

BHAGALPUR RIOTS : 1989

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C E R T I F I C A T E

Certified that the Dissertation entitled "BHAGALPUR RIOTS: 1989", submitted by Mr. SUNIL KUMAR JHA in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Philosophy, has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any university.

We recommend that this dissertation should be placed before the examiners for their consideration for the award of M.Phil Degree.

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To

My Grand Parents

A Constant Source of Inspiration

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Dated: 21 July 1993


(SUNIL KUMAR JHA)

PROLOGUE

Ironically the country which boasts of its cultural heritage from the great exponents of non-violence in human civilization, Buddha, Kabir and Gandhi is stricken by the pestilence of communal violence. During the British period communalism and its major manifestation, communal riots, were attributed by some to there being two nations, and, in that view, it was presumed that the partition would solve the problem forever.¹ But in retrospect our comprehension of communal reality seems to have been erroneous. According to a recent monograph about 8000 riots have occurred since India's gaining of independence.² Bhagalpur riots in October 1989 is one such in a long list.

Communalism has become closely linked with India's socio-political evolution and is today considered a negative feature of contemporary Indian politics.³ With growing awareness and self assertion among religiously bounded groups and gradual federalization processes, it has gained new ground.

Contrary to the general impression, religion is not the root cause of the Hindu-Muslim conflict -- it is -----

1. Zenab Banu, Politics of Communalism, (Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1989), P - VII.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

rather a powerful instrument in the hands of those interests which seek to play their game through it. Competition for jobs, land etc. apart, communalisation of Indian politics and the creation of communal "Vote Banks" and the political appeasement of these vote banks have an important bearing on communal conflicts in our society. Moreover, in a backward and communally divided society, the elites of the respective communities, taking advantage of economic disparities, are able to exploit religious sentiments among the lower economic classes.

In fact, we are entering an extremely dangerous phase in which communalism has made serious inroads into the state body politic. Many of the officials of the government have openly or secretly compromised with or even supported communal forces and sometimes themselves acted in these terms.

The year 1989 will be remembered as a "year of communal riots" in Bihar. Never before had Bihar witnessed so many riots which claimed so many lives. Nearly two dozen places were in the grip of communal frenzy in the last six months of 1989.⁴ In Gaya, Hazaribagh, Sasaram, Munger, Darbhanga, Madhubani, Motihari, Dhanbad, Sitamarhi, and other places the scene was the same. But the worst ever riot was in Bhagalpur which alone took a toll of one thousand

4. Telegraph (Calcutta), 5 January 1990.



REFERENCES
 Boundary International — — — —
 State/Union Territory - - - - -
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The territorial waters of India extend into the sea to a distance of twelve nautical miles measured from the appropriate base line
 Based upon Survey of India map with the permission of the Surveyor General of India

Scale 1:16,000,000
 km 200 0 200 km

The administrative headquarters of Haryana and Punjab are at Chandigarh
 The boundary of Meghalaya shown on this map is as interpreted from the North Eastern Areas (Reorganisation) Act, 1971 but has yet to be verified

lives (unofficial figures). In Bhagalpur the violence continued for nearly a month and spread to rural areas wiping out villages. This phenomenon of huge mobs attacking villages has been reported for the first time in post-partition days.

On top of it, rumours and media played a devastating role by making people believe false, invented incidents and by exaggerating and misreporting the actual cases respectively.

This was followed and strengthened by a complete breakdown of administrative machinery in the city.

All these characteristics place Bhagalpur under a separate category, justifying a case study.

How is the history of such an event to be written? In Bhagalpur, the state's archives are largely missing. A Sunday Mail report of February 11, 1990 on Bhagalpur carnage and its aftermath sums up the situation in this regard:

"Crucial records of the period especially those from the tables of the then District Magistrate (D.M.)...and Superintendent of Police (S.P.)... are missing."

However, the difficulties of source-gathering are only a part of the problem of constructing the history of such events. The question of how to present and analyze such experiences is equally hazardous. For there is the obvious

danger of sensationalizing such strife.

During the course of my field-interviews, very often the accounts I was given were what had, by then, become standard narratives. The standard practice in the affected Mohallas (neighbourhoods) and villages I visited was for me to be taken to a central spot where many people gathered and the elders or the educated gave me what might be the authorized account of local happenings. They were constructed more or less consciously in order to either justify or falsify particular 'theories' or explanations of the course of events.

Hindus, who were accused of taking out an armed procession, during Ramshila Puja in October 1989, declared that the procession was an ordinary religious one and that it was accompanied by very large numbers of women and children singing devotional songs. Muslims who were accused by the local administration and by others of making preparations for a riot declared that they never had any quarrel with the Hindus and had no reason to fear a riot; that perfect amity had always existed between the two communities.

Does this sound convincing? Is it possible that people who live together (have always lived together) and share each other's daily concerns should become enemies overnight? It was, in fact, this kind of thinking that led

many people to stress the importance of 'letting bygones be bygones.'

The major sources which I have used are as follows:

I have taken a number of interviews, during my field work, of persons coming from varied strata of society in order to ascertain the approximate truth. I have also interviewed the Intelligence Officials at Bhagalpur. Details about persons interviewed appear in the field interview section in Bibliography.

I have also gone through the contemporary newspapers like Times of India, Hindustan Times, Indian Express, Telegraph, Tribune, Deccan Herald, Hindu, Patriot, Sunday Mail, Sunday Observer, New Age, Jansatta, Navbharat Times, Hindustan etc. Only after a critical analysis of the reports as published, in view of my inquiry and findings, I have given them a place in my dissertation. The same applies to some articles published in different magazines and journals.

This apart, I have consulted reports like P.U.D.R. Report on Bhagalpur Riots, April 1990, and "Bhagalpur Riots: In Retrospect" by A.K. Singh published in The Administrator (Oct-Dec. 1990).

I have also consulted Bhagalpur gazetteer (1962), one Home Political file in National Archives of India, New

Delhi, "Bhagalpur Ka Sach" by Public Relations Department, Bihar Government and the statements of witnesses including government officials before the Bhagalpur Riots Commission.

Mr. R.P. Singh, Editor, Nayi Baat, a local Hindi daily (Bhagalpur) also kindly allowed me to see his personal notes on the history of communal riots in Bhagalpur and other materials. I am well aware of the weakness of such notes, yet in view of no other authentic source available so far on some aspects, I have relied on these notes whose original sources are not available.

In the first Chapter i.e. 'Historiographical trend on communalism,' I have reviewed five major books on communalism in order to have a glimpse of the prevailing trend of history writing and its practical implication with regard to present day occurrence of communal disturbances and strifes. These are works by Bipan Chandra, G. Pandey, S.B. Frietag, Ratna Naidu and Satish Saberwal. Certain exceptions aside, view from the centre remains the recognized vantage point for a meaningful reconstruction of Indian history (e.g. Bipan Chandra's book). The history of sectarian strife is written as a secondary story. It appears as a minor element in the main drama of India's struggle for independence from colonial rule. Factors like forging of new identities and loyalties or the rise of new ambitions and resolutions among uprooted people are not included. Some new innovations have been made in this regard by historians and

sociologists alike viz. G. Pandey, S.B. Frieting, R. Naidu and S. Saberwal.

Chapter two, "Historical Review of Communal Conflicts' and Inter-Communal Relations", deals with the occurrence of communal riots in Bhagalpur since the inception of this century. I have mainly depended on Gazetteer of Bhagalpur (1962), Home Political file of National Archives of India, Delhi, personal notes of R.P. Singh and field-interviews.

The third chapter 'Background and Genesis' shows how the Bhagalpur society got polarized in the decade of 1980s -- covering the activities and modus operandi of politicians, criminals, religious and communal organizations, business magnets and their bearing on the communal atmosphere. I have also taken into account the prevailing socio-economic conditions. And finally how, in this background, the situation took a dramatic turn with the coming of Ramshila procession -- resulting into the carnage in Bhagalpur.

'Rumours and Media, are discussed in the fourth chapter. These have played a leading role in aggravating the already worsened communal situation, having far reaching consequences. It was a rumour which spread and fanned the feeling of hatred and mistrust in the villages against the minority community. Media played an irresponsible role by exaggerating or sometimes misreporting the news. All the

dimensions of Rumour and Media have been critically analyzed.

'Riots in Rural Areas' the fifth chapter, concerns an event perhaps unique of its own kind. Nowhere else, in recent times, has a huge mob attacking a village of the minority community been reported. An attempt has been made to show 'how' and 'why' this riot spread to the villages in Bhagalpur district.

The history of a communal riot shows that there was a complete breakdown of law and administrative machinery. This is the saddest aspect of the Bhagalpur Riots -- hence the sixth chapter on "The role of State & Administration". A post-mortem of the then law and administrative machinery, and its inner working, has been done in order to reveal 'why' and 'how' this administrative breakdown resulted -- covering politicisation of administration, political interference, role of the notorious Bihar Military Police and Police Vs. Army situation.

In the conclusion, I have put the essence of my major arguments in the whole dissertation.

CHAPTER I

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TREND ON COMMUNALISM

HISTORIOGRAPHICAL TREND

Writing on communalism within the framework of Modern Indian History has been varied one. Bipan Chandra in his book¹ analyses the essential features of communalism and the reasons for its growth in Modern India. Against the backdrop of the freedom movement, the author brings to light those aspects of India's social, economic, political and cultural life which were responsible for the growth of communalism. He firmly rejects the prevalent notion that communalism was the logical and inevitable product of Indian historical development. On the other hand, he emphasises that communalism was a modern social and political phenomenon that could have been controlled and even eradicated if certain social, political and ideological conditions had been met.

To Professor Chandra, communalism is the belief that because a group of people follow a particular religion they have as a result common social, political and economic interests i.e. identity based on religion.² In this view, religious communities are the fundamental social units of society and not the nation, nationalities, linguistic groups or classes.

1. Bipan Chandra, Communalism in Modern India, (Vikas, Delhi, 1984).
2. Ibid, P-1.

Furthermore, the Communalist usually starts from difference and divergence but invariably ends up with the notion that the interests of the people, because of following different religions are antagonistic and mutually exclusive and incompatible. But in Prof. Chandara's view, in real life this division did not exist. There is often a lag between the emergence of new social relations and the birth and spread of new social ideas and identities. It leads to the rise and spread of many versions of false consciousness -- communalism being one. Prof. Chandra believes that false consciousness does reflect, though partially and perversely, some aspects of social reality and at the same time also serves a social function for some groups, classes and interests.

Communalism, to Prof. Chandra, was an upshot of a modern politics which was absolutely different from the politics of the medieval or ancient or pre-1857 period.³ It could take fascist or an extremist form, had people been appealed and mobilised on a large scale, particularly after 1937, due to spread of liberal ideology, extension of franchise and the rapid advance of the national movement.

The author views communalism as a petty bourgeois question⁴ par excellence i.e. an expression of the

3. Ibid, P-8.

4. Ibid, P-41.

interests, aspirations, outlook, attitudes and psychology of the middle classes in a social situation marked by economic stagnation and the lack of a powerful struggle to transform society. ~~But~~ There was unhealthy competition and nepotism, corruption and familism were used on a large scale. The competition for jobs among individuals could be given the turn of being a struggle between two communities.

Every appointment to a government job was seen as communal and unjust and fed communalism - creating a vicious circle. Often the struggle for jobs was no less sharp between Brahmin/Non-Brahmin, Shia/Sunni, urbanite/ruralites. With the decline of faith in the capacity of the united national movement to liberate and transform society, the petty bourgeoisie shifted to short term considerations and advantages. Moreover, the dependence of the middle classes on government services enabled the colonial state to encourage communalism through this patronage. In Prof. Chandra's eye economic factors were the most important for popular discontent. Religious or communal factors were not so instrumental in it.⁵

Surprisingly in several parts of the country the religious distinction coincided with social and class distinction. Thus political mobilisation of both the exploiters and the exploited could thereby proceed on

5. Ibid, P-55.

communal lines. In Bengal, it was the lower castes and classes which had been converted to Islam. The Hindu preponderance in trade and moneylending dated back to medieval times. During that period Hindus had concentrated on getting control of land and position in the army and administration. Hindu merchants and money lenders threatened the economic position of the old Zamindars of all types due to colonial structure of surplus extraction and appropriation.

In other words, while colonial rulers favoured the growth and economic domination of the merchants and money-lenders, medieval history had determined that they would be mostly Hindus. Communalism also represented a struggle between new entrants and the entrenched one in business and commerce as well as a struggle between Hindu and Muslim bourgeoisie.

Prof. Chandra argues that communalism was the ideology of the petty bourgeoisie backed by imperialism and the feudal elements.⁶ It was a reaction which took sometimes casteist and regionalist form and other times it openly defended imperialism and vested interests. The Hindu Mahasabha e.g. actively opposed land-reforms as well as anti-landlords, anti-capitalist and anti-moneylender legislation. Similarly the Muslim League generally opposed

6. Ibid, P-80.

anti-landlord measures. In Bengal, the more the influence of the Zamindars over Fazlul Haque increased, the more communal he became -- unleashing an aggressive communal attack against the pro-peasant members of his own party. At worst the communalist cooperated with colonialism, at best they avoided conflict with it. Even if the communalists envisaged the independence of India from the colonial rule, they were trying to win the confidence of the British rulers in order to strengthen the political claim of their respective community as well as to preserve their distinct mark and identity at the social and political platform - particularly the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (R.S.S.).

Interestingly enough, the communal leaders and organisations seldom attacked their communal counterparts but reserved most of their venom for Congress leaders. In fact, communalism was mainly used to thwart the processes of democracy, social change and anti-imperialism.

Actually the communal and casteist ideology spread due to failure of nationalists' efforts to generate a new national consciousness based on a new modern culture. This proved to be a major road block in the path of a united national movement.⁷ Therefore, what emerged was a dialectical relationship between the imperfect, uneven and slow process of the nation in the making and communalism.

7. Ibid, P-131

The fear of being deprived dominated and even exterminated was widespread. In this atmosphere of frustration, insecurity and anxiety, it was easy for feelings of mistrust, fear and suppressed violence and hatred to flourish. For the Muslims' Indian nationalism meant perpetual slavery and complete absorption into Hinduism. It was natural that Muslims should suffer from the minority and fear complex.

Responsibility to allay the fear of the minority lies with the majority. But the Hindu communalists did just the opposite. On top of it, the strong Hindu tinge in much of the nationalist thought, propaganda and agitation tended to repel and alienate Muslims. Tilak, Gandhi, Aurobindo freely used Hindu symbols, myths, rituals and idioms. They found it difficult to bypass religion in their daily political practice. This was bound to have undesirable consequences in a multi-religious country where communal elements were active with the full backing of the government. Hence, in the author's opinion, simultaneously with modern mass politics, it was urgent to have a cultural revolution incorporating the humanist and rationalist elements of the traditional culture.

Religion served as a vehicle to mask the politics of classes and social groups arising in the secular, non-religious spheres.⁸ But religiosity was a major

8. Ibid, P-167.

contributory factor to the arousal of religious fervour without which communalism could not have acquired the character of a mass-movement as in 1946-47. Reformist and revivalist movements strengthened the irrational aspects of religion. Mullahs, Maulvis and communal leaders had greater social and political influence over Muslims generally. Muslims' all round backwardness apart, democratic and other progressive forces failed to impress them. They were very much in the grip of those forces which brought them closer to the communal ideology.

This social milieu without values and full of material, social and psychological frustration was ideally conducive to irrational philosophies.

A distorted and unscientific view of Indian history (ancient and medieval) was a basic constituent of the communal ideology as well as its products.⁹ Ancient period being described as Hindu period of glory, Muslim period that of debauchery, medieval Muslims rulers as foreigners, and Muslims as an alien element in Indian society. Thus Indianness was linked to religion. The entire treatment of the past was allegorical - projecting the contemporary communal politics into the past. There was totally uncritical approach to the description of ancient Indian society. Indian culture was identified with ancient Indian culture and declared to be free of social and

9. Ibid, P-209.

religious tensions and conflicts. The character of the rulers was said to reflect the inherent character of the communities to which they belonged. This found literary and graphic representation at the level of novels, poems, stories and popular magazines.

British rule and policy have to share a larger responsibility for the growth of communalism. The British were in a position to tone it down but they rather chose to accentuate it. The policy of divide and rule became an important instrument to thwart the rising national movement. It was presented as the problem of the defence of minorities and became a major part of the theory of imperialist legitimation, as its other components got increasingly discredited.¹⁰

Communalists were encouraged in all their ventures. The degree of support also varied in time as well as space. But this support for communal forces was a controlled one. Otherwise it could have boomeranged on the British rule itself. In fact, the Muslim League and Jinnah exercised their veto over the post-war constitutional discussions till the British had a hope to maintain their power and empire in India and the sub continent. Once its impossibility became clear British withdrew the veto. In fact, the logic of colonial structure provided the

10. Ibid, P-243.

parameters within which communalism grew and functioned.

Since 1947, the social, class character and base of communalism have undergone a major change. The capitalist economy has failed to solve the basic problems of poverty, unemployment and inequality. It created regional imbalances. Terrorism in its latest version is a form of communal violence. The solution lies in "...building of democratic, civil libertarian, egalitarian, socially just, nationally united and economically developing society, that is a socialist society."¹¹ Intellectuals have themselves to be free of the communal virus. There is need to secularise the state, administration, society, education, media, press etc. -- a kind of cultural revolution is needed.

In his analysis of the problem of communalism in India G. Pandey in his book¹² argues that both nationalism and colonialism must be understood in all dimensions. He remarks that both these concepts are products of the age of colonialism, of reason and of capital. His investigation of communalism is, therefore, part of a larger exercise aimed at understanding the construction of Indian society and politics as a whole. Prof. Pandey emphasises the historical and contested character of all nationalisms. As categories of thought and as people's movement, he suggests that both

11. Ibid, P-326.

12. G. Pandey, The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1990).

nationalism and communalism are constructed out of shared as well as contested experiences out of common as well as mutually contradictory visions and struggles.

In the very first chapter the author illustrates the term communalism. He suggests that colonial India experienced a peculiar combination of modern and medieval modes of domination and exploitation. There developed a new cohesion "around existing foci of loyalty, such as caste, language and religious community even as a new national consciousness arose." This is where the concept of communalism came into play.¹³ To Prof. Pandey communalism is a loosely used term. That is why he calls it primitive and puerile.

Colonialist view of communalism is described as essentialist -- reflecting the natural condition of India. The nationalists viewed it as a distorted reflection of economic conflict i.e. economistic. An old liberal nationalist and liberal colonialist view survives i.e. communalism was nationalism gone awry.¹⁴

Prof. Pandey's emphasis rests on the exact nature of happenings in respect of time, space and people involved. Only a critical analysis of these aspects of an event can determine their true nature. "One ahistorical assumption

13. Ibid, P-3.

14. Ibid, P-12-14.

replaces another and no attempt is made to study the qualities of a specific historical consciousness in the specific time and place."

Another aspect is that of inconsistency and rather unhistorical ways in which the communal riots were recorded during the 19th century colonial rule. To colonial rulers, all the riots reflected the irrational character of the native people¹⁵. They did not take into account the prevailing social-economic condition or any changes in the social structure which could unfold the main elements behind the riots. The formation of new social groups or classes and in turn the emerging social aspirations were not important enough for the colonial rulers. All the new social and political movements were believed to be coopted by the pre-existing loyalties and tendencies. The depiction of the past is invariably unruly and chaotic. Thus "fanatical and clannish entities; disorderly sections of the population; communities prone to dacoity and rioting etc. - these are the phrases that make history in the 19th century in colonial North India."¹⁶ Thus it is absolutely the statist version of history where nothing ever changes.

The author investigates the origin of the colonial stereotypes and their importance in explaining the sectarian

15. Ibid, P-45.

16. Ibid, P-64.

strife. The larger question is that of the "relationship in colonialist discourse between sociology and history." The image of julaha bigotry, in fact, had been built on the basis of some Hindu-Muslim riots in the Gangetic plain in which a handful of weaving community people were involved.¹⁷ In fact, it was the struggle for power, prestige and pride combined with the socio-economic dislocation of the colonial period that made the julahas participate in several incidents of conflict and confrontation. But historians going through the official record got the impression that julahas are an intolerant and turbulent community. The point to be noted is that this kind of interpretation distorts reality by taking history out of it. For the colonialist if caste was the defining unit of Indian society, communalism was its defining culture.

The unyielding nature of general people resulted in the formation of religious, caste and other local solidarities¹⁸. With improved means of communication, including the press, they became much aware of their significance as agents of history. History to these people also became a point of reference for asserting their identity as a community. They tried to obtain social recognition of their genealogies, traditions etc. This was more so due to the crisis of legitimate hierarachy in the

17. Ibid, P-102-3.

18. Ibid, P-110.

wake of wider social and economic dislocation under colonial rule.

"It was the contest over 'legitimate' authority that created the need to narrativize events to make them speak for themselves . . . the need for history." History itself became a site for struggle between the contesting parties. What was involved in all such cases was the denial by traditionally privileged or super-ordinate classes of a history that was claimed as their own by the subordinate classes. Surprisingly, both colonial rulers and Indian elite were on the same platform in this respect.

The construction of identity for Hindu and Muslim communities remained a central issue around which their social and political activities revolved. Fixing the boundaries between the two was a most complicated issue. Cow protection movement and Urdu-Hindi controversy aimed at, by and large, constructing the larger Hindu community in Northern India¹⁹. Apart from creating a wall between Hindus and non-Hindus, it also brought a sense of oneness among Hindus in general.

Mclane views cow protection movement as a kind of sub-nationalism which attempted to define and construct the community in terms of Hindu customs and thus separating the muslim from the primary community of the nation. To a great

19. Ibid, P-162.

extent, it succeeded in bringing the different sections and classes of Hindu people on a united platform²⁰.

The role of religion was extremely important in mobilising the Hindu people as demonstrated by contemporary leaflets consisting of invocation, information, propaganda and promise of support and sanctions.²¹ In fact, different kinds of groups of caste and communities emerged, depending upon issues at stake, involving both Hindus and Muslims. Some times very strange equations were to be seen e.g. the lower castes had teamed up with the upper castes to end cow sacrifices in the 1890s and 1910s. When in 1910s and 1920s the former started demanding a more respectable status, the upper caste Hindu zamindars joined hands with the upper caste Muslim zamindars of the region to keep these upstart peasant castes in their place²². This divide between upper and lower castes and classes remained the pre-dominant feature of the rural political scene in eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Simultaneously, it was more noteworthy than any rift or strife between local Hindus and Muslims till 1940s. This demonstrates that interests were more important than the caste or community.

The Hindu and Muslim movements of the mid 19th

20. John Mclane, Indian Nationalism and the early Congress, (Princeton, 1977) P-290.

21. Pandey, op. cit., P-181.

22. Ibid, P-200.

century India were an answer to a colonialism that challenged the validity of the indigenous forms of social existence in virtually every respect. It was a sort of cultural-counter-offensive against the British. The movement for cow protection, a sanskritized Hindi written in Devanagri and a Hindu University aimed at providing an indigenous alternative²³.

As Bayly shows (as quoted in the book²⁴) the two faces of nationalism were based on a 'modernist' idiom and a 'Dharmic' idiom. Thus nationalism had to be strengthened through both national and conservative elements and forces. Before 20th century India was perceived as a composite body of several communities each having its own history and culture. The conflicting notions and ideas of Malviya, Lajpat Rai, Bhartendu Harish Chandra, R.C. Dutt give a fine picture of the contemporary notion of nationhood.

"In sum, the evidence from the turn of the century points, on the one hand, to a political vision of emerging or potential unity based on the common interests of all Indians. On the other it indicates the existence of a vision of society as already formed into discrete communities each with the right to determine its own future.... The character of this latter equation speaks of

23. Ibid, P-207.

24. Ibid, P-208.

the limits of Indian liberalism in the 19th and early 20th centuries, a liberalism that was manifestly inadequate for its own project of building a liberal notion of free and equal citizens...."²⁵

Prof. Pandey is of opinion that communalism and nationalism arose together and were part of the same discourse i.e. nationalism driven into religious channels and communalism driven into secular channels respectively. Nationalism was all that was forward looking, communalism was all that was backward looking. Nationalism reflected the spontaneous urge of the Indian people for economic advancement and freedom from exploitation. Communalism reflected the machinations of the colonial rulers and reactionary upper class elements that played on the religious sentiments of the people to further their own narrow interests.

Prof. Pandey suggests that there was no concept like India, Indian civilization or Indian nationalism abinitio. All these were products of colonial rule and constructed very much in order to stand up against the colonial rule.

Sandria B. Frietag²⁶ in her study gives a broad

25. Ibid, P-231.

26. S. B. Frietag, Collective Action and Community (University of California Press, Berkeley, 1989).

and deep analysis of perceptions, values and motivations that activated ordinary North Indian people in the 19th and early 20th century. An attempt has been made to understand the urban riots from the perspective of 'popular culture' i.e. involving crowds and rites, music and sword play, sacred space and time. History is constructed here from the interplay between collective activities of the individuals and the larger world organised around an imperial order.

Major emphasis in this book has been on the construction of community identity. Enactments of events and rituals based on local cultural referents and common shared values and experiences have been the modus operandi for defining community identity. The public arena activities (popular culture) emerged as an alternative to that structured and backed by the imperial order. Through these public arena activities participants (subordinate people) gained legitimacy and also a sense of being important agents in history, apart from creating a distinct boundary for their respective community.

To Freitag, the literature on Banaras riots of 1809-10 shows how loosely the word 'communalism' has been used by scholars. Despite the fact that the scale of collective involvement proved much greater in the house tax protest of 1810, histories of Benaras emphasize the religious riot of 1809. In 1809 riots, Indians had attacked

Indians but the collective action of 1810-11 pitted Benarsis against the British Raj. The action shifted from a dispute over a sacred site to protests against imposition of a new form of taxation²⁷. In fact, communal conflict was something more than so called timeless hostility between Hindus and Muslims. Rather, it symbolised re-alignment and re-adjustment of power relationships in an urban site witnessing significant political and economic change.

The role of colonial state, in general, was more or less like a mediator between 1870 and 1940²⁸. The state saw itself as outside the society. It did not perceive riots and religious violence as a threat to either the government or its philosophy of rule. But when the natural leaders viz Nawabs, zamindars etc. failed to maintain social stability, imperial rulers were virtually pulled into public arena. By that time the activities of public arena had expanded unchecked in view of the aloofness of the colonial state. The result was the birth of a new national level ideology called 'communalism' which came to defy the very structure of the imperial state.

Changes in the structures of the community and locally formed affinities were an important cause of the riots of the 19th century U.P.²⁹ These structures served as -----

27. Ibid, P-42.

28. Ibid, P-53.

29. Ibid, P-126.

focal point for intra-community conflict and competition. There came a stage when these competing claims began to impinge on the Muslim world. Symbolical activities with larger referents were translated into ideological statements. Hindu-Muslim riots were, by and large, the result of this phenomenon.

People started making self-conscious efforts to define and protect the community boundary against the 'other',³⁰. But the definition of community expanded only when it became necessary to do so. As the events of Bareilly and Agra suggest, public ceremonials provided the raw materials for community identity. Likewise the cow protection movement in 19th century helped bring different sections and classes of Hindu people on to a united platform.

The cow protection movement apart, Ramlila and Kanpur mosque affair together demonstrate that new definitions of community were being forged. Ramlila had certain scenes related to Kali and Rani of Jhansi which defended popular values, nationalistic and religious at the same time. But it also raised a serious question - did the population and status of the community numerically dominant guarantee protection for its values and inevitably imperil those of the minority? The incident of Machhali bazar

30. Ibid, P-146.

mosque was symptomatic of the martyrdom of Muslims in general. Such rhetoric brought a number of symbols to the fore. It also demonstrated that, collective agitation apart, a community with symbols was capable of transcending local boundaries.³¹

In fact, Hindus were striving after a larger share of political power. The Muslims made no such claim, rather they felt being ousted by the Hindus. Their resentment against their own impotence and ineffectiveness was at the root of most of the irritation.

The forms of resistance against the imperial or a dominant community were almost similar. In both cases evocation of a larger community was a must. In one case the invocation of community ideology took the shape of nationalism, in the other of communalism.

But the two differed significantly. Hindus with the repeated success of nationalist campaign succeeded in divorcing symbols from their religious or sectarian significance. Whereas Muslims, in contrast, adopted a defensive posture--because they had neither numbers nor the influence for optimistic symbolism.³²

The question of integration of public and state structure, resulted in a territorial division³³. But the

31. Ibid, P-215-16..

32. Ibid, P-217-18.

33. Ibid, P-240.

interests of no community were dealt with directly in the resultant state structures. The sense of frustration was bound to be strongest in those who perceived themselves part of a minority.

However, it is significant to note that collective action, whether ceremonial or violent, served to define the community symbolically. But the very conditions of life in a modern nation state demanded the 'invention' of traditions to bind together the national subjects.

Equally puzzling was the question of authority. Under the colonial regime the moral authority of the people was embedded in the public arena whereas power resided in the imperial state. This posed a serious problem in India because it required to unite the two.

In fact, full participation of Muslims could have been assured only by a society in which the public sphere would be accessible to all -- this was not the case in 19th and early 20th century North India.

In Ratna Naidu's book³⁴, communal conflict has been studied in terms of the structural evolution of the political economy, the formation of new hierarchic social structures and the shifting position of the communities. An attempt has been made to highlight the structural principles

34. Ratna Naidu, The Communal Edge to Plural Societies : India and Malaysia, (Vikas, Delhi, 1980).



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of change as in economic compulsions behind conflict and the political processes which harden and exacerbate communal conflicts. A deep analysis of the structural dimensions of a riot such as the tension-heightening impact of processions, the havoc caused by rumours, the key role played by communal organisations, the psycho-dynamics of the control effort by a majority dominated administration, and so on has been undertaken. Communities have been seen not as cultural units but in the context of a problem which emerged through the politico-economic evolution of the societies of which they are a part.

To be precise, Prof. Naidu's analysis of the communal question is in terms of social morphology of class structure, born of delayed industrialisation. She defines communal situation as tension between "culturally distinct but geographically intermingled communities" due to economic competition, religious or cultural antipathies and memories of past conflicts and humiliations. To her this communal hydra is a combination of language, status, power, bread and butter anxieties which can defy the good-will of the best of government. She believes that modern day communal riots are rooted in social and economic compulsions and carefully nurtured by political parties and opposing communal groups.

Communalism is a result of a time lag in the entry of the different communities into the modernisation

process³⁵. That apart, it (communalism) seems to generate in affluence as sharp and painful psychological antipathies as communalism in poverty like India. In terms of the scale and intensity of riots and measures of physical destruction, Indian communalism pays an infinitely higher price. Decline of feudal economy in which Muslims on account of Muslim rule were better placed in terms of industry and trade, broke their backbone³⁶. The Hindus were better equipped to avail the new channels of business and commerce made possible by the rise of the colonial economy. The resultant growth of new industrial and commercial cities dominated by Hindus, continued to be a sore point for the Muslims. Besides, the purchase of Muslims' land by the Hindus increased their fear. The threat of being displaced loomed large over all sections of the Muslim society.

To R. Naidu, communal separatist philosophy in India emerged to protect the interests and ambitions of an elite class and definitely not to protect the interests of a backward community.³⁷ The young Muslims did not prefer scientific, technical and professional education. This was on account of their cultural inhibition against Western knowledge and the lucrative jobs which were available in many states. Economic sustenance of the upper class Muslims

35. Ibid, P-26.

36. Ibid, P-28.

37. Ibid, P-33.

had been rather comfortable because of their inherited rights and skill in governance.

Communal conflict and nation building activity - each has its bearing over the other.³⁸ In developing societies, government is expected to build and develop social as well as economic infrastructure relevant for the country. This brings the state into conflict with the core of private faith and particular intellectual orientation of individuals and groups because the root of social infrastructure lies in the religious and cultural traditions of a community.

Prof. Naidu believes that purity of party doctrine on Western model left Congress in 1937 with little scope for manouverability. Thus adequate political wheeling and dealing on the Muslims question became a difficult task.³⁹ The communal question thus became non-negotiable and power had to be transferred to two sovereign states.

While the Hindu Congressmen might bend over backward to sympathise with the Muslim electorate, the Muslim Congressman hesitated lest he be branded as communalist. Indian Muslims participated in political process through non-communal parties for some time after the partition but soon within twenty years, shifted to the same

38. Ibid, P-46.

39. Ibid, P-63.

communal line in fear of Hindu communalism. In fact, it would have been of consequence if economically and politically dominant Hindu leaders had taken certain concrete measures to allay the fears of Muslims. Even Congress failed to do so.

"Grievances of the Muslim community - economic discrimination, cultural attrition, fear of communal assault and so on accumulated, having no acceptable outlet such as an organisation for civil liberties or effective representation in the secular parties or in administration. The cup of grievances filled to overflowing into communal parties"⁴⁰

The structure of vote banks on communal line in plural societies is also important - Muslims being one of the significant units. But uneven distribution of Muslim population throughout the country makes it well-nigh impossible for them to exert any meaningful impact over the electoral process except tilting the balance between major national parties.

The Congress has mishandled the communal question. Its insincere attitude and repeated denial of the communal reality have only gone to complicate the issue and increase the fear and insecurity of the Muslim community.

40. Ibid, P-80.

" ... More fundamentally, the secular state is a pluralistic state in which members of diverse ethnic, religious, racial and social groups, may autonomously participate in and develop their own culture and special interests, within the confines of the laws of a common civilization".⁴¹

What we need in India is political modernisation i.e. economic and political responses must take place through secular organisations and not through religious or ethnic ones. Community supported political parties are merely articulating the social, economic and political needs of a particular community which in a way violates the principle of secularism.

Prof. Naidu argues that communalism is subversive of nationalism only when a particular idiom becomes a basis to question the bonafides of other communities. Most economic and political issues have varied implications for the different communities. Answers to these questions have different consequences for the different communities.

The occurrence of communal riots can be explained at the social and psychological base resulting out of threat to self-respect, identity symbols and loss of cherished values.⁴² It is also a result of deliberate awakening of

41. Ibid, P-87.

42. Ibid, P-97.

collective memories by community leaders to experience anew the hatred and fear of generations e.g. Mahad Riot.⁴³

For a minority community, a procession is a definite demonstration of strength and solidarity. But community based politics is more dangerous because, thereby, they are concretely identifiable. Even representation of the communal minority through communal electorates does not give it more political leverage. Rather it creates a commensurate anti-minority front.

Finally Prof. Naidu suggests that communal problem can be tackled by adequate give and take in a two party system. Attempts, therefore, must be made to find integrative solutions. Revivalist and fundamentalist movements serve as a solace in view of the socio-economic dislocation. What we need is enlightened leadership.

Satish Saberwal⁴⁴, on quite distinct platform, explores the sociological and psychological aspects of the genesis of communal ideology. He views communal riots as societal break down. To him, it is the symbolic order of religion which persuades its believers to set themselves apart from the followers of other traditions laying the basis for communal identities.

43. Ibid, P-98.

44. Satish Saberwal, India : The Roots of Crisis (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1986).

Prof. Saberwal's analysis is in the backdrop of colonial regime and its vast institutional network and the way it affected India's socio-political life. The techno-social order i.e. railway, bureaucracy, capitalism etc. resulting from the European colonial presence in India called for a range of institutional capabilities for its sustenance. In medieval Europe legal codes were instrumental both in administering justice and in bureaucratic functioning. But the Indian tradition did not have any master codes like that to deal with its own diversity. British society in its earlier phase did not have an elaborate bureaucratic system and often it resorted to ad-hocism. It was Macaulay who initiated the construction of integrated impersonal codes in India, access to which was essential for making megasociety possible.

In fact the grassroots normative orders in India were worlds apart from those of Europe which gave rise to such institutions. Since Indians lacked an institutional network of their own to sustain the megasociety, they had to resort to colonial mechanisms in order to manage their internal affairs.

Prof. Saberwal argues that India was forced-marched into becoming a megasociety first under colonialism then under Nehru and the regime of capitalism. The result is obvious. In the more recent institutions the calculus of personal advantage displaces all too often that of corporate

purpose--showing that we have weak institutionalised networks and hence tension.

Tensions accumulate at two levels both individual - yielding nervous break downs - and collective - yielding social break-downs, as in communal riots.⁴⁵

State building in pre-colonial India was subject to the rise and fall of dynasties over time. Political actors in contemporary India have inherited a variety of political traditions coming down from the pre-colonial period, which makes for a multiplicity of codes in political arena --tending to exact a heavy price.

" ... The rise of communalism during the colonial period should perhaps be seen in relation to the long standing separateness of religious networks, the acute social distance expressing a high level of social antagonism between Muslims and Hindus, the lapse of formerly functioning, integrative political and administrative ties, and the growth of communally homogeneous neighbourhoods in the new metropolitan centres."⁴⁶

" With older restraints weakening and newer linkages forming separately in an era of unprecedented economic shifts, what had once been relatively stable,

45. Ibid, P-35.

46. Ibid, P-75.

largely local interfaces between Hindus and Muslims tended to become much wider and more active oppositions. Of this situation, the colonial regime was at times more than willing to take advantage."⁴⁷

" The co-existence of numerous religious traditions in India has" not promoted "mutual interest and curiosity but insulation and indifference."⁴⁸

The five major books reviewed (supra) cover the dynamism of communal riots in all its specificities. Prof. Bipan Chandra's Nationalist framework of interpretation, Prof. Pandey's and Prof. Frietag's grassroot level working of communalism, Prof. Naidu's analysis of contemporary scenario and Prof. Saberwal's sociological and psychological analysis unfold the nature and genesis of communal riots. Except Prof. Chandra's book, all the four by unfolding features such as stereotype concepts, importance of public arena activities, the role of rumour, administration and the social and cultural distance between the two communities - bring me closer to my topic "Bhagalpur Riots 1989". But all the above mentioned theoretical aspects have to be applied from the perspective of local referents.

47. Ibid, P-76.

48. Ibid, P-77-78.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORICAL REVIEW OF

COMMUNAL CONFLICTS IN BHAGALPUR

PART - A : HISTORICAL REVIEW OF COMMUNAL CONFLICTS

PART - B : INTER-COMMUNAL RELATION

HISTORICAL REVIEW OF COMMUNAL CONFLICTS

Bhagalpur does have a history of communal riots. Riots have occurred in the years 1909, 1924, 1936, 1941, 1946, 1967, 1970, 1984 etc.¹ However in all these years riots were confined to the town area and were almost immediately brought under control. Even in 1924 when Bhagalpur witnessed a big disturbance the communal situation was not allowed to go out of hand. District Officer, Superintendent of Police, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Sub-Divisional Officer, and other police officials all acted in perfect coordination and controlled the situation.²

"People in Bhagalpur still remember how in 1946 the then District Magistrate late Harihar Prasad Singh controlled the riots within a few ours. [Mr. A.P. Mishra, the then D.S.P., Bhagalpur agreed and narrated to me the strategy he had adopted to control the situation- S.K.J.]³ They are also full of praise for late B.N. Sinha, the S.P. Bhagalpur who did not allow the riots to spread in -----

1. A.K. Singh, "Bhagalpur Riots : In Retrospect", The Administrator, Vol. 35, No. 4, Oct-Dec 1990, P-80.
People's Union for Democratic Rights (P.U.D.R) Reports, Bhagalpur Riots, Delhi, April 1990, P-2.
R.P.Singh, Editor, Nayi Baat, Bhagalpur (His personal notes).
2. Home Political, File No: (249/IV/1924), National Archives of India, (NAI) Delhi.
3. A. P. Mishra, Interview, 22.5.93, Patna.

1967...."⁴ In all these respects Bhagalpur riots 1989 have a very different story.

The causes of the riots which have occurred in the past are mainly political and religious.

The year 1909 witnessed the first riot in Bhagalpur. Communal tension had built up in the city as well as in many other parts of the country with the inclusion of the provision of separate electorate in the Council Act of 1909. But due to strict rule of the British, the situation was brought under control without taking a huge toll of lives.⁵

Another riot occurred on 23rd August, 1924. Muslims at Bhagalpur had taken a decision that there shall be no music near their mosques. This led to several quarrels and one or two violent ones -- the last occurred on August 17 when a small procession was broken up by Muslims.

In view of the coming festival of Janmastmi day (known as Dahi-Kado in Bhagalpur) Hindus had applied for a license to take out a procession. Since the license did not allow playing music before the mosque, Hindus did not accept the license. On 22nd August Hindu Samaj issued a notice to Hindus to close shops on 23rd August. Hindu Samaj comprised

4. A.K. Singh, op.cit., P-80.

5. R.P. Singh, op. cit., His Personal Notes.

of those Hindus interested in politics, many of them holding extreme views. Accordingly the procession was taken out on 23rd and Hindus kept the shops closed. The first Hindu procession without license, in defiance of the standing order, passed the mosque of Mojahidpur with music. While passing through the Khalifa Bagh mosque they redoubled the tone of music and the shouting. Stout lathials (persons having big sticks in their hands) were also accompanying the procession. When the tail of the procession was yet to pass, armed Muslims threw stones, cow-flesh and bones on the processionists. However, with the intervention of the police, collision with the Muslims was checked. Mail lorry was attacked by the Muslims and Muslims' shops were looted by Hindus. Though the police controlled the situation, public confidence could not be restored.

The notice to close the shops issued by the politically minded Hindu Samaj, and the swelling of the procession by lathials, betray the intention of the Hindus to challenge the Muslims' attitude regarding music and mosque. The affray then appears as a deliberate trial of strength between the two communities following upon the embitterment of feeling that music will not be allowed to be played before the mosque.⁶

Again riot was somehow avoided in December 1941 on

6. Home Political File, (249/IV/1924) N.A.I., Delhi.

the occasion of annual session of the Hindu Mahasabha. The Muslims' festival of Bakrid was also to be celebrated at the same time. The district administration was very apprehensive and expecting trouble. As a precaution the district administration imposed a ban over the session of Hindu Mahasabha to be held. All the national leaders of Hindu Mahasabha were arrested. The Hindu Mahasabha took it as a challenge and organised the session at fifty-two places where the written speech of Vir Savarkar was read. The whole thing passed peacefully⁷.

The 1946 riots⁸, in some ways, resembled with the October 1989 riots. General communal tension was widespread in the entire province in 1946. It received pointedness because of the events that followed the Direct Action Day in Calcutta, marked by the killing of a large number of men including some Hindu Biharis. The exodus from Calcutta to Bihar spread exaggerated stories of happenings there. The great Calcutta killing was immediately followed by the carnage in Noakhali, now in Bangladesh. The feelings of the entire Hindu community of the district was very much affected and there was a move for the non-observance of Diwali as a mark of frustration, resentment and sympathy.

A few local incidents occurred. The local Muslim

7. R.P. Singh, op.cit., His Personal Notes.

8. P. C. Raichaudhary, Bhagalpur Gazetteer, 1962.

League held a black flag demonstration on 2 September 1946 when the interim Government assumed office. Besides, the Arya Samajists held a meeting strongly protesting the marriage of a Hindu woman to a Muslim at Mojahidpur. On 26th October 1946, some Muslims of Jogsar (Mohalla) objected to a Kali procession by a certain route. This delicate issue was settled somehow. The same day a communal riot took place at village English Chichraam under Sultanganja police station. Here, a Muslim mob had attacked a Kali Puja procession in broad day light in the very presence of Sub-Divisional Officer (Sadar) at the village. The damaged Kali image remained in the field deserted for days - continuing as a sore point with the Hindus.

Before giving detailed account of 28th October, 1946 backlash, it may be mentioned that from August 1946 to 28 October 1946, several religious processions of both the communities -- such as Dahi-Kado, Bakrid, Chaukchanda, Dussehra, Kalipuja had peacefully passed in the town. This makes one come to the conclusion that had the Kali image not been desecrated at village English Chichraam, there would not have been any backlash on 28 October 1946.

One Hindu Mr. Bishavanath Jhunjhunwala had been attacked on 28 October 1946 near Mojahidpur bridge but a mobile patrolling police party came to his rescue. This incident proved to be of much consequence. In no time, communal tension gripped the different parts of the city and

snipping of persons started. One Dr. Rahim and his compounder in Shujaganja area were attacked brutally, resulting into their death. It was in fact, the worst case both from the vantage point of the status of the person concerned as well as from the ferocity of the frenzied attack that was made. However, due to vigilance of administrative and police officials, widespread rioting was prevented but isolated cases of arson, looting and murder continued. But the casualties were moderate keeping in view the size of Bhagalpur city.

However, the contagion spread swiftly to the Muffasil areas and soon Natha Nagar police station and Thana Muffasil (Muffasil police station) were affected. There were a few cases of murder. There was a riot at Bedarpur in Nathanagar police station where guns had been used on the Hindus. The Badarpur incident ignited the situation in Sultanganja and Shahkund thanas in Sadar sub-division and Belhar, Rajaun, Banka, Dhoriya and Amarpur thanas in Banka sub-division.

However the communal frenzy had its worst in Lakhanpur village on Sultanganja - Tarapur Road. A part of Lakhanpur is in Bhagalpur district while the major part falls in Munger district. This village witnessed unfortunate communal riots. The deputed Magistrate cleared up the remnants of the carnage at Lakhanpur village. The part of Lakhanpur which is in Munger district was a horrible sight.

The village was deserted by the villagers for some weeks and the villagers stayed in the Mango graves near Gangania and Sultanganja.

The subsidence of the communal disturbances took a little time and it may be said that the worst was quickly over quite soon and was mainly due to cooperation of the non-officials with the authorities.⁹

Minor skirmishes also occurred in 1967 when a Muslim student was killed in Marwari College Campus. In retaliation a Hindu student was killed at the gate of T.N.B. College Bhagalpur. Very soon the situation was controlled .

However Bhagalpur riots in October 1989, were quite distinct from all these riots, mentioned above. For the first time, religious places were destroyed on a large scale, which proved to be a trend-setter for the whole country.

Each community tried to protect the criminals of its own community.

Riots spread in rural areas on an unprecedented scale. State Government and District Law and Administrative machinery failed badly in controlling the riots.

9. Ibid.

INTER COMMUNAL RELATION

The Bhagalpur district Gazetteer shows that the two major communities Hindus and Muslims, have generally lived in peace and amity. They share the festivities of many of their religious ceremonies. General comments apart, this aspect deserves a critical analysis.

The opinion of the persons, I talked to at Bhagalpur, on the nature of Hindu-Muslim relationship in the district can be divided into two:

- a) Those who believe that the relationship between the two communities has been quite good and cordial.
- b) Those who doubt the claim of the first category.

The representatives¹⁰ of the first category are P. Mishra, K. Sah, B.D. Gupta, V.K.Jha, M.Q. Tauhid, S.M. Rub etc.

These people hold the opinion that since long the two communities have been on good terms. In fact they are proud of the composite culture of Bhagalpur. There has been a tradition of give and take between the two communities.

If the relationship between Hindu and Muslim is really good then why this communal backlash? Again it has

10. P. Mishra, K. Sah, B.D. 'Gupta, V.K. Jha 'Bechan', M.Q. Tauhid, S.M. Rub.

two aspects. First it is said that the relationship between the two communities is not satisfactory enough. But these people refute this argument and assert that it is the politicians and the criminals who do all these things. Masses have nothing to do with these things.

If it is so why do large numbers of people participate on a large scale when a riot occurs, with all the ferocity: [During my conversations, I gained the impression that many Muslims who hold that the Hindus and Muslims are on good terms say this either to project themselves as secular or out of fear. They are not candid in their expression. Fear and minority complex are part of their psyche.]

The second category is represented by K.P. Rai, K. Rahman, G.N. Thakur, A.K. Mishra, J.K. Singh, R.P. Singh, Mani Khan etc.¹¹.

They all agree that in appearance the relationship between the two communities is good but a wall of social and cultural distance and antagonism is always there. Except K. Rahman all the persons criticise the Muslims for their intolerance. This contention is also supported by Mr. Mani Khan, one of the most powerful leaders of the Muslim community in the city. To quote, "Muslims have a very bad

11. K.P. Rai, K. Rahman, G.N. Thakur, A.K. Mishra, J.K. Singh, R.P. Singh, Mani Khan.

reputation for being intolerant wherever they are on this planet." He also went on to state that there are certain anti-national Muslims in the society. It is difficult to deny this.

To sum up, we may say inter-communal relationship in Bhagalpur has been, ordinarily, cordial in public relationships, but at the same time a feeling of the "other" is always present there. In recent decades the relationship has worsened.

CHAPTER 3
BACKGROUND AND GENESIS

BACKGROUND AND GENESIS

"Religion provides an ideal 'blue-print' for the articulation of informal organisation for interest groups. It mobilises powerful emotions and sentiments that are associated with the basic problems of human existence "

"Symbols are objects, acts, relationships or linguistic formations that stand ambiguously for a multiplicity of meanings, evoke emotions, and impel men to action"

Abner Cohen, Two Dimensional Man, (Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., London, 1974), P-106 & 23.

The riots that Bhagalpur witnessed in October, 1989 on the occasion of Ramshila procession and which continued intermittently till March 1990, were among the worst communal carnages in independent India. The communal situation, brought to a crescendo by a series of events under a weak administration, erupted in a frenzy of violence that left about one thousand people dead (unofficial figure). In fact Bhagalpur figures amongst the fifty-five places spread across nine states¹ where communal carnage took place primarily due to Ramshila procession preceding the Lok-Sabha election. Bhagalpur was one of these places, notable for the unprecedented spread, intensity and magnitude of the rioting. It was the largest Hindu-Muslim riot since 1947.

Before setting out the sequence of events, I give a brief outline of Bhagalpur.

The district of Bhagalpur in Bihar is South of the Ganges and is bounded by the district of Saharsa, Santhal Pargana, Purnea and Kathihar and Munger. Bhagalpur contains three subdivisions namely Bhagalpur Sadar, Banka (Now a District) and Naugachhia, divided into 21 blocks-cum-circles. It had a population of 2,621,427 persons (1981

1. P.U.D.R. Reports, Bhagalpur Riots, Delhi, April 1990, P-1.

district census). Muslims' share in the total population of Bhagalpur district is fifteen percent whereas in the town nearly thirty percent². Marwaris too have a considerable strength in the city. They are mainly Vishva Hindu Parishad (V.H.P.) / Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (R.S.S.) supporters.

Bhagalpur is also the head quarter of the district administration and a revenue division. It has a Commissioner and a Deputy Inspector General (D.I.G.) of police. But Bhagalpur is also notorious for criminal gangs which operate there with political support. The politicisation of crime in this town cuts across communal lines. There are notorious Hindu as well as Muslim criminals.

There are several villages having a fairly large proportion of Muslims. Most of them are weavers or in the powerloom business. Some of them are well to do businessmen or property owners like the owner of Shah Market, Mr. Shah Fakre-Alam, Mr. Mani Khan in export-business, and Ahmad Brothers in watch and leather business etc.

It is worth noting that the rise of armed gangs and criminalisation on a comparatively large scale in the past two decades are related to the stagnant economy.³ These

2. A.K. Singh, "Bhagalpur Riots : In Retrospect, The Administrator, Vol. 35, No. 4, Oct-Dec., 1990, P-80.

3. P.C. Raichaudhary, Bhagalpur Gazetteer, 1962, Chapter X, P-409 & 413.

armed gangs have the patronage of the landowners who use them for appropriating the produce and suppressing the labourers by making them work at low daily earnings. (It is clear from the fact that land reforms in Bhagalpur district have remained a dead letter as elsewhere in Bihar. Minimum wages are not paid to the agricultural labourers many of whom have become bonded labourers.) This unjust situation creates much tension and anger in the lower strata of the society compelling them to take recourse to crimes.

These gangs loot houses, crops and cattle, extort money and are involved in dacoity. In addition, these gangs are engaged in the supervision of small tenants on behalf of absentee landlords or of wage labourers on behalf of their employers. At some places the Mukhia (Head of a village) himself heads the gang of criminals. These criminal gangs from the dominant rural elite are also partly the urban elite in Bhagalpur because some of them are involved in some sort of trade or are contractors for public works programmes etc. In sum, criminalisation is a part of every day transactions and the daily maintenance of local authority through force.⁴

In the past two decades landlords belonging mainly to forward and intermediate castes have begun to encroach upon lands in urban areas. It is due to this sudden influx

4. P. Mishra, Interview, 6.5.93, Bhagalpur.

of these people that a substantial number of Bengalis have left the city for good and gone back to Calcutta.

In fact, the area is infested with criminals of different sorts. They make money out of criminal activities. For them, it is a profession or business. They are on hire. For instance, even during 1989 riots, Gangotas, a local criminal tribe from riverine area, were reportedly invited by the local Hindu leaders for looting, killing and destroying the Muslims' property, For which they were adequately paid. They acted from Hindu side and rampaged through the city during the riots.⁵

They are presently occupying land and living near Bhagalpur University. They are so dreaded that even Bhagalpur administration does not dare to intervene to get the area vacated. That apart, they exert substantial influence over the University administration in matters of admission and results manipulation, etc. for their students.⁶

It needs to be stressed that Bhagalpur and surrounding urban areas have seen the emergence of criminal gangs enjoying political patronage.⁷ They are Inaitullah

5. Ibid.

6. C.P.N. Sinha, Interview, 10.5.93, Bhagalpur.

7. Citizens of Bhagalpur who gave me this detailed information have asked for anonymity.
Patriot (Delhi) 7 November 1989.

Ansari gang, Sallan Mian gang (Sallan is dead now), Ratan Mandal gang etc. The first two gang leaders are reportedly patronised by two powerful local Congress leaders. Two big businessmen of the town and so called Hindu leaders have their own criminal gangs. These criminals oblige their patrons by helping them at elections in booth capturing or at any other occasion when the need of muscle power is felt.

As the name shows, the first two criminal gangs are led by Muslims and are rival to each other over the supremacy of Tatarpur area, the biggest pocket of Muslim community in Bhagalpur city. But during the October 1989 Lok-Sabha election a compromise was struck between the two criminal groups to facilitate the task of election, reportedly on the initiative of Bhagwat Jha Azad, the Congress (I) leader and candidate from the Bhagalpur parliamentary constituency.

It is reported that there is a running political feud between Bhagwat Jha Azad, the former Chief Minister of Bihar and Sheo Chandra Jha, former Speaker, Bihar Legislative Assembly. In the process, Bhagalpur administration gets politicised as both the politicians try to bring their own nominee as District Magistrate or Superintendent of Police, who, in turn, allows the criminals attached to his patron to move freely. This is the nature of the politics- Administration-Crime nexus in Bhagalpur. To quote ". . . question an honest

politician or an efficient civil servant or police officer and he will concede that we have not been able to maintain law and order because half of goondas belong to the ruling party and the other half to the opposition parties."⁸

A majority of people I talked to, supported the contention of economic rivalry between Hindu and Muslim businessmen and its connection with the October 1989 riots. Mr. Shankar Bajoria⁹, however, asked why Marwari businessmen should go against the Muslim businessmen since the latter are mainly financed by Marwaris and their loss is tantamount to eventual loss of the Marwaris.

But there is another side of the picture. Marwaris constitute a substantial part of the city population and dominate trade and business. Bhagalpur is known for its silk, particularly for Tasar variety of silk. Silk goods form the major export of the town. The silk industry is composed largely of numerous small looms operated by individual households, each employing a small number of workers. It is said that economy and politics of the town are very much related to the silk industry.¹⁰

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8. S.K. Ghosh, Communal Riots in India (Ashish, Delhi, 1987) P-95.
 9. Shankar Bajoria, Interview, 5.5.93 and 15.5.93, Bhagalpur.
 10. Dr. Manoj Kumar, Interview, 4.5.93, Bhagalpur.

The elite of Bhagalpur - Marwari Yarn and Credit Suppliers, landlords turned silk exporters and traditional silk traders have all acquired their money and power in the silk-business. But the situation has changed and the monopoly of Marwaris in the silk-trade has been weakened by new exporters, some of whom are Muslim. One of them is Mr. Mani Khan, having wide-ranging operation in the pure silk textile business. This aside, powerlooms are generally owned and run by individual households. They depend upon traders, traditionally Marwaris, both for obtaining yarn and marketing the produce. Traders take the lion's share of the profit. They are in a sense the de-facto owners of the industry, and they control the prices too.¹¹

However, in recent times, the coming of independent operators especially among the Muslims, hitherto dependent on the Marwaris has made the relation between loom-owners and Marwari traders strained. It has been the constant endeavour of the Muslim weavers and loom owners to destroy the monopoly of Marwaris by having their own yarn suppliers and also selling their products on their own.

The riots have gone in favour of the Marwaris as these brought the Muslim loom owner's strategy to an end. During the riots, there was systematic destruction of powerloom both in urban as well as in rural areas, rendering

11. R.P. Singh, Interview, 9.5.93, Bhagalpur.

thousands of Muslims silk weavers unemployed.¹² That is why it appears convincing that Marwaris have financed the communal organisations and criminals in order to advance their own interest.

At this stage, it is important to stress a point made by the weavers of Madina Nagar. They said that just before the violence, the traders, mostly Marwaris from whom they purchase yarn, had exerted pressure on them to obtain the cash dues owed to them on the pretext of pressing cash needs. In retrospect, some weavers feel that the traders, perhaps, anticipated or had knowledge of the violence that was to engulf this area very soon -- showing Marwari's complicity.¹³

Weaving industry apart, the rise of some of the Muslims in other business is also a matter of jealousy for the Marwaris e.g. Ahmad Brothers had expanded their trade and become the biggest watch retailers in the region. They also excelled in the leather business. Mohammed Sattar, a travelling cloth salesman had grown in a few years to own one of the biggest textile show-rooms in the city. Mani Khan had entered the silk-export business.

12. Ibid.

Washir Ahmad, Interview, 13.5.93, Bhagalpur.
Dr. Manoj Kumar, Interview, 4.5.93, Bhagalpur.

13. Times of India, (Delhi), 12 January 1990.

We may note that a number of Muslims in Bhagalpur were among the richest Muslims in the country. This was, in fact, a dimension of the growing sense of grievances.¹⁴ "Why these 'anti-nationals' prosper at our cost?" Riots have changed all that. Mr. Mani Khan estimated the loss, principally to Muslims, at around fifteen crore rupees.¹⁵

Needless to say, a riot often gives a good opportunity to settle old scores, -- be these political or economic. Though the relationship between Marwaris and Muslims appears to be satisfactory on the surface, an undercurrent of hatred is always there.¹⁶ This needs to be substantiated. The younger brother of Fakre Alam, owner of Shah market told me that just the previous day he was invited to a marriage reception party by Marwaris and he attended it. He also said that on many occasions, both Marwaris and Muslims visit each other's houses - there is no hostility. But Kaliur Rahman refutes this. To quote: "Both Marwaris and Muslims in general are carrying the facade of good relation. The fact remains that there is an unbridgeable gulf between the two communities".

14. K.Sah, Interview, 5.5.93, Bhagalpur.

A. Datt, Interview, 9.5.93, Bhagalpur.

S. Thakur, Telegraph, (Calcutta), 20.12.93.

Dr. K.K. Pandey, Interview, 4.5.93, Bhagalpur.

15. Mani Khan, Interview, 14.5.93, Bhagalpur.

16. K. Rahman, Interview, 8.5.93, Bhagalpur.

Rahman's version is logical, though harsh. In a place where Hindus are in a majority, Muslim just cannot dare to display their anger and anguish openly. This is also supported by the fact that many of the Muslims did not speak a single word about Hindus and the riots - so fear-struck are they.

"In recent past, the communal situation in Bhagalpur started deteriorating after 1983 . . ." remarks A.K. Singh¹⁷. It is appropriate to begin with the year 1983; because that year Bhagalpur witnessed a big controversy about a book which had affected inter-communal relations in a vital way. I refer to Professor Dhanpati Pandey's book on Middle East. Professor Dhanpati Pandey is from the Department of History, Bhagalpur University and had written a book on Middle East¹⁸ which mentioned that prophet Mohammad had many concubines. This was considered blasphemous by the Muslims. They asked for a ban on the book and arrest of the author. They did not celebrate Muharram as a mark of protest that year.

Virtually the whole Muslim community of the town rose in rebellion and registered its vehement protest against the book.¹⁹ Professor Pandey's emphatic

17. A.K. Singh, op.cit., P-80.

18. Though I tried my best to find and see the book during my field-work, unfortunately I could not trace it.

19. Intelligence, Bhagalpur.

clarification that he had only translated what H.G. Wells and Gibbon had written in their books was of no avail. It was not convincing enough for the Muslims. Subsequently he was arrested and released on bail by Patna High Court. Meanwhile, a Muslim youth from Bhagalpur fired upon the Judge Mr. P.S. Sahay of Patna High Court in open court room.²⁰ This attack on the life of Mr. P.S. Sahay was not simply a criminal act, rather it was viewed in an enlarged framework i.e. as an attack on the Hindu community as such. Hindus interpreted it as the height of Muslim intolerance.

However, my enquiries revealed the ugly face of the intelligentsia. A Professor of Bhagalpur University told me that it was professional rivalry between the two teachers of the same department which resulted in this ugly incident.²¹ Probably Professor Dhanpati Pandey had an edge over other teachers in terms of "private tuitions" (teaching students privately, for which the teacher is paid). When Professor Pandey's work got published, the rival teacher, out of jealousy, instigated the students of Muslim community to protest against this writing.

The issue was exploited by various political organisations. Mr. Faiyaz Bhagalpuri, now a minister in

20. Ibid.

A.K. Singh, op.cit., P-81.

21. Professor in question asked for anonymity.

Government of Bihar, led an agitation over it and became very popular among the Muslims.

Similarly Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) / Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) activists caught the issue and did much propaganda. The threat perception on Hinduism was enlarged.²²

Before going into further details we have to mention that, in recent times, Bhagalpur has had vast growth of communal organisations, and their popularity base has expanded too, even encompassing the criminals and anti-social elements. The mass base of Vishva Hindu Parishad is said to have expanded after 1988, both in urban and rural area.²³

A religious procession is not new to Hindu and Muslim culture. But in the past five or six years a more centralised organisation for taking out processions has come to the fore, viz. the Central Committee For Kali Puja hitherto organised by the local Mohalla Samitis. The Central Committee has been organised at the behest of Vishva Hindu Parishad activists and its allied parties. Hindus, in general, too, extend their massive support through contributions.

22. Intelligence, Bhagalpur.

23. M.Q. Tauhid, Interview, 7.5.93, Bhagalpur.

Likewise, the Dugra images of different localities used to be immersed in the local ponds or taken to the Ganges through the shortest possible route. There was no big procession. But a Central Durga Puja Samiti was formed in 1987 under the V.H.P. umbrella to bring together the images of different localities and take them out in a procession through Tatarpur.

The processions have also become aggressive, longer in duration and reportedly larger in size; and since 1988, the organisers of the procession and processionists have been adopting a very hard communal stand. That is why a Peace Committee at the behest of Bhagalpur district administration has been set up and is in existence for several years, in order to cope with the regular problems of deciding the route of these processions. In 1989 the committee comprised notable citizens and representatives of the administration such as Superintendent of Police and District Magistrate and the organisers of the processions.²⁴

There is a very good comment on the working of this peace committee in Telegraph (Calcutta) 20 December 1989. It describes it as a defence committee. Hindu and Muslim members do not talk to each other. Both spew venom, both spend a better part of their energies collecting

24. Shib Shanker Singh 'Parijat', Interview, 9.5.93, Bhagalpur.

S.M. Rub, Interview, 6.1.93, Bhagalpur.

protection funds which have gone into the purchase and manufacture of fire arms and crude bombs.

Some events of national level also had their bearing over the communal situation in Bhagalpur. There was a series of Rath Yatras started by Vishva Hindu Parishad ostensibly for strengthening the unity of the country. First in the series was the Ekatmata Rath Yatra. Sea water from Rameshwaram in the far South was to be carried over to Gangotri in the Himalayas and vice-versa. Then came the Kamakhya Rath Yatra carrying the water of Brahmaputra - a part of Ekatmata Rath Yatra in 1983. The water of Brahmaputra in Assam was to be carried to Dwarka in Gujarat.

Vishva Hindu Parishad activists desired to take all these Raths to Munger via Tatarpur which falls on way to Munger. Tatarpur has the largest concentration of Muslims in the city. Tatarpur Muslims objected to the passing of Rath Yatra through Muslim dominated area. Bhagalpur Administration did not allow it and the Rath had to take an alternative route. This caused much bitterness among Vishva Hindu Parishad activists and Hindus in general.

Then it was the Ramjanki Rath in 1986. It started from Sitamarhi, a place in North Bihar, and ended at Ayodhya --in order to "liberate Ram Janma Bhoomi". This time again the Vishva Hindu Parishad/ Hindu supporters insisted on going to Gaushala via Tatarpur. Again the administration did not allow this and the Rath had to take alternative route.

This further embittered the relationship between the two communities i.e. Hindu and Muslim.²⁵

It is worth noting that taking Hindu religious processions through Tatarpur is a matter of pride for the Hindus; it would be a mark of their supremacy over the area. Because, as referred earlier also, Tatarpur is the biggest Muslim pocket in the city. Three areas, namely Shujaganja, Tatarpur and Natha Nagar, are collectively known locally as 'Pakistan'. It is also the active centre of Muslim activities. It is believed that all major policy decisions regarding the Muslim community are taken here.

In fact, the proposal of a Hindu religious procession through Tatarpur and, in turn, the Muslim's objection to it have a psychological aspect too. Hindus have an image of Muslim as the 'other,' a 'rival' etc. Passing through that area in huge numbers in a religious procession gives them a feeling of victory. But from the minority perspective, it is virtually an attack and their prestige and identity as a distinct community are at stake.

This apart, there has been a history of confrontation between the Parbatti Hindus and Tatarpur Muslims (please see the map). It is said that these have

25. Intelligence, Bhagalpur.

Surya Krishna, National level activist of Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), R.K. Puram, Delhi.

been the sites of feuding between their criminal gangs as well. But the conflict on previous occasions remained confined to the two localities only.²⁶ It was first time in October 1989 during the Ramshila procession that the confrontation between the two localities engulfed the whole city. The reasons were many.²⁷

Ramshila procession organised by the Vishva Hindu Parishad was not an ordinary procession. It had been organised to bring the consecrated bricks from different parts of the district to Bhagalpur city at Gaushala. Ramshila procession at Bhagalpur was a part of the same movement going on nationwide in order to build the Ram Temple at Ayodhya. Several processions were reaching the city from different parts of the district on 24th October, 1989. Thus many processions had merged into one big procession, heading towards Tatarpur shouting provocative slogans.

Secondly, Muslims had become intransigent with regard to the route of the procession i.e. not allowing it to pass through Tatarpur. They were fully convinced that Ramshila procession was not religious but political. This was also clear from the fact that organisers of Ramshila procession had taken a firm stand on entering Tatarpur

26. V.K. Jha 'Bechan', Interview, 6.5.93, Bhagalpur.

27. Intelligence, Bhagalpur.

locality, on the ground that this was a public road and anyone could use it.

Thirdly, Muslims had lost their faith in administration. This was mainly due to two events -- killing of Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP) Mr. S.K. Mehra at Nathanagar, a suburb of Bhagalpur, reportedly by Muslim weavers and the killing of seven men of Samua Mian gang in an encounter by the S.P Mr. K.S. Dwiwedi. D.S.P. Mehra was burnt to death in January 1987 by an angry mob of both Muslim and Hindu weavers and powerloom owners who were protesting against the power shortage to their looms. Since Muslims were present in overwhelming number, the incident was given a communal colour i.e. a Hindu being killed by Muslims. Since this incident, the police and the Muslim community in general had become suspicious of each other. Muslims had a notion that police was looking for an opportunity to teach them a lesson.

Another event of consequence was the killing of Samua Mian and seven members of his gang in an encounter at Champa Nagar with the police in July 1989. But a quite distinct story was aired that there were some Hindu criminals too, who were let off and only Muslim criminals were singled out to be killed. This showed that police were anti-Muslim.

There was also a local political dimension to this killing. Reportedly these killing was done at the behest of

a local Congress leader, because the criminals in question used to capture booths during elections for another Congress leader. And they were in all probability likely to capture booths even in the forthcoming Lok-Sabha election, October 1989.

Be that as it may, these two incidents created a wall between the police and Muslims. It also resulted in the legitimisation of the Muslim criminals as saviours of the Muslim community. Criminals who had hitherto functioned opportunistically, in response to changing political equations, now began to operate on communal lines more exclusively. Criminals, now onwards, in their respective community began to play upon the fear and feeling of insecurity of the people. They collected a large amount of money supposedly for purchasing arms and weapons. These criminals had a vested interest in keeping the communal tension alive.²⁸

The following paragraphs will deal with the immediate background to October, 1989 riots.

Visit of two important leaders of both the communities in the early 1989 is said to have affected the communal atmosphere of the city. They were Bala Sahab Deoras, R.S.S. leader, and a Muslim Leader connected with

28. Ibid.

J.K. Singh, Interview, 16.5.93, Bhagalpur.

Babri Masjid Action Committee. It is said that there was nothing communal as such in Deoras speech. As reported, the Muslim leader exhorted the Muslims of the city to prepare themselves for their own security and defend Islam and their distinct identity. They were also told to maintain a distance from the Hindu who are Kafirs. Hindus got the impression that Muslims are preparing for some sort of confrontation -- thus increasing the communal tension in the city.²⁹

The organisers of Ram Navami Puja in April, 1989 expressed their wish to take out a procession via Tatarpur, though there was no such precedent in the past. Tatarpur Muslims objected to it. District Administration did not permit the Ram Navami procession to pass through Tatarpur. As a mark of protest Ram Navami procession was not taken out at all. This caused much bitterness between the Parbatti Hindus and Tatarpur Muslims.³⁰

The Hindus of Bhagalpur celebrate a festival called Bishahari Puja - i.e. - Worshipping the snake goddess.³¹ It is specific to Bhagalpur only and not

29. Intelligence, Bhagalpur.

30. A.K. Singh, op.cit., P-81.

31. Raichaudhary, op.cit., P-38

R.P.Singh, op.cit., His Personal Notes.

K.P. Rai, Interview, 7.5.93, Bhagalpur.

celebrated elsewhere in Bihar. Almost all the localities organise it in the month of August every year. But the Hindus of Parbatti Mohalla celebrate it with great gusto.

Now a coordination committee has been set up for the past five years at the behest of Vishva Hindu Parishad and Bajaranga Dal. Be it Bishahari or be it Moharram, anti-socials of both the communities play increasing role in them.

In the year 1989 the Bishahari Puja happened to be on 17 August, a few days after the festival of Moharram which fell on 12 August. Hindus of Parbatti could have set up their Puja Pandal after the Moharram procession. But the Yadavas and Gorhis (fisher men) put up a tent, a Shamiana, much in advance which obstructed the passing of Tazia during Moharram.

Local Hindus claimed that the road outside Tatarpur Mosque was blocked every Friday for offering Namaaz. In retaliation and in an unprecedented move, the Bishahari Puja organisers decided to block the road for a fortnight before the festival, long before it was required. An objection from the Muslims was quite natural. But the Hindus of Parbatti wanted Muslims to lower the Tazia so as to pass through the Shamiana.

Hindus were adamant upon this because it was due to the Muslims' objection that they could not take out their

religious procession during the previous Rath Yatras and Ram Navami Puja (supra). Thus it was an attempt on the part of Hindus to display their power over the area. With the intervention of peace committee the district administration got the obstruction removed partially, and a part of the road was cleared for the Moharram procession on 11 August. The very next day, on 12 August Tazia procession reached the pandal point in Parbatti and demanded the removal of bamboos on the upper side of the Pandal. Because for Muslims it was blasphemous to lower the Tazia and Nishan. Again, the administration, as earlier, intervened to remove the obstruction.

Meanwhile, out of curiosity, Muslims from other Tazia processions reached Parbatti to enquire about the reasons for the delay. This resulted into an open confrontation between the two communities. Scuffles followed resulting into the looting of some shops of both the communities. Some persons were arrested too but very soon the situation was brought under control.

Needless to say, the removal of the Shamiana was projected by Yadavas as a defeat of the Hindus, and the Muslims took it as their victory and displayed more vigour in the Moharram procession. Similarly during Bishahari Puja procession on 17 August 1989, an attempt was made to avenge the defeat of Hindus at the hands of Muslims. Some anti-Muslims slogans were raised in the procession. Strangely

enough, it stopped at Shujaganja, a Muslim dominated area, for eight to ten hours and in an adjacent locality a Muslim rickshaw-walla was mysteriously murdered. When the procession reached Shah market area, it attacked a few shops of the Muslim and threw brick-bats at the local mosque. The tension began to mount.

As a mark of protest against all these incidents, Muslims decided not to celebrate Chehallum festival in 1989 with the traditional gaiety. They did not take out the usual procession, because they were not sure of its safe passage.³²

Two months later, prophet Mohammad's birthday, on 14 October, 1989, was marked by inflammatory speeches exhorting the Muslims to be ready to save Islam and their distinct identity in a land of Kafirs.³³

It is important to mention that there was a vast circulation of pamphlets in Bhagalpur city. These contributed to moulding public opinion considerably. These were chiefly Hindu Communal. These pamphlets fall into two categories:³⁴ first, being published by religio-communal organisations, and probably sold in many parts of the

32. Intelligence, Bhagalpur.

33. Ibid.

34. P.U.D.R. Report, op.cit., P-8-9.

S.Thakur, Telegraph, (Calcutta) 20.12.1989.

country; the second, published by local presses in Bhagalpur under different organisational names, which never show the name of the printer.

These pamphlets repeated stereo-typed prejudices about Muslims, showing them unified, militant and anti-national, but also invented rumours, vindicated Hindu aggression and assisted in the collection of money for the communal organisations. The course of action suggested for establishing Hindu Rajya is: powerful propaganda, religious education, cow protection, building strong political and communal parties etc.

Pamphlets on the one hand argue that Muslim must join the national mainstream, on the other hand seek to aggravate religious differences. At the local level it warns that the wealth of Hindus is insecure (presumably under threat from Muslims), hence they should pay money to create Hindu Sena in order to exterminate Muslims. Further it shows Muslim religious leaders as encouraging the molestation of Hindu women, that Muslims were en-masse absent from schools, colleges, shops etc in Bhagalpur city on 24 October 1989, the day riot occurred -- thus prepared in advance etc.

During my field-work I happened to see an Urdu Pamphlet exhorting the Muslims to lay down their lives in defence of Islam. They had been warned not to rely on the Government and administration for security because administration is with Hindus. This aside, Intelligence,

Bhagalpur informed me that there was a good network of pamphlet circulation in Muslim community too.

From the mosques flowed leaflets "Islam is in danger. You were beaten in Meerut, Moradabad, Jamshedpur and many other places. If you do not want the same fate to befall you, be prepared." The pitch of alarm in Muslim dominated localities woven around Tatarpur only rose when several history-sheeters belonging to Ansari and Sallan gangs were arrested a few months earlier. The Muslims clamoured, having lost their protectors (S. Thakur Telegraph, Calcutta, 20 October 1989).

It seems that people were anticipating some bigger trouble after the Moharram-Bishahari confrontation in August 1989 (supra).³⁵ The fear that there would be trouble at Ramshila procession of 24 October had already built up in both the communities. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), had drawn up a five-day schedule starting from 18 October in which the 24 hours Puja was to take place at the village level, from where the bricks would be taken to Block Head quarters, and from there to the town.

Meanwhile some communal disturbances had already taken place on 22 October at Fatehpur in Sabour Block where processionists indulged in looting shops etc. On the 23

35. Intelligence, Bhagalpur.

Mani Khan, Interview, 14.5.93, Bhagalpur.

October a Ramshila procession from Sabour to Gaushala in the city had also burnt and broken Muslims' shops. On the same day there was also a procession in the town consisting of lumpen elements at the behest of Bajaranga Dal whose membership overlaps with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, Bhartiya Janata Party and Kalipuja volunteers.

Then came **The Ramshila Procession.**³⁶ Initially, only the Bajarang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad were actively involved in the Ramshila procession. Soon, however, the Hindu anti-socials too came on the scene, and this is what the Bajarang Dal and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad people wanted. The Ramshila procession was to be taken out on 24 October 1989. The tension between Hindus and Muslims greatly added to the strength of the procession of the 24th. The same day Ramshila procession reached the town from various blocks also:

The Bhagalpur administration allowed the procession, despite warning by Intelligence agencies about tension near Tatarpur junction. The District Magistrate denies any such warning but it was common knowledge. Moreover Muslims objected to passing off the procession through Tatarpur area saying that it was not the usual

36. Intelligence, Bhagalpur.

(Also Corroborated by other field-Interviews.)

religious procession taken out on Hindu festivals. Ramshila procession was a political one, they argued. Perhaps the District Magistrate was helpless himself and was under pressure from political bosses.

Ramshila procession was heading towards Tatarpur shouting provocative anti-Muslim slogans³⁷ viz:

" Descendants Of Babur Go To Pakistan Or Graveyard"

" Destroy The Tatarpur Locality In The Name Of Kali Goddess"

But some of the persons I talked to ruled out that there were objectionable slogans. They were persons of Vishwa Hinud Parishad affiliation and wanted to show the Muslims as culprits. Some of the administrative and police officials have also registered their statement before the Bhagalpur Riots Commission denying the provocative slogans by the processionists. It appears that in order to shield themselves from their own failure, these officials' strategy is to pass the blame to the Muslims for initiating the riots.

Some also maintain that even Bihar Military Police

37. P.U.D.R. Report, op.cit.

A.K. Singh, op.cit.

Telegraph, (Calcutta), 26.10.89.

Times of India, (Delhi), 26.10.89.

Hindu, (Madras), 27.10.89.

Tribune, (Chandigarh), 27.10.89.

(BMP) and some other assorted policemen also joined slogan shouting. And they had red Tilak on their foreheads, as applied on religious occasions.³⁸

Tension built up in the city reached its apex when a determined mob of Muslims, 3000³⁹ strong, attempted to block the religious procession at Tatarpur. The processionists led by two Hindu leaders, so called, Kameshwar Yadav and Mahadeo Singh, were determined to enter the Tatarpur locality and follow that route.

These two "leaders" have built their little empire in Bhagalpur with muscle and money. They are also alleged to have links with the "Gangotas", the riverine criminal gangs that stalk the riverine area running along Bhagalpur. The Ramshila movement was the best thing to have happened to them. Apart from doing their bit for faith it was an excellent opportunity to build a political platform.⁴⁰

Kameshwar Yadav and Mahadeo Singh were rivals of Mohmmad Ansari, the notorious criminal of Bhagalpur. Since they along with the processionists (supra) had taken uncompromising stand regarding the route of procession, District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police of

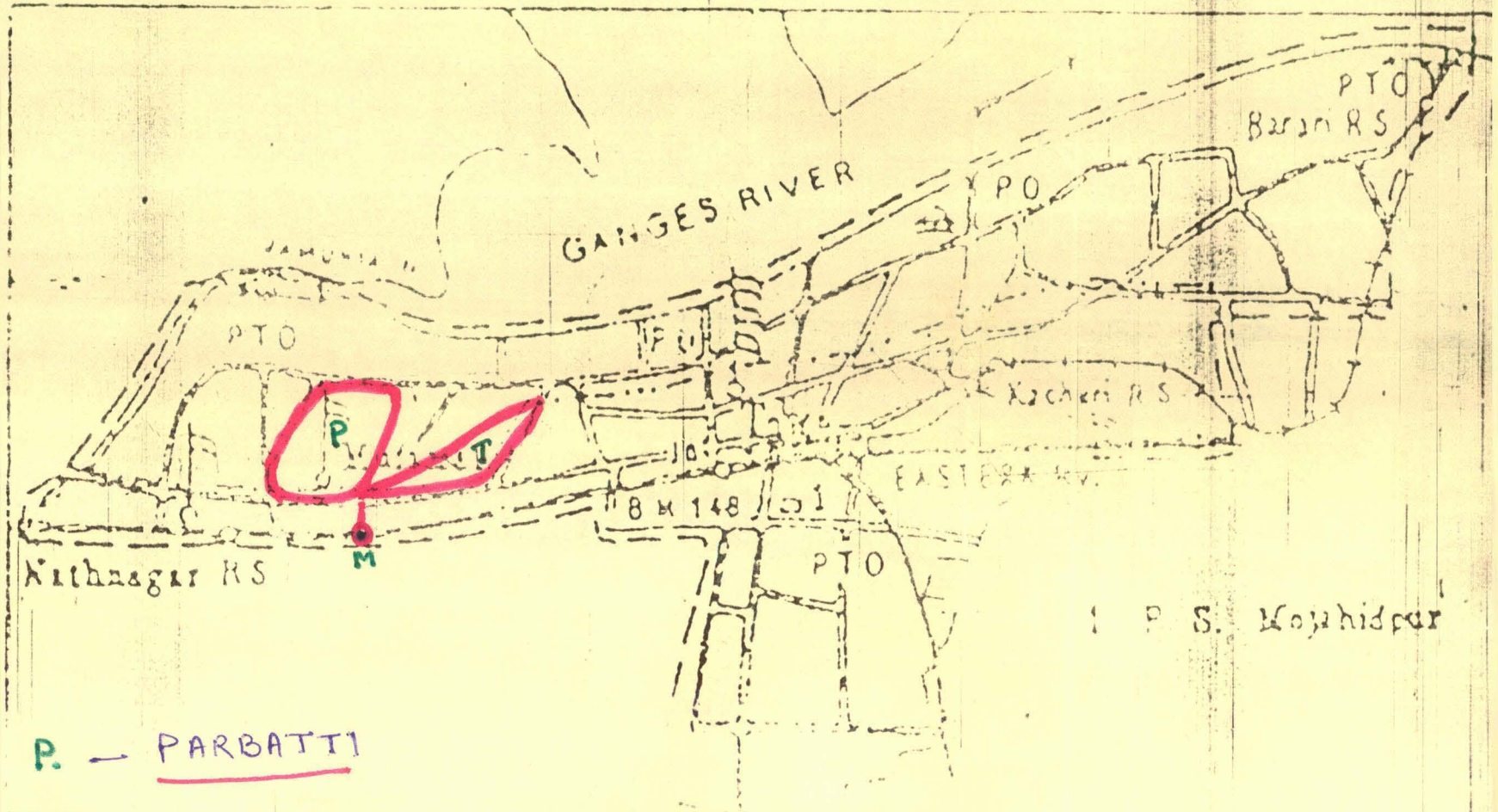
38. S.N.M. Abdi, "When Darkness Fell", Illustrated Weekly of India, 26 November 1989.

39. Hindustan Times, (Delhi), 25.10.89.

40. Telegraph, (Calcutta), 20.12.89.

BHAGALPUR TOWN

Scale 1 inch to 2 Miles



P. — PARBATTI

T. — TATARPUR

M. — MUSLIM HIGH SCHOOL

(The place where riot began)

Bhagalpur requested the Muslims to allow the procession to pass through Tatarpur. But Muslims are said to have refused. At this moment D.M. and S.P. approached Mr. Amman, Head of most important mosque (popularly known as the GADDI NASHIN) ⁴¹ of the town, also the most influential leader of Muslims and a member of Peace Committee.

Inspite of all the assurances, Mr. Amman did not come forward to defuse the situation. Contrary to expectation, he asked the Muslims to go and block the road. ⁴² When this failed D.M. and S.P. desperately tried to negotiate at the head of the procession. At about this time a few bombs exploded. Some shots were also fired from the roof-top of the Muslim High School (see the map).

There could be many reasons for this. Ansari, if his men threw the bombs, as it is alleged, might have targetted his rivals Kameshwar Yadav and Mahadeo Singh or what is equally likely, they tried to kill the S.P. himself who had launched an attack on anti-social Muslims and Ansari's men.

Whatever the motive and whoever threw the bombs, it caused great turmoil in the procession. People began to run helter-skelter. The procession broke and turned into a -----

41. Seat of Muslim Religious Leader.

42. K.C. Dubey, Officer-in-Charge, Kotwali Police Station, Bhagalpur, his Statement before Bhagalpur Riots Commission.

marauding mob indulging in killing, looting and burning - the worst communal carnage in the state since partition had started. ⁴³

Thus, it is clear that Bhagalpur had all the elements required for fuelling a communal riot - communal rivalry, political rivalry and criminal rivalry. The Ram Shila procession was the spark required to ignite the situation.

To Sum Up, the societal break-down which Bhagalpur riots in October 1989 show is a result of positive feed-back where a conflict of ordinary dimension is magnified into bigger one by various political parties, organisations, vested interest in a way which suits their interests. Thus they aggravate the conflict which reaches a point of no return. This positive feed-back refers to all those agencies, primarily interested in aggravating the conflict.

"... with every fresh sign of growth of conflict, they may intervene more and more; inciting one or the other party, supplying destructive weaponry, spreading inflammatory rumours and much else. Unless countered by other mechanisms, the system will rapidly reach a point where it is outside anyone's control. This may precipitate a social break down and major outside force may be needed

43. Intelligence, Bhagalpur.

for restoring order. In our experience of conflicts in South Asia over the decades, this has been an all-too-real possibility....." 44

44. S. Saberwal and N. Jayaram, "Epilogue" in Conflict : a Reader, Oxford University Press, Delhi, Forth Coming.

CHAPTER 4
RUMOUR AND MEDIA

RUMOURS AND MEDIA

"Social problems, then, don't arise automatically from objective conditions, but may be seen to emerge in a context of controversy in which opposing views are projected, persuasion processes are activated, organisation is mobilised, and attempts are made to institutionalise power and authority to manage the condition in accord with preferred values".

Otto N. Larsen, ed., Violence and the Mass Media (Harper and Row, New York, 1968), Introduction, P. 5.

Communal rioting has become a common place occurrence and its unwholesome impact on the minds of people cannot be underestimated. The fact that the community of the killers or their victims is not identified in the official or media reports is no great help in keeping violent emotions under check. The public is able to reach its own broad conclusions from whatever it reads or hears. Thus the pretence of anonymity only partially softens the anguish resulting from death and destruction.

"Law and order have two enemies: the full truth and the complete lie. When people realise the truth, they start revolutions. When they are fed lies they begin meaningless riots...."¹ Lies are the staple of every communal disturbance. In fact both go together. They are spread by people who have a stake in this violence, who have something to gain out of impoverished Hindus and Muslims fighting each other. In fact, businessmen, traders, politicians, goondas, leaders of cultural organisations they all pursue their own interest. In the same process, there comes a stage when their cumulative acts lead to social breakdown giving rise to various kinds of anarchy and chaos in the society. These people in order to fulfil their own interests forget their moral responsibility towards state and society and create a condition which will provoke

1. M.J. Akbar, Riot After Riot, (Penguin, New Delhi, 1988), P-18.

conflagration.

There is fuel already in the murky events that make up communal violence and upon this more lies are heaped. "After all, if the Hindu and Muslim live in peace, how will the R.S.S find another convert? How will the trader sell arms? How will a shopkeeper have the pleasure of seeing a rival's shop burn down? How will the goonda loot? How will the communalist kill a fellow human being?..."²

During the Bhagalpur Riots October 1989, there was a vast circulation of rumours which had vast consequences. On top of it, media played a rather dubious role by exaggerating the actual incidents and sometimes misreporting (particularly Hindi Press and B.B.C.) -- thus building an environment of distrust and hatred. Misreporting in Hindi Press will be discussed in later paragraphs. But before that it is legitimate to say a few words on B.B.C. reporting. Ms. S. Shukla, a correspondent, The Hindustan Times, Patna, who had accompanied the B.B.C. reporter covering Bhagalpur Riots, admitted that the latter had the general tendency to report the highest number of casualties without checking the authenticity of the incident which, in her own words, goes against the very spirit of journalistic investigation.³

2. Ibid, P-18.

3. S. Shukla, Interview, 21.5.93, Patna.

Different sorts of rumours⁴ had been aired:

First and foremost was regarding "killing of students in lodges surrounding the Bhagalpur University - in hundreds".

"A good number of Hindu women students were kidnapped from the University Women's Hostel and raped".

"A bus of S.M. College was hijacked and Hindu girls were raped".

"The municipal water supply has been poisoned by Muslims".

"Some Hindu girls were dragged from the Bombay Janta Express at Natha Nagar Station and molested".

"Criminals of the Ansari Gang were seen moving around the city in military uniform in a military jeep."

"Pakistan made cartridges and arms have been recovered".

"Naseem Ahmed [the then D.I.G.] was arrested while talking to Pakistan on a wireless set".

Jamalpur was one of the two villages where Hindus were attacked by the Muslims killing five persons.

4. Information regarding rumours mentioned below has been gathered in course of field-Interviews.

However newspapers reporting showed that "hundreds of one community (Hindus) had been killed".

There was a rumour that "two Hindu girls had been kidnapped by the Muslims in Nathanagar area". In fact they had gone to their relatives out of the town. But rioting on this issue led to the killing of four persons.⁵

There were rumours regarding "killing of fruit and milk vendors in Tatarpur and Jabbarchak Mohalla". Some Rickshaw pullers were actually killed in such attacks.⁶

All these rumours had many sided repercussions. Every time there was a rumour of trouble, panic gripped the city and feverish collections by the criminals of each community for purchasing arms and weapons started, and often criminals set off a bomb or two to incite fears and expedite profit -- in the sense that a large share of the collections made was pocketed by the criminals themselves. The rumours kept the tension alive.

It is noteworthy that circulation of rumour was not entirely due to ignorance, inefficiency or spontaneous panic. Reportedly, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (V.H.P.) and Bajarang Dal activists were spreading the rumours diligently.

5. A. K. Singh, "Bhagalpur Riots : In Retrospect", The Administrator, Vol. 35, No. 4, Oct-Dec., 1990, P. 93.

6. Ibid, P-93.

The result was obvious:

The rumour of the cold-blooded massacre of hundreds of Hindu students in lodges was the primary cause of the riots in rural areas.

Misreporting on the Jamalpur incident (supra) led to an attack on the Muslim locality named Phenkutola under Pirpainty police station. The C.R.P.F. on duty fired back killing five persons on the spot.

In fact, rumours cause havoc because they generate the most dangerous of passions, the desire for revenge. Bhagalpur Riots October 1989 is a glaring example of this.

I proceed now to consider the media's share in aggravating the communal situation. Since the daily newspapers reach a large number of people, their immediate effect acquires a special significance.

There is a popular feeling in Bhagalpur that Hindi Dailies like Navbharat Times, Jansatta and Hindustan had very biased reporting during October 1989 Riots. Therefore, I scrutinised the daily reports published in the above mentioned three newspapers (Delhi Editions) with regard to the narrative style adopted; the extent of objective reporting; what kind of truth was presented; any attempt to establish a causal link; whether alternative explanations are considered; any particular image of a community is being used etc.

To begin with the questions : who started the riots? which community provided the first provocation? What incident sparked off the riots ? Who was responsible?

Navbharat Times of October 25, 1989 states:

"The tension in Bhagalpur started when a mob of about three thousand people tried to stop a religious procession"⁷

Jansatta of October 26, 1989 states:

"Violence started with stopping of Ramshila procession".

Hindustan of October 27, 1989 States:

"According to official sources, two senior officials told the Prime Minister that violence broke out last Tuesday when the Ramshila procession was stopped".

In all the reports it is clear that the blame for the cause of the riots is not laid on the procession but on the mob which attacked it. In fact, the narrative evokes a natural sympathy for the people of procession. Even the nature of Ramshila procession is completely ignored. The inflammatory slogans shouted by the processionists do not get even a passing reference. Thus they state a cause, presented as the full explanation.

7. All the newspapers reporting quoted are translation from Hindi version.

Again to quote the editorial of Navbharat Times of November 6, 1989:

"The Bihar Government must be regretting rejecting the advice that the Ramshila procession should not be allowed to pass through Muslim dominated areas. Actually it had rejected this request because Moharram processions are allowed to pass through Hindu dominated areas".

By quoting the government a touch of objectivity has been tried to be given but what emerges to the reader implicitly is that the Hindus are more liberal and peaceful, and there is no riot when a Moharram procession is taken out; while the Muslims are aggressive and intolerant, who would not allow a Hindu procession to pass through their areas.

Similarly the report of November 6, 1989, Navbharat Times States:

"According to Government sources the festival of Chhat⁸ passed off peacefully. However, the nearby villages of Tarapur and Asarganja witnessed riots".

Again implicit in the reporting is that Hindu festival passed off peacefully while the Muslim villages continued to indulge in riots. Villages surrounding Tarapur and Asarganja have a good number of Muslims. If any sort of -----

8. A festival of Bihar and Eastern U.P. in which the Sun God is worshipped.

altercation between two communities, irrespective of its nature, takes place in these villages, it is immediately given a communal colour. In this particular news-item, the style of putting the news is worthy of attention. Riots in and around Muslim villages have been put immediately after a news that a Hindu festival passed peacefully.

It is relevant here to state also a lead story that appeared in the Patna edition of Hindustan on November 1, 1989. It stated that miscreants had opened fire on army jawans in Tatarpur locality. The message sought to be conveyed was that the Muslims had attacked the Indian army. The report stated, quoting 'official sources' that 37 miscreants were overpowered by the Jawans, who recovered arms and ammunition manufactured in Pakistan's ordnance factories. The Daily headlined its report:

"Proof of foreign hand in Bhagalpur riots found".

Not so blatantly but extremely cleverly a similar report appeared in Navbharat Times on November 4, 1989:

"The army discovered weapons made in Pakistan, but the police did not inquire into it deeply".

Actually the administration has always been denying that any such weapons were discovered. But a 'foreign hand' is immediately stated and Muslims are blamed.

Implicit is also the allegation of an aggressive posture adopted by the Muslims. Thousands of Muslims suffering in the camps were neglected but a point is scored by stating that from a Muslim locality and religious site (mosque), the army was attacked.

Now the reporting on the deaths, casualties, arson and loot. It would be reasonable to suppose, and past experience bears this out, that in the event of any communal riot, whoever started it, it is the minority community that suffers more casualties and loss of property. "... The communal issues simmer and periodically the communities break into angry riots sparked usually by some trivial incident. Inevitably, it is the minority community which in a moment of defiance commits the first act of aggression. Once large scale riots break out, almost always, it is the minority community which pays the maximum price".⁹ However for Navbharat Times the people killed in riots remained nameless, except on two occasions:

In the report of October 26, 1989 it is stated:

"A sixty year old woman Urmila Devi came running towards the police station and started begging - save my daughter and son".

9. Ratna Naidu, Communal Edge to Plural Societies : India & Malaysia (Vikas, Delhi, 1980), P-10.

Or the report of October 27, 1989.

"30-40 pilgrims have been trapped in a Jaina Mandir. They are extremely insecure".

Or the one on October 29, 1989:

"Ramsharan a social worker, had got off the train and was extremely afraid".

Very clearly a sympathy has been evoked for the Hindus. One knows that many areas and villages dominated by the Muslims were destroyed. Hundreds of Muslims were killed and many more thousands were moved to various relief camps. Not even a small reference is made to them. Thus in the reporting style a very definite and conscious selection process is discernible. The report especially of October 26, 1989 is otherwise dry but the language turns almost poetic when talking of old Urmila Devi. There is an involvement with the character, a kind of deep identification taking place. The rest of the report remains aloof but not this piece: a personal touch is found here.

Similarly Jansatta of October 28, 1989 states:

"At the local crematorium 46 dead bodies were seen. All these people had been killed in the riots".

Again very clearly the crematorium is mentioned but not the cemetery. And how did one know that all the 46 persons killed in the riots were Hindus?

Hindustan of November 2, 1989 states:

"Today six bodies were recovered from a well situated in Sanskrit College".

Some of these statements might be true. But the point is the total absence of the mention of Muslim victims e.g. Hindustan of November 1, 1989 does mention Chanderi¹⁰ but does not state the actual incident in which Muslims were massacred. The silence reflects a particular bias.

Moreover, the reporting is without depth and sensitivity. There is not even an attempt made to visit the relief camps and talk to the victims. In fact, the focus in reporting is on the number of persons killed. Whether only fifty were killed or a hundred, this is clear by the everyday headlines:

"Only 75 houses were burnt, only 5 people were killed".

All the reports quote Government sources extensively. This is the chief source of establishing authenticity. Otherwise the sources quoted are extremely vague, e.g. knowledgeable sources, unreliable sources, official sources, confirmed sources.

The report of November 12, 1989 Hindustan States:

"According to received information 10-15 thousand rioters surrounded Jamalpur village and burnt 200 houses of -----

10. Chanderi is a village, a site of worst carnage where hundred Muslims were allegedly killed.

the same community. Not even a single man was allowed to escape".

Jamalpur is a Hindu dominated villave (supra). Clearly the figures were pointed against the Muslims. News was highly exaggerated. Enquiry reveals that only five or six people had been killed.

The highly controversial role of S.P. Mr. Dwiwedi was highlighted with a one sided story, and sole reliance on official sources. Thus, Jansatta of October 27, 1989 states:

"The news of the transfer of S.P. Dwiwedi has made the people and police angry. The police plans to lay down its arms".

Hindustan of the same day carries the same news item. I have not come across a report of the other side of the picture, that is the anger of the minority community against the S.P., in any of the newspapers.

The worry was also about the elections. Thus many a report appears simply on electoral calculations. Here riot is a tool to be used for and against a party. The misery of the masses is forgotten in the dust of it.

The headlines of many newspapers go to prove it.

Jansatta of November 7, 1989 states:

"The communal card would prove harmful to

Congress: V.P. Singh".

Navbharat Times of November 20, 1989 claims:

"The Bhagalpur riots will have no effect on the Congress vote bank, according to Jagannath Mishra."

Thus, these reports were working very much within the framework of communal ideology and the prevailing situation.

But at the same time the role of press and media has to be viewed in a broader perspective. A riot symbolises societal breakdown which in turn means the failure of the whole social system. Press is a subsystem - why should it be singled out ?

It is often argued that the press must play a positive and constructive role when the situation demands so viz. during communal riots. But it has its own limitation. By and large there are two aspects to a newspaper's role:

I. a vanguard: moulder of public opinion.

II. a business: dependent on advertising revenue; which depends upon circulation figures; which may depend on working within the reader's mental universe.

The second aspect may not be ignored. And its role must be assessed from this perspective. Earning maximum profit from the business is the first priority. To remain economically viable, a newspaper seeks to meet its subscribers' taste. Each newspaper, in fact, has a target

audience; its content and reporting style are adapted accordingly. That apart, the ideology of the proprietor also has a bearing over the manner in which reporting is done.

In sum, it may not, perhaps, be very reasonable for different sections of society, to stoke hatred and violence without inhibition -- and then expect newspapers to embody idealism, to be the custodians of the society's conscience.

CHAPTER 5
RIOTS IN RURAL AREAS

RIOTS IN RURAL AREAS

BHAGALPUR RIOTS of October 1989, spread into the surrounding villages widely and rapidly. It is said that incidents of communal violence had been reported from about 150 villages of the district. 15 out of 21 blocks in the district were affected, the worst being Rajaun, Jagdishpur, Sabour and Nath Nagar.¹ According to several social activists the number of villages affected is even higher.

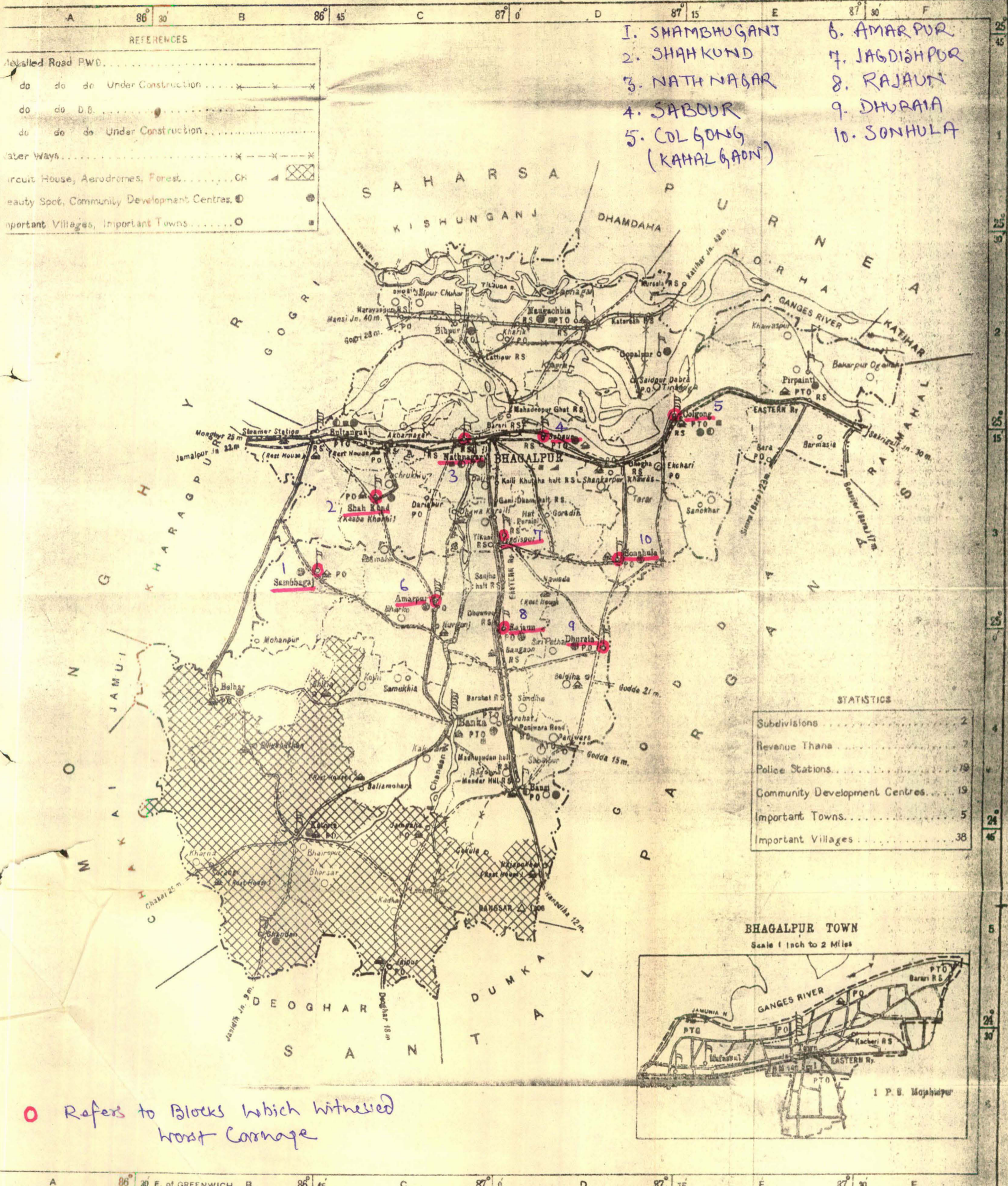
The reasons were many. However, a rumour became the immediate cause of the frenzied violence unleashed on isolated Muslim pockets in the rural areas. Simultaneously it needs to be pointed out that tensions had been building up in Bhagalpur over a period. A wild rumour provided the spark.

It is believed that hearsay on the cold-blooded massacre of hundreds of Hindu students in lodges around the Muslim dominated University area led the killer batches to rural area where the minority were unprotected and defenceless. As a Universtiy Professor put it, "People were thirsting to avenge the killing of Hindu boys. Since the Muslims in the city were well fotified, they moved to neighbouring villages."²

1. District Public Relation Officer (D.P.R.O.), Bhagalpur, Interview, 9.5.93, Bhagalpur.
2. A.K. Mishra, Interview, 11.5.93, Bhagalpur.

DISTRICT BHAGALPUR

HAR



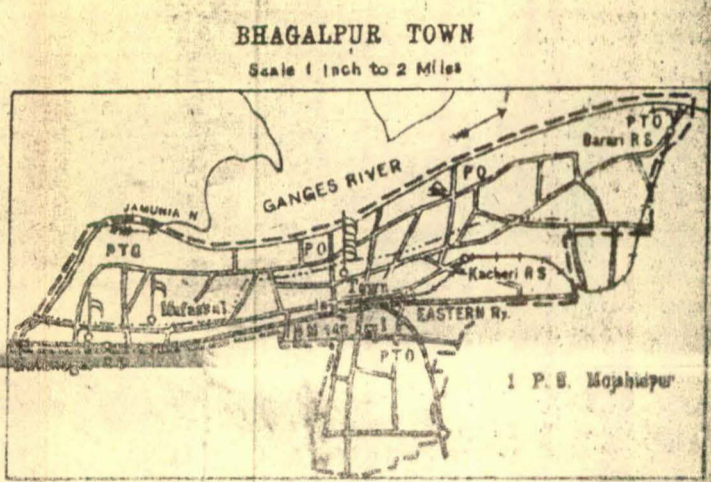
- 1. SHAMBHUGANT
- 2. SHAKUND
- 3. NATH NAGAR
- 4. SABOUR
- 5. COL GONG (KAHALGAON)
- 6. AMARPUR
- 7. JAGDISHPUR
- 8. RAJAMUN
- 9. DHURATA
- 10. SONHULA

REFERENCES

Metalled Road P.W.D.	-----
do do do Under Construction	-----x-----
do do D.B.	-----o-----
do do do Under Construction	-----x-----
Water Ways	-----x-----
Circuit House, Aerodromes, Forest	-----x-----
Beauty Spot, Community Development Centres	-----o-----
Important Villages, Important Towns	-----o-----

STATISTICS

Subdivisions	2
Revenue Thana	7
Police Stations	19
Community Development Centres	19
Important Towns	5
Important Villages	38



o Refers to Blocks which witnessed worst Carnage

A 86° 30' E. of GREENWICH. B 86° 45' C 87° 0' D 87° 15' E 87° 30' F

Boundary:- District or State. -----

do Subdivision. -----

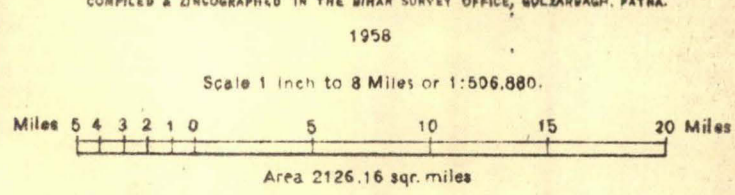
do Thana. -----

do Police Station. -----

do Broad Gauge double line, with station. RS -----

do do single line, with station. RS -----

do Metre or Narrow Gauge with station. RS -----



Note:- Police Station Nathnagar lies partly within Thana Bhogalpur and partly within Thana Sultanganj.

Portion of Thana Bhogalpur lying within Thana Sultanganj.

COPIES OBTAINABLE AT THE BIHAR SURVEY OFFICE, GULZARBAGH, PATNA.

Main road: Metalled.	-----
do Unmetalled.	-----
Bungalows: Dak, Inspection	-----
Head Quarters:- Subdivision, Thana, Police Station	-----
Post Office, Post & Telegraph Office	PO PTO
Bench Mark, Sugar Factory	BM 148 SF
Trigonometrical Station with height	RANGSAR Δ 1308

No doubt, it is true that some Hindu students were attacked immediately after the outbreak of communal riots on 24 October, 1989. "Three huge men dragged my room-mate by his hair. I fled through the window". So said Ram Kishor, a student of the Bhagalpur University (R.Pathak, Indian Express (Delhi), 6 November 1989). This aside, N.K. Jha and Jay Kanta Yadav were brought to Jawahar Lal Nehru Medical College and Hospital with cut mark on their bodies soon after the riots. I have verified their first information report at Kotwali Police Station, Bhagalpur.

However, the inquiry reveals that about ten students died in three days following the 24th October clash, distributed equally among the two communities. The incident was greatly exaggerated in order to stoke the flames of hatred. It is true that lodges are situated in Muslim dominated area but on the day of clash i.e. 24 October 1989, the owners of the lodges themselves helped students to escape from that area. These owners even claim that almost all students residing in the lodges returned after the riots to take their belongings.³

It is necessary to mention some deep-seated factors which had prepared the background for the clash between the two communities. The explosion was just a matter of time. The pattern of almost all the Hindu-Muslim clashes

3. R.P. Singh in Bhagalpur Ka Sach, Information and Public Relation, Government of Bihar, 1991, P.18.

in the country should leave no one in doubt that Ramshila Puja launched by Vishwa Hindu Parishad (V.H.P.) and its allied organisations and the accompanying anti-Muslim propaganda that had been unleashed had poisoned the communal atmosphere to an enormous extent. Banarasi Das Gupta⁴ admitted that the emotions whipped up over the Ramjanma Bhoomi issue had played a vital role. As an example he explained how, even before the outbreak of the communal violence in the city, he had been requested by local officials [because of his influence on Hindus as well as Muslims as a social worker] to visit a semi-rural area in Sabour in view of the prevailing communal tension over the Ramshila procession. There he had been confronted by a very aggressive communally charged mob, and when he tried to protect Muslim friends, who had accompanied him, he had been attacked and injured.

This reveals that the communal aggressiveness in the villages was not only a fall-out of the events in the city but had spread quite widely even before violence rocked the city of Bhagalpur. In this the role of Ramjanma bhoomi issue and its highly communal use spearheaded by Vishwa Hindu Parishad and its allies can not be over-emphasised.

At this juncture the role of Vishwa Hindu Parishad in and around Bhagalpur deserves a special mention.

4. B.D. Gupta, Interview, 12.5.93, Bhagalpur.

According to Vishva Hindu Parishad activists I talked to, Bhagalpur district has a speciality -- it has a V.H.P. organisation extending upto the Panchayats level in every block and even upto the village level. They are also trying to expand their base through retired government officials, enlisting the Block Development Officer (B.D.O.) and other officials at Block level in order to reach every Hindu Mukhia (Head of a Village), Sarpanch and other influential villagers. It is significant that the very people the Vishva Hindu Parishad set out to mobilise today stand accused in the eyes of people from both the communities of organizing the riots.

The regular activities of the Vishva Hindu Parishad consisted of listing "Hindu" problems. They have also undertaken the task of building of Hanuman Temples often on sites hitherto used by villagers as meeting place. Thus there is a definite attempt to transform the character of these places and giving people institutional stakes in communalisation.

They also appropriated the term "Hindu", using it to cover any personal or group interest, rancour or greed. Thus the Vishva Hindu Parishad's mode of functioning, and its accompanying ideology in the district, made it possible to bring various local contradictions -- between rich and poor, between employers and labour -- or disputes over land and power, into the ambit of communal conflict. Thus through

their long term activities they expanded their base and further, by organising Ramshila procession from village level to city, they aroused the Hindu masses with a communal mindset.⁵

It is important to understand the psychology of the period. Vishva Hindu Parishad is notorious for its anti-Muslim stand, its activities did much to generate tensions in rural areas. They were already involved in the circulation of provocative pamphlets and in forcible collections for Ramshila Puja even from Muslim households. Riots took place in the blocks where Vishva Hindu Parishad had a strong base. Riots occurred even in villages where there was no prior conflict, showing the impact of communal propaganda e.g. in Chanderi village (infra)⁶.

Before dealing with the pattern of riots in rural areas, I wish to relate accounts of my visits to villages which witnessed the worst riots. They are Chanderi (Sabour Police Station), Logain (Jagdishpur Police Station), Tamoni and Bhatoria (Natha Nagar Police Station) and Jamalpur (Shah Kund Police Station).

5. Based on Field-Interviews.
Also People's Union for Democratic Rights (P.U.D.R.) Report, Bhagalpur Riots, Delhi, April 1990, P-29.
6. S.M. Rub, Interview, 6.1.93, Bhagalpur.
Mani Khan, Interview, 14.5.93, Bhagalpur.
Intelligence, Bhagalpur.
P.U.D.R., op.cit., P-31.

Chanderi is a village of about 800 people, of whom 150 are Muslims. It lies about 10 k.m. from Bhagalpur. Tension had already gripped the village following the incidents of 22nd and 23rd October in Sabour. The processionists looted and destroyed shops in the market area on 22nd at Fatehpur in Sabour block. On the 23rd, a Ramshila procession from Sabour to Goshala in Bhagalpur city had also burnt and broken Muslims' shops.

Out of fear many Muslims had left the village expecting a backlash. Those left were asked by their Hindu neighbours not to leave. On 26 October, Hindus had objected to Imam being brought from Rajpur (neighbouring village) to conduct the Namaaz. The following day a crowd attacked the village immediately after Namaaz. In a desperate attempt to save their life, Muslims of the village took shelter in Minnat Mian's Pucca (cemented) house. Their houses were burnt and looted reportedly in the presence of police. Meanwhile, a contingent of para-military forces under Major Wirk came and drove away the rioters, reassured the Muslims and put them in charge of an inspector of Sabour thana (police station) and then left, promising to come back.

At about 4 a.m. in the morning, villagers reported, a few hundred people surrounded Minnat Mian's house and assured the Muslims of their intention to take them to a safer place in the presence of police. As soon as they came out they were attacked from all sides. About 100

people were killed. Major Wirk reached the spot in the morning at 9 a.m. The mobs which attacked are said to have consisted of local Hindu elite and criminals. Allegedly police and looters were paid by the local elites. "According to a senior civil official, Superintendent of Police Mr. K.S. Dwivedi had received a message about a probable attack on Chanderi village on the evening of October 27, but the S.P. neither went there nor rushed his force⁷.

Tamoni village is roughly 18 kms from Bhagalpur on Aliganja - Hussainganja Road. Muslims are said to be prosperous here, owning hundreds of bighas of land. There are 160 families of Muslims in the village. It is said that tension grew in surrounding villages with the settling of a hamlet, Nayatola, possibly to ensure an assured labour supply, mainly inhabited by Muslim workers working as attached labour on the fields of Tamoni. Hindus of neighbouring villages viewed it as Muslims' attempt to increase their numbers.

Tamoni village was attacked on 26 October in the wake of the rumour of killing hundreds of Hindu students, and Muslims were forced to leave their homes en-masse and flee. One of the elders of the village said that as the minority community owns most of the land in the village, the

7. F. Ahmad, Telegraph (Calcutta), 3.11.89.

Sunday Observer, (Delhi), 5.11.89.

whole thing was a conspiracy to grab their land. He went on to claim that their rice harvest was already being harvested by others (Hindus). It appears that anti-socials had struck not to kill as much as to systematically destroy household property and to frighten the people (Muslims). Villagers say that police had visited the village a day before the attack and left giving assurances to bring re-inforcements but did not return.

Tamoni village is said to be under the influence of Vishva Hindu Parishad. Vishva Hindu Parishad had reportedly distributed saffron flags in the villages. Even burnt houses and mosques, during the riots, had flags on top of them. This village was conspicuous for two reasons. First, it was thoroughly looted. Second, the mosque was a special target of attack.

Logain village falls under Jagdishpur police station which is said to have the highest proportion of Muslims in the district. The massacre of 100 or 110 persons, as reported, in this village took place on 27 October, 1989 but the incident remained unreported till the recovery of about seventy skeletons, mostly of women and children, in a field with grown cauliflowers. Like Chanderi village (supra), an entire section of village population was reportedly decimated.

It is said in the village that a mob of several hundred, armed with lethal weapons, was led by the Assistant

Station Incharge of the Jagdishpur police station Mr. Ramchandra. All 23 Muslim houses in the village were set ablaze, all members of the community killed, and their bodies thrown into the village well. Some other bodies were thrown into the village pond. Later they were pulled out and buried in the fields.

According to the villagers, one day before this massacre, a similar incident had taken place in the nearby village of Badheri under the same police station, and the same Assistant Sub-inspector of Police (Mr. Ramchandra) had led the rioters there too. "There is no denying that this police officer is deep into this crime",⁸ D.I.G. Ajit Dutta is reported to have said.

Bhatoria is comparatively a bigger village consisting of two Muslim Mohallas: Badki Bhatoria i.e. (Big Bhatoria) and English Bhatoria. Muslims have about 250 households. A majority of the Hindus belong to intermediate castes. This village has been the site of violent feuds and clashes both between criminals of the same community and between the criminals of the two communities. Ram Shila Pujan had been organised in this village too. The village was attacked on 25 October, allegedly led by the Mukhia. It is said that Bhatoria villagers had been informed in advance about the likely attack. The mob consisted of people from -----

8. Telegraph, (Calcutta), 19.12.89.

the neighbouring villages and majority of them were Yadavas, Koeri, Mandal, Gangotas etc. They also attacked the Muslim Mohalla, English Bhatoria, which was looted and about 20 people were killed. Muslims are worried about their lands. They are being threatened that they will not be allowed to sell their land.

Jamalpur village is one of the two Hindu villages attacked by Muslims. Reportedly it was attacked twice in November 1989. About 500 rioters, armed with fire arms and traditional weapons, first attacked Jamalpur from the side of Khaira village about 3 K.M. away. The attacks came from Dariapur on the east and subsequently from Khulli village on the west. People of Jamalpur fled their village towards the north. The fleeing people were also chased and killed. This was the first attack on Hindus by the Muslims. Houses were burnt, and food grains were looted.

These five villages apart, there were villages which had been attacked by the Hindus followed by looting, burning and killing. Some of them were Makramdih (Rajaun Police Station), Rajpur (Sabour Police Station), Mansarpur (Sabour Police Station) Din Dalyanpur village (Shahkund police station), and Dhanaura (Kahalgaon Police Station).

Makramdih has about 150 Muslims families and 50 Hindu families. The village was attacked on 28 October 1989. Houses and mosques were burnt. Police did not try to stop

the rioters. They rather disarmed the Muslims and allegedly brought them on to road and left them. Probably police had given its secret approval for killings.

Rajpur was attacked on 27 October. Here also it is said that policemen signalled the crowd to march forward and attack the village. Some houses were looted and burnt including some Harijan's homes.

More or less, similar pattern can be seen in case of other villages attacked.⁹

From overall evidence available from published reports and newspapers on the spread of riots in rural areas, and from my enquiries in five villages, the following patterns can be identified.

Rumours were aired that Muslims were likely to attack, hence Hindus should be ready, or they should take the initiative. A temple in Dhankul village did much propaganda to incite Hindus.

The attacks seem to have been planned as villages like Bhatoria, Chanderi and Tamoni were attacked twice by redoubled crowds. In other places like Mansarpur, Logain, Chanderi, attacks followed briskly on reassurances that nothing would happen to the Muslims. In some cases advance warning to the Muslim community in villages was given e.g.

9. P.U.D.R., op.cit., Rural Area Section.

Dhanoura under Kahalgaon police station and Bhatoria under Nathnagar police station. All these strengthen the logic of planning.

Attacks were generally led by the local criminals or people from the neighbouring villages, or in some cases from the same village also. There are instances where the Mukhia (Village head) and Sarpancha of the same village were also involved e.g. Bhatoria, Tamoni and Chanderi.

Greed of Hindus to capture the Muslims property, and lands, seems to be prime motive.¹⁰ All the things which could have been carried away were taken out. They even harvested the standing crops. They had struck not to kill as much as to systematically destroy household property leading to immediate pauperisation and to frighten the people because Hindu villagers wanted the Muslims to flee from their area so that they may capture their lands. The same was also informed to me by the villagers at Tamoni.

One common feature was the destruction of the mosques and Mazaars (monument) and Muslim graveyards¹¹. In some cases Hindu religious slogans were also written inside the mosque and even the idol of Hanuman or Ram installed

10. Ibid, P-55-70.

Personal visit and enquiry

11. P.U.D.R. Report, op.cit., P-61

S.N.M. Abdi, "When Darkness Fell", Illustrated Weekly of India, 26 November, 1989.

there e.g. in Tamoni village, Chanderi and Makramdih. Some Hindu temples had been attacked by the Muslims in the city but not in rural areas.

Though the attacking crowds included people from all the castes, they came largely from the intermediate castes i.e. Yadavas, Gangotas, Kurmi etc.

The attacking crowds did not make any distinction in terms of age and sex of the victims.¹²

Dhanoura village under Kahalgaon police station, shows how the political and economic rivalry takes communal colour. With the establishment of the electricity generating National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) venture in neighbouring area (at Kahalgaon), there was intense competition between local Hindus and Muslims for getting contracts and availing of other opportunities. Muslims therefore feel that the riots came as an opportunity for the Hindus to take revenge against the Muslims. Thus riots acquired different dimensions at different places depending upon the local factors at work.¹³

Jamalpur under Shah kund Police Station (supra) and Kumarhat¹⁴ under Amarpur Police Station are two odd

12. Field Interviews.

P.U.D.R. Report, op.cit., P-55/63-65.

13. Ibid, P-67-68.

14. Ibid, P-58-59.

villages where Hindus were attacked by the Muslims.

The complicity of police is quite obvious in some cases e.g. Chanderi, Logain, Tamoni etc. (For details, please see my personal accounts of five villages-supra).

What is more macabre about Bhagalpur riots, October 1989, is that killers had time not only to kill but also to bury the victims e.g. Logain village, Makramdih etc. This reflects not the cruelty or brutality of the rioters as much as the laxity on the part of administration. In Logain Muslims were killed and buried and even cauliflower grown over the place - yet administration did not get any clue about the incident.

Most of the villages which were the sites of communal violence, are considered to be under influence of Vishva Hindu Parishad. In sharp contrast, villages and circles having Communist Party Organisations were not affected at all. Without caring for their life, the Communist Party of India (CPI) cadres boldly faced the armed rioters. Most of the places witnessed the C.P.I. cadres foiling the armed attack of the rioters. Many C.P.I. cadres gave shelter to the minorities in their houses. One comrade Chandra Shekhar Singh managed to bring out 70 students safely from riot-torn Mohallas and helped them to reach their villages.¹⁵

15. M. Jabbar Alam, New Age, (New Delhi), 24 December 1989

It is reported that there was systematic destruction of looms in the rural as well as in urban areas. In the case of some families the looms were entirely destroyed. In some electric motors have been damaged or the beams (of costly metal) have been looted. The yarn stocks of most of the weavers have been looted, giving a shattering blow to the livelihood of the weavers.¹⁶

Thus riots in rural areas seem to have been planned, started and conducted by the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), Rashtriya Swaym Sevak Sangh (RSS) Bajarang Dal and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP). Though in my earlier account, I have cited VHP only, VHP, Bajarang Dal, RSS and BJP all have overlapping membership -- in Bhagalpur too.

The indifferent attitude of the administration proved to be helpful for them. But all these are indicators of the larger communal ideology and attitudes that are spreading through all aspects of life.

16. Bharat Dogra, Times of India, (Delhi), 12 January 1990. Abdi, op.cit.

CHAPTER 6

ROLE OF STATE AND ADMINISTRATION

ROLE OF STATE AND ADMINISTRATION

"No Police Force in the Country is free from communalism, casteism, indiscipline and politics...."

"Case studies of some of the major communal riots reveal a pattern in the failures on the part of the law enforcement authorities in the prevention and suppression of riots...."

S.K. Ghosh, Communal Riots in India, (Ashish Pub. House, New Delhi, 1987), P. X and 79.

Lawlessness in India goes beyond the limited area of communal rioting; this should not be ignored. So extensive is the ever enlarging field of crime, big and small, that even five times the size of the existing police force in its various forms would not be able to cope with the menace without a drastic change in our thinking. "Much of the contempt for the law of the land has come to be accepted as normal in unstable conditions. Recognized party politicians seem to delight in comradely relationship with mafia group whose numbers keep growing. Dhanbad in Bihar's mining belt is not the only cesspool of protected gangsterism in the country."¹

Take the question of law and order in Bihar. It is well known that there exists a nexus between politicians and corrupt officials and criminals. Initially the politicians made use of the criminals in order to win votes but later the criminals were not satisfied with mere patronage, they insisted on sharing power. The fact that Bihar has the largest number of MLAs with criminal record speaks for itself.²

And about the corruption the less said the better. Bihar might lag behind other states in most fields, but in corruption it leads the rest. "The megasize

1. P. Bhatia, Tribune (Chandigarh), 21 December 1990.

2. S. Sahay, News Time, (Hyderabad), 26 April 1988.

corruption has corroded the administrative and judiciary system of Bihar. It is said that Bihar is a vanguard for corrupt officers."³.

That apart, Bihar has become a byword for caste and communal riots, atrocities on Harijans, Naxalite turbulence and private armies of powerful rural interests with political clout running amuck from time to time. In fact, nowhere in India is the nexus between landlords, police and government official as marked as in Bihar.⁴

The crux of the problem with Bihar, explaining why the bureaucracy can be so willful, is the lack of political will to govern. It is also corroborated by the past record e.g. Mr. L.V. Singh⁵ a Senior Police Officer, who investigated the Bhagalpur Blindings of 1980 had stated in his report that the Chief Minister and certain Senior officers knew of the blindings and that even though the relevant file went up and down for several months, the blindings were not stopped. State government wilfully avoided any action against the Bhagalpur Police and the blindings continued unabated.

More or less similar picture emerges during the Bhagalpur October, 1989 riots. Even though the B.P.C.C.

3. S.K. Singh, National Herald, (Delhi), 29 March 1992.

4. Indian Express (Delhi), 11 February 1991.
National Herald, (Delhi), 29 March 1992.

5. Kuldip Nayar, Tribune, (Chandigarh), 10 December 1981.

(Bihar Pradesh Congress Committee) had warned of the dangers posed by the Ramshila processions, the S.N. Sinha ministry remained unmoved. It took the horror of Bhagalpur to make it sit up and that too when it became evident that the Muslim vote may be cast largely against the Congress. Even then there was a lot of hesitation about prohibitory and preventive measures. It is this hesitation that has been taken advantage of by an administration whose members in Bihar are as much guided by the caste and communal considerations as their political masters. Going by the past, the ruling elite in Bihar has never been unduly perturbed by killings. This is the case this time also.⁶

In fact, all the recent riots have taken place on a comparatively large scale in Congress ruled states. This is itself a clear indictment of the state government.⁷ Those under the National Front parties remained relatively quiet even though Ramshila procession had caused concern to the authorities there also. Since there is hardly any difference between the bureaucracy of a Congress (I) and National Front state, the only conclusion seems to be that political leadership was less vigorous in the former.

6. Times of India, (Delhi), 8 November 1989.

A Senior Administrative Official who requested not to be named.

7. Statesman, (Delhi), editorial, 28.10.89

Deccan Herald, (Bangalore), 26.10.89.

The Bihar government could perhaps not have acted otherwise when the central government itself had reached an agreement with the V.H.P. (Vishva Hindu Parishad) permitting the foundation laying ceremony for the temple in Ayodhya. As a report in one of the national dailies⁸ pointed out, quoting from the house journal of Ramshila Pujan Samiti, Home Minister, Buta Singh had not only given the go ahead to the Vishva Hindu Parishad (V.H.P.) and its general secretary, Ashok Singhal, he had also instructed all concerned officials to ensure that the bricks were taken to Ayodhya and the foundation laid without hindrance. The Central Government's and Congress silence till October 26, over the role of Vishva Hindu Parishad (V.H.P.) and the Ramshila Procession was revealing in this respect. It was only after the official death toll had crossed a hundred, the situation had become uncontrollable and there were reports of the government's tacit involvement, that Rajiv Gandhi visited Bhagalpur and the silence was broken.

The following pages will deal with these aspects viz. politicisation of the administration, inner working of the administrative machinery at Bhagalpur, communalisation of the police and instances of police complicity in order to find out why the administration at Bhagalpur failed in 1989

8. Statesman, (Delhi), 26.10.89.
Indu Bharati, "Bhagalpur Riots and Bihar Government",
Economic and Political Weekly, December 2, 1989.

unlike the past, when it had controlled the riots speedily and effectively.

The way Bhagalpur Administration handled some of the cases is thoroughly scandalous. Kidnapping of Papri Bose Ray a student of S.M. College from a busy thoroughfare in early 1989 and failure of administration to arrest the culprits roused the whole city in protest. Since the persons involved were men of Bhagwat Jha Azad, the then Chief Minister of Bihar, the then D.M. Bhagalpur, Mr. Arun Jha, reportedly shielded them. This not only shows the politicisation and criminal neglect of duty on the part of administration but their complicity in the crime itself.⁹

The running political feud between Bhagwat Jha Azad, Ex-Chief Minister and Sheo Chandra Jha, ex-Legislative Assembly (Bihar) Speaker had its own telling upon the administration. Both patronise criminal gangs and also try to bring their own nominee to the key administrative posts in order to manipulate the situation as per their liking.¹⁰ The then District Magistrate (D.M.) Mr. Arun Jha and Superintendent of Police (S.P.) Mr. K.S. Dwiwedi are

9. Bharati, op.cit.

P. Mishra, Interview, 6.5.93, Bhagalpur.

Intelligence, Bhagalpur.

10. S. Naqvi, Patriot, (Delhi), 7 November 1989. Citizens of Bhagalpur who gave me this information asked for anonymity.

reported to be men of Bhagwat Jha and Sheo Chandra Jha respectively. It was Lok Sabha election time (October 1989) and Sheo Chandra Jha was interested in fomenting troubles for Bhagwat Jha Azad, the candidate for the Lok Sabha Election from Bhagalpur Constituency.¹¹

The killing of alleged dacoits belonging to the Muslim community in encounters in July 1989 after K.S. Dwiwedi had taken over as S.P. Bhagalpur also contributed to the tension. The town was agog with talk that the encounters were taking place at the behest of a Congress (I) leader because those killed used to capture booths for another influential Congress (I) leader and would have done so in the forthcoming Lok Sabha election too. Bhagwat Jha, it appears, was rather unsure of Muslim vote hence wanted the riots to linger till the situation turned in his favour. Arun Jha (the then D.M.) obliged him by reporting to the Election Commission that election in Bhagalpur be postponed. As reported, it had been the order of Congress High Command that the contesting candidate can choose the D.M. of his own choice.¹²

Mr. B.D. Gupta¹³ told me that "D.M. released a criminal immediately after arresting him once he came to

11. S. Naqvi, Patriot, (Delhi), 7 November 1989.

Telegraph (Calcutta), 31 Oct. 1989.

12. S. Naqvi, Patriot, (Delhi), 7 November 1989.

13. B.D. Gupta, Interview, 12.5.1993, Bhagalpur.

know that he is from Bhagwat Jha's group."

Thus the entire polity, Government, Administration had been in league with the criminals to the extent which could have hampered the efficiency of the former. This is not gossip but a harsh truth.

Now we move to consider the inner working of administration at Bhagalpur, mainly why and how this breakdown of Administration resulted.

Mr. A.K. Singh's ¹⁴ long paper gives a clear picture of the administrative machinery in the city.

"Bhagalpur is one of the oldest divisional headquarters in Bihar. Besides, the Commissioner and D.I.G. it boasts of an Inspector General of Police, being one of the zonal headquarters of police force. The district has the sanctioned strength of 7 D.S.Ps. 14 Inspectors, 145 Sub-Inspectors and 178 Asstt. Sub-Inspectors of Police. . . eight percent of the constables are Muslims."

All the police stations are fully equipped with wireless sets and some of them have jeeps also. Further need of vehicles could have been fulfilled from Block, Circle and Sub-divisional level. Thus the administrative machinery had quite adequate strengths for facing any law and order

14. A.K. Singh, "Bhagalpur Riots : In Retrospect", The Adminsitrator, Vol. 35, No. 4, Oct-Dec., 1990, P-95.

problems. But it proved to be a mere show-piece when the moment of crisis came. This needs an explanation in its own right.

A perfect coordination in working was wanting among the different hierarchies of administrative officials. Also the relationship among them was far from satisfactory on one excuse or other viz. Superiority syndrome, indiscipline, politicisation, personal grouses, unnecessary interference etc. For instance, D.M.'s behaviour towards the Deputy Collector Land Reforms (D.C.L.R.) for not complying with his wishes during a fancy Cricket Match¹⁵ was improper and shows how personal whims affect professional integrity. Finally that D.C.L.R. was transferred. This made the subordinates lose their trust and confidence in superiors.

The relationship between Commissioner and District Magistrate (D.M.) Inspector General (I.G.) and Deputy Inspector General (D.I. G.) of Police, D.I.G. and Superintendent of Police (S.P.), I.G. of Police and Commissioner, D.M. and S.P. was not cordial.¹⁶

During the riots many new postings were made, old officials being transferred. Thus officers having some idea of the local people and places were removed from the scene.

15. Ibid, P-96-97.

16. Ibid, P-97-98.

F. Ahmad, Telegraph, (Calcutta), 31 October 1989.

The newly posted officials faced many hardships for being new to the place, they could not reach the trouble spot soon in such a demanding time.

There was also confusion with regard to jurisdiction. Many officials e.g. D.I.G. (Rural), S.P. (rural) and S.P. of the district had overlapping or coterminous jurisdiction and functions. In case of any major incident all the three would rush to the site.

Some problems were typical to a riot situation only. For instance, Naseem Ahmed replaced J. Mahapatra as the D.I.G. of Police by the end of October 1989. "Naseem Ahmed felt extremely diffident in taking action against the Hindus lest he would be branded as communal. He could not take action against the Muslim lest he would be called insensitive and partisan. So he chose to remain indifferent to what was happening".¹⁷

Further with the deployment of army and para military forces, the attitude of police underwent a change. Since army and para military forces began to expose the misdeeds and the cover-up efforts of administration, the local administration began to resent their presence and desisted from co-operating with them. The situation was retrieved only after Union Minister of State for Home Mr. Chidambaram's visit to Bhagalpur when he put the police

17. Singh, op.cit., P-99.

under the army which nearly stung the local police. The Minister had to get Bihar's former Police Chief J.M. Qureshi back from Delhi and put him in charge. But mentally the police were not ready to accept the control of army authorities. Aggrieved over this the local police almost mingled with the Hindu criminals.¹⁸

Communalisation of the lower hierarchies of the police force was another significant factor contributing to the administrative efficiency. Constabulary was not only Hindu dominated and therefore affected by the rapid communalisation of the atmosphere, they had grouses too. Firstly they were looking for an opportunity to teach the Muslim a lesson ever since the killing of a D.S.P. Mr. Mehra at Nathanagar, a suburb of Bhagalpur, allegedly at the hands of Muslim weavers in January 1987. Secondly they held Muslims responsible for the transfer of the S.P. who was rightly or wrongly projected as pro-Hindu. As a result, they openly sided with the Hindu criminals during the riots. In fact, Bihar Military Police (B.M.P.) enjoys the same notoriety as the infamous Provincial Armed Constabulary (P.A.C.) in Uttar Pradesh as a partisan communal outfit.¹⁹

18. S. Mishra, Sunday Observer (Delhi), 5 November 1989.
Patriot, (Delhi), 4 November 1989.

19. Tribune (Chandigarh), 13 November 1989.

Sunday Observer (Delhi), 30 April 1989.

Hindu (Madras), 25 August 1989.

Telegraph, (Calcutta), 27 August 1989

Even the families of other policemen belonging to a different community but under police protection were allowed to be slaughtered. The riots revealed a sharp communal division in the police and administration. A typical example was the case of Mr. Mohammed Rahmatullah, a Circle Officer posted in a police station. Hearing that his family was trapped he contacted a sub-inspector of his own community who agreed to help but later informed Mr. Rahmatullah that his men would not follow him. Mr. Rahmatullah's relatives were killed.²⁰

Here are some of the examples of police laxity and complicity.

The Sub-divisional Magistrate, a D.S.P., an Inspector, six Sub-Inspectors, six Assistant Sub-Inspectors and forty armed police men were in Champanagar police station with three jeeps when the marauders came on the morning of October 25. The killing, arson and looting continued throughout the day and night. But the police did not lift a finger to prevent the orgy of violence.²¹

There are instances of the police and Central Reserve Police Force (C.R.P.F.) beating up innocent persons. The victims include Kaliuar Rahman, Senior Medical Officer of Bhagalpur University and Dr. M.A.I. Beg, Professor of -----

20. Indian Express (Delhi), 7 November 1989.

21. Hindu (Madras), 2 November 1989.

Botany, Marwari College Bhagalpur. To quote Rahman, "my only offence was that I sought protection of a C.R.P.F. patrolling party".²²

Police high handedness continued against innocent persons despite the heavy presence of army and para-military forces.

The chapter "Riots in Rural Areas" will deal with the police complicity in villages.

22. K. Rahman, Interview, 8.5.1993, Bhagalpur.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

In view of the available source-materials on Bhagalpur Riots and my personal inquiries, I am in a position to make certain tentative arguments.

No riot is a product of a single factor, no matter what provides spark to it. An environment of communal tension had been building up in the city over a period. Bhagalpur has witnessed the rise of armed gangs and criminalisation on a comparatively large scale in the past two decades which are inextricably related to the stagnant economy. This criminalisation has its own telling upon the society. Besides, the city and rural areas have witnessed the emergence of communal organisations and their base has expanded too, even encompassing the criminals and anti-social elements viz. Vishva Hindu Parishad (V.H.P.), Bajarang Dal etc.

In recent time, factors like controversy around Professor Dhanpati Pandey's book on Middle East having references about the life style of Prophet Mohammad, Hindus' hard stand on taking every Rath-yatra or procession through Tatarpur, a Muslim-dominated area and in turn Muslims' objections to them, visit and speeches of communal leaders from both the communities, confrontation between the two communities in August 1989 in Parbatti locality during Moharram procession, circulation of communal pamphlets on a

wider scale to incite the respective community proved to be strong elements in building up communal tension.

Equally shocking is the highly politicised Society of Bhagalpur. The running political feud between Bhagwat Jha, former Chief Minister, Bihar, and Sheo Chandra Jha, former Speaker, Bihar Legislative Assembly has contributed to the criminalisation of the society. Both patronise criminals and also try to bring their own nominee to the key administrative posts at Bhagalpur in order to manipulate the situation as per their liking. Both Bhagwat Jha and Sheo Chandra Jha belong to Bhagalpur and used to represent it in the Lok Sabha and Bihar Legislative Assembly respectively -- hence the political rivalry and ego-clash.

The hurling of a bomb on the Ramshila procession, itself, is the first sign of criminality. Besides, the kind of people involved and the nature of place where the riot started are significant indicators of the nature of incident. Muslim High School (see the Map), from where the bomb was thrown, is the area where Muslim criminals rule the roost. Since a confrontation was already going on between the then superintendent of police, Mr. K.S. Dwiwedi and the Muslim criminals of the city, it appears that the bomb might have been thrown on the Ramshila procession, October 1989, with a purpose to kill two birds with one stone.

Moreover, Marwari businessmen appear to have financed the criminals and communal organisations to destroy

the Muslims' shops and property because of their rise as competitors in business and trade. "Why these anti-nationals prosper at our cost" -- this is their version. It is significant to note that since Marwaris are mainly businessmen and outsiders, almost everywhere including Bhagalpur, they try to protect themselves by promoting an ideology which ignores their own role as exploiters and defines the Muslims, instead, as the real threat. If they do not divert the attention of Hindu masses through this communal game, may be, the anger of other Hindus would turn against the Marwaris themselves.

The Bhagalpur Administration failed badly in controlling the riots. There was lack of perfect coordination among the different hierarchies of officials. Clear-cut demarcation of their jurisdictions was also wanting. Personal relationship among the top officials were far from cordial. As the evidence suggests, key officials were under political influence.

The role of police, Bihar Military Police in particular, is beyond imagination. They not only mingled with the Hindu crowds indulging in looting and killing, but at many places led the marauders in attacking the minority community e.g. village Logain under Jagdishpur police station and Chanderi under Sabour Police Station. They even desisted from cooperating with the army and para-military forces, so communalised were they.

Rumours were very much central to the Bhagalpur Riots, October 1989. Various concocted stories were aired, primarily to incite the Hindu masses against the Muslims viz: killing of hundreds of Hindu students in lodges located in the Muslim-dominated university area, kidnapping and raping of girls of university women's hostel, poisoning of Municipal water etc. Reportedly V.H.P. and Bajarang Dal activists were very active in making false propaganda.

Media played equally dubious role by exaggerating or misreporting the actual incidents. National Hindi dailies like Jansatta, Hindustan and Navbharat Times were in lead in biased reporting. Due to large circulation of these papers, distorted news reached the masses like fire. B.B.C., considered to be a byword for objective reporting, also aired many distorted news.

Of course, it was the rumour of killing of Hindu students in cold-blooded manner that provoked the villagers to attack the minority community in rural areas but the root lies deeper. Vishva Hindu Parishad is said to have built a strong base from Bhagalpur city to village level in the previous five or six years preceding the October 1989 Riots. They were reportedly active and very much instrumental in making false anti - Muslim propaganda.

Besides, the Hindus' motive of capturing the land and property of the Muslims in villages also appears to be a

major factor behind this backlash.

Inter - communal relations in Bhagalpur district have deteriorated to an enormous extent. If the relationship gives the appearance of being normal, it is largely due to compulsion of social decencies.

Once again I would emphasize that Bhagalpur Riots 1989 is conspicuous for the following three factors: break-down of administrative machinery on an unprecedented scale, riots in rural areas and circulation of rumours and dubious role played by the media. Very few riots, so far witnessed, can stand on parallel with Bhagalpur Riots October 1989 in these respects.

To sum up, we may say that it was the sum of relations between criminals, the police, administration, politicians, the dominant elite and the economy which was generally responsible for the happenings. In any given instance, one or all of these - along with some local people - were significant factors and agents in the riots.

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