



COMMUNALIZATION OF MIRAJ CITY

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ABSTRACT

Miraj, a Muslim majority (of about 50%) town (taluka) in the Sangli district (Maharashtra, India) is an important Junction Railway Station on the Central Railway. It was looked upon as an example of communal harmony, until Independence, even though, this town has a majority of Muslims and there live both the fundamentalists: Hindu and Muslim. However, the people belonging to varied communities are having intimate relations with each other in their own way.

KEYWORDS: Muslim majority, communal harmony, until Independence.

INTRODUCTION :

There was not a single incident of communal riot in Miraj during partition of India and even after the demolition of Babari Masjid. It happened in 2009. Even then, Miraj is not as sensitive as Bhiwandi and Malegaon. Then, why it did happen in 2009 is a matter of objective investigation from unbiased secular point of view. What happened in 2009 that this city became communally disturbed and resulted into riots? Was it politically engineered violence or fundamentalist current affected the religious harmony? Did the fundamentalist currents erupt for the political benefits? Therefore, the aim of this research paper is to examine the causes of communalization and communal disturbances occurred in Miraj city during 2009.

MIRAJ : A SOCIO-CULTURAL BACKGROUND

Miraj is one of the largest medical centers in India and may be abroad having tens of thousands hospitals. The poor and rich around and from nearest Karnataka state normally come to this town for medical treatment and ailment. The Arabs from abroad also usually come to Miraj town for ailment. The very presence of Arabs in the town infuriates the Hindu fundamentalists, spreading canards against Muslims as anti-nationals. Even then, Miraj has its own culture apart from its multicultural social structure comparable to the Mumbai culture. According to the 2011 census, the population of Miraj is: Hindu, 195678 (44.7%), Muslim, 245890 (50%) and remaining are the Jain, Buddhist, Christian, Sikh and others. Miraj was looked upon as an example of communal harmony, until Independence, even though, this town has a majority of Muslims and there live both the fundamentalists: Hindu and Muslim. However, the people belonging to varied communities are having intimate relations with each other in their own way.

Miraj is internationally popular place for artists to perform at Urus (Muslim Festival) and Navratra (Hindu festival) musical concert. The well known musicians and artists such as Ustad Abdul Karim Khan, Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, Bhatkhande, Hirabai Badodekar, Vinayakrao Patwardhan, Bal Gandharva (his debut performance at Hans Prabha Theatre, Miraj and the Balgandharva theatre was named for him), Ustad Abdul Karim Khan (a doyen of the Kirana Gharana, lies interred within the Khvaja Samsuddin Mira Saheb dargah), Ram Kadam, Marathi films musician and many more frequented to this place. An annual music

festival at the dargah takes place in the memory of Khwaja Samsuddin Mira Saheb dargah in which internationally well-known musicians, singers and artist take pride in attending this musical concert. In Navaratra Mahotsav (Hindu), the Muslim artists, like Parveen Sultana, across the world rush to attend the musical concert organized by the Hindus.

MIRAJ RIOT: THEORIZING COMMUNAL RIOT

The Social theorist of riots like, Steven Wilkinson, Sudhir Kakar, Asghar Ali Engineer, Ashutosh Varshney, Paul Brass, B. Rajeshwari etcetera all agree with the argument in the theory of riots that communal riots are not caused spontaneously and also that they are rarely caused by religious animosity. They arise due to conflicting political interests, which are often linked to economic interests. The emergence of Hindutva politics has been the cause of communal riots in the phase from 1960s until late 1980s coupled with local economic and political factors. However, Miraj riot is exception to this observation because there was no economic interest in this riot but it was purely of political interest of right wing political parties. The communal riots, according to Rajeshwari, since 1990s needs to be seen in the light of the changing political equations in the country. The decline of the Congress and the emergence of the BJP as a strong political force resulted in shifting patterns of communal riots. Communal riots in the last two decades is a result of the manipulation of the religious sentiments of people by the Hindu right-wing organizations for political gains. The politicization of the Mandir-Masjid issue and the subsequent demolition of the Mosque gave the BJP the opportunity to consolidate its vote bank (B. Rajeshwari,2004). The eruption of communal riot in Miraj is planned. In Miraj, the Christians are new targets and dalits are drawn into riots against Muslim seeking its entry with there is a clear relationship between riots and politics.

MIRAJ RIOT: SYSTEMATICALLY ENGINEERED RIOT

In Maharashtra Assembly, from Miraj Assembly Constituency, no Muslim candidate represented this constituency with an exceptional example of Hafizbhai Dhature in 1999 and 2004. Moreover, although Miraj is a Muslim majority constituency, no Muslim candidate had contested the Assembly election except one Ilias Naikwadi contested against Mohanrao Shinde, a caste Maratha and was defeated. Otherwise, Miraj Assembly Constituency was represented by a non –Muslim representative, for instance, Maratha, Brahman, Jain and now Scheduled caste (BJP). As political parties, Indian National Congress and Janata Dal won the elections from this constituency. It was after communal riot in Miraj in 2009 BJP won the election in the same year. It was not coincidence or element of chance but as Paul Brass suggests that, an institutionalized riot system was created at the time of elections. Communal riots are far from being spontaneous occurrences. The production of a riot, Brass argues, involves calculated and deliberate actions by key individuals, like recruitment of participants, provocative activities and conveying messages, spreading rumours, amongst other specific activities (Paul Brass, 2004). Communal riot in Miraj was produced rather than occurred spontaneously.

Siddhesh Inamdar writes in *The Hindu* that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has been saying it is confident of victory in this Muslim-dominated town (Miraj) in the coming Assembly polls. Asked whether the BJP would win Miraj, a former BJP worker and corporator, says, '101 per cent. No matter how many Muslims come together, the BJP will certainly win'. The BJP alliance hardly has a presence in Sangli district and neighbouring Kolhapur. So what is with this confidence? For one, the BJP has moved its only 2004 Sangli winner Suresh Khade, who won a handsome 46 per cent of the votes, from Jat to Miraj. For another, Miraj witnessed a communal riot less than a month back.

SIVAJI POSTER ISSUE

In Miraj, where an arch, sporting a poster depicting the slaying of Afzhal Khan at the hands of Shivaji Maharaj was erected on September 2, a day before Ganesh visarjan. The Muslim group demanded the removal of the poster; Hindu group wanted it retained. People also refused to immerse Ganesh idols until the administration conceded their demand on the poster. Later, they demanded permission for it to be

displayed in the visarjan procession. The situation festered, and stone throwing and arson took place in Miraj. In a few instances, some persons threw pieces of beef and placed piglets near temples and mosques respectively. As the two groups clashed, the police had to resort to lathi charge and teargas. Around 300 arrests had been made on charges of rioting and damage to property. No casualties were reported in the riot, though there were unconfirmed reports of one death. In fact, there was a death of a teacher due to heart attack but it was reported propaganda as a death in the riot. On Monday, peace prevailed in Miraj when curfew was lifted for an hour.

The communal riots in Sangli, Miraj and Kolhapur in 2009, just before the state assembly elections, was the handiwork of the BJP and Shiv Sena. According to the secret cable, the politically motivated violence was stoked by right wing parties. The cable dated September 9, 2009, states that the politically motivated violence was stoked by opportunistic elements of the BJP-Sena opposition coalition who are trying to polarize voters before the upcoming state elections in October. With the latest violent events occurring in southern Maharashtra (traditionally a Congress-NCP bastion), it is clear that the Sena and BJP are trying to divide the Hindu and Muslim communities, thereby giving the Hindu nationalist parties a better chance during elections. Explaining the political situation of southern Maharashtra, the cable states that if the Sena-BJP manages to polarize Hindu voters in these districts, comprising 30 of 288 seats, they will likely improve their chances in the state election.

COMMUNAL PROPAGANDA

The right wing politicians made CDs of video clips showing Hindus being attacked by Muslims during the riots and distributed them in towns and villages in Karnataka and Gujarat and Maharashtra. The number of such CDs distributed at over 10 lakh. Another CD was made viral that a Muslim youth hoisted their Green flag on the top of SP (Superintendent of Police) Krushna Prakash's van and he was helpless and did nothing; on the other hand, Krushna Prakash beat Hindu youth mercilessly and even beat Hindu women in their homes upon the false complaint from Muslim youth. However, the sitting Congress MLA from Miraj Hafijabhai Dhature does not think the riots will benefit the BJP. He says that emotional sways are momentary, the people are aware.

Whenever a communal riot takes place, the most important question is who starts it. In addition, the Newtonian answer is always violence and counter violence. Muslims objected to a poster depicting slaying of Afzal Khan by Shivaji, found it provocative and started stoning the Hindu religious procession and there was counter-reaction. In fact, in Miraj the communal riot, neither was spontaneous nor is it caused due to religious animosities but it was politically motivated. It was observed by majority of the theorist of communal riots that the communal riots during the 1950s appear to be more the result of sudden outburst of group violence. From the 1960s, communal riots appear to be systematically engineered.

COMMUNAL HARMONY, RIOTS AND POLITICS

Miraj has been looked upon as an example of communal harmony until today, even though, this town, unlike the rest of the country, has a majority of Muslims. There was a communal riot in 2009; however, the situation has not yet been deteriorated, like Bhiwandi and Malegaon. Before 2009, there was not a single incident of communal riot including at the time of partition of India and even after the demolition of Babari Masjid. Then, why it did happen in 2009 is a matter of objective investigation from unbiased secular point of view. There are no fact-finding reports available regarding communal riots in Miraj. Neither any enquiry commission nor any study group researched the Miraj riot like Bhiwandi or Malegaon. Asghar Ali Engineer has pointed out that 'medium sized towns like Aligarh, Jamshedpur, Moradabad, Bhiwandi, Malegaon, Varanashi, Godhra, etc., have been communally sensitive' (2004:14). However, Miraj is exception to this observation because Miraj is not sensitive communally like Bhiwandi and Malegaon in the manner what Engineer points out. Hence, the extensive research work needs to be carried out particularly on Miraj riot for the building of peace and to reconstruct communal harmony.

CONCLUSION

The Social theorist of riots agree with the argument in the theory of riots that communal riots are not caused spontaneously and also that they are rarely caused by religious animosity. They arise due to conflicting political interests, which are often linked to economic interests. The emergence of Hindutva politics has been the cause of communal riots in the phase from 1960s till late 1980s coupled with local economic and political factors. However, Miraj riot is exception to this observation because there was no economic interest in this riot but it was purely of political interest of right wing political parties. The communal riots since 1990s needs to be seen in the light of the changing political equations in the country. The decline of the Congress and the emergence of the BJP as a strong political force resulted in shifting patterns of communal riots. The eruption of communal riot in Miraj is planned. In Miraj, the Christians are new targets and dalits are drawn into riots against Muslim seeking its entry with there is a clear relationship between riots and politics.

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