

Communal Frenzy Again

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[Protest by Hindutva organisations against construction of a mosque in Rohini Sector 16, Delhi...Prayer by the MUSLIMS not allowed by hindutva forces on 26.6.2009 and those who were coming for the NAMAJ were beaten up and chased back. .. Hooligans marched in street to look out for muslims... Women also participated in large numbers..Timely intervention by the police.. 19 arrested... Appeal to maintain communal harmony by citizens groups.

According to reliable sources, a piece of land was allotted by the DDA to the 'Dargah Islamiya Intezamiya Committee' for a mosque in the area in North-West Delhi to cater to the longtime demand of the minority community. In fact people from Rohini have to either go to Badli or Avantika, if they have to offer Namaz on any day..

—Based on newspaper reports appearing in *Rashtriya Sahara, Rojnama Sahara* (27 June, 2009) and others]

Wahidbhai, who is nearing sixties, is feeling low since last few days.

A doctor by profession, he is suddenly contemplating shifting to his paternal home in Jama Masjid area from his own flat in Rohini. In fact it was only a few years ago that he had purchased this flat despite opposition from his other relatives.

To be very frank the recent developments in his own neighbourhood have left him completely devastated. He had not imagined in his wildest dreams that many of his own neighbours—who were regular visitors to his house as well as clinic—would have no qualms in raising slogans which stigmatised the whole minority community.

It was true that in this part of Delhi, people owning allegiance to his faith—who were not in significant numbers—had to travel a few kilometres just to offer Namaz on special occasions. And during the time of *Ramzan* when people fasted for the whole day, it became further difficult to do so. Sometime back the government had agreed to the proposal put forward by a local organisation for a mosque and had granted a piece of land in the area. Many community members in the area had contributed wholeheartedly and a token amount was deposited with the government in lieu of the piece of land.

Wahidbhai shivers to think if the police had not shown enough alertness what could have happened on the day when people had gathered there to offer Namaz. (Friday, 26th June 2009) It was a mere coincidence that he was away on that day and had gone to meet his relatives in the other part of the city. Although he had noticed the manner in which Hindutva forces had become hyperactive supposedly to stop the construction of the mosque, it was beyond his comprehension that they would resort to violence. He was also told that fanatic elements also attacked a man in his hair cutting saloon. And the most tragic part of the whole episode was that many youth from a poor neighbourhood which housed many victims of the tragic 1984 riots were also to be seen in the melee. The only silver lining to the otherwise disturbing situation was the manner in which few ordinary wo/men who stood the ground and resisted the lumpens who were attacking innocents and talked of unity of all religions.

As of now there is calm in the area but it seems deceptive. Police is vigilant and is taking extra precaution but mischievous forces may again become active to keep the tensions high. Nobody can deny that they are more keen to keep the pot boiling. It was no coincidence that a temple 'came up' suddenly one night on a

piece of government land, near the mosque itself. And a 'bhandara' was also organised at this temple supposedly to mobilise people. This temple was in addition to many other illegally constructed temples which have come up in recent times in the area (Rohini Sector 15, 16, 17 and others) by encroaching public land. Few such temples have even proved to be moneyspinners for their promoters.

For outsiders the manner in which communal forces have become active in a middle class dominated area of Delhi may sound incomprehensible. But close watchers of the situation know the desperation in the ranks of the pro-Hindutva forces when the results to the elections to the parliament were out. To the surprise of all, this area which used to be a stronghold of the saffrons, registered more votes to the Congress candidate vis-a-vis the saffrons. And thus apart from the national context where the saffrons faced humiliating defeat, the sense of vengeance among them had an added local context.

However can it be said that this is for the first time that Delhi has witnessed such majoritarian attempts to deny even the constitutionally granted right to freedom of religion. It was only last year that a church in Delhi was attacked by the Hindu Right (*Delhi church attacked 2 weeks ago, cops mum, Times of India, 4th Oct 2008*).

New Delhi : The fanatical Hindu mobs have struck in the Capital. And the police has kept it under wraps. A good fortnight ago, a mob attacked a handful of Christian families at the Peeragarhi Relief Camp and demolished the frontal portion of the Christian prayer hall in the camp.

This camp in west Delhi is barely 15 km from Parliament House. To this day, this group of Christians is holding weekly mass with police protection. The families say they are living in constant fear of local miscreants allegedly owing allegiance to "some religious organisations" who accuse them of carrying out "forced conversions" and threaten to "take away" their daughters unless they "mended their ways."

The mob had struck on September 16. Despite repeated attempts, the community has not managed to get a FIR registered for what they call "vandalism" and police describe as "regular land dispute".

Ezik Malik, the priest-in-charge of the prayer hall says that a day before the actual demolition, he had got a call from an unidentified caller saying that the roof of the hall had collapsed.

"We promptly went to rebuild it when suddenly this mob of 500 reached the place carrying saffron flags and sticks. They started pelting stones that left six people injured. There were anti-Christian slogans and then they demolished part of the hall. Policemen just looked on. On hindsight I realised that they had damaged the roof to create a situation that could later be used as an excuse for unrest." He added that despite repeated attempts the local police station refused to lodge a FIR but gave the community protection.

...DCP (west) Sharad Aggarwal denies any religious angle in the unrest. "It was entirely a land dispute," he claimed. "The Christians were trying to extend the prayer hall beyond the boundary wall which is when locals objected. There was an agitation but everything was under control because

we were right there when it happened. There was no demolition and we have given them police protection.”

The MCD, which is the sole body that can carry out demolitions, is not aware of any unauthorised construction here. MCD commissioner K S Mehra said he was unaware of the incident. A MCD spokesman, however, said that the police or anyone else is not authorised to carry out demolitions. “We carry them out and ask for police protection,” he said.

A similar piece of news was reported from Dilshad Garden, Delhi when thirty Hindutva extremists had disrupted the prayer service of St. Sebastian Church on February 23, 2008 in Dilshad Garden, Delhi. Fr. Antony William, the priest of the church had told Christian Legal Association that they had prior information that local goons might attack the church, and had requested police protection for the Sunday worship service. However, the attack came after the worship service concluded and the constable had left the premises. The Hindutva extremists, who had been hiding in a nearby temple, came to the church and started shouting anti-Christian slogans and disrupted the prayer service. The miscreants resorted to stone pelting at the vehicles belonging to the congregation members. Nobody was injured in this incident. The concerned police station was duly informed and a case was registered under Section 427 of the Indian Penal Code.

It need be noted that the day after the incident in Rohini, many citizens and political groups in the area organised a meeting to take stock of the situation and decide an appropriate response to the machinations of these anti-human forces. They have already sent a memorandum to the higher authorities - signed by many residents of the area as well as few resident welfare associations - communicating to them that they do not approve of such actions by the fanatic forces to vitiate the atmosphere. They have also demanded that administration maintains extra vigilance so that these mischievous forces are not allowed to raise their head again.

The said memorandum can also be said to be an open appeal to all people/formations yearning for secularism and democracy..

Is not it high time to understand that political defeat of an idea like Hindutva in an election does not necessarily mean its social defeat. And the recent developments in Rohini suggest that such forces can utilise every other opportunity to further polarise the situation and try to capitalise it politically.

One still remembers the famous poem by the legendary poet Gorakh Pandey *‘Is saal Danga bahut hua, bahut hui hai khoon kee baarish, agale saal acchi hogi fasal matdanki’* (This year there were many riots, much blood got spilled, next year it would reflect in voting). □□□