

# Trajectory of Srikrishna Report

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Once again, the ruling coalition in Maharashtra is trying to project as if it wants to implement the recommendations of Srikrishna Commission report. The Maharashtra Home minister, the NCP member, R R Patil on one hand says that action is being taken and on the other he points out that it is difficult to find the witnesses as so much time has lapsed. It is alleged that the 'soft line' being adopted by NCP man may be due to the growing closeness between his party boss Sharad Pawar and Shiv Sena Chief Bal Thackeray, who should be the chief accused in the Mumbai violence. In response the worried Congress Chief Minister, Deshmukh, apprehending loss of Muslim support, has recently called the meeting of leaders from Muslim community to assure them that action will be taken on the Srikrishna report. Meanwhile the Shiv Sena supremo's heir Uddhav Thackeray, has warned that violence will erupt if cases related to 92-93 riots are opened up, while BJP leaders on a different track are warning that if cases are opened up they will benefit on electoral field as they benefited in Gujarat after the 'Maut ka Saudagar' (Merchant of Death) phrase was used by Sonia Gandhi in the election campaign.

Just to recapitulate, Srikrishna commission was appointed to investigate the communal carnage of 92-93. As soon as Shiv Sena-BJP govt. came to power (1994), it scrapped the Commission, which had to be revived on the initiative of Prime Minister Vajpayee under popular pressure. The Commission showed how the Hindutva parties, Shiv Sena in particular coordinated the whole violence, in which around one thousand people lost their lives and 86% of those killed belonged to Muslim minority. Commission meticulously documented the direct involvement of many leaders in instigating the violence and also participating in the same. It showed that Shiv sainiks took lead in organizing attacks on Muslims and their properties under the guidance of several leaders of Shiv Sena from the level of *shakha pramukh* to top brass. Cases of very minor nature were registered which were later dropped by Shiv Sena-BJP coalition which came to power in the elections held in 1995. Congress all through cowed down to the threat that violence will break out if Thackeray, the main accused is arrested.

Similarly the role of other leaders like Madhukar Sarpotdar, Ram Naik, Gopinath Munde and many others was documented by the Commission. Shiv Sena-BJP dropped the cases and the Congress alliance which came to power (1999) on the promise of implementing the findings of Shrikrishna Commission, did not bother to do anything in this direction. Madhukar Sarpotdar's case was deliberately put on the weak wicket, attention was not paid on the case details and neither was it pursued in a proper manner, with the result that he was untouched despite being a potential TADA accused and also for carrying unlicensed arms. The pattern is same in most of these, either cases are not registered, or registered under weak clauses, then dropped and not pursued. So a biased police machinery and opportunist political leadership supplement each other to ensure that justice is not done.

Similar points can be made about the police officers. Of one hundred police officers who had negative role, Commission named 31 for their lapses or

proactive involvement in the carnage. Joint Commissioner of Police R D Tyagi, Assistant Police inspector Deshmukh, and P I Lahane were found to be guilty of excessive and unnecessary firing resulting in death of nine Muslims in Suleiman Bakery incident. Tyagi was discharged in 2003 and others were exonerated and discharged. In case of Tyagi the matter was not pursued by the government. On the top of that many of them like R D Tyagi and Nikhil Kapse were promoted in the course of their careers. In another case the police blatantly opened fire in Hari Masjid, the Commission names the guilty, but the Govt. is clever enough to protect the culprits.

As the Commission submitted its report, the ruling Shiv Sena-BJP duo, dubbed the report as anti-Hindu and refused to implement it. Later one of the arguments proffered was that people have reconciled to the aftermath of the carnage and any implementation of the report will open up the wounds. With defeat of the Sena-BJP coalition by Congress coalition (1999), the hopes were revived that the report will be implemented, as this coalition came to power on the assurance that it will implement the report if it comes to power. During five years of its rule it did precious little to give justice to the riot victims and Srikrishna report was put in the deep freeze. The Congress coalition, true to its opportunist character, never bothered to give justice to the victims. It cleverly gave the impression of implementing it while comfortably sleeping over it.

Now the issue has become hot once again as the culprits of bomb-blasts, which followed the riots were given punishment one after another (2007). Most of the guilty have been punished. In the bomb blast nearly 300 people died. The convictions of culprits included many a life sentence and other punishments are dime a dozen. The state government has acted efficiently in these cases. Also showing if there is a will convictions do take place. In case of Mumbai carnage not many have been punished. In these riots over 1000 people died but not a single life imprisonment and no other convictions/punishments worth their name. The ghastly difference in the state governments dealing of riots and blast cases is glaring. Now the two set of legal systems are well in place, punish the guilty and all the suspects of the blasts, and avoid the prosecution of the culprits of the communal violence.

Irked by this social activists and community leaders have revived the campaign to get justice despite losing all the hope in the Congress coalition. The different attitude of the two parties of ruling Congress is just a make believe. While NCP has its political arithmetic in protecting the culprits, Congress leadership is spineless, lacks courage and principles to do anything serious in this direction.

This coalition has already completed one full term of ruling the state. Now the argument is being put forward that because of the lapse of time they are not able to find the witnesses. What was it doing when it was ruling in the previous term? In the previous Govt. another of NCP strong man Chagan Bhujabal was the home minister. He was honest to say that since implementation of the Commission will jeopardize Hindu votes, he will not do it. With great hesitation they did the drama of arresting Thackeray for few hours and the arrest too was made at the terms reportedly dictated by the Thackeray himself.

What stands out is that the political leadership is totally bereft of the principles and commitment to justice. The parties like Shiv Sena and BJP whose hands are

soaked with blood of riot victims, do ensure that first they lead the carnage as they did in Mumbai in 92-93 and in Gujarat in 2002, and then they polarize the communities along the religious lines and take pride in dividing the nation in the name of Hindu Nation. This leadership calculates that their involvement is a plus point for them as it will enhance their electoral power in polarized community.

For the Congress variety leadership, justice is a matter of political expediency, and calculation. If one can get votes by promising to implement the Commission report, do it! If the electoral calculations deserve keeping quiet on these issues it is better to keep quiet about it and sincerely pursue the cases of blasts which have followed the riots, which as a matter of fact are an aftermath of the riots. The honesty of punishing the guilty, upholding the law is gradually a virtue disappearing from the public arena. The state Congress leadership thinks it can fool the victims all the time. But the question is how long can Congress sustain policies which betray the victims, which are against the promises and oath which they take while grabbing the seat of power? □□□