

# **A WARNING FROM BIDAR**

A Report on the Anti-Sikh Disturbances

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DELHI***

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## PREFACE

In conducting the enquiry into the tragic events of 14-16 September in Bidar, Karnataka, the fact finding team received cooperation and assistance from several persons and groups. Nagrik Ekta Manch would like to place on record their appreciation and gratitude to Dr. Mohinder Singh, Sant Esher Singh, S. Nanak Singh Nistar, Hyderabad Ekta, Mr. Aloysius Fernandez, Mr. Ranganath, Ms. Sashi Rajagopalan, Mr. Chandrakant Patil, Bidar district administration and those who prefer to remain anonymous.

Nagrik Ekta Manch would also take this opportunity to convey their deepest condolences to the families of the six young men who lost their precious lives in this tragedy.

### Introduction:

The violent incidents in the town of Bidar on the north-eastern tip of Karnataka during September 14 and 16, 1988, which left at least six Sikh students dead, about 100 injured and loss of property worth nearly Rs. 62 lakhs, indicate the increasing vulnerability of members of the minority communities to mob frenzy in any part of India that can be triquered off by communal elements at the slightest pretext.

A two-member team of the Delhi-based Nagrik Ekta Manch which toured Bidar and other neighbouring areas on a fact-finding mission from September 27 to October 1, witnessed the aftermath of the violence and interviewed a cross-section of people - both Sikhs and non-Sikhs, local representatives of the political parties as well as police officials and district administrators. The team found that a fracas generated by an accumulation of factors of a purely non-communal nature was overnight transformed into an issue of Hindu-Sikh conflict with the Sikhs at the receiving end of a meticulously devised plan of looting, arson, physical assaults and savage killings. The team felt that part of the responsibility will have to be borne by the local police which not only failed to stop the miscreants right at the beginning, but is also known to have turned a blind eye if not connived at the violence in some places. The team also found that local leaders of the political parties, including the ruling Janata Party as well as the Congress (I) and the BJP, tended to acquiesce in the communal violence by repeatedly stressing certain allegations against the Sikh students (most of which after inquiries were found to be either baseless or exaggerated), and by remaining consistently reluctant to condemn the beastly killing of the six Sikh students. Instead of playing the responsible role of maintaining communal harmony, they appeared to have fallen prey to the spreading communal virus that tends to brand every Sikh as a belligerent delinquent, if not a suspected terrorist. The team also noted the accumulation of tensions among the local people generated by an unfamiliar life style followed by a group of outsiders ( both Sikh and non-Sikh students of the Guru Nanak Engineering College who come from a different cultural background ). In an atmosphere already surcharged by suspicions against the Sikhs in general (fostered to a large extent by the media coverage of events in Punjab - a factor with which we shall deal later in this report ), such tensions against the outsiders escalated into hostilities directed selectively against the Sikh members of the community.

As happens in such situations, while a handful of miscreants planned and carried out the operation, they were confident of the approval and acquiescence of an already prejudiced majority of the local people.

The main events:

Piecing together bits of information from various sources, we could reconstruct the main sequence of events that rocked Bidar for three days. On the night of September 14, a few Sikh students who were returning from the centre of the town to their residences in Gandhinagar, were accosted by some Hindu boys who demanded from them subscription for the Ganesh Chaturthi celebrations that were due to begin the next day. It must be mentioned here that the students of the Guru Nanak Engineering College (both Sikhs and non-Sikhs) had been subjected earlier to extortions by organizers of the festival. The students who were accosted on the night of September 14, refused to pay the subscription, as they claimed that they had paid up before. This led to a scuffle in the course of which the Sikh students got beaten up. The latter returned to the spot in a larger number, and damaged a few vehicles and shops belonging to the Hindus. In retaliation, late at night a group of Hindu young men struck at the houses where the Sikh students were staying and burnt their scooters.

During the night of September 14, however, a meticulous plot was apparently hatched. A meeting was held that night under the auspices of Muddha, a Commission agent in Gandhigunj area, where it is believed that the future course of action was decided upon. The planned nature of the attacks - use of petrol, selective assaults on all Sikhs, burning of the houses, of Muslim landlords and sparing those owned by the Hindus - indicates the well-thought out strategy that was shaped at the meeting on the 14th night.

From the morning of 15 September a regular onslaught began - not only on the Sikh students who were staying at the new colonies of Vidyanagar, Gandhinagar and Kuinarwara, but also against houses and shops owned by other Sikhs (businessmen, retired air force personnel etc) in different parts of the town. As reports of assaults on Sikhs began to trickle into the Sikh student community residing in the new colonies, they decided to take shelter in the Engineering College situated beyond Gandhinagar. In the afternoon, a mob of about 500 young people gathered outside the Engineering College and started pelting stones at the students, who in turn countered by throwing stones at the attackers. An inadequate police force, headed by the Superintendent of Police, Dr. B.

Umapathi, tried to keep the two contending groups at bay. Caught between the volley of stones, from both sides, the SP was injured in his hand (which led to the widespread rumour that he was assaulted by a sword-wielding Sikh). This could have provoked the police who as described by the students, deliberately fired tear gas shells and rubber bullets at them. The latter stated that it was clearly visible from the rooftop of the Engineering College that while their houses in neighbouring Gandhinagar were being burnt, their properties dragged out and destroyed, the police stood idle.

The slanging match between the stone-throwing groups continued till late evening by which time the Deputy Inspector General Police (DIG) Mr.S.H. Pawate arrived with his force from Gulbarga, and shifted the beleaguered students from the College to the Nanak Jhira Gurudwara on the outskirts of Bidar town, a historic shrine built on the site where Guru Nanak had stayed during his travels in the Deccan in 1512 A.D.

But while the main body of the Sikh students was saved, six of their friends were trapped and killed. Four of them Amarjeet Singh and Harvinder Singh (two brothers from Bara Banki), Balwinder Singh of Jaipur and Gurinder Singh of Delhi, who for some reason or other, could not join the rest of their co-students in the safety of the Engineering College, tried to escape from their residences. Through the adjoining fields they apparently tried to reach the main road linking Bidar to Hyderabad probably expecting to take a bus to reach the safety of Hyderabad. But from the information collected from various sources, we believe that they were trapped by a gang which was keeping a watch on the Hyderabad road. Various sources in Bidar informed us that all through September 15, buses coming from outside Bidar were intercepted by gangs at various entry points and Sikh passengers were dragged out and assaulted. The dead bodies of the four students were recovered on September 18 from a well in the fields just a few yards away from the main Bidar-Hyderabad road - three days after their murder. The photographs of their bodies which were shown to us revealed the physical atrocities that they must have undergone - mutilation of their faces and laceration of their fingers.

The other two victims - Jasbir Singh of Kurukshetra and Upkar Singh from Gurudaspur in Punjab - a student of a local pharmaceutical college run by a local Janata Party leader, Mr. Kashinath Rao Belure - succumbed to stab injuries later.

Among the survivors, a student, Sarabjit Singh, escaped death only because the saw mill to which he was tied by the miscreants failed to operate because

of power failure. He was then tied to and dragged around by a scooter and later abandoned by the miscreants. We also met Kuldip Singh, an 18 year old student of First Year (Electronics) from Bhatinda who lay injured with 10 to 12 stab wounds in the Apollo Hospital in Hyderabad. He and his classmates were chased by a mob. While the others could escape, Kuldip was dragged into the fields and attacked by the miscreants. The stabs were inflicted on his chest, arms and stomach, indicating clearly that the assailants intended to kill him. The police first removed his unconscious body to a hospital in Bidar, from where he was taken to Osmania Hospital in Hyderabad, and later his father a farmer in Bhatinda, transferred him to the Apollo Hospital.

On the 15th the onslaught soon spread to other areas and was directed against the Sikh residents of Bidar. Restaurants owned by Sikhs in the centre of the town were the main targets. One Sikh businessman - Iqbal Singh - lost four establishments; a restaurant, a drug store, a godown and a mess - to the arsonists. The branch of the Punjab Sindh Bank was set ablaze on the night of September 15. The next day, September 16 - although by then the local police had been reinforced by other forces from Gulbarga and personnel of the Karnataka Special Reserve Police Force (KSRPF) - saw a continuation of the onslaught. At the time that the local administration was holding a peace committee meeting, miscreants attacked the polytechnic run by the same Sikh trustees who manage the Engineering College and looted the furniture while the police stood by. Around 11 a.m. the house of a Sikh ex-Serviceman was burnt down the same day - this when Section 144 Cr. PC was supposed to be in force. Although the family had left earlier for the safety of the Guru Nanak Jhira Gurudwara, their belongings were dragged out from their house and set on fire. That the attacks were selective - directed only against Sikhs - came through clearly in our interviews with local residents. The shops of Hindu neighbours were spared. In one case, the arsonists even removed the mobile stand of a Hindu 'pan-walla' from the premises of a Sikh-owned restaurant before setting it on fire. The pro-Hindu bias was also evident in the manner in which houses were raided and burnt in the Gandhinagar colony. The miscreants raided most of the houses where the Sikh students lived as tenants. But while they burnt and destroyed the houses of the Muslim landlords (who had rented out their houses to the Sikh students), they spared the houses of the Hindu landlords which they raided only to drag out and destroy the belongings of the Sikh tenants.

Although the spree of looting and physical assaults came to an end by September 16, tensions continued and spread beyond Bidar. On September

25, the Nishan Sahib on top of the Janawada Gurdwara some 15 kilometres away from Bidar was removed and torn up by some miscreants who also desecrated the Gurudwara. Earlier the same day the Sikhs had gone to the Gurdwara under police escort to hoist their flag.

#### The Background: Students and the Local Populations

The historical past of Bidar, to a large extent, explains the concentration of Sikhs in the city. During his extensive tours Guru Nanak visited the Deccan, and was believed to have stayed near the town - the site of the present Gurudwara. One of the first 'panj piyaras' (the five beloved baptised by Guru Gobind Singh) Sahib Chand, hailed from Bidar. Given these historical connections, Bidar became an important pilgrimage for Sikhs from all over the country.

In addition to the descendants of the baptised Sikhs of the south - known as 'Dakhni Sikhs' - Sikh migrants came from the North and settled down here, first as soldiers for the local landlords, who later became a part of the Nizam's irregular army - Fauj-e-bequaida. During the post-Independence period, as elsewhere Sikhs migrated to Bidar and built up flourishing trade and commercial activities, like hotels, automobile repair shops etc. Given both the historically rooted connections and its image as a 'safe' place, following the 1984 killings of Sikhs in the north, many Sikh families chose to send their sons to study at Bidar. As everyone we talked to agreed, Bidar had a record of amicable Sikh-Hindu relations, and even during the worst days following Mrs. Gandhi's assassination there were no attacks on Sikhs in Bidar.

Mr. Joga Singh, a Sikh businessman who operated from Hyderabad, set up the Engineering College in 1980 in the northern part of the city. Besides the College, there is a polytechnic, a public school and a hospital, all run under Mr. Joga Singh's auspices. The College was earlier managed by the Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee - also headed by Mr. Singh. Later in 1987 he set up a trust - the Guru Nank Jhira Foundation Trust - which replaced the Prabandhak Committee in the running of the institutions. The Trust includes five life-members all of whom are said to be related to Mr. Singh. It is speculated that Mr. Singh set up the Trust to keep the properties under his direct control.

Of the 1300 odd students of the polytechnic and the Engineering College, the number of Sikh students varied every year between 40 to 47 percent, never exceeding 50 percent at any stage. The majority of the students are from north India - Punjab, Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan - followed by boys from Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. Both the students and the teachers of

the Engineering College (the bulk of the teachers are again non-Sikhs) told us in one voice that relations between the Sikh and non-Sikh students in the campus had always been cordial. Indeed we learnt of Hindu boys protecting Sikh students and taking them away to safety during the recent disturbances. The teachers claimed that, by and large, the students were a highly disciplined lot.

Given the paucity of hostel accommodation on the campus, many of the students rented houses in the neighbouring new colonies of Gandhinagar, Vidyanagar and the State Bank of India complex, paying a monthly rent of Rs. 200 to Rs. 300 for one room, often shared by two or three of them.

A few words on the socio-economic composition of the student community are necessary at this stage. As is common in Karnataka, the Engineering College is also known to charge high capitation fees from students - the rates ranging from Rs. 20000 to Rs. 50000. A large number of students come from rich families - affluent farmers and businessmen. According to the students we interviewed, while the sons of the rich spent Rs. 2000 a month, on an average the monthly expenditure of those coming from a less affluent background came to about Rs. 800. The upper strata came mainly from Punjab and Delhi. The life style followed by the students - particularly the rich amongst them - seemed to have created feelings of envy and contention among the local population. What however is extremely disturbing is that although the rich students (both Sikhs and non-Sikhs) might have followed a similar life style, it was only the Sikhs who were selected for stringent criticism by the local Hindus. Repeatedly we heard complaints about the behaviour of the Sikh students who were 'accused' of flaunting their wealth, getting involved in drunken brawls in cinema houses and other places, and of misbehaving with girls. Some of the stories making the rounds during our visit were quite lurid and seemed to have stemmed from one common source: (i) the Sikh students indulged in taking snapshots of the women of the locality when the latter came out to take their bath at the public water pump; (ii) the Sikh students were responsible for the growth of prostitution in the area; (iii) the Sikh students raped girls and used them for making blue-films. As support for these allegations, the local BJP leader, Mr. Nandkishore Verma, produced for us a photograph showing the upper portion of a bare-bodied couple - a bearded young man with his arm around the shoulders of a girl facing the camera. Mr. Verma claimed that it was one of the many photographs recovered from the houses of the Sikh students. Although he asserted that



hundreds of such photographs had been handed over to the police, the Inspector General of Police (I.G.) Mr. Anandan, whom we interviewed later denied knowledge of any such photographs.

We visited some of the houses in Gandhinagar which were attacked and burnt down by the miscreants. Half-burnt books and notes, beddings and other belongings were still scattered around. The only possessions of the students which could possibly have inspired the salacious rumours about their alleged libidinous tastes were a few pin-ups still stuck on the walls. There were pictures of film actresses, Western rock stars, cricket players - features familiar to any campus hostel.

This is not to argue that all students were always blameless. As in any other campus, they were rowdy elements, irrespective of the fact whether they were Sikhs or non-Sikhs. Several people pointed out that these elements often got involved in local clashes. Two students of the Engineering College whom we interviewed - Jatinder Singh, a Sikh student in his final year (Mechanical) and his friend, a non-Sikh in the same class, P.V.Rajeswara Rao - confirmed that there were a few cases of fights between the students and the local youth. They added: "When the clash took place on the night of 14 September, we thought this was in the nature of similar fights in the past and would soon blow over as used to happen. We never thought that it would take on the colour of a Hindu-Sikh fight". The two students also admitted that some students brought prostitutes to their houses, but that this was not a widespread phenomenon. Some time ago, the police raided a house when the students were watching a blue film. But there was no question of any of the students making blue films, they asserted.

The impression that we gathered from our talks with various people was that the G.N.D. Engineering College could have also been affected to some extent by the vices that characterize the life-style of some upper class youth in any metropolitan campus. The pampered and well-to-do sons of the nouveau riche who are found swaggering and bullying over others, showing off their cars and other symbols of status, indulging in eve-teasing in buses and public places - in Delhi, Bombay or Calcutta - have their counterparts even in a small town like Bidar, where they stick out like a sore thumb. But what must be stressed in this connection that these spoilt boys in Bidar did not come only from Sikh families, but also from rich non-Sikh families of neighbouring areas as well as from north India.

Why then were only the Sikh students picked out for comment and assault ? The nature of the operation - gruesome killings and calculated destruction of property - was out of all proportion to the alleged provocation by the Sikh students. While the behaviour of some of the students may well have provoked elements in the local population, we found that the stories spread about them were highly exaggerated and in some cases totally fabricated. If they really were a menace - as made out to be by some people - why were there no complaints at all filed with the police about their alleged exploitation of local women and cases of rape ? In any case, what is completely unacceptable is the tendency to employ these 'petty conflicts' as factors of explanation and justification for what has happened.

During our interviews in Bidar town, district Congress (I) president Chandrakant Sindhore told us that there was a "limit to our tolerance" regarding the alleged Sikh students' behaviour. The city Janata party president, Ramesh Nimbule echoed the same sentiments, "We tolerated for four years, and then we had to respond". The local BJP leader, Nandkishore Verma said that there was no planning behind the violence; it was an "emotional outburst" of the people against the Sikh students. He also complained that the police were arresting innocent people. The fact that shops and residences of local Sikh citizens were also attacked contradicts this theory of pent up rage against the students.

On the basis of these facts, notwithstanding the claims to the contrary made by the local politicians, we cannot escape the conclusion that the violence in Bidar from September 14 to 16 had a definite communal character directed against Sikhs in general. We also feel that the lurid stories about the Sikh students being circulated in Bidar could well have been manufactured as an afterthought to rationalize and justify the violence. The uniform pattern of the stories (e.g. taking snapshots of women bathing, raping of girls, production of blue films etc.) leads us to suspect that their source could be one common rumour mill.

#### The local Hindu youth

In this connection we would like to take up the other theory that the Sikh students of the Engineering College represented 'an island of affluence in the midst of an ocean of poverty', as a result of which they became targets of attack by the poor, disgruntled neighbours. Although Bidar is a 'backward' district, the town has grown rapidly over the last few years proudly displaying the usual symbols of urban prosperity - bars, cinema houses, shops, markets and new residential complexes. As in other Indian cities, these are pockets of prosperity in the midst of squalor represented by 'jhuggi-jhopries', and colo-

nies with inadequate sanitation. Incidentally, the areas like Gandhinagar where many of the Sikh students lived, were lower middle class areas, badly serviced by sanitation facilities - hence the prevalence of stories about watching local women bathing at wells etc. To argue that the Sikh students represented the only 'island of influence' in the town would be a travesty of facts. There is a substantial middle and upper middle class in this town of over one lakh. Even of the six families considered very rich in Bidar, while there is one Sikh (Mr. Joga Singh, the founder of the Engineering College), a Muslim and the others are north Indian Hindus as well as local Kannadigas. The Congress (I) leader Chandra Kant Sindhur for instance owns a huge shopping cum hotel complex in the heart of the town. His family owns the biggest petrol pump in town ( which incidentally is suspected to have supplied petrol to miscreants during the recent events). The sons of these new rich Hindu businessmen and traders have emerged as a privileged community in Bidar. Like their counterparts in other metropolitan cities, they are assured of enough money and protection, thanks to their family background and powerful connections, and can therefore indulge in all kinds of anti-social activities with impunity. It is they who head a number of gangs in Bidar town which have been clearly identified as elements central to the recent violence.

From a list of suspects submitted to the police by the Sikh students ( Appendix I) it can be made out that a large number of them came from Hindu families of traders and businessmen and well-to-do professionals. They were the leaders of the gangs which had been operating in Bidar for quite sometime now. One such gang is the 25-member NAVY (an acronym formed from the first letters of the names of four of its leaders), the president of which is the son of the editor of a local newspaper. Two similar gangs are SWAGAT and FIRE-FORCE.

A further study of the individual suspects named in the list reveals their socio-economic background. Raju Agarwal, for instance, is the brother of a municipal councillor who also happens to be the owner of a hotel. Chandu Patil, Viju Patil and Somu Patil are three brothers from a family that runs a transport business. Vasavara Shetkar and his three sons own an engineering firm. Sanjay and Ajay Sail are owners of a bar and restaurant.

Gangs like NAVY and FIRE FORCE received a fillip for their anti-social activities in recent years from a curious source - the annual Ganesh Chaturthi festival. The festival, never a widespread phenomenon in Bidar in the past, has in last few years seen a sudden proliferation of images of Ganesh being

set up in public places, and an increase in the number of Ganesh festival celebrations in different parts of the city. Some local people attribute this to the influence from neighbouring Hyderabad, where too during the last few years the Ganesh Chaturthi festival had become a big occasion for rallying Hindus on a militant platform, marked by fiery speeches on the need for Hindu unity and demonstrations of martial art. It is also an occasion to extort large sums of money.

Gangs like NAVY and FIRE FORCE have been in the forefront in setting up 'Ganesh Mandals' or community committees for celebrating Ganesh Chaturthi in different parts of the city. The number rose to an astonishing 65 locations this year. Members of the gangs had installed images of Ganesh in public parks, street corners and on the main roads. Local political leaders of the Congress (I) and BJP praised the activities of these groups and told us that they were doing "valuable social work". But from other sources we learnt that their 'social work' was not confined to merely setting up 'Ganesh Mandals' and encroaching on public places for installing idols. An ex-municipal councillor who prefers to remain anonymous, told us that on September 11, (three days before the anti-Sikh troubles started) during the elections to the students' union in a local college, gangsters sought to provoke a clash between Hindus and Muslims. They later brought out a procession raising slogans like "Hinduon ke liye Hindustan, Mussalmanon ke liye kabrastan". (Hindustan is for Hindus, and the graveyard is for the Muslims). He asked the police authorities to take action against these miscreants. The police did hold a peace committee meeting on September 13 on the eve of the Ganesh Chaturthi festival. But this was clearly inadequate as is evident from later events. It was the same miscreants belonging to these notorious gangs, who went around the town extorting money from people in the name of collecting subscriptions for the Ganesh Chaturthi festival. The Sikh students were made special targets of these extortion drives.

The controversy over collecting subscriptions which was the immediate spark for the disturbances in Bidar, points to a disturbing trend developing in almost all cities and towns in India. Hindu religious festivals have become excuses - sanctioned by religion - for anti-social gangs to extort money from citizens. Every year on these occasions, there are reports of assaults on unwilling people who had refused to pay money to volunteers of local clubs demanding subscriptions for organising religious festivals - whether Dusserah or Dipavali in Delhi and north Indian towns, or Ganesh Chaturthi in Bombay and west Indian towns, or Durga Puja and Kali Puja in Calcutta and other areas of West Bengal.

Such extortions are bad enough for the ordinary Hindu citizens who in spite of pecuniary difficulties have often to shell out the money out of religious loyalties or, more often, out of fear of these local gangsters. But when the drive for subscriptions is directed against members of the minority communities, who cannot be expected to share the religious obligations of the Hindus, it can well lead to explosive communal repercussions - as evident from the tragedy in Bidar. In this connection, it must be added that one of the organisations in Bidar found to be forcibly collecting money from the Sikh students is called the New Shiv Sena. The leaders of the organisation mentioned by the Sikh students in the list that they submitted to the police are Dasrath Doddi, Raghu Doddi, and Venkatrao - the latter known in police records as a criminal called Venkati. The RSS also figures in the list. One of the suspects named is Ajay Singh, the younger son of Brijpal Singh, a local RSS leader.

The involvement of members of overtly Hindu communal organisations like the Shiv Sena and the RSS in the Bidar disturbances should be a matter of serious concern.

#### The Medical College and Capitation Fees:

Higher education, particularly technical education is a highly lucrative business in Karnataka. Seats in medical and engineering colleges are virtually sold off to the highest bidder although this price is euphemistically called a 'donation'. These 'donations' have been known to vary from a few thousand rupees to several lakhs of rupees per seat depending upon the institution and its general standing. Despite election time promises, the Janata Government of Mr. R.K.Hegde had been unable to do away with this scourge of capitation fees.

The substantial pickings to be had from setting up institutions of higher learning would also expectedly lead to competition amongst potential investors which, in turn, involves seeking patronage at the political level for securing permission from the government. Competing claims for setting up a new Medical College at Bidar were amongst the underlying causes for the growth of tension and hostility within the local residents, particularly the more affluent and influential, against the Sikh community.

The Guru Nanak Jhira Foundation Trust which already runs a high school, junior college, polytechnic and the Engineering College is one of the applicants for sanction of a medical college. It is said that on the basis of his personal equation with the former Chief Minister, S. Joqa Singh, Chairman of the Trust,

was successful in obtaining a commitment from Mr. R.K.Hegde that the College would indeed be awarded to the Trust. In order to strengthen his claim, S. Joqa Singh expanded the clinic at Gurudwara Nanak Jhira into a 500 bedded hospital by converting the guest house which was earlier used by pilgrims. The confident campaign for the medical college launched by S. Joqa Singh in his capacity as Chairman of the Trust created not a little resentment amongst other contenders for the potential profit making Medical College. To counter the GNJFT a campaign was launched by three other educational societies operating in Bidar who organised a bandh in the District earlier this year, following it up with a joint memorandum to the Chief Minister in July 1988 signed by all the legislators of the District as well as some other prominent citizens. One of these three societies, the Rahstriya Rachanatamak Karya Samithi, which runs the Pharmacy Diploma College and whose Chairman is Mr. Kashinath Rao Belure, a former Janata Party legislator, had also started the construction of a 500 bedded hospital since this was a precondition for being eligible to run a medical college. This building on the outskirts of Bidar beyond the Air Force area, has barely reached the plinth level, whereas the Guru Nanak Jhira Foundation Trust infrastructure is as good as complete.

In the joint memorandum presented to the Chief Minister (Appendix II) a number of allegations have been levelled at the Trust charging them with maladministration of the existing institutions resulting in 'dissatisfaction' and 'annoyance' amongst the local citizens and "disturbance of public peace and.... a feeling of insecurity in the minds of people of Bidar District". Our enquiries however, revealed a somewhat different picture. According to some of the faculty members, the Engineering College has always insisted on strict discipline inside the campus and has during the last few years been achieving the best academic results in Gulbarga University to which it is affiliated. These teachers (it becomes necessary to point out that they were not Sikhs) were also quick to deny the stories doing the rounds in Bidar that local students were not being given admission in the College, that the large majority of the students belonged to the Sikh community, that the faculty also comprised largely of Sikh teachers and, ludicrous as it may sound, that non-Sikh students were not allowed to sit in the front rows of the class. The facts are that 10% of seats have been taken by local candidates, about 45% of the students are Sikh, whereas the majority 55% are from other communities, predominantly Hindu and other than 4 or 5 teachers, the rest all belong to the Hindu community. The point is not that these facts by themselves prove or disapprove any particular hypothesis,

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In the joint memorandum presented to the Chief Minister (Appendix II) a number of allegations have been levelled at the Trust charging them with maladministration of the existing institutions resulting in 'dissatisfaction' and 'annoyance' amongst the local citizens and "disturbance of public peace and.... a feeling of insecurity in the minds of people of Bidar District". Our enquiries however, revealed a somewhat different picture. According to some of the faculty members, the Engineering College has always insisted on strict discipline inside the campus and has during the last few years been achieving the best academic results in Gulbarga University to which it is affiliated. These teachers (it becomes necessary to point out that they were not Sikhs) were also quick to deny the stories doing the rounds in Bidar that local students were not being given admission in the College, that the large majority of the students belonged to the Sikh community, that the faculty also comprised largely of Sikh teachers and, ludicrous as it may sound, that non-Sikh students were not allowed to sit in the front rows of the class. The facts are that 10% of seats have been taken by local candidates, about 45% of the students are Sikh, whereas the majority 55% are from other communities, predominantly Hindu and other than 4 or 5 teachers, the rest all belong to the Hindu community. The point is not that these facts by themselves prove or disapprove any particular hypothesis,



but that they expose the falsity of the deliberate and insidious rumour campaign that has been unleashed in Bidar. It came as a great surprise that local leaders of all the three main political parties in the district - namely Janata, Congress (I) and BJP - not only provided a similar account of the happenings with virtually the same analysis of the causes, but were also unanimous in laying the entire blame on the Sikh students. There was no condemnation or even remorse expressed by these local leaders about the violence. Rather, at the first Peace Committee meeting on 16 September, demands were made to close down all 'Sikh' institutions and throw out the Sikhs from Bidar. The only protest came from Mr. Brijpal a former freedom fighter. In these circles, there was general support for the candidature of Mr. Kashinath Rao Belure, who also belongs to the dominant Lingayat caste, for the Medical College. What is more, to buttress their support they did not hesitate in making allegations against the Guru Nanak Jhira Foundation Trust and its Chairman, S.Joga Singh. In contrast, one of the senior Bidar based journalists was emphatic in his view that not only was the Engineering College efficiently managed but "none but Joga Singh would be able to run a Medical College in Bidar".

This is by no means to suggest that S.Joga Singh can be held blameless whilst apportioning responsibility for the building up of tensions and hostilities. It is evident that S. Joga Singh has not only built up substantial business interests and amassed considerable wealth but has also acquired a degree of influence both in Hyderabad and Bangalore. What is more, by converting the Guru Nanak Jhira Foundation from a registered society into a trust largely comprising of his family members, he has alienated the wider community. The Sikhs generally believe that S.Joga Singh neglected the College, was only committed to making money and behaved in an irresponsible manner when the students were attacked. The fact that one section of the Sikh community led by Sant Eshar Singh Jathadar of Gurudwara Gosha Mahal, Hyderabad demanded his excommunication from the fold at the Bhog at Gurudwara Nanak Jhira on October 2 is an indication of the controversy surrounding this aggressively successful entrepreneur.

#### Role of the police:

The local police has come in for criticism by all in Bidar - the Sikh students, the political party leaders, the ordinary citizens. From our investigation, we feel that the police should and could have intervened much earlier. Tensions between the students and the local population had been on the increase for quite some time. The rise of the Hindu communal groups, their connivance



with the local gangsters, and their open display of communally surcharged emotions (e.g. the events preceding the Ganesh Chaturthi festival) - all these were apparently allowed a free rein inspite of warnings sounded by some citizens like the ex-municipal councillor mentioned earlier. Even when the violence started - on the night of September 14 - the police acted in a lackadaisical manner. The ex-councillor who was dining at a friend's place that evening in Badruddin colony near Gandhinagar (where 80% of the Sikh students live), sensed that trouble was brewing after he heard about the first attack on the Sikh students on the question of payment of donations. He rang up the SP, Dr. Umapathi, that very night asking him to send a police force to the affected area. But only four constables were sent to the spot. He added that in the past too the police invariably failed to tackle local incidents and did not respond promptly to complaints. From the different versions we heard of the incidents in front of the Engineering College on September 15, we believe that the inadequacy of the police force combined with the connivance of some policemen with the rioters definitely aggravated the situation. While some people blamed the SP, Dr. Umapathi as incompetent, others gave him the benefit of doubt by pointing out that even with the limited manpower he had, he tried his best to keep the warring groups apart by restraining the students from coming out of the Engineering College and keeping the mobs at bay outside. But, in the process, instead of the marauding rioters it was the students on the opposite side who had to bear the brunt of the police action. Students informed us that the police raided hostel No.2 on the campus, where some of them had taken shelter, and indiscriminately beat them up. Although the SP denied that the police had taken any student into custody, 41 students were found locked up when DIG, Mr. Pawate arrived with his forces on the evening of September 15. These students had also been beaten up by the police. The students also complained that the police stood idle while the rioters attacked their houses and destroyed their belongings. The police was also nowhere around then the miscreants started attacking Sikh owned shops and their houses in the centre of the town.

In view of the pathetic performance of the police, one can quite understand the sentiments of the Sikh citizens who are demanding the suspension of the SP Dr. Umapathi. The demand was made when the Chief Minister visited the Gurudwara and the students raised slogans against the S.P. who had to be removed to safety by a police escort.

Although everyone agrees that the arrival of the DIG Mr. Pawate on the evening of 15 September with additional forces saved the situation from further deterioration, one wonders why it took him so long to come with reinforcements. His headquarters at Gulbarga is only 120 kms away from Bidar. Yet, he reached Bidar only at around 5.30 p.m. While credit should be paid to him for rescuing the besieged students from the Engineering College and transporting them safely to the Gurudwara, it appears that even his presence and the patrolling by the KSRP (Karnataka Special Reserve Police) could not restore order in the town. On September 16, the miscreants attacked the polytechnic and set on fire the house of a Sikh ex-serviceman. On the night of September 26-27, there was an attempt to loot a bank. In some areas of the town, night patrolling by the local police had stopped altogether from September 15.

By September 29, the police had arrested 104 people. Three murder cases had been registered. When asked whether the arrested included those who figure in the list of suspects submitted by the Sikh students, the IG Mr. Anandan told us that some of them had been apprehended.

We strongly feel that immediate identification of the guilty and their arrest and punishment are essential to restore confidence among the Sikhs in Bidar and elsewhere. If the authorities drag their feet on this issue, as the Centre had been doing for the last four years on the question of punishing the culprits responsible for the 1984 massacre of Sikhs, it will further aggravate ill-feelings, not only among the Sikh population, but also among members of other minority communities in Bidar, some among whom complained to us about a growing feeling of insecurity and lack of confidence in the local police.

#### Role of the Press:

A disturbing aspect is the inordinate delay in the reporting of Bidar incidents in the national dailies. Although the disturbances took place between September 14 and 16, and the bodies of the four Sikh students were recovered from a well on September 18, it was almost a week later that readers of the national press came to know about the ghastly happenings. Our inquiries revealed that the local police misled the representative of a national news agency by giving out the story that a minor clash had taken place over a eve-teasing incident. But by the 18th it should have been clear that the incidents were of a far more serious dimension and communal at that. Yet, it took several days for the national dailies to react and start reporting the disturbances. That there was a major lapse cannot be denied.

Even when reporting the incidents, some of the national dailies seemed to add more importance to the allegations of eve-teasing than the essential communal motivations as causes of the violence.

We feel that both the local and the national press, instead of depending on police briefings and taking their words at face value, should have made independent inquiries to ascertain the truth. Immediate publication of a faithful account of the incidents would have shown that the Sikhs in this case were not the culprits, but the victims of a communal outrage. This could have prevented the circulation of rumours that warped the public mind. The rumours shaped their psychology in a way as to make a large section of the Bidar people tacitly approve of the anti-Sikh violence.

#### Behaviour of the Political Parties:

Whilst the involvement of all the political parties at the local level was of a piece - be it in terms of actual participation in the violence, material and moral support to the criminal elements, or through offering rationalisation of the attack on the Sikh students after the event - there are indications of some equivocation at the State level. In the first place there was no outright condemnation of the killings, arson and looting. On the contrary, there was a strange silence from the State leadership for the first several days. Even on the visit of the Chief Minister and Mr. R.K.Hegde, the public statements made, referred to the 'unfortunate' and 'tragic' happenings rather than an unequivocal indictment of the culprits. After visiting Bidar, Mr. JH Patel, Industries Minister stated that the violence was not communal and less serious than made out. Subsequently, in a statement made in the State Assembly, the Chief Minister referred to the increase in eve-teasing over the past few years and the failure of the police to control this as a possible cause of tension. This would suggest that the ex-post rationalisation being put across by the local apologists has found a sympathetic listener in Mr. S.P.Bomma, despite the fact that there have been no complaints about eve-teasing or misbehaviour made to the police in the past, as was confirmed to us by Mr. Anandan, Inspector General of Police. The Chief Minister also denigrated 'attempts by some to blow up the events out of all proportion.'

One of the leaders of the 45,000 strong Muslim community (approximately 1/3 of the population) in Bidar complained bitterly that the police did not allow them to meet the Chief Minister during his visit and represent their point of view. As a result of the attack on Sikh students and the destruction of the property owned by Muslims, a sense of insecurity had grown among the latter

and their confidence in the local police had diminished.

Although the State Government has been quick to appoint a judicial commission of enquiry and strengthen police arrangements to restore peace, it would seem that the pressure of Bidar's 'power lobbies' is being felt in Bangalore. Whether this would further influence the responses of the State government in terms of action to be taken to re-establish confidence amongst the minorities remains to be seen. We can only hope that political considerations and pressure from the dominant caste group would not take precedence over the need to combat the communal virus which has expressed itself against the relatively small Sikh minority in South India for the first time. What is, however, gratifying is that there has been no serious attempts so far to politicise the Bidar tragedy despite some 'unnecessary' initial noises made by the Congress (I) and a few of its front organisations in Delhi. At the same time, it would be unfortunate if this was because of a tacit understanding to play down the gravity of the matter. The events at Bidar need to be discussed and debated widely so that effective steps are taken to restore communal harmony in the disturbed area and prevent similar occurrences elsewhere.

#### National Implications:

Attempts like those of Mr. Balasaheb Deoras to dismiss Bidar as a 'local matter' notwithstanding, the terrible events of 15 and 16 September and their underlying causes have wider implications for the entire country. This has been the first major attack against the Sikh community since the 1984 massacre in Delhi following Mrs. Gandhi's assassination. It is significant that such an incident should take place in one of the southern States, where the Sikh population is comparatively small and which saw relatively less ugliness in 1984. Despite this, an anti-Sikh sentiment has emerged in a place with rarely any instance of communal conflict of any kind. During the course of our investigations, it became only too clear that not only was there a distinct lack of sympathy for the victims but a commonly held stereotype image of the Sikh as aggressive, violent and 'anti-national'. The primary cause for this appears to be the constant and calculated propaganda by the official media through television and radio about the situation in Punjab which has led people to believe that only Hindus are being killed by the terrorists. Yet, among the victims of Khalistan terrorism, no less than 40% are Sikhs - many among whom died while trying to resist the terrorists or protecting their Hindu neighbours. The spread of such communal sentiments is a matter of serious concern and needs to be countered without loss of any more time.

The stereotype of the Sikh as a potential terrorist is further reinforced by comments and utterances, often made by 'responsible' people like political leaders. In Bidar for instance, the Congress (I) leader, Mr. Chandrakant Sindhor told us that the Sikh students studying at the Bidar Engineering College who were sent by their parents from Delhi had "terrorist connections". We learnt that an ex-MP belonging to the BJP had submitted a petition to the former Chief Minister, Mr. Hegde, warning him against giving approval to Mr. Joga Singh's proposal of a medical college since it would help the Khalistanis: One can well imagine the impact of such comments and opinions on the non-Sikh public mind.

A second and, in our view, equally significant lesson from Bidar, is that there are unmistakable and strong trends of a growing Hindu fundamentalism with militant overtones in many parts of the country. The recent popularity of the Ganesh Pooja in Bidar seems to have been inspired by the massive processions and rallies organised in Hyderabad by the B.J.P. A number of so-called 'social' groups have sprung up, ostensibly to establish Ganesh Mandals, but which can easily be utilised for instigating mob violence, as was witnessed in the September clashes. It is also important to point out that these gangs and the violent mobs were led by neo-rich middle class youth who were able to mobilise other lumpen elements to go on a rampage. The emergence of this type of a middle class is evident in all such small and medium sized towns across the country. The possible nexus between the emergence of this middle class and the rising Hindu fundamentalism deserves to be examined in greater depth as its implications could indeed be widespread and serious.

The South Indian states had till recently been free of anti-Sikh violence. <sup>? TN</sup> The latest disturbances in Bidar however, threaten to endanger the security of both the Sikhs and non-Sikh population in the South. While the Sikhs may no longer feel safe in these areas, the non-Sikh population may feel threatened by possible terrorist retaliation. In the wake of the Bidar disturbances, at least one Khalistani terrorist organisation had come out with threats of attack against the Karnataka state emporium and the information office in Delhi. In the South, Andhra Pradesh leads in the concentration of Sikh population, most of it in Hyderabad city. In 1984, after the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi, ~~an~~ explosive situation threatened to develop when Congress (I) demonstrators planned to take out a procession in front of a gurudwara. Intervention by some prominent citizens and civil liberties groups however prevented any untoward incident. But the sudden explosion in Bidar - without any provocation whatsoever - has bred a sense of insecurity among the Sikhs in Hyderabad. The increasingly aggressive tone of the Ganesh Chaturthi festivals in Hyderabad every year

is viewed with apprehension not only by Sikhs, but Muslims too, who in 1984 had been victims of widespread communal riots. Since it was the Ganesh Chaturthi festival which indirectly sparked off the violence in Bidar - so near Hyderabad - the religious occasion is likely to become a source of perpetual tension every year.

Although situated more than 700 kms from Bidar, the Karnataka capital Bangalore has not escaped the tensions generated by the Bidar incidents. We visited the Sikh gurudwara at Ulsoor in the heart of the city, and were told by the office secretary that they had also received threatening letters.

#### Summing up

Bidar represents a graphic microcosm of social processes that we can neglect only at our own peril. Over the last decade, we have seen how yet another insecure minority, the Sikhs, has not only been created but that a climate of ill-will and hostility surrounds it. Consequently, even in a locality like Bidar, far away from the surcharged Hindu-Sikh atmosphere of the north and where the earlier holocaust had been unable to register its presence, a conjuncture of essentially local factors when placed in a milieu marked by communal feelings can lead to tragic consequences. What begins possibly as a business rivalry amongst powerful contending groups to monopolise a source of potential profits, draws upon communal stereotypes and resentments, employs local hooligans and utilising the backdrop of a religious festival leads to the death of innocent Sikh students, assaults on many others, destruction and looting of property and a major fracture in inter-community relations. All this is assisted by a larger shared feeling that Sikhs are 'legitimate targets', and the ineptitude of the local administration. The fact that Bidar is a backward district, culturally more attuned to neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, and far away, both spatially and cognitively from Bangalore, helps. Our press and politicians, both local and national, hardly cover themselves with glory. With a breakdown in all our instrumentalities, we are all forced to be witness to the making of another tragedy, one whose fallout might well become even more horrific, unless concerted action is taken all around.

#### Recommendations:

On the basis of our findings and as a result of discussions with a cross section of people in Bidar, Hyderabad, Bangalore and Delhi it is our view that urgent action is required to be taken on the following lines:

arrest and prosecution of those involved in the killings, beatings, arson and looting. Many of these persons have been identified by the students and others and a list has been made available to the police (Appendix 1). There would be others as well who could easily be identified by a determined investigative team, considering that Bidar is not a very large town and no outside elements were involved.

settle doubts about missing students. On the basis of the list of registered students from the College management, the State government/District authorities must make an unequivocal statement about the number of students missing and/or dead so that speculation and misgiving on this issue comes to an end.

appointment of the judge for the commission of enquiry which has been announced and fixing a period of three months for the commission to submit its report. The enquiry should not be allowed to be prolonged as has, so often, been the case in the past.

settle the compensation claims for the property lost and damaged. According to the Deputy Commissioner, Bidar the assessment has been completed and the administration has estimated the loss to be Rs. 62 lakhs.

postpone the Engineering College exams for a period of six months to enable the students to make up their lost work and regain their confidence. The next terms study should be immediately after, so that the loss of time is minimised to six months.

construct adequate hostel accommodation during the period so that no student is required to live outside the campus in rented premises. However, this should not result in the creation of a ghetto psychosis. In order to avoid such a situation free interaction between the citizens of Bidar and the student community would have to be encouraged which, in turn, would require the punishment of those involved in criminal acts. Without the latter, the Sikh students could not be expected to regain their sense of security and confidence. At the same time, the management of the College would also need to make conscious efforts to increase the sense of participation and involvement of the local community in the affairs of the institution.

reconstitute and activate the local Peace Committees so as to provide greater representation to the genuinely secular elements in place of the existing group which has been set up in a mechanical and bureaucratic manner. Apart from political parties and legislators, socially conscious and motivated citizens could be associated with the efforts to restore the communal harmony which Bidar has known in the past.



APPENDIX I

List of suspects submitted by Sikh students to the Bidar Police

1. Arvindali S/o Sivasanappavali (Editor) - leader of group called NAVY which has 25 members.
2. Chandu Patil
3. Viju Patil
4. Sornu Patil
- 
- 
- 
- Patil Transport Co.
5. Karnataka Sidu - leader of group called FIREFORCE
6. Khasampur - financiers of group called SWAGAT
7. Raju Agarwal, brother Ramesh Agarwal, Municipal Councillor and owner of hotel Aradhana
8. Ramesh Goel - Hari Textiles
9. Vasavraj Shetkar - Jyoti Engineering
10. Dashrath Doddi
11. Raghu Doddi
- 
- Shiv Sena leaders
12. Brijmohan Tandon
- 
- Shopowner
13. Sanjay Sail
14. Ajay Sail
- 
- Moti Mahal Bar & Restaurant
15. Vidya Sagar
- 
- Friend of Sails
16. Sanqram
- 
- Owner of black Hero Honda
17. Venkat Rao
- 
- Shopowner new Shiv Sena Group
18. Ajay Singh S/o Brupal Singh, RSS leader
19. Muddha
- 
- Commission agent in Gandhigunj area involved in starting riots and 14 Sep night meeting.
20. Dattu Katakam
- 
- owner of watch shop
21. Balaji
- 
- Former manager of Deepak Theatre
22. Biradar and his brothers
- 
- Owner of customs notified shop in front of Central Jail
23. Gini S/o Sivarudrapa Gini
24. Siva Kumar Kolar S/o Sivasarana Kolar

## APPENDIX II

21st July, 1988

To

The Hon'ble Chief Minister  
Government of Karnataka  
Bangalore

Hon'ble Sir,

### Sub: Sanction of Medical College at Bidar

We would like to bring to your kind notice the prevailing demand for Medical College at Bidar.

That since long we are pressing for the sanction of Medical College to the local societies of Bidar.

Rastriya Rachanamatmak Karyu Samithi is in existence since 1961 under the Chairmanship of Sri Kashinath Rao Belur. It is running three High schools, two Junior Colleges, one Degree College, Para Medical courses like Diploma & Degree in Pharmacy Lab. Technicians and a T.B. Sanatorium and serving the cause of education in Bidar District. It has applied for Medical College and capable to run.

Karnataka Rastriya Education Society is in existence since pre-independence period i.e., 1941 under the chairmanship of Mr. R.V. Wadga. It is running Karnataka High School, Karnataka Arts, Science & Commerce College, Karnataka Law College, Karnataka 'B' Pharmacy College, Karnataka Industrial Training Institute, Karnataka Book Depot, Karnataka Free Dispensary & Clinical Lab., M.B. Co-Ed Institute of Pharmacy, Post graduate Diploma in Business Management, Vocational courses like Lab-technicians, computer and Neelimbika Girls High School. It has also applied for Medical College and capable to run.

Vysily Singh is running one school, has also applied for Medical College and capable to run.

Sri. Gurunank Dev Foundation Trust has also applied for Medical College at Bidar. It has appeared in the local press that the said society has constructed Hospital of 500 beds, which is far from truth. In fact the said trust has put 400 beds in Gurunank Dev Guest House which is purely meant for sick pilgrims. It is already running one Engineering College, Polytechnic Junior College and one school. The people of Bidar already dissatisfied and annoyed with the way of administration and admission especially to Engineering college and polytechnic and resulted in disturbance of Public place and there is feeling of insecurity in the minds of people of Bidar District. The people of Bidar have showed their dissatisfaction and annoyance by observing Bidar District, Wardh and representations were made to you yourself when you were in Bidar District tour. In such circumstances it is not desirable to sanction Medical College to Sri Gurunank Dev Foundation Trust, which further aggravates the local people in the interest of people in general.

Yours faithfully,  
[Signature] Secretary to Government of Karnataka

Vyshiya Sangh which are the best societies serving in the cause of education and we will be ever grateful for this act of kindness.

Thanking you Sir,

Sri. Murtidhar Rao Kale  
President Zilla Parishad,  
Bidar

Sri. Raj Kumar Mohite  
Vice President Zilla Parishad  
Bidar

Sri. Basava Raj Patil Attur  
M.L.A. Basava Kalyan

Sri. Basavaraj Patil  
M.L.A. Bidar

Sri. Md. Laiqoddin,  
M.L.A., Bidar

Sri. Varjmath Patil, M.L.A.

Sri. Kashinath Rao Belure  
President R.B.K. Samithi  
Bidar

Sri. Varjmath Artham  
Secretary, Vyshiya Sangh

Sri. Jaganath Patil  
Zilla Parishad Member  
Bidar

Sri. V. S. Patil  
Chairman of Cell  
Bidar

Sri. Ananth Rao Chinnave  
President Dist. Youth  
League Party, Bidar

Sri. Ravindra Mase  
Vice President, T.M.C.  
Aurad

Sri. Vishwas Badale  
Councilor T.M.C.  
Basava Kalyan

Sri. Venkateshwar Patil  
M.L.A. Basava Kalyan

Yours faithfully,  
Bhaskar Chatur  
Hon'ble Minister of State for  
Women & Children Welfare.

Sri. Nursing Rao  
Suryavanshi  
Member of Parliament, Bidar

Sri. Gurupadappa  
Naganna Patil, A.P.A.  
Aurad

Sri. Kallyan Rao Molkari  
M.L.A., President Dist.  
Janatha Party, Bidar

Sri. Pandlik Rao, M.L.C.

Sri. Hanumanth Khandre, M.L.C.

Sri. Channabasappa Halbhali  
Secretary K.R.E. Society  
Bidar

Sri. B. Narayan  
Zilla Parishad Member, Bidar

Sri. Basenoddin Halbharpur  
General Secretary  
D. C. C., Bidar

Sri. S. S. Tondore  
Senior Member of  
Janatha Party

Sri. V. S. Rao Patil  
New Member  
Janatha Party

Sri. N. B. Patil  
President of M.C.  
Bidar

Prof. M. N. Bhat, Aurad

Sri. P. S. Tondore  
Congress (P) Member

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