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# Police Firing

## at Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar

a joint fact-finding report

17 th July 1997

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### Terms of Reference :

1. To enquire into the State Reserve Police firing on 11<sup>th</sup> July, 1997 which killed 10, and injuring over 20 at Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar, Ghatkopar (East), Mumbai; on people gathered to protest against the desecration of the Ambedkar statue.
2. To ascertain and record facts about the killings and injuries following the State Reserve Police firing on protesters at Ramabai and other parts of the city.
3. To review the state's response to the incidents and the people's response.
4. To record the context (economic, social, cultural and political) that makes the desecration of the statue a crime against dalits.

### The fact finding team :

The fact finding team consisted of Mr. Edward Rodrigues, Adv. Suresh Rajeshwar, Mr. George Jose, Mr. Mahesh Gawaskar, Ms. Nivedita Rao, Ms. Rochelle Pinto - members of CPDR; Mr. Antony Samy, Ms. Sanobar Keshwaar and Mr. Vinod Shetty - members of LHS.

The team visited the area on the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> of July 1997 and met the wounded at the Rajawadi Hospital on the 13<sup>th</sup> of July.

## Introduction

Once again the dalits of Bombay have been the victims of a brutal firing by the State Reserve Police. The residents of Ramabai colony ask how many times the statues of Ambedkar are to be desecrated, how many times are the dalits to rise up in protest and become victims of police firing in a seemingly unvarying cycle.

This is not the first time and nor will it be the last that a statue of Ambedkar has been desecrated. According to Home Minister Gopinath Munde, such acts of desecration of various statues have happened more than 70 times in the past ten years in Maharashtra. In similar instances in the past, the dalits have responded with a groundswell of anger and violence towards those whom they consider the culprits of such desecration. The singular difference between the present incident and those of the past is that this time not only were the dalits outraged by the insult, but they must also come to terms with ten members of their community dead and over 20 wounded in the police firing and lathi charge that followed the desecration. The immediate response of the dalits was to call a bandh not only in Bombay but in the whole of Maharashtra. Throughout the State, dalit leaders and members of the dalit community questioned the use of brute force by the police machinery. It would appear that the act of desecration was neither an arbitrary act of vandalism nor an act of dissenting individuals from within the community. Rather, as the facts unfurl, it would seem more and more clear that this act against the dalits was a political one, aimed at engineering a crisis which should be seen against the backdrop of the larger politics of Maharashtra.

In this report, we shall attempt to show that the State Reserve Police firing on that fatal day of July 11<sup>th</sup>, was neither a mistake nor an overreaction, but rather a trend that is now becoming more and more evident in the way the police machinery responds to protests by democratic groups and more specifically, minority and marginalised groups.

This report will try to show that not only is the police version of the incident of firing and its cause a complete fabrication of untruths, but also how the State with the help of the police have helped to legitimise an impression, within the public, through the media, that the murder of ten dalits was justified in the larger interest of the dalit community and Bombay society at large.

From the evidence we have collected, we want to state in no uncertain terms that :

1. The entire theory of the LPG tanker is a fabrication.
2. The burning of the private luxury bus took place *after* the police firing.
3. That from their own admission, the police admit to the fact that they observed no rules of procedure when firing on civilian population is concerned. Rather, they themselves admit that their aim was to 'shoot to kill' the residents of Ramabai without any prior warning.
4. That a description of those dead and the position where they died clearly shows that they were residents going about their daily routine or going to work and were shot at random.

### A brief overview of Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar

Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar is situated in North-East Bombay, off Ghatkopar, adjoining the Eastern Express Highway. The colony is comprised of dalits and sections of other communities. It is however predominantly a dalit colony with a population of around one lakh. Most of them are neo-buddhist and have availed of education. The occupation of the residents of this colony is essentially to do with the service sector in Bombay. Many of them are employed in the government service. Besides, a number of them own their own small businesses and many of them work as skilled and unskilled labourers. The colony presents an image of being economically better off than other slums of Bombay. Nonetheless it must be noted that there is large scale unemployment within this colony. The entire colony is made up of a series of baithak chawls and has been in existence for more than thirty years. The colony has a voting population of around 30,000 voters and in the past, the elected representatives for this colony came either from the Republican Party of India or the Congress. In the last municipal elections, the Congress corporator, Namdeo Ubale won by a narrow margin of about 300 votes from his rival Shiv Sena candidate, Subhash Jadhav. The Republican Party of India candidates in this colony lost out because of their divided vote bank, and the gains of this division went to the Shiv Sena candidate. The entry of the Shiv Sena into this colony is however a recent phenomena. A still more recent development of the past few months is the entry of the Akhil Bharatiya Sena a political outfit headed by Arun Gawli. It is of equal importance to note that in the recent past, some Republican Party of India activists have also joined the BJP. The extent of local support for the Akhil Bharatiya Sena is yet unknown. It is against this background that one must place the instance of desecration that took place on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1997.

## **I: The incident - the police version as published in the press**

Given the intensity of the violence and anger that was evoked among the residents of Ramabai Nagar resulting from the desecration of the statue and the killing of ten members of their community, the news of the incident was carried by every national and local daily in the country, giving wide publicity to the police version of the firing.

What we are reproducing below is a summary of what the newspaper reports have provided as the police version of what happened on that fatal day. Despite the fact that sections of the press have gone beyond the call of duty to inform and began prejudicing the content of information, we believe that it is possible to construct a fairly authentic version of what the police told the press regarding the desecration and the firing, both on the 11<sup>th</sup> as well as in the days that followed.

The following quotes give the consistent police version that had appeared in various sections of the press.

The Joint Commissioner of Police T.K. Choudhury, told Mid-day on the 14<sup>th</sup>, "The State Reserve Police reached the scene first because they are trained for these situations. The local police are not trained this way."

"Even a constable can order firing or fire to save life and property when there is a threat of arson or looting. We resort to firing only when there is threat to life and property."

"The firing started when few people set a luxury bus standing near Ramabai colony on fire and then moved towards the two LPG tankers in front to set them on fire as well."

"If our intention was to kill whosoever was there, how come our bullets did not hit any of the passengers who were being moved out of the bus? Our .303 bore bullets can pass through the bone and hit the people behind. That is why one woman was shot. It was an accident."

"A mob of 10-15 people who were instigated to set the tankers afire. The State Reserve Police Force fired only when they moved towards the tankers."

"The police fired only at those who were trying to set the tankers on fire. If they had fired at the mob, then the casualties could have been greater."

"If any person was shot below the waist, he could have still gone ahead and torched the tankers. Many of the rioters were bent over and not standing straight, which resulted in bullet injuries to the upper parts of their bodies."

"We need more rigid punishment for people involved in desecration of statues. The punishment at present is a minimum of 6 months imprisonment."

"The investigation is in progress. We know four culprits are hiding in the colony and we are keeping a watch on them. Right now we are just trying to gather evidence. We cannot take action unless our investigation is complete but we can say that this was not by anyone who hates Ambedkar, but by people who wanted to create a problem."

The additional commissioner R K Gadge told Indian Express on 11<sup>th</sup> of July 1997, "State Reserve Police patrol resorted to firing because an angry mob of about 500 strong miscreants were about to set fire to 3 trucks which were laden with lpg cylinders."

"the protesters were warned for about 10 minutes not to approach the trucks before opening fire."

"had the miscreants succeeded in setting the tankers afire, all colonies in the 4 km radius would have been devastated by impact of the blast. The mob was equipped with petrol cans."

The police version has been endorsed in toto by the chief minister and the home minister.

### a. The main highlights of the police version

It would appear from the above comments made by the joint commissioner of police to the press that the incident of firing took place only when the police were firmly convinced that the mob that set the bus ablaze would do the same to the tankers that were behind the bus. A few important facts of this police version need to be highlighted at this point.

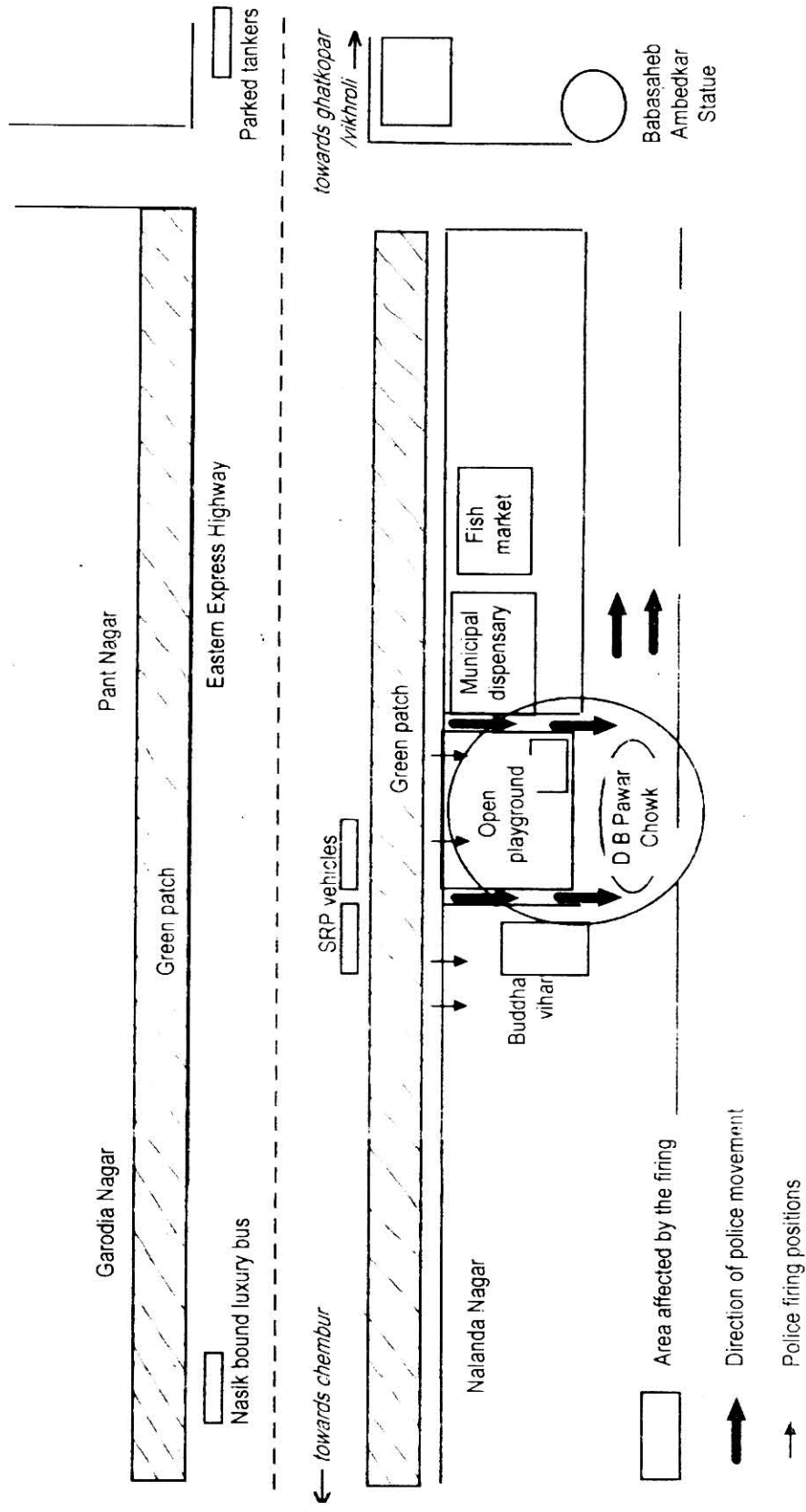
1. That the police believe that the mob was going to set the tankers ablaze.
2. That the police shot at those whom they considered to be those miscreants who were going to set the tankers ablaze.
3. That the police in the interview admit that they were in fact shooting to kill, since they believed that just injuring these above miscreants might not prevent them from carrying out the supposed arson.
4. That according to the police with regard to timing, they only began firing when they saw that a luxury bus had been set ablaze.
5. That according to the police's own submission, they fired 50 rounds at the miscreants, and that if they were actually firing at the mob, the death toll and injuries would have been much higher.
6. That according to the police, blame has already been fixed on four culprits who are 'hiding' in the colony and sections of the press have named these four, saying that they have been arrested, and that all four are local Republican Party of India and Congress leaders from within the colony.
7. Further, according to the State government, as reported in the same sections of the press, the incident of desecration is the combined work of the Congress, with the help of local Republican Party of India and Akhil Bharatiya Sena activists.

## **II: The peoples' version**

If one must undo the sets of misrepresentations and fabrications that the police version offers us, it is necessary not only to get a correct sequence of the police firing and how it happened, but also to be able to see this in a graphic representation. This would make it possible to understand the distances between different places as well as the specific site of firing that took place on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July.

It is our contention that with both these, i.e., the graphic representation of the firing and the sequence of events in the way they took place, we would be able to establish beyond a shadow of doubt that not only is the police version of the firing a fabrication, but also a desperate attempt to justify the brutal killing of ten people by the State Reserve Police.

a. A graphic representation of the firing and where it occurred.



b. The sequence of events to do with the police firing.

From available evidence that the local people provide, it is clear that the act of desecrating the statue took place between 5 a.m. and 6 a.m. on the morning of 11<sup>th</sup> July. One of the local residents Mr. Rajendra Dhumale reported that at 5 o'clock, he passed by the statue on his way to work and at that time, he found there was nothing wrong. It was around 6 a.m. that residents going to work observed the garland of chappals around the statue and as word spread very quickly they began gathering around the statue.

Between 6 a.m. and 6.30 a.m., local residents infuriated by this act of desecration, began coming onto the highway and enforced a rasta roko. By 6.30, the highway was blocked and vehicles which refused to stop were pelted with stones. Meanwhile crowds began gathering around the statue, preventing anyone from removing the garland of chappals. It must be pointed out here that Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar is under the Pant Nagar police station and the station has a beat within the colony, Beat No. 5, which is very close to the statue. At the time of the incident, head constable Katadkar and two sepoy, Sripalir Rathod and Javade were on duty. The infuriated residents gathered around the statue, began demanding of head constable Katadkar that he should get in touch with the higher authorities, call for a dog squad, and take the panchnama. People going to work stopped and gathered around the statue.

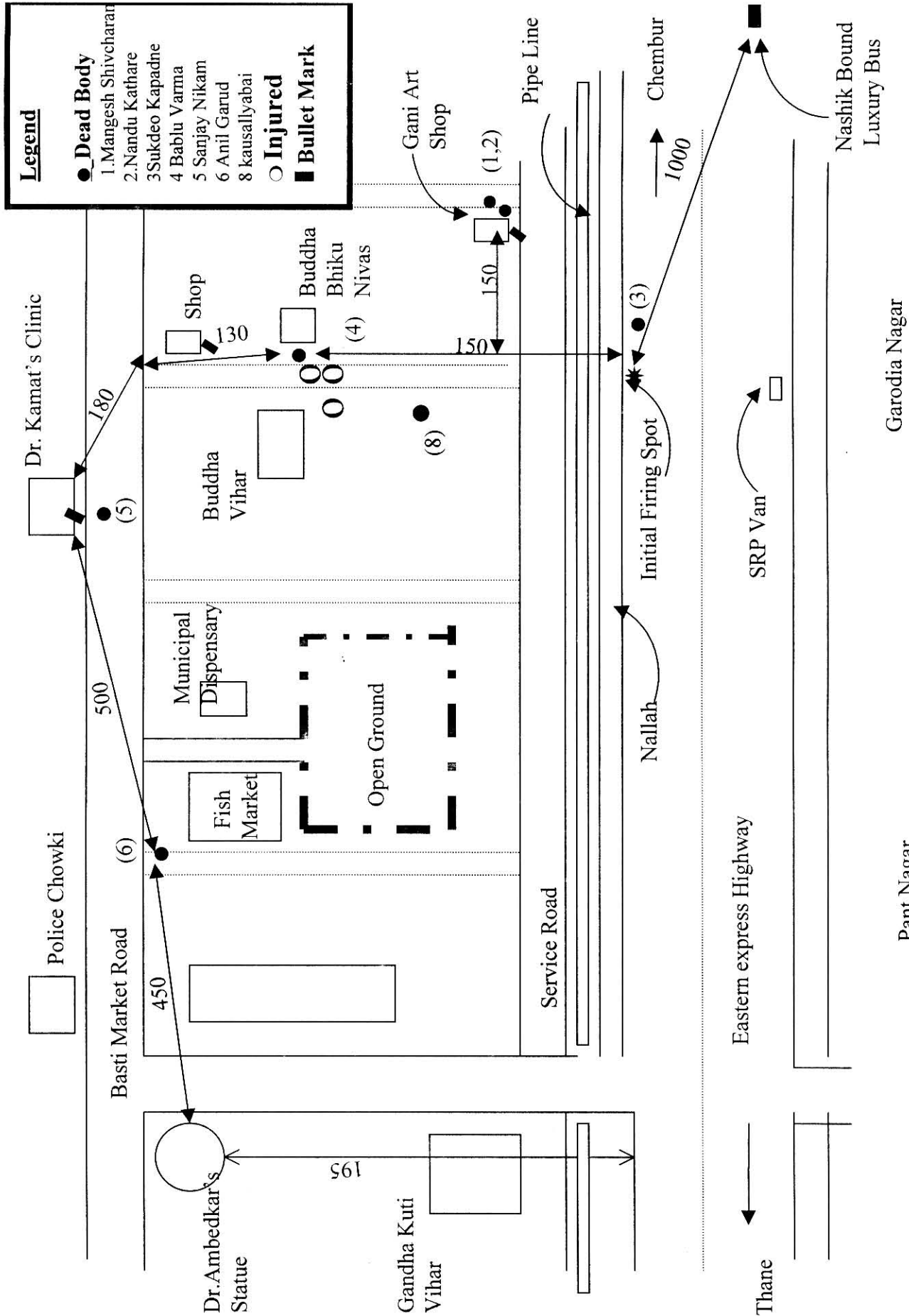
Between 7 a.m. and 7.10 a.m., ACP More whose residence is close to Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar, arrived at the scene of the desecration in plain clothes and in his jeep. The infuriated public began demanding of ACP More that he should immediately call for a dog squad and take the panchnama. Throughout this period residents of the colony began crowding around the statue and along the Eastern Express Highway where a rasta roko was already in effect.

By 7.20 a.m., 2 vans of State Reserve Police came onto the highway via the Ghatkopar bus depot. The crowds began pelting stones at them and the police retreated. A few minutes later 2 vans approached Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar from the opposite direction, the Chembur end. The crowds pelted stones at these as well. It is when the 4<sup>th</sup> van reached the highway at a point directly opposite Buddh-Vihar (see map) that the State Reserve Police got out of the van immediately took position along the highway and began firing directly into the crowd and into the colony through the alley-ways. The residents used the in-between alleys to run for cover. (see map) The State Reserve Police firing caught those running for cover in the alleys. The whole operation took barely 10 minutes and the dead bodies were strewn on the inner road outside buddh vihar and the adjacent open ground. It is important to note here the place at which the State Reserve Police began firing and the place at which the crowd was gathered near the statue of Ambedkar. The distance between the two sites is almost about a 150 metres.

By 8 a.m., the State Reserve Police approached the statue and began entering the adjacent areas of the colony, dispersing the crowd with a lathi charge. They finally surrounded the statue and took off the garland of chappals with a stick. The crowd near by objected to this but they were lathi-charged by the State Reserve Police. The State Reserve Police was pelted with stones by crowds from all around. The bodies of those injured and those dead were kept where they were for a whole half an hour from 7.30 a.m. to 8 a.m. with the State Reserve Police refusing permission, at the risk of being shot at, to the relatives of those who had fallen down as a result of bullet shots. It is very likely that some of those injured through bullet wounds died in this half an hour. It is only at 8 a.m. that the bodies were removed and taken to Rajawadi hospital. It is only when the relatives of those dead and volunteers from Ramabai reached Rajawadi that the full impact of what had happened became clear.

In the meanwhile in the colony, the State Reserve Police had begun to take control of the entire area surrounding it, using lathi charge on groups of residents and forcing them inside their homes and asking them to shut their windows and doors. The violence however between the residents and the State Reserve Police continued unabated with the





### Schematic Layout of Firing Spot

(Distance in Feet, Drawing Not to the Scale)

3. Sanjay Nigam was a 22 year old working for the BMC. He was shot dead on his way to work, near the Buddh Vihar. Eye-witnesses say that his lunch packet that he carried to work dropped from his hands where he fell.
4. 14 year old Shiv Sharan was defecating on the service road by the highway, when the police opened fire. Sharan's head was shot open.
5. 22 year-old Bablu Verma was on his way to work when he saw Hiranman Sadashiv Gaikwad being shot. As Verma tried to help him, he was fired at and died on the spot.
6. Sanjay Subhash Kamble, a 28 year old, was also shot down on his way to work.
7. 40 year old Kaushalyabai Pathari was a domestic help on her way to work. She was shot in the chest when she stopped to help one of the victims and died with multiple wounds.
8. 18 year old Anil Garud was shot dead. He was standing among the onlookers gathered near Buddh Vihar.
9. 18 year old Nandu Katore was with Garud when he was also killed in the firing.
10. 17 year old Amar Dhanavade ran home to warn his family in to stay indoors because there was trouble in D B Pawar chowk, when he was shot down in the street.

d. Evidence of the relatives of those dead in the firing and eye-witnesses to the firing

Vishwanath Shivpathi Khade works at the Directorate General of Shipping. His grand nephew, Amar Ramchander Dhanavade warned his aunt not to open her shop as there were signs of trouble at D. B. Pawar chowk. At around 7.15 a.m., he made his way to his father's house to alert his brother and father when he was shot in the abdomen at D B. Pawar chowk. His brother approached him but couldn't lift the body as he was abused and lathi-charged on his arms. 20 minutes later an Republican Party of India van took Dhanavade to the Rajawadi hospital where he was declared dead.

The fact-finding team of 15 members visited the Rajawadi hospital on Sunday, 12<sup>th</sup> July and recorded the following evidence from those whom they met at the hospital. The team spoke to both the injured as well as to their family members.

e. Evidence of those wounded in the firing and the subsequent police lathi charge

1. Sanjay Ahir works as a driver in the Dairy Development Board. At 7.30 in the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> he set out to drop his daughter to school when he heard firing near the statue of Ambedkar. He decided to return and leave his daughter at home. When he emerged from his house, the police had already opened fire. He was shot in the knee. His nephew Arun Garud was shot dead near the D B. Pawar chowk (Behind the Buddh Vihar).
2. Vinod Dhengle: he was lathi charged as he was returning to the basti after having left the injured at the Rajawadi hospital, he has minor injuries.
3. Ravindra Devram Kedari: is a painter on contract work. He was leaving for work at about 9:15 a.m. when 2-3 policemen caught him and beat him with their lathis. He has serious injuries on both his legs. He was taken to Rajawadi hospital in an ambulance called by the local people.
4. Vijay Vishwanath Gaikwad: does the washing at a local bar in the Ramabai basti. He had just got up from sleep and came near the entrance of his house which faces the D.B. Pawar chowk. As he heard the shots he turned back to enter his house. He was shot from behind and a bullet passed through his neck. He lost consciousness and was

brought to the Rajawadi hospital after almost half an hour in a rickshaw. In his account he also mentioned that he personally saw the State Reserve Police chief give orders to shoot. He also saw an State Reserve Police shoot a 14 yr. old boy (Shivsharan) who was defecating on the highway. He said he saw the boy's head shot open.

5. R.J. Jadhav is 45 yrs. old. He was going towards the bus stop to leave for work when he was shot at. He has a bullet injury in his right arm.

6. Bapu Kelkar is 32 yrs. old. He had come from Solapur 3 days back to visit his in-laws. He had just come out of his house to spit, when he was shot through the abdomen.

7. Kadam Ramchandra Anna is about 50 yrs. old and is a lorry driver. He was standing near the open ground, leaning on his lorry when the State Reserve Police began firing. He was shot 3 times in his right arm and one bullet grazed his waist. Holding his bleeding arm he ran inside the colony and with a friend asked the police for help. They were refused twice. They got a rickshaw and reached the hospital.

8. Narayan Gaikwad is a contract worker at Vashi. At 8.20 a.m., he set off for the bus stop from where he catches the bus to work. Policemen called him back from the bus-stop and hit him with rifle butts on the legs. Injury on the legs.

9. Nimrao Gopinath Nimangre is a BEST bus conductor. He had finished his duty and was on his way home when the police hit him with lathis. He pleaded with them to stop, but one policeman hit him on the head with a lathi and he fell unconscious. As he made his way to the hospital accompanied by his child, the police refused to give him transport to Rajawadi. Has head and leg injuries.

10. Raghunath Jadhav, a 30 year old, works at Nerul as a contract labourer. He was accompanying his children to school when he heard of the firing and dropped them home again. As he left for work himself, he was shot on the right forearm which is now numb.

11. 17 year old Popat Namdeo Nalavade is not from Ramabai colony, but was accompanying his brother on a container lorry. The lorry stopped at the traffic jam on the highway, and Nalavade fled when the stone pelting began. As he ran, he was shot in his left calf.

12. Hiranman Sadashiv Gaikwad is a 37 year-old peon in St. Teresa's School, Girgaum. He was on his way to work, when he was shot thrice in the lower half of the chest and the abdomen.

#### **Kurla firing - on 12<sup>th</sup> July, buddh colony.**

1. Chandrashekhhar Kedar: studies in the 10<sup>th</sup> class in a night school. In the morning of the 12<sup>th</sup> he was going to get milk when he was shot. He did not know who, or from where the shot had been fired. He has a bullet injury in the left shoulder; while Jitesh Balerao was shot dead. Eyewitnesses say that on the day of the bandh i.e. 12<sup>th</sup>, everything was normal in bodh colony. When the police entered the colony, the local residents asked them to not enter the colony as it would fuel passions because the residents blamed the police for the Ghatkopar firing. The police withdrew, but soon after, they were firing indiscriminately from the bridge overlooking the slum with no apparent provocation. The bridge's location and topography helped the police to shoot at the bodies of the group of boys standing inside the basti below. This bridge is between Kurla station and Kurla depot. In this firing, three were injured and one killed.

#### **f. Evidence of a case of police torture**

18 year old Milind Pagare who runs a dairy was inside his house at 2.30 p.m. on the 11<sup>th</sup>, when neighbours told him that a tear gas shell had landed on the roof of his house. As Pagare emerged, another shell burst on his legs. Pagare went to the Sion hospital with severe burn wounds on both legs. By 6 o'clock, he was discharged after inadequate treatment. On his way back home, the Pant Nagar police arrested him on the charge of burning the police station. Pagare was detained in the lock-up all night. At 2.30 a.m., he was manhandled and put in a detection room without food or water. Pagare was slapped on his wounds which began bleeding. His parents approached a Pant Nagar corporator and got a letter from her, after which Pagare was released. Later, Congress corporator Ubale took him to Rajawadi hospital.

### III: Conclusion

What emerges in a stark contrast in this fact-finding report is the two versions that have been provided here. The former, a version that is provided by the police and the latter that the fact-finding team has put together with the help of eye-witness accounts from the residents of Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar. It becomes more than clear that not only is the police version radically different from what the residents have provided by way of eye-witness accounts, but also that the police version is lacking in authenticity.

#### a. Refutation of the police version and its reporting by sections of the press

In proving the police version as false, we would like to state the following:

1. The thrust of the police version is hinged on the allegation that the people collected on the highway were going to set the tankers ablaze. If one only goes by the graphic representation provided in the map, then it becomes clear that the bus set ablaze was not at all in the vicinity of D.B. Pawar chowk where the firing took place but rather on the other side of the highway opposite to the Nalanda colony which is adjacent to D.B. Pawar chowk.

Further, it is also a known fact that regulations exist in the city preventing the parking of filled LPG tankers on any point on the highway. If at all the tankers were there, the residents claim that they were empty. They obtained this information from the drivers of the tankers who came into the colony after parking the tankers ahead of the burning bus, opposite to D.B. Pawar chowk. It stands justified.

Further, from eye-witness accounts of the residents, the tankers were never there during the time of the firing. They were brought in much later from the RTO side to create an alibi for the police so that they could justify their arbitrary firing.

Further, the residents of the colony contend that even if the tankers were presumed to be filled, they were completely aware of the consequences of such a disaster; that it would also affect their own colony should they set it ablaze. There is no reason to believe that the residents of the colony were in a suicidal mood such that they would like their own colony to be destroyed by such an action.

The fact of the matter is that the tankers were never there at the time of firing. They were only brought in much later to create an alibi.

Further, the residents were witness to the fact that the tankers were taken to the Pant Nagar police station in the later part of the afternoon to file a panchnama.

2. From the description provided above, of those who died and were wounded in the police shooting, it becomes more than clear that these were individuals who were caught without warning and taken completely unaware. They died and were wounded not because they were attempting to burn the tankers but because they were caught in the firing on their way to work or as they were carrying out their daily chores. Otherwise, how does one explain the death of the child killed while defecating, or how does one explain the death of the schoolboy whose head was shot off or the death of the man who was pleading with the State Reserve Police to stop shooting. All these and the other descriptions provided of the dead and wounded clearly indicate that they had nothing to do with the burning tanker story. The fact of the matter is that there was no tanker in the first instance.

3. That the police admission to firing to kill is not an admission based on the threat that the dead and the wounded posed for the tanker, rather, it is a post facto admission aimed at lending legitimacy to the tanker story. Further, it is also important to note that as per the existing guidelines the State Reserve Police Force has to report to the duty

officer and seek instructions for further action. under no circumstances are they empowered to initiate action directly. It is thus evident that the police firing was not only uncalled for but also completely illegal going by their own procedures. Further, in the same way as eye-witness account of the resident report how the tankers were brought to the site of the burning bus, it is not difficult to believe that the police themselves could have placed the dead body under the tanker and had photographs and footage to create evidence for their alibi.

4. One of the critical points about the police story is the fact of their timing. According to the police, the firing took place only after the bus was set ablaze and they feared that the crowd would set the tankers ablaze as well. But as we have already shown from the eye-witness accounts provided by the residents, this timing, is completely false. Instead, what is far more plausible to believe is the fact that the luxury bus was emptied of its passengers as soon as the rasta roko began. There were no passengers near the site during the time the bus was being burnt. This only proves the point that the bus was burnt much later as reported in the sequence of events, i.e., around 11.30 when the lathi-charge had begun in the colony. It is also at this time that not only was the bus burnt, but also the police Beat no. 5 was set ablaze by the infuriated residents of the colony.

5. Finally, the statement of the police as reported in sections of the press, that they have fixed the blame for the desecration of the Ambedkar statue on two sets of four residents each of the colony. The names are: Namdeo Ubale (local congress I corporator), Vikas Pawar, Kailash Barve and Chintamani Gangurde - all local Republican Party of India activists. The names in the other set are : D C Karamkar, Shashikant Barve, Arun Kamble - all members of the local Tarun Mitra Mandal and Deepak Ubale, brother of the local corporator. This a complete frame-up to shift the focus of the public's attention from the police firing and put the blame on these eight residents of the colony such that their own behaviour during the firing is not only condoned but also justified. The fact of the matter is that these eight members whose names have been mentioned, are respected leaders of the community in Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar. The fact-finding team observed that even on the 12<sup>th</sup> of July i.e., the day of the funeral of those who had died, while speaking to a cross section of the community, it became more and more clear to the fact-finding team that there was a palpable anger in the community that their leaders were going to be named as the culprits for desecrating the Ambedkar statue. What is even more important to note is that in their discussions with the fact-finding team the eight leaders mentioned above pointed out that not even the police at Pant Nagar station were aware that they were being framed as culprits. According to one of the leaders, corporator Ubale, the only thing that the police at Pant Nagar station has taken from them, are statements of their whereabouts on the day the desecration of the statue occurred.

Yet, it is a telling remark on the behaviour of certain sections of the press that they were quick to sensationalise on the remarks made by the police about these eight leaders. They even went to the extent of publicly announcing that the eight leaders were arrested. Notwithstanding the damage that such statements would have on the character of these leaders as well as the impact that their arrest might have on the larger community of Ramabai nagar.

The police firing at Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar is by all accounts an act in which excessive force was used without any legitimate reasons for its use. This is not the first time that the police have resorted to such a brutal way of dealing with minority groups protesting their democratic rights. The use of brute force to quell the protests of democratic groups throughout the country is growing by the day. The way in which the police conduct this violence has also acquired a kind of pattern. Not only is the violence in the first instance illegitimate and uncalled for but what follows in each such instance is a fabrication of untruths on the part of the police such that the violence that is committed by them is not only condoned but always justified. Such a pattern is to be witnessed not only in the present context of the firings on Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar but also in many other situations where fact-finding groups have undertaken investigations into police atrocities and police violence on minority and marginalised sections of the population.



### b. Demands of the fact-finding team

We demand:

1. That the officer who ordered the firing and 7 State Reserve Police jawans who fired at the people should be charged for mass-killing and punished.
2. That the real culprits who desecrated the Ambedkar statue be caught and punished along with those who incited them to do it.
3. The compensation for the dead and wounded be paid immediately. That compensation be paid with immediate effect to those whose property was damaged during the firing and subsequent police raids in slums in different parts of the city.
4. Procedures to be followed prior to ordering a firing should be adhered to and all violations of these should be punished. Riot control procedures should include the use of rubber bullets and water cannons.
5. That the police refrain from framing innocent members of the Ramabai community in the pursuit of their investigations.
6. All cases of rioting foisted against the agitating dalits in the city and in different parts of the state, during these days of protest, should be withdrawn forthwith.

The people rose in anger against the desecration as Ambedkar is a symbol of their self-respect and their freedom from caste oppression. Such desecrations are politically motivated and become the site for political parties to gain mileage from the misery of the people, who are already oppressed in poor. We condemn the widespread repression unleashed on dalits, dalit bastis in the city and in other parts of the state by the police.

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A report by Lokshahi Hakk Sangathan and Committee for the Protection of Democratic Rights.

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