from a nearby building, opened the taxi dickey and took out the bags these two women and said to them:

'You can sit in our house safely. He's a Muslim, don't worry about him.' He escorted these two women to a nearby building.

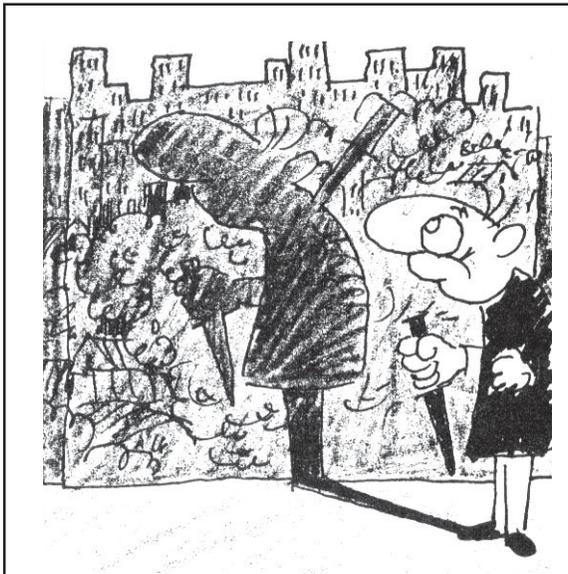
"After this, they overturned the taxi. It fell on its side. One man came with a small can of petrol from a nearby petrol pump right around the corner. While he was pouring petrol, another man came with a torch in hand, singing that famous national unity song that comes on TV, "*Mile sur tumhara hamaara*". (May your and my tune become one). They burnt the taxi. The injured Muslim boy tried in vain to get up and run, but when he got up, his pants fell down. While trying to pull his pants up, he was grabbed hold of by this gang who started battering him all over again. And as he fell down again, they picked a big stone slab lying on the pavement where some repair work was on, and with a shout of "*Jai Shri Ram*" they dropped it

down on his chest with a bang. All this while several upper middle class men were watching the scene from their balconies, as though they were watching a film. Not only that, there were several policemen too standing not too far away from this scene who made not the feeblest attempt to stop this brutal murder in broad day light.

“Had I intervened, they would have said ‘We will kill you first and him later.’ Remember, I too have a beard. That alone was enough to get them provoked assuming that I am Muslim. They forgot that even Shivaji sported a full, long beard. In those days of frenzy, they wouldn’t have spared Shivaji himself, for what they now consider a Muslim symbol...”

“Near Dadar station, there is a famous store called Dawood Shoe Mart owned by a Muslim. After this was looted, expensive shoes were being sold openly for Rs 15 to 20 on the pavement. The middle class happily came and bought those and other looted goods at throw away prices. Many even joined in the looting. They took whatever they could lay their hands on and later shamelessly went around exchanging these looted shoes with their friends in case they had picked the wrong sizes. This was an open acknowledgement of their crime, yet no one seemed to feel ashamed.”

In some middle class and elite areas, the hounding out of Muslims took place due to threats from the Shiv Sena. A section of the city elite did get somewhat shaken up by the brazenness of the mobsters who came even to posh areas threatening to burn down the multi-storeyed buildings where Muslim families also stayed. In such cases they had to organise heavy security around their buildings for their own self protection because they



knew that once the Shiv Sainiks came in, their arson and looting could not possibly stay confined to Muslim apartments. Many of the rich Muslims paid heavy sums as protection money to Shiv Sena (just as Hindus did) but even that did not often save the Muslims. In almost all multi-storey buildings people had removed all name plates so that the Shiv Sainiks could not easily identify the buildings where some Muslim families lived. In many such buildings, even Hindus asked their Muslim neighbours to move out, at least temporarily, in order not to jeopardise the safety of the entire building. Many, including famous Muslim film stars, had to go and stay in hotels for those days of frenzy.

In many instances, middle class families actively worked to make their Muslim neighbours feel insecure. For instance, in the Reserve Bank Colony situated behind Maratha Mandir, officers’ families forced fellow Muslim officers to leave the colony. Even little children of officers played an active role - they would stone the windows of Muslim homes, abuse, threaten and beat up Muslim children.

In many areas, residents have passed resolutions that Muslims would not be allowed to stay there.

Even where they are being allowed to come back, they have to accept humiliating terms and conditions, such as, they will not be allowed to rent or sell their house to a Muslim. Those involved with rehabilitation work have heard many Hindus declare openly: ‘We don’t want Pakistan in our area - *Hamare area mein Pakistan nahin chahiye.*’

The popularity of Shiv Sena among the middle and upper classes during this phase can be gauged by the sudden increase in the circulation of Shiv Sena paper

Saamna. This is a four-page rag of a paper. For the first time it reached the homes of the elite which till now prided themselves on reading only the likes of *India Today* and *Time* magazine. All of a sudden, Sharad Pawar’s *Navakaal* were eagerly sought after. In some places *Saamna* would be read publicly and exhibited prominently in various street corners. On certain days the premium price of *Saamna* has been quoted at Rs 16 to Rs 25. Thackeray had succeeded in convincing even the upper class Hindus that he was their saviour.

Around the 18th of January, a rumour was spread that Bal Thackeray was going to be arrested. Personnel managers of public sector undertakings started telephoning the police to find out if it was really true. They were saying that their employees were spontaneously walking out of their offices. Bazaars started getting closed, offices were deserted and shops looted and burnt just on the basis of that rumour. As a result, the government had to make repeated announcements on radio and television as well as through the use of microphones in public places, saying, “Rest assured. Bal Thackeray is not arrested.”

Has BJP's Ram Divorced Sita?

For centuries “*Jai Siya Ram*” has been a common form of greeting used by ordinary Hindus in the villages of North India. Even the unfair banishment of Sita by Ram could not separate the two in the minds of those people for whom the *Ramayana* presented a revered *dharmic* text. Just as Shiv cannot be conceived of without his Shakti, so is Ram inconceivable without Sita. It is noteworthy that Sita's name comes even before Ram's in the popular chant: “*Jai Siya Ram*”.

But the BJP-RSS-VHP combine has consciously tried to obliterate Sita's name by amending the traditional greeting to “*Jai Shree Ram*”. This obviously fits in with the martial Rambo type of Ram that it is trying to recreate in order to preach its politics of hatred, and bloodshed. It has no use for the gentle and caring Ram of Valmiki, Tulsi and a host of other versions of the *Ramayana*—Ram who cries like a child in *viyog* when Sita is abducted, Ram who is a loving and caring husband, brother and son.

The aversion of the Sangh parivar to Sita is understandable. Those who are actively involved in instigating riots and killings, burning people's homes, killing their near and dear ones brutally in front of their eyes, not even sparing little children, can have no use for a non-macho Ram. *Logon ke ghar jalane wale, Ram ki grihasthi kaise basi rehne denge?* (Those who are

destroying people's homes cannot let Ram's household stay intact).

Sita's presence next to Ram poses a real threat to the hate soaked ideology of the *Sangh parivar* because Sita is the one who preached pacifism to Ram. The *Aranya Kand* records a very moving interaction between Sita and Ram—one of those rare occasions when Sita presumes to advise and correct Ram:

“Three evils are born of desire: speaking untruth—a great sin indeed; but worse still are: coveting another's wife and harming those against whom one has no quarrel. O Ram, you have never uttered a lie, nor will you ever be found to have that failing. And the vice of guilty love has never been yours — not even in thought, always true that you are to your wedded wife.”

“And this third great evil, thirst of blood where there is no enmity, to which the ignorant are prone, seems to be alarmingly near you.”

“O hero, my prayer is that when, armed with the bow, you are engaged in waging war against the *rakshasas* who have this forest for their home, you may never allow yourself to slay indiscriminately those who are not to blame...”

A Sita who exhorts Ram that he should never allow himself to slay indiscriminately those who are not to blame, cannot be allowed to be one with Ram. The Sangh parivar's idea

of an appropriate consort for Ram would be a venom-spewing Ritambara-Uma Bharati type of woman who delights in sowing hatred and violence among the Hindus. Contrast Sita's words with some extracts from Sadhvi Rithambara's speeches:

“We could not teach them [Muslims] with words, now let us teach them with kicks—Let there be blood-shed once and for all...”

“Throw off the cloak of cowardice and impotence. Learn to sing songs of valour and courage. Do not display any love (*preet*). Let this fire blaze magnificently. Let there be a conflagration rather than this slow torturous simmering... We have come out to strengthen the immense Hindu *shakti* into a fist... You kept saying you will offer sacrifices. We will take thousands of sacrifices. Now we will not only shed our own blood, but the blood of others, too—That Mahatma Gandhi led you to ruin... Tie up your religiosity and kindness into a bundle and throw it in the *Jamuna maiya* [river Yamuna]... Hindustan is foolish, it refuses to give up its foolish course, it gets beaten and forgives its opponent.” Why? Because this is the land of Buddha and the Mahatma, Guru Nanak Dev and other Sants who sacrificed their lives, offered their necks but could not break the neck of others...”

Unfortunately, the Sangh parivar have been avidly accepted by many women. □

Murders were being committed in broad daylight - not just in slums but also in middle class-upper class colonies, and those who watched applauded this violence by and large rather than come and demand action against culprits. School children and college going boys of middle class families carried knives and took pride

in stabbing fellow Muslim students. Similarly, thousands of middle class people, including women, children and teenagers, would collect for the so-called *maha aartis* even at curfew times -even when they knew the *aartis* were only an excuse for starting more violence, thus providing legitimacy to

criminal acts. The police joined them as well.

However, some sections of the city elite demonstrated that they cared by spontaneously coming together in a broadbased forum called Citizens for Peace (CFP). It was sparked off by some people living in the posh

Carmichael Road area witnessing with their own eyes the mayhem organised by the Shiv Sainiks. About 150 Muslim families who had been torched out of their homes came and sought shelter in one of the high rise buildings, followed by Shiv Sainiks with weapons in hand, demanding that these Muslims be handed back to them. The residents resisted, called the police and handed over the Muslims to them. This triggered off the setting up of CFP which not only tried to raise resources for relief work but also set up a round the clock hotline so that trapped families could call for help and CFP would try to pressure the police or army to take note of that complaint. Their success in putting together a number of volunteers and collecting a substantial amount of relief supplies at a time when a majority of people in Bombay including middle class intellectuals, felt Muslims deserved what happened to them, was a remarkable achievement. Their letting the administration know that they were monitoring government actions, did work to some extent. In addition, a number of people from the civil liberties and left oriented organisations organised a number of relief camps. Among the city's elite, the Jain community was in the forefront of raising funds and other resources for relief work.

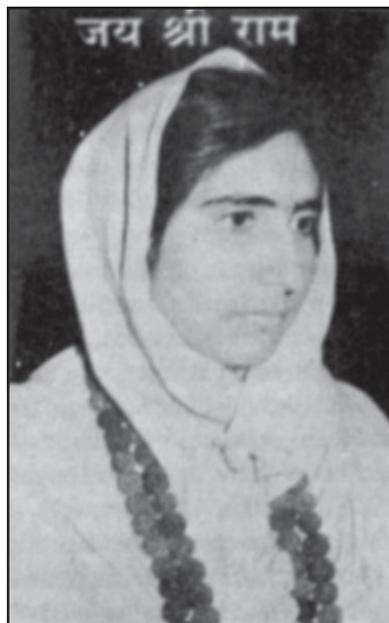
Women

One of the most disturbing features of this riot was the large scale enthusiastic participation of women and even young girls in the acts of violence. The fascination of the women for the Sangh parivar politics is especially noteworthy considering that their politics is brazenly macho, so much so that they have even obliterated Sita from Ram's world. (See Box).

So far, women in India have entered politics mostly as wives, mothers and daughters of powerful

male politicians. Sangh parivar has changed this by making space for two young women — Uma Bharati and Rithambara — in leading roles, both of whom came on their own rather than through family connections. They have been surprisingly successful in mobilising women in outfits like Durga Vahini, thus making a distorted use of another traditional Hindu symbol. Durga is supposed to have destroyed evil; but the Sangh parivar's Durgas lead riotous mobs to burn homes and kill innocent people.

Several people in Bombay told me that for the first time in their lives they had witnessed women enthusiastically supporting violence. Normally, women do not applaud rape.



Rithambara — the woman who launched a thousand riots



A Sangh parivar Durga taking part in the riot

Photo: Soumitra Ghosh, Courtesy: Observer

But this time many Hindu women in Bombay were openly justifying the rape of Muslim women. They would argue: 'Why not? What is wrong with it? For hundreds and thousands of years, Muslims have done the same to Hindus. We are settling those old scores because now we are powerful and united. They have invited it on themselves.'

In Bombay, a woman corporator was killed by a police bullet while she was leading a riotous mob in an attack on Muslim homes and shops. This is one of the rare cases of a riotous mob being fired upon by the police. So confident was this woman corporator of police support that when a police officer ordered her to stop, she did not pay any heed and continued leading the violence. She had not calculated that there were still a few policemen left who believed in trying to stop rioting. It is alleged that she was involved in all kinds of illicit activities, including running of liquor dens. She belonged to that faction of the Republican Party which has an alliance with the Congress (I).

Likewise, another woman "social

worker” of the Congress (I), called Malsa, is supposed to have led the mob which burnt and looted a big commercial complex of readymade garments and leather goods in Dharavi. Women and young girls avidly looting shops along with men was a common sight in Bombay during the January riots. I heard accounts of how Hindu women dragged Muslim women and children and joined the men in stoning them and setting them on fire.

When Madhukar Sarpotdar, the Shiv Sena MLA who played a very prominent role in instigating riots, was arrested by an army officer for carrying a carload of weapons during curfew hours, hundreds of women (some say several thousand) came and lay down on the road in front of the army vehicles, saying they could take away Sarpotdar only over the women’s dead bodies. They went and demonstrated outside the police station and got Sarpotdar released. During the same period, when in Behrampada, several Muslim *jhuggis* were set on fire by Shiv Sainiks, women of Shiv Sena families came and sat on the streets to prevent the fire brigade from reaching Behrampada.

However, many of the Hindu women who were mobilised by the Shiv Sena joined out of fear rather than conviction. The women of *jhoadpattis* who were taken to protest against Sarpotdar’s arrest were told that the government was planning to arrest all able bodied Hindus, along with Sarpotdar, under pressure from the Muslims: “If you don’t protest now, Shiv Sainiks won’t help you when your husband or son gets arrested,” they were warned.

But there were at least a few courageous women who dared go against the tide and intervened openly and sometimes even effectively in saving precious lives. While many may not have been able to intervene at the time of violence,



Shaila Satpute

many joined the relief work. A few of them belonged to women’s organisations, some others had been active in civil liberties organisations and a few were grassroot level political workers of the Janata Dal as well as the Congress. Such people were isolated within their own parties and worked mostly on their individual strength because no party or mass organisation could put its act together and combat the violence in an organised way. Their efforts were sporadic and/or isolated. Yet sometimes they succeeded.

I quote from the account of Shaila Satpute, of the Janata Dal and one of the founders of a women’s organisation called Svadhar: “During the height of rioting in January, a mob of about 10,000 people had gathered near where we live. We came down to find out what had happened and were told that the nearby marble shop owners, who are Muslims, had hoarded weapons inside their shop godowns. Behind these Muslim shops live a few Muslim families. The rest of the neighbourhood is inhabited by the Hindus. We went to the local police station and asked the man in charge why he had let a mob gather at a time of such tension. The police

repeated the same allegation about Muslims having stored weapons in those shops. The Hindus were all ready to attack and burn those shops after stoning them. But we managed to persuade the police to come with us, along with three-four such Muslims who were trusted and respected by their community. In addition I prevailed upon the BJP MLA, Abhiram Singh, and the local corporator belonging to the Shiv Sena to come with us and conduct a thorough operation of those Muslim shops. Nothing was found except marble slabs and the marble stones that are leftover when slabs are cut. In addition, we found a few fused tubelights. In an establishment which uses 50 tubelights, finding four or five fused ones is not unusual. But there were no weapons there whatsoever. Yet had I not gone and intervened, those shops would have been destroyed that day and the owners physically attacked. Luckily, our local Shiv Sena corporator is a relatively mild man but in other places such rumours have led to brutal destruction.”

However, Shaila did not succeed all the time. She could not even save the homes of her own party workers. “In my own area, each one of our Muslim party workers had had their homes destroyed. There is a man called Khursheed who was to be elected our local unit president. When I heard that a 5,000-strong mob had gathered to attack his house, I rushed there. But one of our senior party workers told me ‘Tai, you should go back. Don’t stop here a minute. They will strip you and attack you as well’. Khursheed’s house was looted and destroyed. He somehow managed to run away and save his life.”

Likewise, Sushobha Barve’s work in Dharavi is supposed to have saved many a potentially explosive situation. (A detailed account will be published in a forthcoming issue.) Another name



Beyond the pale of fear: Hindu middle class during Wadala curfew

that was gratefully mentioned by the Muslims was that of Shirley Pawar, a woman corporator belonging to the Congress (I). She is supposed to have escorted more than a hundred Muslims to safety. Among others who described her courage and compassion were 20-year-old Parveen and her husband, Mohammad Hussain, who used to live in Tardeo. Their house was reduced to rubble right in front of their eyes and all the Muslim families of the area were asked to leave. Hussain says: "It was Shirley Pawar (he calls her Sarli Pawar), a local Congress woman leader, who helped all the surviving Muslims to escape from that area. If she had not helped us, all of us would have fallen as corpses. The police chowki did not help us at all. She escorted all of us Muslims out of that area. She brought some families to Bombay Central, some others to Madanpura and went back after seeing us off safely. But when she returned to that area, she too was threatened for protecting the Muslims. But she did whatever was

in her reach. She was able to bring out 100-150 people."

But on the whole, women's enthusiastic endorsement of and participation in the riots shattered the popular stereotype of women as being innately more peace loving and compassionate.

Shiv Sena Gains

The biggest gainer of this violence was the Shiv Sena because their leaders were the only ones who dared play an open role in it and boast of their doings. The other parties had to per force pretend that they were not happy with it, even when their leaders and cadres played an active part in fomenting the bloodshed.

Before the riots the Shiv Sena's political fortunes were sinking due to infighting in the party leading to continuing defections. In the last municipal elections they were badly defeated. The post of the opposition leader also went out of their hands and passed on to the BJP. Therefore, the Shiv Sena decided to capitalise on the Hindutva wave created due to

the Ram mandir campaign and outdo the BJP in rioting as well as. in boasting of their role in Babri Masjid demolition.

A young Shiv Sainik named Jais provided a fairly lucid statement explaining the logic behind Shiv Sena's targeting of Muslims. He works with his father who runs a furniture business in Bandra East. He narrated how after four days of mayhem, Bal Thackeray reportedly told Shiv Sainiks to halt the violence for a while because the Shiv Sena would need another anti-Muslim wave at election time. Jais boasted that had they been allowed another week of rioting, not a single Muslim would be alive in Bombay. In response to our question: "Would you like to kill all Muslims", his answer was: "No, all Muslims should not be killed at once. Otherwise, what issue would we Hindus have left to fight for? Whenever there is an election, we need to kill a few Muslims to revive the anti-Muslim sentiment. If all the Muslims go away, we will have no

enemy left and the Hindus will start fighting among themselves.” He added by way of an explanation: “Whenever among our friends, young boys get angry and start a fight, we say, ‘*Bhai*, don’t fight with another Hindu. Go and beat up or kill a Mussalman and cool your anger.’ If we fight among ourselves, we will become weak. We want some Muslims to stay in India, otherwise Hindus will have no issue to unite them politically.”

We asked him whether after collecting protection money from Hindus in the name of *Nirdhaar Nidhi*, Hindus will actually get security or the money will be embezzled. His answer was: “*Khayenge to hamare log khayenge.*” Bal Thackeray also said in response to allegations of corruption among Shiv Sainiks, “*Apne logon ko khane do.*” (Let our own people embezzle).

Jais, who prides himself for being one of the few who became a Shiv Sainik much before it became fashionable among young boys to join the organisation, seemed unhappy at the way the new breed of Shiv Sainiks were getting out of control. He narrated an incident whereby his fellow Sainiks caught hold of a young boy, poured kerosene over him and lit a fire. “The boy cried out, saying, ‘Don’t kill me. I am a Hindu. My name is Shankar.’ But the Sainiks yelled back, ‘You don’t know Marathi. What kind of a Hindu are you?’ and burnt him to death.”

Jais’s explanation was: “*Aur kya hoga madam? Jo ladkon ko patthar marne ki bhi aukat nahin hai, unke haath mein bandook pakda denge, to aise hi hoga na phir.*” (Such things are bound to happen if you put guns in the hands of boys who have not yet learnt to pelt stones properly.) This was in the context of Bal Thackeray apparently calling all the Shiv Sena *pramukhs* to a meeting and



Photo: Soumitra Ghosh, Courtesy: Observer

Shiv Sainiks in action in Dadar West

saying, “It is a shame on Hindu *dharma* that you are not teaching Muslims a lesson. Take whatever weapons you want. I’ll open our stores and give you as many guns and weapons as you ask for. But you must do a good job.”

He admits to Shiv Sena having given them weapons and that all their *shakhs* have a big stock. Most Sainiks keep their weapons in the Sena office instead of taking them home so that they don’t get caught in the eventuality of a police raid. But during the entire period of December and January riots, the police did not once raid any of the Shiv Sena offices even while they were daily raiding

Muslim bastis.

He also narrated how for the first time he felt bad over anti-Muslim violence when an old Muslim friend of his who used to join them whenever they went on a looting spree, became a victim of the current phase of violence. This friend’s small shop of cassettes was burnt by his own friends. Jais says, “I was very upset when my friend said to us, ‘You people have burnt my shop, how will I live now? Throw me also into the fire.’” Jais told us that this time Sainiks did not even spare the few Muslims who had joined the Shiv Sena.

There is general consensus in Bombay that the enormous clout that

the Shiv Sena has acquired over the years is primarily due to the political patronage Bal Thackeray and his hoodlum brigade has received from the ruling Congress party. Bal Thackeray is often referred to as the *paltu kutta* (pet dog) of successive chief ministers, starting with Vasant Naik, who patronised him along with leading industrialists, to break the powerful trade union movement led by Dutta Samant in Bombay.

Vasant Dada Patil encouraged him to spread to rural areas to destroy the influence of Shetkari Sangathana among the peasantry. Sharad Pawar, the present chief minister, has been hand in glove with him and used the Sainiks to settle scores with political rivals of all kinds. As a result, Thackeray has become so powerful that no one dare take action against him.

Someone who has worked closely with various politicians summed up the reason for Thackeray's clout succinctly: "People say that Bal Thackeray was able to get politically so powerful because Shiv Sainiks are able to extort huge sums of money from industrialists and everybody else. I don't think money makes that much of a difference. If I give you Rs 100 crore tomorrow you will not be able to become a big political leader with that alone. But the moment I give you political power and moral legitimacy, things start changing. When successive chief ministers themselves invite Bal Thackeray and let him interfere and influence the police functioning and general government policy, all because they can use his hoodlum brigades to settle scores with political rivals or combat the challenge posed by various movements, such as the farmer's or the trade union movement, that amounts to actually building Thackeray's political clout. On his own he is a cipher. But the backing of

all these powerful politicians makes him the invincible monster he has become."

Day after day, during the riots, Shiv Sena's mouthpiece *Saamna*, came out with the most provocative lies, openly instigating violence against the Muslims. Despite their having violated every possible law of the land, their leaders were neither

arrested nor their papers censored or banned. Shiv Sainiks openly talked about Congress MP Sunil Dutt and a senior police officer among others, being on their hit list, for having played a supposedly anti-Hindu role. Sunil Dutt is the only politician who risked his very life to save Muslims and got actively involved in relief work. He even resigned in protest

An Exceptional Policeman

Even while a majority of policemen violated the norms of their own profession, there were a few courageous and fair minded policemen who took enormous personal risk to remain true to their duty. DCP Pandey, in-charge of Dharavi police station, played a positive role in keeping things under control by being non-partisan. But, instead of being rewarded, he was transferred from that job to a department which allowed no public dealing. Many view his transfer as a punishment posting. A few other names were mentioned as well.

Sanobar Kishwar, a Bombay based social worker who was actively involved in relief and rehabilitation work, described how one particular Sikh policeman acted with remarkable courage in Habibpur of Pratikshanagar area. On January 11, the Shiv Sena had organised *amaha aarti* in the local Hanuman mandir, which became the starting point of an all out attack on the Muslims. Firebombs were thrown at their homes and shops which were reduced to ashes right in front of their eyes. A mob of about 500 was led by an ex-corporator of the Shiv Sena, called Satyaram Jamkar. They came and set fire to some Muslim flats. Those trapped in the burning flats were petrified of coming down because the mob was waiting for them down below.

Sanobar was later told by those people that they — and especially the women decided — that they would

choose being roasted alive rather than falling into the hands of the Shiv Sainiks. A police force was stationed there but did nothing to save the trapped people, except for one policeman by the name of Pratap Singh. A Muslim social organisation had sent an ambulance with a driver and another helper to rescue the victims but the two men, themselves Muslims, were too scared to go and evacuate the building, defying the mob. At this point, Pratap Singh is supposed to have held the mob at bay single-handedly, with just one gun" in his hand. He himself went up to the building and shouted, saying: "I'll protect you. Come down or else you will die." Because they recognised the Muslim social worker who accompanied the ambulance, many of the trapped people came down. But they would have been killed by the mob had it not been for the great courage shown by Pratap Singh. He kept them at bay by firing in the air and thus saved nearly a hundred families single-handedly. While Pratap Singh was thus risking his life, the other policemen shot dead the driver of the ambulance, injured the social worker and punctured the ambulance tyres. The injured driver still tried to drive it away but they got him and shot him dead in front of everybody. Sanobar says, Pratap Singh refuses to talk about the incident and feared that he would be transferred from the area as a punishment for doing his duty.



Congress MP Sunil Dutt accompanying the Governor in Behrampada

against his own party's role in the violence; but his resignation was not accepted.

Even as rehabilitation work started, Shiv Sainiks were openly threatening that Muslims would not be allowed to return to their old neighbourhoods. It was another way of either grabbing the deserted homes and shops or demanding a pay off by way of money. A political worker involved with relief work said that when efforts were made to encourage the Muslims to go back to their homes, the Shiv Sainiks would say openly: "Give us such and such amount per *jhuggi* or shop or give us your *madarsa* or some other property as a fee for letting you come back."

Shiv Sena trade unions were not letting Muslims come back to their jobs. In February, there were a number of instances of Muslim workers being physically attacked or even killed by Shiv Sainiks when they came to rejoin their jobs. Muslim street vendors and hawkers were likewise being prevented from plying their trade in Hindu or mixed areas. Muslim school

children weren't allowed to come back to schools.

The winning over of a large number of Dalits to the cause of the Shiv Sena played an important role in making the riots so widespread as most poor Muslim bastis are surrounded by Dalit bastis. By successfully creating a fear psychosis among the Hindus, the Shiv Sena managed to persuade Hindus across the spectrum that they had saved them from the Muslims.

At the height of anti-Muslim violence, the *Indian Express* published a news item which said that a Pakistani ship carrying a huge arsenal of weapons was intercepted by the Indian coast guard. The news report implied that the weapons were meant for the Muslims to help them fight against the Hindus. Shiv Sena's *Saamna* went much further in fuelling such rumours and said that 400-500 Muslims would come in black uniforms and attack Hindu houses and buildings. The Shiv Sena made a careful plan, as a result of which from Cuffe Parade to Borivili, every Hindu

stayed awake and kept guard over his respective building at night.

A businessman who requested anonymity, described thus the madness that had gripped Bombay: "In my own building I saw my neighbours collecting chilli powder and soda bottles. I asked them: 'The police is sitting downstairs. The military is all around. If their bullets cannot protect you, how will you protect yourself with soda bottles? The rumour is 400-500 men with modern weapons are going to come to attack you. Will you be able to protect yourself from them with chilli powder?'"

"But, when sanity is lost, a person's capacity to think and understand also goes. The result was that the Shiv Sena was successful. When some Muslim *goondas* were raided, all that was discovered was swords and petrol bombs. In Andheri, the Shiv Sena corporator himself lied that 400-500 Muslims came to attack him, and the Shiv Sainiks went and burnt the huts of the poor and the small shops owned by Muslims. But



A Muslim woman with her little children requests the policemen to take her to a safer place, at Jogeshwari East

the Hindus do not pause to ask—how is it that if Muslims have all these modern weapons, how come they are the ones to get killed most? It's mostly their homes which got burnt. Very few Hindus were killed.”

The Shiv Sena hoodlums are not content with terrorising the Muslims alone. In fact, like all terrorists they have to first strike fear in the hearts of their own community in order that they can function without hinderence. Their targets too have kept changing. First it was all non-Maharashtrians, especially, South Indians, then rival trade unions, and for some years even Sikhs. Now it is the turn of Muslims and all those Hindus who dare oppose them.

Even at normal times Bombayites have become used to paying whatever contributions Shiv Sainiks demand of them at festival and other times. But following the riots, Shiv Sainiks were extorting huge sums of money from Hindus which no one dared refuse. Bal Thackeray gave an open call for collecting Rs 100 crores as election funds.

Even though Shiv Sainiks were committing violence in the name of safeguarding Hindus, yet Hindus seemed far more petrified of Shiv Sena than even the Muslims. While Muslims would openly criticise the role of Shiv Sena and never once refused to be identified or photographed when they gave statements regarding the riots, very few Hindus were willing to talk about the violence, and the few who did, insisted on anonymity — such was the terror the Shiv Sena had struck in the minds of those whom they claimed to defend.

The Shiv Sena and Sangh parivar been able to motivate large sections of Hindus towards criminal activities by playing on the negative stereotypes of the two communities and their views of each other as well as of themselves. Hindus harbour deep-seated fears of Muslims because they believe them to be innately cruel and violent. Their regular meat eating versus the vegetarianism of upper caste Hindus and the fact that many of the butcher community people are

Muslims, feeds into the stereotype of Muslims as *kasais* (killers). The presence of a large number of Muslims among the underworld dons, confirms the stereotype of their being inherently violent. Hindus also believe that Muslims are more virile and circumcision helps them to “perform” better. Thus, they are paranoid about Muslims being sexually attractive to Hindu women.

Interestingly, Muslims have come to accept some of this as their self view, just as Hindus have accepted the Muslim view of Hindus being cowards. Shiv Sena cadres say openly that they will not allow the Muslims to have a monopoly of *dadagiri*. Bhisham Sahni's novel, *Tamas*,

had a powerful scene in which a young Hindu boy recruited by the RSS is taught to get over his revulsion of blood by killing a hen with his own hands, by way of an initiation rite. The Sangh parivar and Shiv Sainiks are now taking these rites much further by encouraging Hindus to believe that by learning to kill and torture people and rape women, they are getting rid of the “fatal flaw” of Hindus — namely, their propensity towards non-violence.

The large scale criminalisation of the Hindu community being fostered by the politics of Shiv Sena and Sangh parivar by making young men feel “brave” and righteous while looting and killing constitutes a grave threat for the well being of Hindu community.

Safe Nation Unsafe People

The Sangh parivar and Shiv Sena project themselves as the saviour of the Hindu *dharma*. In actual fact they are destroying both the social and moral fabric of the Hindu community as well as its *dharma*. For Hindus, the

word *dharma* symbolises far more than what the West understands by the word religion. *Dharma* stands for varied ethical codes of conduct for different roles and situations that a person has to deal with in life. It also means the essence or the inner law of one's being. Thus there is *matr dharma*, *putr dharma*, *pitr dharma*, *raj dharma*, *guru dharma*, *manav dharma*, *kshatriya dharma*, and so on. These refer to the ethical codes of conduct expected of a person as a mother, son, father, as a ruler, as a *guru shishya*, as a human being, as a *kshatriya* or warrior. The list is endless and includes virtually every aspect of human life and every social relationship.

A person is enjoined to follow a specific moral code for each of the different roles a person performs in society as well as in family life. The *dharmic* world view does not make allowances like, "All is fair in love and war." Warriors have to follow a strict code and enemies have to be dealt with honourably. Even gods are not forgiven for violating that code. For instance, Krishna's goading of Yudhisthra to tell a lie in order to win the Mahabharat war or Krishana's cheating of Duryodhana by telling him that he should not go naked in front of his mother, Gandhari, when she had asked him to appear thus in order to make his body invincible — are seen as violation of the code of conduct expected in warfare.

A Hindu is enjoined to treat the entire universe as one's family. *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, is the philosophical ideal. This gets translated into a concrete, everyday code of conduct in the popular culture as *padosi dharma*, or *mohalledari*. Neighbours are supposed to come to each other's help in times of need, share each others' joys and sorrows, protect

each other from harm by outsiders, forget even their grievances in times of illness or death in the house of a neighbour and share their sorrow and offer to help. This ensures a certain kind of mutual safety and provides valuable social security which is not available to people living in atomised societies, where there is no such sense of mutual obligations. So strong has been the hold of this ideology of duty to one's neighbours, that in many the stable neighbourhoods, even *goondas* are made to honour it by keeping their nefarious activities outside the neighbourhood and avoid teasing and misbehaving with the women of their neighbourhood, no matter how badly they may behave outside. The ideology demands all the women of one's neighbourhood or village are expected to be treated as sisters or mothers.

In our own neighbourhood in Lajpat Nagar, I have never witnessed young boys indulging in sexual harassment of the young girls of the neighbourhood, though I am sure many of them do so outside. During the anti-Sikh riots of 1984 many neighbourhoods organised night long vigils together and successfully repelled attackers. In all those areas in Delhi where neighbours came to protect the Sikhs, the latter were saved from the mob violence. Most of the violence was done by *goonda* brigades brought in from "outside". Even in those areas, where joint Hindu-Sikh defence of the neighbourhood was not organised, such as the poorer localities in trans-Yamuna areas, many Sikh families testified how even though their homes were destroyed, they were able to save their lives because of shelter provided by their neighbours. In the area of Delhi

where my parents live, when a group of hoodlums came to burn a house belonging to Sikhs, just two unarmed old people—my father along with an 80-year-old woman — were able to prevail upon the rioters to go away without burning that house. In most of the earlier riots — including those involving Muslims — neighbours mostly provided protection and did not join in the loot and arson. The rioters often retreated from arson and loot even when a small handful of determined people stood guard to protect their neighbours.

It would be rare for people to be killed or have their own houses burnt for daring to save their neighbours. But things have changed fast. This time neighbours joined in the rioting against people they had lived close to for years. Most simply watched. The few who dared offer shelter were attacked if the Shiv Sainiks found out. Several Muslims who had been saved by their Hindu neighbours, narrated how they were punished for doing so. Bhamabai, who works as a part time domestic servant, lives in a slum of Tulsiwadi all by herself. This old woman sheltered her neighbour, Kehkashah's six children and husband in her *jhuggi*. As a result, Bhamabai's own house was broken and the pitiful little she had, was looted. When I met her in March, she told me she had literally nothing left. Even the sari she was wearing belonged to one of her neighbours. Many others succumbed to the threats and asked those they had sheltered to leave because the Shiv Sainiks would come and boldly announce that, they would destroy the homes of all those Hindus who dared hide Muslims. Therefore, very few people dared protect their neighbours.

The sense of *mohalledari* or



Photo: Soumitra Ghosh, Courtesy: Observer

Rioters throwing a cycle into a fire at Dharavi

village solidarity, in case of rural areas, apart from being rooted in natural human compassion, is based on the pragmatic consideration that one's own safety lies in the safety of one's neighbourhood. For some people like Mahatma Gandhi, total and unconditional commitment to non-violence and peace was a moral, *dharmic* resolve. Most ordinary people keep away from blatant forms of violence such as murder and arson for more practical reasons — that is, their realisation that killing or hurting someone, especially in one's neighbourhood, is a risky proposition, because violence inevitably leads to counter violence which can become an unending deadly game. On this premise of enlightened self-interest is based the code of *mohalledari*,

of joining together to make at least one's immediate social environment safe. Almost every *mohalla* in cities and towns of India follows the practice of appointing a *chowkidar* to ensure common security of all residents. This is outside the police system as the latter is not trusted to ensure safety.

However, through their relentless hate propaganda, the Sangh parivar and Shiv Sena combine have succeeded in a large measure in tearing asunder these neighbourhood ties. Over the years they have engineered to divide neighbourhoods into warring camps. Earlier it was primarily due to a tussle between the Congress and the BJP (or its earlier incarnations) for political control

over *mohalla* associations and traditional panchayats, thus bringing the ugly aspects of party politics into organisations which were meant to act on a consensual basis. The other is attempts to polarise neighbourhoods on communal lines. The process was started at the time of the Partition by the Muslim League and the believers in the ideology of Sangh parivar. But at that time the trouble was engineered at the national level and implemented at the local level mostly through outsider *goondas*. Moreover, it stayed confined to select parts of India. But today the Hindu-Muslim divide has become very widespread and has destroyed neighbourhood ties.

The Sangh parivar is out to destroy the *dharma* of Hindus where it matters most—that is, in

their day to day relationships, with people with whom they have the closest interaction apart from their immediate family. By sowing the seeds of mistrust and hatred among neighbours, by encouraging Hindus to view their Muslim neighbours as enemies to be destroyed, they are actually making the lives of Hindus insecure, thus endangering the well-being of the Hindu community as well. **What meaning can national security have for people, if they do not feel secure in their own mohallas and villages? What good is national unity, if one's neighbourhood is torn asunder by hatred and mistrust?**

Repeated bouts of Hindu-Muslim violence have led to increasing ghettoisation of the Muslim community — a process that started with the Partition. Both Hindus and Muslims start leaving neighbourhoods that have preponderance of the other community.

That is exactly what the believers in the ideology of the Sangh parivar want — complete isolation of the Muslims and breaking of all communication channels between the two communities. As long as Hindus and Muslims continue to interact with each other as neighbours and colleagues or business partners, they will know them as individuals not particularly different from themselves despite some cultural, religious variations. But as soon as the two communities get physically distanced, it becomes much easier for hatemongers from both sides to present the other as a hateful stereotype and legitimise hatred and violence against the other.

Who are the guilty?

The Bombay violence has been variously described as the result of inflamed religious sentiments among Muslims and Hindus; as the handiwork of underworld dons in

league with the builders' lobby which is believed to have encouraged the burning of slums and *chawls* in order to grab prime pieces of land; as the fall out of political rivalry between warring factions of the Congress party led by Sharad Pawar and Sudhakar Naik respectively.

No doubt criminals and builders played a role in stirring up violence. But no society can be taken over by criminals unless influential sections of that society give their sanction to such a takeover. The participation of the middle class and the tacit or active support of the city elite gave crime an unprecedented boost. Large section of the Congress and Republican leadership and cadres joined and led the killing brigades. Even the left trade unions did not or could not organise any resistance. The organised working class too had either been won over by the Shiv Sena or stay immobilised. Even those trade union leaders who disapproved of the violence, did not dare take a clear public stand for fear of alienating and losing their supposed following. When Sainiks began to brazenly prevent Muslim workers from rejoining duties after the massacres subsided, the trade union leaders did not intervene to protect Muslim workers from being hounded out of their jobs.

While a couple of stray instances were cited whereby Dalits joined in with Muslims to defend their bastis by and large Dalits, including those aligned to the Republican Party joined and even led the rioting brigades. Ramdas Athavle, minister of state for social welfare, who belongs to the Republican Party, actively lobbied for the release of Madhukar Sarpotdar the Shiv Sena. After he was released on bail, Athavle shared the platform with him to address a victory rally organised by Shiv Sena supporters to celebrate the release of Sarpotdar.

Criminals cannot function without powerful political patronage. Men like Dawood Ibrahim are known to be very close to the political leaders of Maharashtra, especially Sharad Pawar and are in that respect known to be "secular" in their criminal and political alliances. The riots cannot be attributed to land grabbers because then violence should have remained confined to a few selected areas. But the way it spread all over Bombay shows that it was not due to a spontaneous outburst of inflamed religious sentiment. Powerful political forces were involved and the riots were well planned and well organised.

But even politicians, no matter how influential and powerful, cannot instigate large scale violence so brazenly unless they are confident of being able to get the police and other arms of the state machinery, to function at their behest without any fear of consequences. Criminals, even in ordinary times, cannot go beyond petty crime without the connivance, help and patronage of the police and politicians. Similarly, the builders' lobby dare not undertake large scale criminal acts like paying off someone to burn *chawls* and slums if they are not used to doing these things routinely and buying protection by paying the police, the bureaucrats and the politicians.

Likewise, no matter how much the Hindus hate the Muslims and vice versa, few among them are likely to have the courage to act out that hatred. Most ordinary people refrain from killing, even when they are angry, simply because they fear revenge. In today's world of powerful state machineries, only those groups or individuals dare kill with impunity who can rely on the protection of the state machinery.

Government Sponsored Killings

Shiv Sainiks and other criminals could run amok only because the government machinery, especially the

police, gave them whole hearted cooperation, barring a few exceptions. By and large the policemen either turned a blind eye or themselves joined the rioting brigades. **What better proof of police complicity could there be than the fact that rioting was most fierce in areas where there are police housing colonies.**

Shiv Sena has for years especially targeted policemen's sons as their cadres. That is why in localities around police quarters, the young Shiv Sainiks could wreak vengeance without the slightest obstruction because the policemen were giving free support and encouragement to their sons who went looting and killing.

In the midst of the riots, an Indian reporter was able to record radio transmissions picked off the police radio band, giving conversations between policemen and their control room. The Indian newspapers imposed a form of self-censorship and did not publish these testimonies of police complicity in the violence. Extracts from these taped conversations were, however, published in *The New York Times* of February 4, 1993. They indicate that the officers at police headquarters were repeatedly telling policemen patrolling during the riots that Muslim homes were to be allowed to burn without interference, and that aid to Muslim victims was to be prevented.

According to one transcript quoted by *The New York Times* on February 4, 1993, the control room referred to the site of a fire, saying it must be a garage owned by a Muslim man. The Marathi speaker at the control room said, "Let

it burn." Then he added, "If it belongs to a Maharashtrian, don't burn anything that belongs to a Maharashtrian." The control room went on to urge the policemen to burn everything belonging to Muslims.

In another conversation, the police in district Dongri inquired over their police radio what they should do about two army trucks filled with milk that had been sent as relief to a slum area where Muslims had been burnt out of their homes. The police control room replied, "Why are you distributing milk to them?" and added, "Do not distribute milk to the *laandyas*. Have you understood?" The control room then ordered these policemen to "Seize that vehicle."

The most damning testimony about government inaction cum complicity came from a fairly senior officer of the Maharashtra government - someone who claims to have witnessed the governmental goings on as an insider: "I myself witnessed how

on one occasion the police and Hindu mobs kept their looting, burning and killing spree going even while the home minister's motorcade was passing by. They did not think it necessary to halt their violence even temporarily and continue after letting the home minister pass because they were sure no action would be taken."

Even though normally such situations come under control as soon as the army is called, this time even the army was forced to play a partisan role. It is well known how former defence minister Sharad Pawar had come and planted himself in Bombay during the riots with the purpose of deliberately paralysing the administration because he wanted to teach the then chief minister, Naik, a lesson for having tried to clip the former's wings by arresting some of his well known criminal colleagues such as Pappu Kalani and dismissing some pro-Pawar ministers from his Cabinet.

Many in the government allege



that the police acted like Pawar's private army. He wanted to show Naik who really controlled Bombay and so in most cases the police joined the rioters at Pawar's encouragement. But he didn't stop at that. This time, he succeeded in politicising the army as well. A government official, on condition of anonymity, gave a detailed account of how the army command refused to cooperate with the chief minister on one pretext or another: "They would make excuses like: We will only do flag marches, no firing. We don't want to alienate civilians,' or "We won't fire without written orders given to us in each specific instance.' Now how do you ensure that a magistrate is forever accompanying each of the army contingents, ready to sign an order to fire whenever they witness a riotous mob. Even so, Naik's government gave a large bunch of presigned orders in the hands of army officers in charge of patrolling riot torn areas. But with continuous attempts at sabotage by the defence minister himself, the army was not allowed to discharge its duty properly. In fact, this time there have been allegations that in some cases they too joined in raping Muslim women."

Even those sections of the press that condemned the role of the police were not willing to mention similar lapses committed by the army. However, Pritish Nandy, the editor-in-chief of the Observer group of papers, was open in describing what he witnessed personally:

"I live on the 24th floor of a high rise building on Carmichael Road, which is one of the poshest areas of Bombay. I could see 30 major fires from my window and saw the slum outside my house being cleansed of all Muslims. I called the police and

asked them to provide protection. First they refused to come. When they did come, they were callous and indifferent. Then I called the prime minister's office. Not being able to get him, I called the then defence minister, Sharad Pawar, and was able to prevail upon him to send the army. But they did no more than coolly amble in and quietly drive out in the name of patrolling. It was like they were romancing down the streets of fire. Most of the time they did not even offload the soldiers. This when the violence was in full view and even little children and infants were being tossed around and thrown into fires."

The partisan role played by our criminalised state machinery in favour of dominant groups whenever a conflict situation arises between different communities is the key reason for increasing communal violence in our society. In a Hindu-Muslim conflict, where the Hindus are assured of police and other protection, they don't have to fear reprisals. This violence can be curtailed only by making the government machinery more accountable for its actions. This task cannot be performed by the vulnerable sections of the population without help from the middle class intelligentsia.

What Needs Doing

So far we have tended to respond to each such crisis by demanding that the guilty be punished. But nothing happens because there are no institutional mechanisms to ensure that this happens automatically. Steps in that direction should include:

- Accountability of the police to the people. This means that the police in each locality be in the service of the local residents. These personnel should be recruited, and the power of dismissing them should be held, by elected

representatives of the local residents. This will make it harder for the police to subject the local population to arbitrary excesses. At present they are only accountable, if at all, to their district hierarchical police superiors, immune from accountability to the local people.

- The centrally controlled police force should only have jurisdiction over offences that operate on a national level only. They should be permitted to intervene at the local level on the specific request of a freely elected local government or where there has been a violation of fundamental human rights by the local police.

A special peace force be set up to deal with communal and anti-minority violence. In each area, this force should have an equitable representation of the particular minorities that are resident in that area. Thus the representation of minorities will not merely be proportional to their overall proportion in the all-India population, for example, 11 percent Muslims or 7 percent tribals, but will be commensurate with their proportion in the particular affected area, for example, an equitable percentage reflecting the population of Muslims in certain disturbed areas of UP, of tribals in south Bihar or in the North East, as well as in each area of a city.

- Suitable changes in the legislatures to ensure that the political representatives, MLAs and MPs have to take responsibility and make effective provisions for the prevention of communal killings. There should be legal provisions for the recall of MPs and MLAs and for disqualifying them from recontesting if massacres or riots take place in their constituency. We need to make it politically unrewarding for politicians to instigate riots with a view to strengthening vote banks.

• Likewise it should be made mandatory for the deputy commissioner to give a detailed, community by community description of those killed, injured or maimed, as well as an account of property losses suffered by each community. If it can be shown that the deputy commissioner is providing wrong information(s), he should be immediately dismissed from service. Systematic misinformation by the government has facilitated the task of

the RSS-VHP-BJP combine. In the absence of reliable and accurate information, this combine can deliberately, through their exaggerated, baseless rumours, foment a siege mentality among the Hindus who are being led to believe that they are the victims of aggression, even when the majority of those killed and looted are Muslims.

• Legal changes to ensure that the deputy commissioner and

superintendent of police are investigated whenever such incidents take place in their area of jurisdiction.

If specific government functionaries and elected representatives could be held accountable for their acts of commission and omission in case of communal violence, the fearful nexus between criminals, politicians, fanatic hate mongers and the government functionaries might be broken.

An Extract From **An Anti-Secularist Manifesto** by Ashish Nandy

The *Indian Express* of 19th January 1983, published a brief biographical note which provides a profound insight into the inner capacities of faiths in the matter of ethnic tolerance :

On January 9, the house of a young Telugu poet in the old city of Hyderabad was raided by a band of communalists. They stabbed him, his wife and his child. The woman died immediately, the poet on the way to the hospital. The orphaned boy is in hospital, dangling between life and death. Communal frenzy does not know what it claims. They...did not know that they were destroying a promising Telugu poet, who was writing the 17th version of... *Ramayana*.

The poet was born on January 2, 1946 at Kalwakurty, a big *tehsil* village in Mahboobnagar district of the Telengana region. His mother was a teacher in the village school. He too followed in her footsteps. "Teaching is the noblest profession", he used to say. But he was not content being a matric-passed trained basic teacher. His ambition was to become a *vidwaan* of Sanskrit. But Kashi Vidyapeeth rejected him. ...Then he

met a scholar, Pandit Gunday Rao Harkarey, who taught him the secret of learning a language by the self-taught method... Thus, studying privately, he obtained Master's degrees in three languages — Sanskrit, Telugu and Hindi.

He had started composing small poems in Telugu when he was just 12 years old. After his marriage, he produced four volumes of *kaavyas* and three volumes of *khanda kaavyas*. After the publication of *Vijaya Bheri*, *Asru Dharuand Bharati*, he was hailed as the most significant poet since Umar Ali Shah. Presenting him at a Telugu *mushaira*, Viswanatha Satyanarayan... said: "This is a gathering of poets in their 70s. This young poet being only 25 should not have been here. But if he is here, it is because he already was 50 when he was born". Such a rich tribute is all the more significant because the poet was from Telengana and the literary elite of the Godawari district dismisses Telengana's *ulligaddi*, *badnikai* Telugu with disdain...the unspoilt villager in the poet had survived despite the many degrees he obtained...

The young poet now began studying all the versions of *Ramayana*— Valmiki, Ranganatha, Bhaskara, Kambha, Molla, Viswanatha, Kalpa Vruksha and Tulsi. "I have discovered rational and logical flaws in Valmiki in his description of places and situation", he said. "I want to write my version of *Ramayana* ...I want to name it *Yaseen Ramayana*. It will be my gift to posterity". That is what Ghulaam Yaseen, the teacher and the poet, was busy doing when fanaticism struck its deathly blow ... And the *Ramayana* which Ghulaam Yaseen wanted to leave behind him...remains unfinished.

What was Ghulaam Yaseen? A secular Muslim who did not know his real vocation? A good man with a Muslim name who could be *used* by dedicated social reformers or by the Indian State to establish bridges between faiths? A crypto-Hindu killed by the Hindus by mistake? Or a true Muslim who could express his religious sensitivities through other people's faiths? Or an Indian whose assassination has simultaneously impoverished Hinduism, Islam and Indianness? □