

TEN DAYS THAT SHOOK BOMBAY BHIWANDI: AN ANALYSIS OF EVENTS

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The outburst of communal violence in the Bhiwandi-Thane-Bombay industrial belt, while confirming some theories of communal violence, blasted many others. These riots once again woke us to the reality, that the beautiful mosaic of races, cultures, languages and religions can easily turn into a volatile mix and explode at the hands of some mini-fascists or a cheap demagogue, causing untold misery to thousands of helpless people. The targets of attack in such cases are those people against whom it is easier to arouse emotions, for a variety of reasons. What follows is an attempt to analyse what happened in the industrial belt of Bhiwandi-Thane-Bombay.

Various explanations have been offered by journalists and politicians, many of which are quite valid although they do not quite come to grips with the complex events. An oversimplified or mechanical approach would not do. A social scientist has to grapple with this complex problem from various angles, at the micro as well as the macro level. As already pointed out, there have been myriads of partial explanations like builders' conspiracy to get slum-occupied plots vacated, fights between rival criminal gangs taking a communal turn, envy of the rural poor against the prosperity of urban areas like Bhiwandi assuming a communal form, etc.

These are micro causative factors no doubt, but do not by themselves offer a comprehensive explanation of the riots. The whole thing needs to be seen in a larger perspective. We can ignore neither ideological motives nor local reality. Ideological motives are as important as objective reality. After all, human

beings, whether they succeed or not, wish to mould this world of theirs according to their desires even if they have to reshape, change, or distort the objective reality. A mere empirical approach therefore would not be satisfactory for our purpose.

Before we come to grips with local realities, we would like to discuss the national situation as a whole. There is a dialectical relationship between the two. Ours is a dynamic society beset with serious problems of socio-economic growth. The significance of the fact that widespread communal violence has taken place in an important industrial belt of the country should not be lost on us. Seen rather mechanically, the working class in the most industrially advanced cities should be free from the virus of communalism. But something quite contrary to this happened and not for the first time. Both unionised workers and lumpen elements took part in these riots.

Due to the slow and distorted growth of capitalism, India's social formation has emerged full of contradictions, both social as well as economic, which are highlighted in times of economic crises. We have the most advanced technology coexisting with backward socio-religious consciousness; advanced urban areas in uncomfortable conjunction with the most backward and poor rural areas; tribals and Dalits still living the most primitive life, slogging as slaves and bonded labourers. We have the most advanced and modernised urban elite who have discarded all religious traditions on the one hand, and masses of people, illiterate, ignorant, drawing their spiritual sustenance from the most primordial traditions on the other. These contradictions are ironically getting more and more sharpened with slower and distorted growth of the Indian economy.

It should also be noted that socio-economic growth, even if slow and distorted, brings greater consciousness of their rights to the people belonging to backward sections and religious minorities. Again, this consciousness in a backward society gets expressed through an assertion of religious and communal identity because of its widespread emotional appeal. Assertion of neo-Buddhist identity and rise of Ambedkarism among the Dalits of Maharashtra, conversion of Harijans to Islam and Christianity in the South to acquire a new psychological identity, rise of Sikh and Muslim fundamentalism should all be seen in this perspective. This assertion of religious-cultural identity makes it clear that religion,

