

## Why did the riots happen?

Extracts from Sreekrishna Commission Report...

### Immediate Causes:

#### Socio-Economic, Demographic and Political Factors

- i) A communal riot has several causes, some are political, some socio–economical and others demographic. Since it was impossible for the Commission to undertake a study of these factors it appointed a committee of experts from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, to undertake an analysis of the causative factors for the December 1992 and January 1993 riots from these perspectives.
- ii) The expert panel submitted a report giving various theoretical formulations for analysing communal riots as a social phenomenon. It also collected and analysed the data available to examine how far different factors were responsible for the riots of December 1992 and January 1993 and presented its conclusions tersely in Chapter—III of the report. After studying the conclusions of the expert panel, the Commission is inclined to accept the report and conclusions drawn by the panel of experts from TISS. Class conflict, economic competition, and decline in employment opportunities and changing political discourse are some of the immediate causes for urban riots in different studies undertaken by sociologists. How far they are relevant or they are responsible for the riots of December 1992 and January 1993 in Bombay city is discussed below:

#### A) Class Conflict

- i) The theories of class conflict, viz. class stratification coinciding with religious cleavages or the dominant property group trying to raise bogie of (Hindu) communalism in order to mute or deflect the rising demands of the (Muslim) under–privileged are hardly applicable to Bombay. Muslim communalism in Bombay is not due to their comparing themselves with affluent Hindus or because of their feeling of being exploited by Hindus.
- ii) There is also no evidence to suggest that the riots on such large scale could have been engineered by builders or land–grabbers, though land–grabbing may have occurred on certain occasions as a consequence of riots.

#### B) Economic Competition

- i) There is no adequate data to conclude that factors of economic competition between the ethnic groups and the ethnic division of labour caused the riots. The city has not witnessed any rising Muslim bourgeoisie competing with Hindu bourgeoisie. The Muslim community in Bombay has hardly produced sufficiently large number of educated youth to compete with educated Hindu youth for the white collared jobs. There is also no evidence that Hindus had encroached upon the traditional economic activities and businesses like bakery, poultry, leather, goods, timber etc. in which Muslim businessmen have sizeable share. There is no material to show that Hindus felt any threat of displacement from their usual economic enterprises. On the other hand, large exodus of Muslims during the riot periods affected garment industries in which there is economic interdependence of Hindus and Muslims.

#### C) Decline of Employment in Organised Sector and Growth of Informal Sector

- i) The employment in organised sector which provides stable jobs and hence is coveted has declined since 1971 in the city and the decline has been quite sharp between 1981 and 1990. There is also decline in employment in large factories over the same period. This economic decline could have generated frustrations mainly among unemployed youth and poorer sections. De–industrialisation of Bombay has generated unemployment in organised sectors while inflation has hit hard even those in jobs. This is another powerful source of frustration which could have contributed to make the city vulnerable to communal violence.
- ii) More than half of the employed people in Bombay are employed in the informal sector — the sector which has no legal existence and is not accountable to any one. The world of informal sector is lawless, cruel and harsh with rank exploitation of workers. There is neither protection of any labour laws, nor job security in this sector. It is possible that informal sector workers are likely to be first victims of communal aggression and, conversely, it is also probable that they are easily susceptible to be drawn into communal riots.
- iii) There has been almost a three–fold increase in the slum population as compared to 1961. The number of

footpath dwellers and dwellers in slums has also sizably increased. Though not necessarily under the poverty line, life under such conditions involves misery and lack of civic amenities. This is likely to produce in them frustration–aggression syndrome. Thus, the relative deprivation in regard to economic situation in Bombay is also a relevant factor facilitating ethnic violence.

#### **D) Density of Population**

i) Increasing density of population of the city is a factor which has generally affected life in Bombay. The average number of occupants for one room tenement is higher in Bombay than the other metropolises. Though there is no concrete proof of ghettoisation, the concentration of minority community in distinct pockets has probably led to withdrawal and exclusivist tendency among its members. Given the historical antecedents, national contexts and peculiar economic and political situation in Bombay, such demographical changes might have created the potential for communal mobilisation. All over the world such tendencies draw the ire of the majority community.

#### **E) Changing Political Discourse**

- i) The political discourse has changed over the decades throughout the country. During the early years the themes of parliamentary democracy, respective merits of public versus private sectors used to dominate political discourse. Suddenly, all this has yielded place to communal discourse. Bombay is no exception. On the other hand, it has other aggravating factors like decline of organised sector employment, phenomenal growth of informal sector, presence of vocal Hindutva parties and increasing assertion of Muslim ethnic identity and the like.
- ii) Originally confined to the forward caste the middle class in Bombay, Hindutva has recently gained currency and fashionableness and its appeal cuts across economic strata and linguistic divisions. Issues like reversal of Shah Bano decision and singing of Vande Mataram and the aborted co-operative endeavour between Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan and Anjuman–e–Islam and the alleged appeasement of Muslims have increasingly helped the acceptance of Hindutva among the Hindus. The Muslims on their part have been driven more and more to assert their identity and become increasingly exclusive.
- iii) Unlike elsewhere in the country, the Muslims have not acquired sufficient political clout, nor have they been able to increase their representation in Bombay Municipal Corporation or in the Legislative Assembly. This has contributed to the Hindutva idiom gaining ground.
- iv) Thus, over the years various social, political, economic and demographic factors prepared the ground for communal violence and riots. The socio–economic and demographic factors contributed to development of a situation conducive to ethnic violence. The political factors aggravated the cleavages between the ethnic groups, functioning as proximate contributory cause for riots and violence in Bombay.

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