

KALYAN RIOTS: A CASE OF CONTAINMENT OF A COMMUNAL SPARK

A Report by The Fact finding Team of the CPDR, Mumbai

In the wake of the communal carnage that is carried out over the last 40 days and which still simmers in Gujarat, a communally explosive atmosphere is created all over the country that only awaited a spark to explode. One such spark fell in Kalyan on April 9, 2002 and within hours the fire that erupted consumed five lives, 20 houses; destroyed property worth lakhs of rupees and rendered many people propertyless.

Kalyan, a virtual extension of the Mumbai metropolis, shocked the entire country to its bones because of the bitter memory of riots that engulfed it after the demolition of the Babri Masjid on the December 6, 1992. The CPDR therefore decided to carry out on-the-spot investigations and sent a Fact Finding Team to the scene of riots on Saturday, the April 13, 2002 when most of the city of Kalyan surrounding the area of riots was still under curfew and in custody of police, SRPs and Rapid action Force.

The team consisted of Ms. Niranjani Shetty, Mr. P. A. Sebastian and Dr. Anand Teltumbde.

The objective was to understand the reasons behind the riots, the roles played by various people in its start as well as in development; how the relief work was carried out and to draw appropriate lessons so that such incidents do not recur.

The team had extensive interviews with the Muslim residents of Rohidaspada- the place where the major riots took place. They had fled their houses and were staying in make-shift camps organized by their community people. The interviews took place in the verandah of a house in the MB Kazi Chowk area of the ward No. 47 of the Dombivli-Ambarnath Kalyan Municipal Corporation. The entire area was under curfew and we could just manage our entry as the Human Rights Team. Besides the victims and other eye witnesses, we interviewed Mr. Saad Khot, Corporator, Ward No. 36; Mr. Shoeb Ahmed Bardi, a member of the Peace Committee, Mr. Iftekar Ayub Khan, Corporator, Ward No. 35, Reti-Bunder, Dr. Naseem Shaikh, a medical practitioner who has been treating victims of the riots free of cost in his dispensary.

We met with Dr. Telwane, President of BJP, Kalyan in his Nursing Home and subsequently with Mr. Jayant Laxman Hardas outside his house at Dudhnaka. He was a person whose shop was destroyed by the mob far away from Rohidaspada.

We then interviewed police officials and significantly the ACP Mr. Amar Jadhav in his office in the Bazarpath Police Station. We visited the actual scene of riots in Ambedkar Nagar and Rohidaspada and spoke with number of people, the notable among whom were

one Mrs. Kusum Waghchoude, Mrs. Vimal Mahadeo Bhoir, Mr. Bhalchandra Bhoir, Mr. Manohar Walunj and Prakash Walunj (brothers of Ramesh Walunj), and Mr. Bhagwan Rokde.

The last one to be interviewed was Mr. Ramesh Walunj, a Shiv Sena activist who had unsuccessfully contested the last Corporation election and could not retain the Shiv Sena seat previously occupied by his wife- Mrs. Usha Walunj.

The Locale and Brief History

Rohidaswada – the area where the riots broke out is an old Gaathan which developed into a slum with hundreds of new houses adding to the old ones with the urbanization of the town of Kalyan. The inhabitants mainly belonged to two religious communities- Muslims and Hindus. The latter mainly comprised people of the Cobbler (Chambhar in Maharashtra) caste which is one of the Scheduled castes. The old houses underwent alterations into a new shape of slum chawls and blended into the new ones that came up later. The people of both the communities have lived there for generations and with cordial relationship as structurally borne out by the fact that there was virtually no segregation in the area along the religious lines.

Muslims were mainly engaged in the profession of slaughtering animals for food and the Hindus in various vocations as their traditional caste calling no longer accommodated so many of them. In general the Hindus appeared to be economically better off than the Muslims.

The area had largely belonged to Shiv Sena in recent past due mainly to the influence of Walunj family whose members held various posts in Sena and other organizations within the Sangh Pariwar. Only in the last Corporation elections held in September 2001, this domination of Shiv Sena appeared to be reversed when the Sena candidate Mr. Ramesh Walunj, the husband of sitting Sena- Corporator Mrs. Usha Walunj lost the election to his NCP rival- Iqbal Sheikh. All Walunjs stayed in the Rohidaswada but in the recent past Ramesh Walunj has shifted into a big house that is situated beyond the natural border of the slum.

As one enters the Rohidaswada through Ambedkar Road through a narrow footpath there is a small Masjid. At the other end is a Hanuman temple which is being renovated into a bigger version. The construction work for which is in progress.

There was no history of any communal skirmish in Rohidaswada. However, there have been some incidents of communal strife since last September.

Version of Muslims

Ever since Ramesh Walunj lost the corporation elections to Iqbal Sheikh, the communal harmony in Rohidaswada was shattered. There were at least 10-15 incidents of some kind of skirmishes that are registered in the Bazarpath Police Station. Ramesh Walunj had a

grudge that the Muslim community had not voted for him. His son Umesh walunj had started Bajarang Dal- an outfit within the Sangh pariwar known for its militancy, and became its district president. He has been using provocative language against Muslims. In one of the meetings that he held in Daulat Singh Palkiwala School, he had displayed objectionable posters and banners and made provocative speeches against Muslims. There is a complaint registered against him in Ramnagar Police Station, Dombivli for giving an abusive public speech against Muslims. In addition to this, an affair between a Muslim girl and a Hindu boy belonging to Walunj also created tension between the communities. The girl lived off and on with the boy for the last one and a half years and recently is abandoned by the boy as well as her parents. These incidents cumulatively vitiated the atmosphere of communal amity and created tension in the locale.

On the fateful night of April 9, 2002 at about 10.30 PM, there was a quarrel between a Muslim rickshaw driver and a Hindu passenger over a small difference of fare of Rs.2. The Hindus from the nearby harijan Wada came and beat the rickshaw driver. When the Muslim boys who gathered there learnt that he was stabbed, they went and enquired about the incident. But the people from Harijan Wada started pelting stones and soda water bottles on them. One of the boys was injured due to the throwing of an acid bulb and was admitted in Aman hospital. The quarrel spread across the road to Rohidaswada where Hindus started beating Muslim people and setting fire to their houses. Muslim people ran after the mob which was being led by Ashok Walunj, who had a criminal record and Umesh Walunj, the son of Ramesh Walunj and the local Bajrang Dal President. In the melee, Ashok Walunj was stabbed by some one. There was news that Hindus had stabbed a Muslim tanagawalla named Sameer Shaikh and his horse at Ahilyabai Chowk. His friend took the tanga to Dudhnaka side and informed people about the incident. People took Samir's friend to Police Station but the police refused to take the complaint. That angered the mob gathered there which moved to Diwan Bowdi. At that time bullets were fired at the mob from the house of Bala Hardas, who is a senior Shiv Sena leader, situated on the first floor just above Vijay laundry owned by his brother Jayant Hardas. One of the bullets hit a pregnant lady named Nusarat Chavgade who was in her mother's house. She had come from Mumbai to her mother's place in Kalyan for her delivery. This angered the mob further and they ransacked Vijay laundry.

The next day, on Wednesday, i.e., April 10, 2002, in the morning at about 5.15 AM the police came inside the house opposite Jama Masjid and took two boys who were sleeping there, into custody. They picked up some 50 to 60 Muslim youth from Rohidaswada. They did not have anything to do with the incident. During the day, shops belonging to Muslim and Bohra communities were damaged and put on fire at Neelkanthy Dhara Society, Wadeghar Naka and at Beturkarpada.

On the April 11, 2002, Rauf Chaulkar's and Abbas Bohri's shops were damaged and burnt down at Ganapati Chowk behind Telwane Hospital. Bakery and property belonging to Sufyan Kazi & Brothers were damaged and burnt down. A Truck belonging to Sagir Ahmed Falke was burnt down at Adharwadi. Property of Khatri was also fully damaged at Ahilyabai Chowk. Garages belonging to Nasir Baig, Nanhe and Lucky Garage were fully damaged. There were 10-12 vehicles of different makes which were damaged and

burnt. These garages were situated on Agra road opposite Dhamele's Hospital near Durgadi Fort. Two youths – Firoz Abdul Rehman and Shaikh Rehman aged about 20 years were beaten by mobs as they were going to hospital. Police picked them up and put behind bars. They are still languishing in police custody. A Mob came in rikshaws and attacked a Nursing Home of Dr. tariq situated at Kali Masjid on Agra Road. In the evening a body was found in Hindustan graveyard in Rohidaswada. On enquiry, it was identified as Abdul Rehman Abdul gaffer Baig. Two persons were attacked in Rohidaswada and beaten up. Police picked them up, gave first aid but refused to take their complaint. On the contrary, they put false cases on them and put them behind bars.

The next day, i.e., April 12, 2002, an illegal procession was taken out. The people in procession pelted stones at the bakery opposite Platform No. 1 at Kalyan Railway Station and Hotel Taj on Shiwaji Path was also fully damaged. In the evening, at Shankar Rao chowk, property belonging to Nazir Ahmed Kuwari and the mandap materials of about Rs. 16 lakhs were fully burnt down. During the night, stones were pelted on Zojwala building at Mohammed Ali Chowk and in Rambaug and Joshibaug. One rikshawwalla along with his passengers were beaten up in front of the Telwane's Hospital. His rikshaw also was damaged. A person named Samser Shaikh was beaten up and wounded at Ahilyabai Chowk.

The Muslim activists produced a list of people who suffered damages in this riot.

Many people whose houses were either burnt down or looted narrated their woes with tears in their eyes.

People generally complained of discrimination by the police in terms of putting their localities under curfew while the Hindus roamed freely.

At the same time, some activists showered praise for some Police officers like Kiran Shellar and Amar Jadhav for their impartiality and prompt action in controlling the riot.

Hindu Version

We did not get a narrative of how the riots broke out at the first instance from any one we interviewed. Dr. Telwane stated that he was surprised that such an incident took place when he heard about it from his sister in Panvel. He generally reasoned out that the illiteracy and unemployment among people are really responsible for such incidents. He however put certain questions about why there was no uniform civil code for all. In his carefully worded statements he did not reveal anything in particular but indirectly insinuated justification of the majority community's wrath. He testified that there was no history of communal enmity in Kalyan but wondered why innocent people like Jayant and Bala Hardas at Dudhnaka were attacked. He said that the Muslim mob tried to burn them down but they dispersed hearing the siren of police vehicles.

Jayant Hardas said that a mob consisting of some 200 to 300 people charged from both the ends, i.e. from behind his house and from the front road. His house is typically at the

junction of the Hindu and Muslim localities. Just after his house is a big Muslim slum. They were shouting slogans like “Allah O’ Akbar” and “Hinduonko Jalayenge”. The mob started pelting stones at his shop and house. They broke open the doors and ransacked the shop, damaged his Xerox machine, PCVO and other instruments. They took away all the sarrees from the laundry. When police came they had to resort to lathi charge and then firing on the unruly mobs. One of the police bullets hit a woman in her hut and killed her.

The mob also ransacked Mankame’s general shop and Shah’s shop on the road. They damaged a scooter belonging to Suresh Nagre. Only the Hindu shops were targeted while the Muslim ones were spared.

Hardas felt that the reason for the event lay in the Godhra and Gujarat incidents. He explained that there was a rikshaw stand right opposite their house. The rikshawwallahs are inherently Goondas and generally belong to NCP. The political rivalry between NCP and Shiv Sena has significant role in this riot. He named two people – Danesh Dolare and Aulkan Dolare, both belonging to NCP as behind the attack.

The most articulate version of the riot, albeit limited to what happened in Rohidaswada, came from Mrs. Kusum Waghchaude, a middle aged lady whose house was completely burnt down by the mob. She narrated a story that two fakir like people in blanket sat in the evening on the platform in front of her house. When questioned, they had asked her whether the narrow lane beside her house could take them out. She had doubt about their antecedents and asked them to leave. They left. However, at about 10 PM a mob of people suddenly rushed to their house and burnt it down. They had to escape from the backdoor leaving her mother behind. She said she knew some of the boys. After they finished with her house they rushed to Ashok Walunj’s house which was just behind hers. Ashok Walunj was just alerted by her sons and was about to run. They felled him with a dash of hand cart and attacked with sword. She wanted to show us his red shirt with blood stains but could not find it there.

She said that the Muslims always annoyed them by taking slaughtered cows from the roads in front their house. She said that after burning her house they were dancing and mocking at her from the rooftop of the building behind two rows of houses from hers. She showed a shawl that she got from near the house fo one Muslim boy in testimony that they had looted and burnt her house.

Ramesh Walunj had received the news of the riot when he was attending Shiv Sena conference at Shirdi. He said that Muslims took advantage of this fact and planned the attack on Hindus. If he had been around, he claimed, this riot would not have happened. He said he received the news of it at Shridi and immediately rushed after hearing about the murder of his brother- Ashok Walunj. According to him, Ashok was attacked with the big Butcher’s knives; he had 54 wounds on his body. But when they found that he still was not dead, they drew sword into him and pulled out his intestines. Ashok finally breathed his last on the ground near Ramesh’s house. He was very angry at the brutal manner that they killed Ashok. The actual story was narrated by his brother Manohar.

According to him, he and his brother- Ashok were at Ambedkar road in the evening of that fateful day. When they saw an altercation and mobs on the Ambedkar road, pelting stones and soda water bottles, they rushed back to Rohidaswada. They already saw mobs of Muslim youth setting fire to Hindu houses. Ashok wanted to run away but they trapped with a hand cart and attacked with knives. When his another brother Anand Vitthal Walunj ran to lift him, he was also attacked.

According to Walunjs, the main reason for the riot was the Hanuman Temple that they were renovating. That has been the notable irritant for the Muslims of Rohidaswada. They had meetings over this issue and were collecting weapons. This attack was planned as he was to be away in Shirdi. They suddenly attacked us. 24 houses of Hindus were burnt down. None of Muslim houses were burnt because they had vacated them before two days of riot breaking out. On the Mandir issue, he said, they had asked for the police protection but suddenly around the time of riot there were only two or three police. The SRP van that was stationed there was suddenly withdrawn. He accused police inaction. If the police had rushed quickly the riots would not have been as severe as it has been.

One person present at the venue of the meeting opined that only Gujarat strategy can only be the solution. While people killed Muslims the police looked on other side! Here the police was totally useless.

Police Version

Rohidaswada had no history of communal tension but for the past one and a half year there were some or other skirmish of communal kind. It started with the result of last corporation election. Ramesh Walunj who contested the election as Shiv Sena candidate lost to Iqbal Shaikh, a NCP candidate. Traditionally, Rohidaswada always had a Shiv Sena corporator, the previous being Mrs. Usha Walunj, the wife of Ramesh Walunj. This defeat must have irked Walunj family. Walunj family members are actively involved in Shiv Sena, VHP and Bajrang Dal politics. They suspected one Russul Shaikh who worked as their man, of changing sides in the election and secretly supporting the rival NCP candidate- Iqbal Shaikh. This has resulted in a series of incidents some seven or eight of which are registered in the police records.

The police had taken note of the communal tension that was building in the area and taken the preventive measures like insuring cross surety and providing police bandobast. A committee was formed of five Muslims and five Hindus to provide cross surety.

There were minor irritants like a Muslim girl being kept by a Hindu boy.

In the evening of April 9, 2002, there was stone pelting between mobs. Some Muslim leaders like Saad Khot were attempting to pacify the mobs but could not succeed. Police had to intervene and resort to Lathi charge and thereafter firing. This happened at Ambedkar Road, Rohidaswada and Dudhnaka. Police action had one casualty, a Muslim woman called Nusrat. Police brought the things under controlled by 2 pm. Isolated incidents of arson and stabbing however continued.

On the damage, the police said that on the first day Muslims looted and burnt many Hindu houses but the next day they were at the receiving end.

The police said they were investigating roles of people involved in riot.

Analysis

As it happens in any such incident, both sides give an exaggerated and one sided story. We presented the versions of three major parties involved in this riot. The objective facts on ground and the various stories people gave us did vary in some respects. While the Muslims version created an impression that they were attacked mercilessly by the Hindus and were tacitly supported by the police (albeit, they praised some police officers), the reality in Rohidaswada where some 15 Hindu houses and 4 Muslim houses were burnt, told a different tale. Likewise, Hindu version that did not cohere on any of the facts of the case and had many loopholes. While Dr. Telwane gave us an impression that innocent people like Hardas' were attacked, but the ground reality that both the brothers were political activists of Shiv Sena tended to tell us otherwise. Likewise, Walunj's were not an innocent lot. Out of the three versions presented above we felt the police version rather was most plausible one.

The temple theory projected by Ramesh Walunj that reminds us of the now familiar stand of the Sangh Pariwar that the religious interests of the two communities are irreconcilable, falls flat in face of the facts. Firstly, none other than Ramesh Walunj voiced it. It is clearly to hide his guilt that he had the basic role in creating the communal divide that has culminated in this riot. Secondly, the temple had existed there for more than 100 years as Ramesh Walunj himself stated. What was being done was a mere renovation, although in much grander scale. There is absolutely no rationale that a community that lived with the temple for ages will suddenly grudge its presence.

The facts resultantly corroborate building up of communal tension in the Rohidaswada as a result of the Ramesh Walunj's defeat at the hand of a Muslim- Iqbal Shaikh. The Walunj family had hegemonic hold over the area which appeared slipping out of their hands because of this defeat. The police records also bear out the fact that a number of communal skirmishes took place after the election results were out in Rohidaswada which otherwise had no such history. The communally explosive atmosphere built there just needed a spark from any source to explode. It was seemingly provided by the incident of beating of a rickshaw driver. What appears to have happened thereafter is the Muslim fury at the beginning before the police arrived at the scene. However, soon the tables turned against them and they suffered more on subsequent days.

The procession that happened on the previous day, i.e., April 12, 2002 was seemingly allowed to vent up the anger of the organizers. This is not beyond conjecture. The situation could take a drastic turn for the worse in such events. As it turned out, many incidents of burning and looting took place during and after the procession. It created a

misgiving in the minds of Muslims moreover that the administration is partisan in allowing the Shiv Sena procession.

The role of police in this riot comes out relatively clean. Notwithstanding the complaints of Muslim community that they were being discriminated against in enforcing curfew and that police were picking up more of Muslim boys than Hindus, we feel that the police should be commended on bringing the situation in control in the matter of hours. We do not underestimate the above complaints of the Muslim community. They may well be true in all probability. But, keeping the horrendous scale of partiality in mind that usually surfaces in such situations we are of the opinion that they were negligible. The police however, should take note of these complaints and review their content as a learning exercise.

To us who have been inured to see the police partisanship in such communal riots in the past, this case presents a pleasant surprise about the police role. It proves our long held hypothesis that if there is no involvement of political bigwigs, the police force can control the situation without much loss of life and public property. The situation in Kalyan probably had it in this form.

Conclusion

The genesis of the Kalyan riot clearly shows how the politics created the communal divide among the communities that lived for years without any ill feeling. The communal strife has always been the handiwork of politicians. As it comes out clean on both the sides that except for the recent past, people of both the communities had really lived without any such notion.

The Kalyan incidents had all the potentialities of big flare up given the communally charged atmosphere that exists in the country today. So far the government and the police have succeeded to contain the flare up in Kalyan and to bring the situation in control. But there are rumors floating around that there might be bigger incidents. In certain quarters there is talk of teaching the Muslims a lesson which will show them their proper place in Kalyan. Here comes the important role which the government and the police must play. There must continue to treat both the communities on par and do whatever possible in the circumstances to see to it that the evil forces, educated or uneducated, do not succeed to carry out their evil designs which will ruin the life of both the communities.

The government and the police must be aware of the explosive situation existing in India today and the unpardonable and terrible things happened in Gujarat and must take appropriate measures as required under the laws and the Constitution. One of the principle functions of the government is to enforce the rule of law which the governments in India have often failed to perform. We recently saw in Gujarat. It should not be repeated in Maharashtra.

What happened in Kalyan manifests how devastating the communal passions can be. The people who lived together for hundred years and who had cordial neighborly relations

turned on each other, looted each other's property, set each other's houses on fire and treated each other as enemy. Both the communities in Rohidaswada and Harijanwada which became the focus of the communal strife belong to the lowest strata of the society. Their interests are the same. Both the communities need better houses, better infrastructure where they live, and better means of livelihood. The objective reality shows that they should have united and fought for better roads for their slums, more water, schools for their children, and a dispensary for the inhabitants for the slum and so on. Instead they wasted their energy on abusing each other and accusing each other of the worst things in the world only because they belonged to two different religious communities which had no material bearing on their every day life.

Mr. Telwane, BJP President of Kalyan said to the team that things went wrong in Kalyan as elsewhere in India because there was no uniform civil code. He also said lack of education and unemployment lay at the root of all the troubles. It is always said that people in India are illiterate and they do not deserve democracy. This is nothing but an attempt to cover up reality. The people may be uneducated but left to themselves, they do not destroy each other's property, they do not rape each other's women and do not kill each other. It is the so called educated who have important status in society, who whip up communal passions. Those who led Rath Yatra to demolish mosques are not illiterates and we hold that it is such people who must be held responsible for the destruction, mayhem and murder in India in the name of god and in the name of religion. The incidents in Kalyan are no exception to this. The poor people, both Hindus and Muslims have been misled and instigated to attack each other by their leaders who are not uneducated and unemployed. This has been done for ulterior reasons which have nothing to do with the lives of poor people who live in Rohidaswada and Harijanwada. This is deplorable and the people concerned should refrain from such activities.