

Solapur Riots

October 2002

X-rayed

Centre for Human Rights' Studies and Awareness (CHRSA), Mumbai

The Background:

Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini is a unique academy with the mission of training and orientation of social activists and leaders. The Centre for Human Rights' Studies and Awareness (CHRSA), a forum of Rambhau Mhalgi Prabodhini is involved in the field of awareness, research and advocacy in the area of human rights. To empower the masses with awareness about their human rights is also an avowed objective of this forum. Based in Mumbai, the forum consists of a core group of activists drawn from all walks of life.

The issue of communal riots is the single most vexatious problem facing the nation today. The incidents of communal strife and disharmony which have occurred in different parts of the country in the recent past have once again brought this issue to the fore. Despite inherent and fundamental contradictions, history has shown that two civilizations have assimilated with each other and co-existed in this country. However, the communal flare-ups in the recent past are threatening to fissure the very psyche of the society at large. The tolerance levels of both the communities have touched an abysmal low, with the slightest provocation being sufficient to trigger off extreme reactions. The city of Solapur in Maharashtra was the epicenter of communal riots during the month of October 2002. The riots lasted from 11th October to 13th October, 2002. The State of Maharashtra has witnessed more than 50 communal riots in the last three years. This alarming situation in the society at large is a cause for concern indeed.

When communal riots occur, human rights violations are in a way inevitable. Frenzied mobs devoid of reason take the law in their own hands and thus trample on the human rights of others. Human rights abuses transcend the man made borders of faith and are a universal phenomenon during such communal conflagrations.

Animated by concern to find the facts behind the hype and rhetoric that generally accompanies such incidents and to investigate and document human rights abuses if any, a team of four members from this forum undertook a week-long tour of the riot affected area of Solapur in Maharashtra. The team was drawn from diverse fields such as law, social work and the media. This report encapsulates the observations, conclusions, and recommendations of the study team.

1.1 Objective:

The primary objective of this study team is to investigate and document the factual incidents of human rights violations during the period of communal disturbances in Solapur from 11th October to 13th October 2002.

The ancillary aim is to understand and dispassionately and objectively analyse the dynamics of a communal riot from the human rights' perspective as a case study.

- 1.2 The study team: Adv. Ashish Chavan Keshav Upadhye
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1.3 Period of study:

From 20th October, 2002, to 26th October, 2002.

1.4 Some statistics of the riots:

- * Nine people died in police firing and three persons lost their lives in mob violence.
- * Around 388 shops and 110 vehicles fell prey to arson and torching by rioting mobs.
- * Nearly 1140 persons were arrested during the riots and 102 FIRs (First Information Reports) were filed.
- * Nine Devi idols were desecrated by rioting mobs during the first day of riots viz. 11th October, 2002.
- * As per our estimate the total economic loss due to incidents of arson, looting and destruction of property is estimated to be around Rs. 3.5 crores (35 million).

2. Observations:

2.1 Solapur: A city of contradictions:

* Solapur derives its name from 'Sola Gaav' or a conglomeration of sixteen villages. Situated 460 kms to the South East of Mumbai, it is a cultural centre and an industrial township in Maharashtra with a rich and varied heritage. Among the first cities to be liberated from British rule and known as 'Hutatma Nagari' (City of Martyrs), Solapur has been blessed with literary and cultural heritage as well. Solapur has led Maharashtra in diverse spheres, be it politics, literature, sports or socio-cultural activities. Traditionally established as a textile township, it is famous for its 'chaddar' and towels.

* With a mixed population of 11 lakh, Sola pur is one of the most multi-lingual and multi-ethnic cities after Mumbai, in Maharashtra. The linguistic composition of the city comprises of 40% Marathi speaking and 30% non Marathi (Telugu and Kannada) speaking population. The district is surrounded by the boundaries of two States, namely, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

* The Lingayat and Sali communities constitute a major part of the Hindu population, which is 80% of the total population of the city. Oalits also form a considerable part of the total Hindu population. Among the minorities in general, Muslims form a sizeable part (15% to 18%) while other religious groups are in minority.

* The backbone of economy of Solapur city rests on its textile mills. However, due to the closure of the powerloom units and mills in the recent past, which has rendered eight to ten thousand labourers jobless, the economy of Solapur has received a severe setback. There is a large scale migration of labourers from neighbouring States of Karna taka and Andhra Pradesh (more so from Hyderabad). A number of allegedly unauthorised constructions by way of slums and chawls have cropped up with the tacit knowledge of the ~ocal municipal authorities. The unorganised industry of beedi making (tendu leaves) is also rapidly diminishing thereby causing major unemployment problems in the city. The frustration and depression that is generated because of these setbacks is evident in the day-to-day life of the average man in Solapur.

2.2 History of inter-community relations in Solapur:

* Business relations exist between the Hindu and Muslim communities in Solapur. Since both the communities have co-existed for several decades in the city, there is a natural exchange of socio-religious ceremonies, so much so that Muslims actively celebrate typically Hindu religious functions like Diwali, Laxmi Poojan, etc., while Hindus take part in the Muharram procession (Tazia). which knits a significant social interaction between the two communities on an appreciable scale during these festivals.

* At the same time, it is observed that incidents of communal tension between the two communities also have occurred with alarming regularity during the post-independence

period. Though, *prima facie* it is observed that Solapur as a city has never stood behind so-called communal or religion-based political or social organisations, which is evident from the electoral behaviour of the city, there is and has always been an undercurrent of communal polarity prevailing amongst members of both the communities.

* Instances are not lacking where the differences between the two communities have threatened to assume proportions of full-fledged riots. Solapur city has a history of communal riots right from 1948, in 1966, 1972, 1982, 1989, 1992 and 2000. In 1989, the city experienced minor riots after the news that the Rath Yatra of Shri L. K. Advani was halted at Samastipur in Bihar. In the same year the RSS procession on the eve of the birth anniversary of its founder Dr. Hedgewar, was attacked. In the year 2000, some members of the Deendar-e Anjuman allegedly attempted to throw a bomb on a church in Solapur. Stray incidents of tensions between the two communities have also occurred with alarming regularity. Observers who have studied the history of these tensions feel constrained to state that the peace between the two communities is deceptive and quite often dictated by the necessity of economic and business compulsions.

2.3 The genesis of recent riots

* The spark of the recent communal riots was first ignited in the morning of 11 th October 2002 when unruly mobs, predominantly Muslim, tried to enforce a 'bandh' in the Aasra locality, on Hotgi Road, a suburb of Solapur. The call for 'bandh' was given by All India Muslim Vikas Parishad, headed by M. D. Shaikh, a so-called journalist to protest against the alleged derogatory remarks made by Jerry Falwell, a Baptist Minister on CBS (An American TV channel) in the programme "Forty Minutes". As a matter of fact, the CBS is not telecast by any cable network in India. However, the news of Falwell's alleged remarks against Prophet Mohammad were reported by some news channels in India and were also carried by a section of the print media in the second week of October. Mr. Shaikh was personally leading the mob on this occasion. He also made speeches whipping up communal passions. On the day prior to the Bandh (Thursday 10th Oct. '02) he also had made an inflammatory speech near the Corporation building. However, the police failed to take note of the same. Local traders, who were reluctant to close their shops and establishments, opposed the mob, leading to an altercation.

* A large mob of rioters went on a rampage from the Industrial area towards Kumtha Naka, Nai Zindagi Chowk, looting and torching shops and entered Daji Peth area. Simultaneously, another mob allegedly led by one Tajuddin Moholkar, brother of present Congress (I) corporator Maqbool Moholkar, came from Kontam Chowk and proceeded towards Madhla Maruti area. This stretch is a flower market area. The mob tried to forcibly down the shutters of the local Muslim shopkeepers in that area, who were reluctant to do so as the Navratri was the only period during the year, when they make a flourishing business. An altercation ensued between the mob and the rioters, stones were pelted, and some of these stones hit the Oevi pandal in the area. The mob then proceeded to the Saraf Bazaar (Gold Smith) area.

* At the same time, a large mob of rioters had gathered near Begumpet, a predominantly Muslim populated area. The mob armed to the teeth with incendiary weapons like petrol bombs, swords, sticks, sattoors (chopper-like weapon used by butchers in abattoirs) was pelting stones and raising inflammatory slogans. This mob made a twopronged attack on a Oevi pandal situated just opposite Begumpet Police Chowky attached to the Jail Road Police Station. It is very interesting to note that the police candidly admit that only 2-3 police constables were present in the Chowky, this despite the fact that police had full knowledge of the likely impact the enforced bandh would have in Solapur and also that this particular area is considered to be communally very sensitive. The mob attacked the outer structure of the pandal, brought the Oevi idol on the ground, desecrated it, and chopped off the limbs of the idol. Then the mob turned its ire on the volunteers standing near the pandal who were mercilessly assaulted. The mob burst into the house of Mrs. Rekha Bande, local corporator, and ransacked her house, looted valuables and destroyed property. Members of the team spoke to Mrs. Bande, who said that the police arrived much after the mobs left the place, though the police station is only a stone's throwaway from the scene of the offence.

- This incident sent shock waves through the length and breadth of Solapur. People were horrified at the brutality of this abominable incident. This was the first time that such a despicable act had occurred in the recent history of the city. The imagery of the Devi has great socio-religious importance in the mind of the average Hindu in Solapur. Navratri in particular is celebrated with great fervour (compared to Ganesh festival) in many pandals across the city. This very sensitive icon of the majority community was desecrated. A Ganesh idol in the Vithoba temple just behind the pandal, was also desecrated and so were nine other idols of Hindu goddesses in the entire city during the first 4-5 hours of the riots. The majority community was gravely provoked by this incident.

* Another incident was the burning down of the house of ex-MLA Shri Narsing Mengji, situated at Shaniwar Peth, near Vijapur Wes area, on the same day in the afternoon. A large mob surrounded the house located in a thickly populated Muslim residential area and attacked it with petrol bombs, fire balls and other inflammatory materials. Several vehicles on the porch were set afire. The family members of the Mengji family gathered on the terrace of the house and watched helplessly as the crowd swelled in size and set the entire house on fire. Mengji's infirm mother who could not move was about to be engulfed in the flames when their Muslim neighbours (Darud family) evacuated them to the safety of their own house.

* The role of the police in this entire incident has come under lot of criticism from all quarters including the media and independent observers. As the news of the fire reached Shri Mengji he made frantic phone calls to the police. Every time, he was assured that help was on the way. However, when the police did arrive late in the afternoon, the damage had already been done. When members of this team spoke to the Senior Police Inspector PI Mujawar of the Jail Road Police Station (within whose jurisdiction Mengji's house is situated) about this incident, he admitted that there was a delay on the part of the police to reach the spot. However, he justified it by saying that at that time the police was besieged by rioters from all sides and hence could not reach the area in time. There is also a major discrepancy between the version of the police and that of Shri Mengji as to when the police actually arrived on the spot. When members of the team spoke to Shri Mengji about the incident, he said, "I am not in a frame of mind even to visit the spot where the charred remains of my house now lie. The loss amounts to a huge figure of nearly 40 lakhs (four million)." He added that apparently the intention of the mob was to burn the family members alive in the house to supposedly avenge a similar such incident regarding a Congress ex-MP in Gujarat. The members of the team also could feel the terrible tragedy and the emotional plight of Shri Mengji when they visited the spot, where nothing exists except charred remains and black soot where a majestic and imposing structure once stood.

* During the first two hours of the riots, a Shiv Sena activist, Chandrakant Mehetre was brutally hacked to death by a 100 strong mob of rioters armed with dangerous weapons, while trying to protect a Devi pandal at Kumtha Naka area from being desecrated. This incident also made the majority community lose its restraint.

* The initial wave of burning, looting and desecration of idols provoked rioters of the other community to mobilise themselves. Once reason leaves the mind, humanity is the first and last casualty. Rioting mobs came face to face at Madhla Maruti area and several other places in the city. This time Muslim shops and establishments were the focus of the fury of the mob that set fire and looted the shops that came their way. Notable amongst these incidents was the burning down of a three-storied building known as the Nadaf Building, which housed a mattress factory. An incident of private firing was also reported from the Nadaf building. Powerlooms in Muslim populated areas, All India Glass Shop at Navi Peth, Anas Hotel at Tilak Chowk and Timber Depots were burnt by rioters. The rioting mobs were uncontrollable and no amount of pleading could make them see reason. The economic loss of the Muslim trader community in Solapur City is incalculable. This pattern of mindless looting, burning and arson continued for the next three days. From the first day itself *i.e.* on Friday 11th October 2002, police imposed curfew on the Commissionerate area of Solapur. The

curfew lasted in phases until Dasara day. However the fury of the rioting mobs was not checked by the curfew and mobs went on a rampage in the city, even during the curfew period.

* On the second day of the riots, one Sanjay Alkunte, a youth who was sitting at a Pandal during the curfew period was allegedly beaten to death by two police Havildars by name Shaikh and Sayyad.

2.4 The Role of M. D. Shaikh in the recent riots:

* M. D. Shaikh, a self proclaimed journalist, is widely perceived to be the mastermind behind the riots. He had the ambition to be a predominant leader among the Muslim community. He had also formed the All India Muslim Vikas Parishad as a front organisation for his ulterior activities. With a history of 'yellow journalism' to his discredit, Shaikh was prone to giving inflammatory speeches, making unsubstantiated and reckless allegations and whipping up communal passions at every possible opportunity.

* M. D. Shaikh did not spare any incident in Solapur, however insignificant, to derive communal mileage from it. For instance, an incident of alleged eve-teasing in an area called Vidi Gharkul was blown out of proportion by Shaikh who delivered speeches inciting Muslims to take up arms against the Hindu community. He also used this opportunity to vent his anger against the local media who did not want to make a hero out of him and burnt several copies of local newspapers in a public square. As a direct result of his inflammatory speech, several auto rickshaws were burnt by an angry mob. This incident took place on October 4, 2002.

* Known for his communally sensitive writings, M. D. Shaikh's 'Bandhuprem' carried two inflammatory news items in its issues of October 5 and 6, 2002, which were sufficient enough to create panic in the minorities. The news item published in its edition dated 5th October, 2002 carried a headline 'An attempt to burn the houses of Muslims in Solapur on Gujarat pattern'. This was followed by another news item in its issue dated October 6, 2002 edition captioned 'Action under 'POT A' demanded against culprits throwing bombs in the Muslim locality of 'Vidi Gharkul'. These two news items were so provocative in their substance that any sensible member of the Muslim community was bound to come under the grip of paranoia. At the end of the news item appearing in October 6, 2002, issue of 'Bandhuprem' there was a clear indication that M. D. Shaikh was planning to organise 'Solapur bandh' very soon. However, the police department rather its Special Branch (Intelligence Unit) hardly took any notice of it, leave alone taking any follow-up action.

* In his Editorial of 'Bandhuprem' (October 10, 2002) M. D. Shaikh had called upon the people belonging to minority community to pull down their shutters to observe bandh on the following day, *i.e.* Friday 11th October, 2002, in protest against the alleged derogatory remarks made by a Baptist Minister in USA concerning Prophet Mohammad. Our team learnt that a night before the bandh, a right thinking Muslim clergy known as Bihari Maulana is believed to have painstakingly tried to explain to M. D. Shaikh, what Islam preaches as to how to tackle those who make a derogatory reference or two about the religion or Prophet Mohammad, but to no avail. Notwithstanding, M. D. Shaikh was unrelenting and finally went ahead with bandh.

* After the October 4 incident, M. D. Shaikh kept on stoking the communal fire by publishing incendiary editorials and making reckless and irresponsible statements time after time. He had organised a morcha in Solapur where he had made speeches threatening dire consequences and a fitting reply by the Muslim community. Even on the eve of the first day of riots, he made attempts to heat up the communal situation.

* The immediate provocation that was created by Shaikh was the call for 'bandh' given on 11th October to protest against the alleged derogatory remarks made by Jerry Falwell, a Baptist Minister during an interview on a news channel. What is significant to note is that M. D. Shaikh was not even aware of the correct name of the Baptist Minister and he referred to Jerry Falwell as the Pope in his newspaper report and also in his speech. In the light of the background of M. D. Shaikh, needless to say that this was

only an excuse to foment more communal trouble. Members of the team spoke to several Muslim leaders. during the course of their visit. They informed that in Solapur, normally, when the decision to give a call for bandh is taken, the local religious leaders, muftis, maulavis, etc., are taken into confidence and only then such a drastic step is taken. The unilateral decision of M. D. Shaikh to enforce 'bandh' shocked even the Muslim leaders, who felt that it was a breach of conventional rules laid down by leaders of the society.

2.5 The Role of police during the riots:

* Members of the team met several police officials to elicit their opinions about the role of the police during the riots. The police officials whom this team spoke to, candidly admitted that they did not expect such a largescale violence. Every year some Muslim organisations observe a bandh on 6th December as protest against the Babri demolition. This bandh is confined to the Muslim community only and no untoward incidents have occurred during such bandhs in the last 10 years. The police were therefore under the impression that this bandh would also pass off peacefully and hence they did not call for reinforcements or adopt preventive measures.

* There was a total lack of co-ordination amongst the city police, Collector of Solapur, Municipal Commissioner and the DSP Sola pur. Also there was no contingency / disaster plan, ever thought; despite the fragile atmosphere prevailing there since last few years. The police were absolutely not equipped with anti-riot machinery. The study team was told that no attempt was made to disperse the mob with the blow of siren fitted on the police jeep.

* Because of the failure of the police to contain the riots at two initial spots, viz. Asara Colony and Fool Bazar, the riot spread like a wild fire and the existing staff of the local police commissionerate was not sufficient to contain the same.

* It must be pointed out that reinforcements of SRPF (State Reserve Police Force) and RAF (Rapid Action Force) could not reach the riot-affected areas in time, which further escalated the already worse situation.

* There are allegations of bias on a particular police officer attached to the Jail Road Police Station in whose jurisdiction maximum rioting took place. The Deputy Chief Minister reportedly took cognizance of his behaviour himself during his visit. It was also reported that the State Guardian Minister Shri R. R. Patil himself expressed the view that the concerned officer ought to have been suspended. However, the fact is that the same officer continues to occupy his position even today. Members of this team met the concerned officer. He chose to remain silent and non-committal about several issues and gave evasive answers to many questions.

* At the same time it must be mentioned that despite the overall laxity by the police force, pitched battles between rival mobs in many communally sensitive areas of the city were averted only because of the sheer presence of the police force. There were many occasions when heavily armed, slogan shouting rabid mobs of rioters were face to face. The barricades and police firing were the only successful deterrents, without which the number of casualties would have gone up significantly.

* The combing operations during the post-riots phase resulted in unearthing a large cache of lethal weapons, which averted further escalation of the mob violence.

2.6 The Role of media during the riots:

* The national media, both print and audio visual, virtually shied away from covering this riot whereas the local media on the other hand played a positive role by objective reporting and lending a healing touch to the riot affected city as it limped back to normalcy.

* The local media played a positive and dynamic role in bringing about peace and restoring normalcy in Solapur. A balanced view of the incidents as they happened, was reflected in the dailies. Appeals to maintain peace and not to believe in rumours were made continuously by the media. Press photographers and correspondents braved stones and risked their lives to give an objective analysis of the riots without letting

their personal judgement cloud their professional duty. The role of the local media is indeed commendable as it acted as a catalyst in restoring normalcy.

* A special mention must be made of a unique local news channel called "Vrutadarshan". Normally it is seen that during communal riots, heavy censorship is imposed by the government on local channels; however this was the first instance of its kind where the government machinery in fact encouraged the news reporting of this channel, since it helped restore confidence and dispel rumours among the common people. Such was the role of the local media that it was a point of reference for the citizens of Solapur and also their only link to correct information. Members of the team spoke to the owner Shri Mendkudle and the Chief Correspondent of the channel, Shri Arun Ramtirthkar who said that they imposed self censorship on their own news and that they were working together to see that the fires of communal passion did not destroy their beloved city.

3. Conclusions:

The analysis of this team is that the attacks and desecration of idols, looting, etc., in the first 4-5 hours on the first day of rioting were a systematic plan designed to create a major communal conflagration in the city. This point can be further amplified by the following facts, all of which can be corroborated from independent sources:

(a) A large cache of weapons namely swords, saUoors, petrol bombs, tube lights, hockey sticks, etc., was recovered from Shastri Nagar during combing operations by the police after the riots.

(b) Similar weapons were also recovered from Urdu School No.7 in the Railway Lines area and one Taufiq Shaikh, brother of a Congress (I) corporator was arrested along with several externed and known anti-social persons.

(c) The family members of M. D. Shaikh, the alleged mastermind behind the riots were sent away from his house safely one day prior to the riots.

(d) Simultaneous attacks of well-armed, organised and aggressive mobs at different places at the same time within a span of 3-4 hours clearly negatives the theory of a 'spontaneous' reaction or riot. The objective behind such attacks was only to create terror and to confuse the police department. The rioters were largely successful in this design.

3.1 Human rights abuses during the riots:

* Human rights are many times a casualty in the friction between the forces of the law and rioting mobs. There is a tendency by non-governmental agencies, be it the media or other organisations, to sensationalise such incidents as violations of human rights. Members of this team are mindful of the repercussions such sensationalism has on the State agencies and are aware of the sobriety and seriousness of this issue. At the same time, truth and objectivity must never be sacrificed at the altar of 'political correctness' and no attempt is made to mince words where the team has observed an infraction of basic human rights.

* *Sanjay Alkunte Case:* The team visited the house of Sanjay Alkunte, a youth who was a victim of police brutality. He was allegedly beaten to death by the police on the second day of the riots. Sanjay Alkunte was sitting at a Oevi pandal when he was suddenly assaulted with sticks, by two police havildars. Eyewitnesses say that he was mercilessly flogged by two policemen allegedly without any provocation. The alleged perpetrators of this heinous crime, Shaikh and Sayyad have been named in the FIR. However they have neither been arrested nor any departmental action is initiated against them.

* In one case when a mob of rioters desecrated a Oevi idol and ransacked the house of Rekha Bande, a local Corporator, she desperately turned to the police for help. However, she was told to hush up the matter and to hide the desecrated idol somewhere. The police did not give her a copy of her FIR (First Information Report) about her house being broken into and looted; in fact it is doubtful whether the police actually recorded her complaint as FIR. It must be borne in mind that this was the

treatment meted out to an elected representative of the people.

* The team has observed that dubious FIRs are recorded by the police in many cases of arson, rioting and attempted murder. A few names of the offenders are recorded in the FIR and others are shown as 'absconding unknown accused'. Reliable sources informed members of the team that Police Stations are now picking up members of the majority community based on the lists of the members of the Navratri Mandals. They are being charged with serious offences and arrested en masse. These arrests are apparently to restore 'equity' between the arrests of members of both the communities. This is a gross abuse of human rights and it is such actions that erode the confidence of the common man in the law enforcement machinery.

3.2 Indifferent reporting by national media:

The leading newspapers at the State and National levels that had so promptly and diligently covered the riots in Gujarat, shunned this entire communal conflagration for reasons best known to them. The audio visual (electronic) media which had sent scores of correspondents to show 'live' coverage of the Gujarat riots were nowhere to be seen as houses and shops were being razed to the ground in Solapur. This 'selective' indifference of the media towards such a sensitive issue has left the common man in Solapur angry and hurt. Curiously enough, the national media which was very quick to put the Gujarat Government in the docks and hold it vicariously liable for the communal riots in that State, chose to remain silent on the responsibility of the Maharashtra State government vis-a-vis the Solapur riots. This Study Team is of the opinion that such irresponsible attitude of the national press, especially on such sensitive occasions exacerbates polarisation between the two communities.

3.4 Apathetic and un co-ordinated police force:

The police force was ill prepared, ill equipped and ill informed about the extent and intensity of the riots. The team observes that there was a complete failure of intelligence network of the police force. Despite being aware of the undercurrents of tension prevailing in the city in the wake of the inflammatory speeches of M. D. Shaikh, the police did not take any preventive measures to quell the likely trouble.

An understaffed police department could not bear the burden of controlling such a massive and simultaneous disturbance from all directions. During the first 4-5 hours of the first day of the rioting when systematic and preplanned attacks were made by the rioters at the same time in different areas of the city, the police failed to counter effectively.

The police machinery came in under an even greater strain when nearly nine ministers from various departments in the State government literally camped in Solapur on the second day of the riots *i.e.* on Saturday 12th October, 2002. This compounded the problem of the police as they were forced to accompany these ministers as a matter of protocol and thereby effectively reduced their strength on the field.

3.5 Discriminative policy of police:

The police force and State administration is being subjected to political interference, for petty vote bank politics. Police officers who spoke to this team said that the members of the Ulema Council and other Muslim religious leaders from outside Solapur were openly flouting curfew rules and r9aming about in the city, with impunity. There were incidents where these leaders publicly abused police officials. These incidents if tolerated are deleterious to the morale of the police force.

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abuse of human rights and it is such actions that erode the confidence of the common man in the law enforcement machinery. This sends off wrong signals to the majority community who feel victimised. Consequently, the communal situation in the area worsens further. It is the considered opinion of this team that objectivity and truth should not be sacrificed for political 'correctness' and the policy of minority appeasement.

3.6 Economic impact of the riots:

As a riot-scarred Solapur city limped back to normalcy, the economy of this largely industrial city is in shambles. Arson and torching of business establishments has caused enormous loss to the trader community of Solapur. The economic loss is estimated to be around Rs. 3.5 crores (35 million).

Solapur is a wholesale market for many edible items. It is also an important conduit for transport of food products from the neighbouring States of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh. The riots disrupted the functioning of these markets thereby causing an escalation in prices.

4. Recommendations of this team:

4.1 The State Human Rights Commission and the National Human Rights Commission have not even taken cognizance of these communal disturbances. This study team feels that in keeping with their 'interventionist' approach, these nodal human rights agencies should have sent their teams to study the situation in Solapur. Even now, these agencies can investigate the human rights abuses and secure justice for the victims of the riots.

4.2 It was observed by the team that basic rights of the riot victims, such as recording FIRs in cognizable offences, giving copies of FIRs to the informants, have also not been followed by the police. Informants of offences in many cases are not even aware of the progress of the police investigation in many cases. The relatives of the arrestees were also not informed about the arrests of their kith and kin. This is a very serious issue and the State Government must look into these matters immediately.

4.3 The death of Sanjay Alkunte must be investigated immediately. The two constables, who allegedly beat him to death, and who are named, must be immediately arrested for culpable homicide and must be suspended with immediate effect.

4.4 It is recommended that such allegations must be probed impartially and objectively and a strict vigil must be maintained to see that innocent and minor persons are not the victims of police harassment.

4.5 It is recommended that conclusive evidence must be collected against the mastermind behind these riots, M. D. Shaikh. It is observed that the State Government launches prosecutions against anti national offenders without sufficient evidence resulting in their being granted bail by the courts of law. This has a negative impact on the morale of the police, prosecution, and the common public. This mistake must be consciously avoided in the present case. The daily used by Mr. Shaikh must be banned immediately and the press must be proscribed.

4.6 Members of Navratri Pandals who have been mischievously booked under false charges must be released immediately to prevent an emotional backlash and bitterness amongst the majority community. At the same time, no effort must be spared to bring the real culprits to book, irrespective of their religion.

4.7 The intelligence branch of the local police department must be spruced up and a reliable network of informants must be developed so that the earliest rumble of trouble can be detected and dealt with an iron hand.

4.8 The State Government is setting a wrong precedent by awarding compensation to the kith & kin of those who got killed in police firing. This had happened in Malegaon riots and now the same path is followed, which is extremely incorrect. This will only encourage people who claim to be the relatives of the deceased in police firing, to lodge false claims.