

AURANGABAD RIOTS : AN ANALYTICAL VIEW

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In order to understand communal violence in Poona, Aurangabad, etc., one has to understand the way in which the Shiv Sena is aggressively trying to penetrate the interior of Maharashtra and capture its municipalities, gram panchayats, etc. Mr. Bal Thackeray has been saying, "If there can be an AIDMK chief minister in Tamil Nadu and a Telugu Desam chief minister in Andhra Pradesh why not a Shiv Sena chief minister in Maharashtra? Maharashtra's regional identity too, must strongly and aggressively assert itself."

However, empirical reality does not easily fit into an ideological mode. Had it been so, Hitler and Bal Thackeray would have been ruling the world. So the Shiv Sena has to find other, more amenable means to capture power. Maharashtra, unlike the southern states, does not feel its identity threatened *vis-à-vis* the states of the north, at least not so strongly. Thus regional identity alone cannot help the Shiv Sena achieve its ambition of having a Shiv Sena chief minister in Maharashtra.

In fact the regional chauvinism against the south worked for a while in Bombay. Soon Mr. Thackeray discovered that his anti-south campaign in Bombay had lost its edge. In fact he sulked in isolation for quite some time during the mid-seventies. Some political commentators had even written him off as a spent force. Mr. Thackeray, however, was looking for an opportunity to assert his importance once again.

He got this opportunity when the Hindu revivalist movement began to emerge in the early eighties, after the episode of conver-

sion to Islam, of some Harijans in the Meenakshipuram district of Tamil Nadu. Mrs. Gandhi, who too had begun to cultivate Hindu votes in the post-emergency period, exploited this episode politically and lent subtle support to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Mrs. Gandhi, of course, was not a leader of a communal outfit but was only shrewdly exploiting Hindu sentiments for her ballot-box victory.

The Shiv Sena and its supren o have had a strong communal orientation right from the beginning. The Shiv Sena had played a significant role in the Kosa and Bhiwandi riots in the late sixties and early seventies. Only at times was its anti-Muslim tirade overshadowed by its anti-south tirade. Recently, of course, it has been unabashedly indulging in anti-Muslim propaganda. No more anti-south outbursts.

The Sena's communal rebirth took place around the mid-eighties, 1984 to be precise. After sulking in isolation for a long time it decided to 'champion the Hindu cause'. It tried to create a united Hindu front in a meeting at Chowpatty, in April 1984. This meeting was followed by country-shaking riots in May 1984, from Bombay to Bhiwandi, the highly industrialised belt of the country. It created absolute havoc for the minorities. Swords in hand, the Shiv *sainiks* were roaming the streets of Bombay, Thane and Bhiwandi, with of course, the police looking on helplessly.

The Sena adopted the same strategy for penetrating the interior of Maharashtra. Its ambitions soared high especially after it captured the Bombay Municipal Corporation in the 1985 elections. Wherever the Sena tried to gain entry, it did so by causing communal conflagration. Thus a series of riots took place in Panvel, Nasik, Amravati, Aurangabad, etc. Wherever it opened its branch, communal violence followed. The Sena presently has its sights on municipalities and gram panchayats. It is trying to win these elections by inciting communal passions. It tried to do this in the Aurangabad Municipal Corporation elections.

Here it is necessary to mention the demographic and other changes which have been taking place in Aurangabad, to understand the genesis of the riots. Marathwada was earlier a part of the old Nizam state. It was naturally ruled by the Muslim elite with a section of the Hindu elite playing a dominant part. The understanding between the two elite had helped maintain the

