

**Communal tension in Siddipet:
A matter of serious concern**

- Dr.A.Suneetha, Mr.M.A.Moid and Dr. P. H. Mohammed

The positioning of Muslim question in the Telangana movement has been a matter of concern for many. Fears about the rise of Hindu right wing forces in Telangana have been voiced, even as many Muslim organizations extended their whole-hearted support for the demand of a Telangana state. In this context, those of us who believe in the democratic potential of Telangana movement have been disturbed by reports of small incidents of communal tension in many Muslim concentrated towns, including Hyderabad (March 2010) – Karimnagar (August 2010, March 2011), Tandur (Feb 2011) and Miryalaguda (July 2011) - most recently in Siddipet on 9th October 2011. After visiting Siddipet and speaking to the Muslim community there, we think that the Muslim fears about security are not untrue and that the democratic forces supporting the demand of Telangana statehood need to address their concerns urgently. We visited Siddipet (Medak district) on 12th October 2011. Most reports of the event that appeared in Telugu and Urdu newspapers were vague. Apart from getting the details of actual event we were keen to understand how this event has been perceived by the Muslim communities and the rest. We met the victimized petty traders, shop owners, journalists, local activists and members of Tanzeem-e-masjid. The following report gives our assessment of the situation that is developing in this part of the region.

The Event

Siddipet is a fast growing town in Medak district, at a distance of 100 km from Hyderabad and is known as the poultry capital of South India. It boasts of several rice mills and is also an important educational centre in the district. It has 22% Muslim population, majority of who live in six colonies – Khaderpura, Sajidpura, Murshidgadda, Nasarpura, Baraimam and Charwadan. Among the 32 municipal councilors, there are five Muslim councilors, all of who belong to TRS or Congress. The lone MIM councilor is a Hindu, Jakkula Kavita. The town falls in Mr.Harish Rao's (TRS) constituency. The MLC of the town is Mr.Farooq Hussain from Congress. The town president of TRS is a Muslim councilor, Nayyar patel. The town has not witnessed any serious communal tension in the last two decades.

Sunday's events began with Muslim *namazees* spotting neatly shredded pages of the holy Quran at around 6.00 AM (Rastriya Sahaara of 10th October carried the photos). On the previous evening a Dasara procession had passed by the same route. Soon, a few hundred Muslims gathered at the town centre to stage a dharna. They demanded that the culprits be immediately brought to book and the police on duty the previous night be suspended. The protest continued for three hours. During this time, according to eye witnesses, the chairperson of *Tanzeem-ul-masajid* (Mr.M.A.Saleem), MLC of the town (Mr.Farooq Hussain of Congress) and Akther patel (from TRS) tried their best to control the agitated young people.

Despite this, a few Muslim boys (all below age of 20) threw stones at a few shops in the locality, broke a few hoardings on the street and disrupted the business in the nearby rythubazaar where a few men and women vendors were beaten up. A few shops selling mutton (3) and sweets (2) were also vandalized. The day's stock was destroyed in the process. One sweet shop owner showed us the broken showcase and wasted product. The vegetable vendors and the sweet shop owner said, "If they had asked us to close the shop, we would have. But they came without a warning". Though we could

not get an exact estimate of the loss, it would run into a couple of lakhs or more. The elders of *Tanzeem-ul-masajid* were quite distressed about this turn of events. They said, “The boys did not listen to us, but no person above 20 was involved in that incident. It is also not true that women were beaten”.

The nearly sixty strong journalists from print and visual media in Siddipet (of which five Muslims belong to the Urdu press) initially covered the event. The Muslims were also pleased at the attention by the media but started becoming uncomfortable once they realized that the journalists are particularly focusing on taking pictures of bearded and kurta-pajama wearing Muslim boys indulging in stone-pelting. Since the same pictures could be used by police in arresting or harassing them, the boys asked the journalists to stop. When this request was not heeded the already agitated boys beat a senior journalist and threatened few others. The offended journalists decided to boycott the coverage. In the scuffle between the police and the boys, Md.Jani (reporter of Rastriya Sahara) also received a few blows.

The angered journalists stopped coverage of incident and decided to meet at the local Press club. They also decided to take out a rally to demand that those who beat them should be brought to book. This decision was taken despite the apology that the Muslim elders offered. However, as one eyewitness said, the gathering of Muslims mistook the rally of the journalists to be a procession of ‘Hindus’. When the agitated boys grew restive, the CRPF platoon lathi-charged them injuring 28 boys. Among them 8-10 sustained head injuries and the Muslim gathering dispersed.

As soon as the Muslim gathering dispersed around 10.30 AM, a ‘Hindu’ procession marched towards the town centre from Bharathnagar. This crowd destroyed all the Muslim fruit vendors’ shops, chicken centres and the new Grand hotel on its way, picking and choosing the Muslim owned/run shops. In all 13 fruit vendors’ pavement shops, located outside rythubazaar, were destroyed. The women vegetable vendors whose produce was destroyed in the morning participated in this vandalism. The fruit vendors incurred a loss of Rs.6,50,000. Two chicken shops were vandalized, each of which incurred a loss of around Rs.25,000. The Grand hotel incurred a loss of more than a lakh. Thereafter, the Hindu crowd was lathi-charged and dispersed. Three people sustained injuries.

At 4.00 PM Siddipet MLA Mr.Harish Rao called for a meeting of Peace committee where the elders from both communities were invited. While the ‘Hindu’ representatives spoke without any interruption, the speech of the Muslim representatives was not allowed to continue. The peace committee then met at the Collector’s office next day in small number and sought to maintain peace in the town. The police clamped S144 and also booked several cases of arson against the agitators.

The rythu bazaar vendors, assured of police protection, have come back to sell their produce. We could also see that the Hindu shop owners have resumed their business. Grand hotel is also back to business. The Muslim fruit vendors and hawkers have not been able to resume their business, however. They fruit vendors were prevented from re-opening the chawl-shops by the police, till yesterday i.e., 16th October. All the Muslim hawkers who make a living on the Subhash road have also been advised by the police to keep off the road ‘to avoid escalation of tension’.

Is it a conspiracy?

The whole episode took place in a very short time, making it look like a planned and coordinated activity, giving rise to ‘conspiracy theories’. The Hindus put the blame on the Congress and MIM accusing them of diverting the attention from the Telengana Movement. The Muslims accuse the BJP of trying to increase its influence by polarizing people and thereby increasing pressure on Muslims to submit on different fronts. But, we think that several underlying tensions played out in this event: the tussle between the Hindu shop-owners and Muslim hawkers on the main market street, Subhash road;

the dispute over land on which Muslim fruit vendors' shops stand outside the rythu bazaar; the Muslim discomfort about growing presence of Hindutva organizations in the town and Hinduization of the public space.

On the day of our visit, three days after the disturbance, the hawkers could not be found on Subhash Road. On inquiry it was found that the shop owners are mostly Hindu and hawkers, mostly Muslim. These hawkers had become a source of irritation to the shop owners since they occupy the front spaces of their shops resulting in traffic problems and loss of customers. They had complained to the authorities, arguing that the government should give them the priority as they were tax payers, by removing these hawkers. The government's inaction had already made the Hindu traders angry. We were informed that these traders became sympathetic supporters of Hindu organization which started taking up their cause and raising voice for them. When we spoke the shop-owners on 12th, they sounded quite pleased that the hawkers have been removed from the scene.

It was reported that Badam Bal reddy of BJP on his visit to Siddipet appealed to the Hindus that they should stop buying from Muslim shops (since muslims also don't buy sweets from Pulla Reddy sweets in Hyderabad, supposed to be owned by a staunch VHP supporter) and that they should not work for Muslims. Another Hindu leader is reported to be encouraging Hindu hawkers to settle down in the place of Muslim hawkers on Subhash Road. Efforts are being made, it is feared, to use this disturbance make main business areas 'free' from Muslim hawkers and small traders. The government's inaction on this issue has let the ground open for the Hindutva activists, who have taken up the cause of the shop-owners. There is a likelihood that these tensions may become permanent sources of tension/conflict between the communities.

Thirdly, there has been a Hinduization of public spaces. Celebration of Dasara, a very popular festival in Telangana, has become much more public – with installation of idols of Durga and immersion related processions at the end of nine day festival. Though it started on a low key in Siddipet three to four years ago, it reached a high this year. Several big idols were put up at many places and noisy processions took place till late in the night. Such processions and celebrations, as local Muslims suspected, have become sources of trouble and disturbance.

More importantly, it is the failure of political leadership which is more disturbing in this event. During the dharna by the Muslims, the MLC and two Muslim councilors belonging to TRS tried to pacify the protestors, especially the youth, by requesting them not to become violent. The young protestors decided to observe a bandh and left the dharna to enforce it. The young boys argued that only a bandh can make every body know about the seriousness of their feelings. Similarly, the constitution of the Peace Committee also ran into rough weather, this time, due to the intransigence of the self-styled representatives of Hindus. At this meeting, called by the MLA and MLC, around twenty Muslims and nearly a hundred Hindus turned up. The Hindus were allowed to speak first and present their views and complaints. When it was the turn of the Muslim leader to speak, the Hindu group started shouting Jaisree ram and did not stop despite the MLA's request. Becoming aggressive and abusive, they started calling the MLA and the MLC names. One person even lifted a chair to attack the MLC. Out of frustration, we were told that the MLA cancelled the meeting and left the place. It appears that the political leaders of Hindu and Muslim communities could not contain the fury of the mob.

Finally, there is a (false) 'commonsense' regarding 'Muslims as trouble-makers' which seems to have been mobilized to draw the 'Hindu community' together, before, during and after the disturbance. The popular narrative in the town (and elsewhere) is that Muslims themselves desecrated their Holy Quran (who else will have access to the book, people ask?); that the MLC and the two Muslim councilors (one of whom was invited by the police and the other was at Banswada on that day) instigated the Muslim mob; that the Muslims damaged their own shops; that the Muslim journalists sided with their community and finally, that Muslims have indulged in this riot on the instigation of MIM, to taint the

Telangana movement! As a result, we found that Muslims were being blamed disproportionately for creating tension, despite the heavy loss that they consequently suffered.

There is an uncomprehending disbelief even among the 'progressive sections' about Muslim distress regarding the desecration of holy Quran. Due to this incomprehension, the aggression of the Hindu mob is being understood as 'natural and fair'. Media is no exception to this 'balance' narrative. Muslim boys' venting of anger on journalists has also turned the largely Telugu media unsympathetic towards the community. As such, except the Urdu news papers, many Telugu news papers carried the news about the attack on journalists, rather than that of the desecration of the Holy Quran, causing resentment among the Muslims about the indifference to their actual grievance. The overwhelming tilt against the Muslims has prevented even the Urdu media journalists (except Rastriya Sahara) from filing any report about the damage to Muslim establishments and shops. No wonder that the Muslims highlighted the one sidedness, distortions, biases or indifference by the Telugu press more than that of the police, "Why couldn't the Telugu journalists show the same tolerance towards the Muslim boys that they showed during the Million March on the Tank Bund?" One may not agree with the comparison, but cannot deny that the reporters' sympathy and agreement with the genuineness of the grievance shapes their conduct vis-à-vis the protestors. (Ironically, two sets of rallies were reported in the local press - by Muslims and journalists!)

Is it an isolated incident?

We found Muslims in a state of fear and the Hindus in a state of aggressive normalcy. We also found that the media clampdown of the issue has prevented the Muslims from presenting details of their loss and seeking compensation. The injured Muslim boys are too scared to be named or seek compensation, while the situation is not so for the Hindus. Even as the team was welcomed by the Muslims who sought to explain the sequence of events and their absolute non-interest in breaking the law, we were accosted by one Mr. Balarajesham (of local Hindu Vaahini), a member of Peace Committee, who, claiming to be a representative of Hindus, threatened us. Given the prevailing scenario, we think that the analysis of these incidents in terms of balance - apportioning equal blame on both communities - may make policing easy. But it would not help us in understanding what is happening to majority-minority relations or in addressing the concerns of the Muslim communities that are spread across villages and towns of Telangana.

Certain issues need to be immediately addressed. The Muslim street vendors, fruit vendors and others who incurred losses should be immediately allowed to resume their business, as Hindu vendors have been allowed to do. Compensation process for the victims of both the communities should be expedited. Muslims should be given assurance that the case of Quran desecration will be investigated. There should be increased vigilance in view of impending yatra of L.K. Advani on 19th to Siddipet.

More importantly, we suspect that Siddipet incident is not an isolated one. As we mentioned above, several instances of communal tension have come to the fore in different Muslim concentrated towns, over the last two years. At Siddipet, we were also informed that Muslim families of Nangunur, Velkatur (Nangunur mandal), Pullur and Gangapur (Chinnakodur mandal) (all in Medak district) have been harassed, threatened and beaten up by people from Hindutva outfits such as Hindu Vaahini to ABVP. In fact, the imam of Velkatur was beaten on Sunday night, right after the Siddipet disturbance. At Gangapur, nearly eight months ago, a Hindu mob attacked a Muslim house. Muslim community elders in Siddipet chose not to expose such incidents. Even as they are concerned about the safety of Muslim families scattered in villages, they feel hemmed in by the situation where any discussion of such events would brand them as anti-Telangana. The fact that no political leader of significance (apart from Mr. Balala of MIM) visited them has reinforced their sense of alienation. While accepting the mistakes of the Muslim boys, they state that it is the Muslim stakes in Telangana movement which is preventing them from speaking out against these small and big incidents that are occurring in and

around Siddipet. In the communally vitiated atmosphere, they feel that acts of desecration of holy symbols of their community would not be investigated properly. They also object to the blame game where the entire community is being blamed, given the fact the elders, MLC and the councilors tried their best to control the young boys.

Their anxiety about the changing dynamic of majority-minority relations in the context of the ongoing Telangana movement cannot be dismissed or can be described as the handiwork of mischievous anti-Telangana forces. The legitimacy gained by Bharatiya Janata Party through the participation in the movement is enabling the Hindutva forces to re-emerge and revive an anti-Muslim rhetoric in towns that did not witness communal tension in recent history. We need to pause and ask what the BJP's vision of Telangana is. In the three states that it created, one has been written away to the corporate greed (Chattisgarh) completely trampling over the tribal interests; one is led by the mining mafia, mercilessly throwing aside the decades long tribal leadership (Sibu Soren in Jharkhand) and one is where the pharmaceutical lobby is slowly getting crowned (Uttarakhand). Which of these opportunistic visions is in store for Telangana? Or are these incidents simply a gift that Advani's rath yatra is bestowing upon Telangana, giving us a hint of what is going to come?

It is also quite possible, as some of the anti-MIM Telanganaites in Siddipet suspect that MIM would be interested in this kind of communal polarization, given its neutral stand on Telangana and may foster these tensions to stall the formation of Telangana in its current form. In such a scenario, we think that it is all the more necessary or even imperative on the left and democratic forces in the Telangana movement to initiate a discussion with Telangana Muslim groups and the MIM on these issues as well as on Telangana statehood, despite the in-commensurable differences one may have with the latter. One needs to recognize that on the issues of security of Muslims in rural areas, there would not be any differences among the Telangana Muslim groups and the MIM. It is necessary to initiate a public-political dialogue on the status of Muslims in Telangana with the MIM at this juncture, given that it is the only Muslim political party with significant political presence even in the districts. Such a dialogue seems unavoidable to foster an inclusive Telangana.

We strongly urge the democratic organizations to take this emerging pattern of communal tension in Telangana as seriously as the violations of human rights of Telangana protesters by the state. We also feel that concerted efforts should be made by the activists to reach out to the Muslim communities in all the areas affected by communal tension, including Siddipet. There is a need to acknowledge their contribution and address their grievances more robustly. It is necessary to do so at this moment so that the democratic appeal of the movement does not get vitiated or directed against the minorities in the region.

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List of people that we met: Mr.M.A.Saleem, Chairperson, *Tanzeem-ul-masajid*; Mr.Aijaz Hafeez, ex-chairperson, CPI, member of the Peace Committee; Mr. Habeeb Saab (Reporter, Ethemad); Mr.Kaleem-ul-Rahman (Reporter, Siasat); Mr. Javed, proprietor, New Grand Hotel; Mr.Anwar, MIM; Mr. Tirupathi Reddy, APTF and HRF; Mr. Raghu, Reporter, Saakshi; Mr. Rangacharya, Reporter, HMTV; Mr. Kondal Reddy, CCC; Hindu owner of the Rajasthani Sweet House, Subhash Road; Hindu shop owners on Subhash Road; Hindu vegetable vendors (4) and watchmen (2) of Rythu bazaar; Muslim fruit vendors near the Rythubazaar; Mr. Md. Jani (Reporter, Rastriya Sahara)

New arrivals in English- subject wise

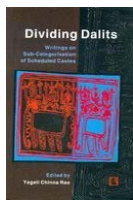


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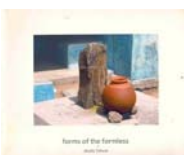


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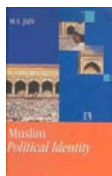


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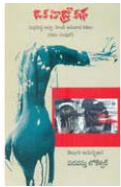


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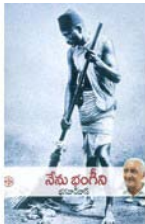


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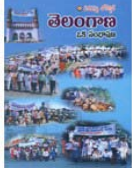
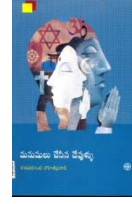


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Duration: 25min.

Abstract: This film is an attempt to question values associated with dowry. The film traces the experiences of two women - one who submits to the pressures of the system and the other, who attempts to overcome them

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Asian Journal of Women's studies

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THE PROBLEM

Posed by Amit Kaushik, Chief Operating Officer and MD-designate, Educomp Infrastructure and Schools Management, Gurgaon, and Vimala Ramachandran, Education Resources Unit (ERU), Delhi

PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Amit Kaushik, former civil servant and Director, Elementary Education, Ministry of HRD, Government

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Sridhar Rajagopalan, Managing Director, Educational Initiatives; set up the Eklavya Institute of Teacher Education, Ahmedabad

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Vimala Ramachandran, Education Resources Unit, Delhi

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Geeta Gandhi Kingdon, Chair of Education Economics and International Development Institute of Education, University of London

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Shailaja Fennell, Lecturer in Development Studies, University of Cambridge; and Fellow of Jesus College, Cambridge

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Devesh Kapur, Director, Center for the Advanced Study of India, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and Madhav Khosla, doctoral candidate, Harvard University, Cambridge

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