

Communalism:

Fact Finding Team Report Reveals the True face of Communal Forces

The United Against Hate appointed a Fact Finding Team, comprising of Nadeem Khan (Social Activist), Prashant Tandon (Journalist), Hasnul Banna (Journalist) Tarique Anwar (Journalist), Kissu (Journalist), Mahatab Alam (Social Activist) and Farrah Shakeb (Social Activist), visited Bihar after the engineered communal violence around Ram nabami this year. We are giving some excerpts from the report of Fact finding Team here.

The communal violence in Bihar that began from March 25 and continued till March 30 engulfed nine of the 38 districts – Bhagalpur, Munger, Samastipur, Siwan, Gaya, Aurangabad, Kaimur, Nawada and Nalanda – one by one. One person was killed and around 65 suffered injuries in the clashes, which erupted during Ram Navami processions.

Several people have been arrested in connection with these riots and over a dozen of them are BJP workers, including two senior leaders – Mohan Patwa and Dinesh Kumar Jha. Union minister Ashwini Kumar Choubey's son Arijit Shashwat, who was jailed on April 1, instigated the violence that erupted in Nathnagar area of Bhagalpur, leaving several persons, including two police personnel, injured because of heavy stone-pelting, arson and exchange of fire. Shashwat was named in one of the two FIRs lodged in the aftermath of the violence. He surrendered before the police at the Hanuman temple in the state capital Patna.

The spate of communal violence in Bihar that first started at Bhagalpur and then spread to 8 districts. Communal forces have tried to trample the social fabric of the society, which was, until now, known for communal harmony. According to the reports, one was killed and 65 were injured in communal clashes in all these districts. Besides many shops were set ablaze and vehicles gutted. It all started with the Rama Navami procession where an unruly mob went on a rampage while brandishing swords and holding saffron flags. Almost all the districts have suffered a rash of arson attacks. Mostly all these districts have elected candidates from BJP and even Congress men are alleged to be the part of the communal campaign. A joint fact-finding team from Patna and Delhi visited Bihar on 3rd April, 2018 under the platform, United Against Hate to analyse the situation and see how far the violence has penetrated in these regions.

Politicisation of religious festivals, highly provocative and Islamophobic songs and forced entry into eventually resulted into communal conflagrations in the nine districts. Religious festivals have now a day been completely taken over by RSS-BJP activists for communal polarisation.

The districts we visited had the same pattern. Newly-formed organisations approach the districts administration, asking for permissions for the Rama Navami processions, which are granted in many cases with terms and conditions. People – especially youth – riding on hundreds of motor bikes take out rallies, brandish brand new swords and other weapons and play highly objectionable songs. Violating the terms and conditions, they try to enter Muslim-majority areas which is objected by the local Muslim population. As a result, stone pelting starts and then shops and other properties belonging to a particular community are set on fire.

One allegation that was common in the versions of both sides that the mob was carrying large number of swords. The Principal Secretary (Home) Amir Subhani also confirmed the same. These sharp edge weapons were imported through courier from outside and distributed across the districts for free.

The team met Amir Subhani, Principal Secretary (Home), Govt. of Bihar, who said they are aware of presence of huge number of swords in the procession. He too said brandishing weapons was a new phenomenon and was never witnessed before.

CDs and pen drives containing abusive and highly objectionable songs were distributed well in advance in all the affected districts. People belonging to both communities confirmed it apart from administration. The team also learnt that same lyrics were played through loud speakers in different affected districts, indicating that it was done through a centralised production.

Reports also indicated that the preparations to engineer a communal tension were going on for the past six months.

Take a look at some of the songs that were played during the processions:

'Pakistan mein bhejo ya qatleam kar dalo, aasteen ke saanpon ko na dudh pilakar palo'

'Jis din jaag utha hindutva to yeh anjam bolega, topi wala bhi sar jhuka kar Jai Shri Ram Bolega'

'Dur hato Allah walon, kyun janmabhoomi ko ghera hai, masjid kahin aur banao tum, yeh Ram Lalla ka dera hai'

Majority of these songs have been uploaded on YouTube around a year ago and have fetched millions of views. These songs were seemingly shared via pen drives and CDs, to be circulated, apparently, with an aim to foment communal tension in the regions that have been peaceful for years.

Aurangabad

Aurangabad was the worst affected among the three district, including Kaimur and Gaya, where communal violence broke out on March 25 evening. Rioters set ablaze 31 shops, suggest official figures, but locals say over 50 shops were turned to ashes. More than 25 people were injured.

The violence began after crowd of hundreds, as part of the Rama Navami processions – forcibly tried to enter Qazi Muhalla – a Muslim-majority area – at Nawadi Road. The participants of the bike rally tried to make a forced entry into the area. The police said objectionable slogans provoked people of the locality and they asked the participants of the rally not to enter into the area and go ahead passing straight through the market. Following a heated verbal exchange, stone pelting started between the two groups.

After the police pacified the two groups and dispersed the crowd, people gathered again and took out another procession on March 26. It is interesting to note here that the police gave permission to take out the second rally without taking lessons from the violence during the first procession.

It now resulted in large scale damage. Several shops were gutted and property looted. A video shot by a local – accessed by this team – shows hundreds of men violating a Muslim burial ground and proclaiming victory with loud chants of *'Jai Shri Ram'* after having pitched a saffron flag there.

The violent mob also resorted to firing and allegedly used hand-made bombs but this could not be confirmed.

Prohibitory orders under Section 144 of the Cr PC were enforced. The situation in the town is tense but completely under control.

Over 150 people were arrested in connection with the communal clashes witnessed in the town for two days in Aurangabad and Internet services have been suspended for an indefinite period.

Nawada

A huge procession was taken out on March 28 (Rama Navami was on March 25) in a local market. People from neighboring villages were called to join the rally. However, it passed peacefully.

As per the reports, the idol of Lord Hanuman was found vandalised in a temple which led to the riots but on the ground, there is a different story. There was no temple but only an isolated idol of Hanuman fixed on a cemented pedestal, near to which is a marriage hall where a Muslim wedding was going on. Around 2 am in the night, a group went to the wedding accusing people of vandalising the idol.

The eyewitness said nobody from the wedding had vandalised the idol and nobody has even seen the vandalised idol. The group of men had also tried to burn down the wedding hall. The next morning on 27th March a mob led a rally in the Nawada district while shouting Islam phobic slogans. Eyewitnesses even revealed that it is the planned conspiracy to create a divide between Muslims and Yadav. Further after no retaliatory actions by the Muslim youth, the mob went on vandalising whatever came in front of them. People have even accused the police of randomly arresting the people and so far, FIRs have been filed against 40 people belonging to both the communities and over 200 against unknown persons.

1) Ahead of Ram navami, there was a peace meeting in the locality where it was decided people with the license can only hold the processions.

2) The pen drive will be available from the government which will contain religious songs which will be played at the procession.

3) After the Rama Navami festival, all the places where the saffron flags are hoisted will be removed.

But according to the people on the ground, nothing like this happened. Outsiders had taken part in the rally with no license and provocative islam phobic songs were played while sloganeering Jai Shri Ram. The police have taken the action but didn't investigate the matter like Aurangabad, Nawada followed the same organised pattern of violence including damage to the property. Eyewitnesses have revealed the involvement of the local leaders from BJP.

One eye witness from Rosera (Samastipur)

Manish runs a stationary shop and is a social activist. "In 28 years of my life, I have never seen this. We have always lived with love and unity. Every year, there is a Ram Navmi procession but nothing like this happened before. There was a mob of around 4000-5000 people, mostly young boys, who barged into the Madrasa and vandalised everything that was visible including study tables and chair. They even set ablaze the vehicles parked inside the Madarsa." Manish further confirmed that no one from their village had taken part in the rally, it was the handiwork of the outsiders.

We Demand:

The accountability of the Public officials and elected representatives, who participated, instigated and encouraged the riots be fixed and should be given exemplary punishment. Compensation for the victims must be ensured at the soonest. A judicial enquiry to look into the plan and programme of the organized violence must be done.
