



Women Protest for Peace शांतीसाठी स्त्री-संघर्ष

द्वारा : महिला दक्षता समिती, कोरगावकर परिसर, रेल्वे स्टेशन समोर, कोल्हापूर - ४१६ ००१

23-07-2024

To
Hon. Chief Minister,
Government of Maharashtra,
Mumbai

Subject: Fact-finding Report of Brutal Violence in Vishalgad-Gajapur

Hon. Sir,

As you are aware, on July 14, 2024, Vishalgad and Gajapur in Shahuwadi taluka of Kolhapur district were subjected to brutal communal violence. This is a grievous and worrisome occurrence for all citizens of Kolhapur, which bears the legacy of social equality and justice for all, particularly women, as instituted by Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj. This frightening reality came to light after meeting with the women victim-survivors of Musalmanwadi in Gajapur village. Undoubtedly, encroachment at forts is an important issue for all Maharashtrian and Marathi people. But the so-called devotees of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj (Shiv Bhakts) in the name of Shivaji Maharaj, committed untold violence at Vishalgad and on Gajapur, which had no encroachments whatsoever.

Women of all castes and religions of Kolhapur have come together to form a unique platform named *Shanti Sathi Stri Sanghrsh* (Women Protest for Peace) following religion-based violence in Kolhapur in June, 2023. We have resolved to support each other in times of communal crisis by communicating with each other and publicly representing the women's point of view and women's issues. The forum is working to fight for a safe world for women. Through this platform, we are trying to draw attention to issues of peace and justice through **silent demonstrations** against hatred.

In the background of the violence at Vishalgad and Gajapur, we decided to prepare a 'Fact - finding Report' on behalf of *Shanti Sathi Stri Sangrash* (Women Protest for Peace) We researched the background of the incident and the horror of the victims' experiences by visiting the Gajapur village meeting with women, men and children. These are our concrete demands to the government, administration, and police department.

Key Findings of the Committee:

1. The city of Kolhapur known for the ideological legacy of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj who instituted the policy of total inclusiveness, social equality, and justice, is now being targeted by Hindutva activists and right-wing organizations. The principles of secularism,

equality, and freedom of expression guaranteed by the Indian Constitution are being continuously violated in the district.

The incidents in Kolhapur must be seen in the context of the politics of supremacy of the majority and the oppression of the minorities that has unfolded throughout the country.

In June 2023, houses and shops of the Muslim minority community were attacked in the city of Kolhapur due to the 'Mobile WhatsApp Status'. Thousands of youth from outside of Kolhapur city were involved in it. The perpetrators of that incident have not yet been punished.

2. There is no opposition from any citizen to remove any type of encroachment on the forts. But this problem should be resolved by the government, administration, Hon. Courts and concerned local bodies as well as through awareness and strict legal action. But the Vishalgad anti-encroachment campaign and the brutal violence in Vishalgad-Gajapur were premeditated, with the political aim of creating religious polarization ahead of the upcoming assembly elections. It was planned to target the Muslim minority community. It is intended to create terror and fear in the minority community and to destroy harmony between the Hindu-Muslim community.

3. The issue of Vishalgad encroachment and the violence in Gajapur have nothing to do with each other. Hindutva organizations gave a call to take the law into their own hands, used the encroachment dispute, and resorted to destroy 42 houses in the Musalmanwadi of Gajapur village located 3 Kms from Vishalgad. This in spite of the fact that Gajapur was not part of the disputed encroached area. Locals we spoke to told us that Ravindra Padwal (Pune) of 'Samast Hindu Bandhav Samiti', Sambhaji Raje Chhatrapati, and leaders of other Hindutva organizations were mute witnesses to this violence and in some instances supported the same violence.

4. In this violence, all components of Maharashtra state administration and government, police were from the side of violators. The chief minister as well as other administrative officers did not show any sensitivity towards prevention of violence.

5. Locals who met with us told us that women who accompanied the perpetrators were inciting them to destroy homes and the mosque. It is deeply disturbing to find that they encouraged their fellow men to commit this violence. The feeling of religious hatred transcends their feeling of solidarity with women of other religions.

As secular, conscientious citizens of India we strongly condemn the violence that happened in Vishalgad-Gajapur. These incidents should be investigated impartially and the masterminds and instigators, as well as all the perpetrators of this violence should be arrested immediately, and strict action should be taken against them. Provocative videos on social media of speeches inciting religious hatred, violence and communal strife must be immediately taken down and legal action taken against those who produce and circulate such content.

At the same time, to prevent such incidents from happening in the future and to maintain social harmony, people from all walks of life should come together and have a thorough discussion on this problem. Also, we are demanding that a helpline should be set up to facilitate immediate response in case of such incidents.

Shanti Sathi Stri Sangharsh (Women Protest for Peace) forum is ready to take the initiative and implement an action program on this problem.

We are attaching the Fact-finding report.

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Pushpa Kamble – Ekati Sanstha

Deepa Shipurkar – Aman Foundation

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WOMEN PROTEST FOR PEACE

Fact-finding Report

‘Vishalgad Encroachment Issue and Gajapur Violence’

Date: 23.07.2024

Gajapur is a small village located at the foothills of Vishalgad in Shahuwadi Taluka in Maharashtra’s Kolhapur district. There is a locality of Muslim community in this village called Musalmanwadi. A total 42 Muslim families stay there. On 14 July 2024, a violent mob attacked this locality.

The Forum called ‘Women Protest for Peace’ tried to find out the truth behind this incident. Dr. Megha Pansare, Smt Bharati Powar, Rehana Mursal and Malika Sheikh of this Forum visited the site and talked to affected women and other villagers. Many affected people and eyewitnesses also gave statements. A report based on information received from face-to-face interviews and communications is as follows.

In the last three decades, politics in Maharashtra has been affected by Right Wing, Hindutva ideology similar to that all over the country. Communal violence has become a day-to-day affair now. Study and analysis of such incidents happening in various villages - towns co-existing peacefully for many decades helps to understand the present, past and future directions of the society. Therefore, we are viewing this fact-finding report as an effort to register serious and important incidents in society.

Violence at Gajapur was clearly done with a view to target the minority Muslim community. However, it has a specific procedure and pattern. It is important to understand that.

1. Maharashtra has an inspiring history of forts. The topic of purity, preservation and conservation of these forts which are the historical heritage of the state as well as preservation of biodiversity and developing facilities for tourists around these forts is very sensitive and close to the heart of the Marathi community.

2. Since the last two years a few organizations were demanding removal of encroachments from Vishalgad historical fort. There are almost 156 encroachments at this place and the issue of 6 encroachments is sub judice. Many petitions are pending in Courts.

Since the last few years people promoting militant Hindutva have initiated a planned effort to divide the Hindu and Muslim community at Vishalgad. Both the Hindu and Muslim communities have various types of businesses at Vishalgad. In this regard extremist Hindu organizations put forth the idea of an anti-encroachment movement to Hindus at Vishalgad and told them that by this Muslims will be removed from the Fort. They argued that this would benefit the Hindu community in their business. When the list of encroachments was being prepared, the Hindus got disturbed as that list contained names of people from Hindu community also. Then Hindus and Muslims came together. But the people supporting Hindutva kept the issue of encroachment alive.

On 7th December, 2022 a meeting of District Administration, Organization working for 'freedom' of Vishalgad from encroachment and locals was held during which a time period of three months was given to remove encroachments by themselves on the Fort. At the same time, an order of 'Ban on killing of Birds and Animals and Cooking of meat' on Vishalgad was implemented and its strict compliance was started. For this base of 'Ancient Monuments and Archeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958' 8(c)¹ was taken.

In February 2023 a petition was filed in the High Court against encroachments. The court stayed the removal of encroachments on 6th March. Therefore, the administration did not carry out the action of removal of encroachments. To get permission to celebrate Bakri Eid and Urus and to sacrifice roosters and goats as well as preparing non-vegetarian food, Muslim community filed a petition in the High Court. However, the High Court gave the decision to take permission from the concerned department and then hold the festivities. Then Muslim people went to the District Collector, Kolhapur. The District Collector said that this matter falls under the purview of the Archaeological Department. Their office is situated in Mumbai. It was not possible to visit Pune and do anything because the next day (29th June, 2023) was the festival of Eid. Hence, the Muslim

¹ The Maharashtra Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Rules, 1962 Rule 8. Prohibition of certain acts within monuments.

(1) No person shall, within a protected monument

(c) cook or consume food except in areas, if any, permitted to be used for that purpose by the Director or an Archaeological Officer; or

community sent an email to the concerned office. They informed that ‘Email has been received which is being sent to the Chief Secretary, if a reply is received by 12.00, you act accordingly, otherwise you decide yourself.’ No reply came to the email and therefore Eid passed without celebration.

During June 2024, a petition was filed in High Court on behalf of the Muslim community that permission may be granted to sacrifice roosters and goats for five days during Eid and Urus and to prepare meat. They enclosed all documents related to efforts made during the last year and requested to grant permission directly. On perusal of this, the Court scolded the concerned government officials and gave permission to Muslim Community of Vishalgad for sacrificing for five days from 17 June – 21 June 2024 during Bakri Eid and Urus.

Despite permission by the Mumbai Bench, Police and Revenue Department asked the devotees of the fort to refrain from sacrificing. Then Dargah Trustee and villagers did not celebrate Eid and protested administration by keeping all shops and businesses closed for one day in Vishalgad.² Again permission was obtained from the High Court and the festival was celebrated. While going on the fort, all persons are screened thoroughly including purses of ladies. Even school buses carrying students are not allowed on the foothills of the fort. Similarly, locals are angry over the ban on non-vegetarian food. They are asking if such bans are not prevalent at other forts, then why they are imposed on Vishalgad.

Post that after four days, Ravindra Padwal of ‘Samast Hindu Bandhav Sa. Sanstha’ (All Hindu Brothers Social Organization) released a video clip. In that it was mentioned that a lot of encroachment has taken place in Vishalgad. Now we would not visit Pandharpur for religious pilgrimage as *Varkari*³ but would go as *Dharkari*⁴. We will take a large army to Vishalgad and will get the encroachments removed from there. We will start from Pune on 29th June on foot and will reach Vishalgad on 14th July.⁵ This video was released on Instagram and social media under the title ‘Vishalgad Mukti Sangram’ (A Battle of Freedom of Vishalgad). After that many staunch followers of Hindutva joined that campaign and this campaign gained publicity.

² <https://pudhari.news/maharashtra/kolhapur/kolhapur-prohibition-of-sacrifice-at-vishalgad-protest-against-administration-by-shutting-down>

³ The Varkari Movement is a significant spiritual tradition that originated in Maharashtra, India, in the 13th century, as panth during Bhakti Movement. This movement is centered around devotion to Lord Vitthal, also known as Vithoba. It brings together people from various backgrounds in a mutual journey of faith and devotion to Pandharpur, marking an essential part of Maharashtra’s cultural and religious life.

⁴ Followers of the organization Shri Shivpratishtan Hindustan founded by Sambhaji Bhide, a staunch Hindutvavadi, in 1984. The organization aims at establishing a Hindu Rashtra and takes thousands of youths to various campaigns in the forts of Maharashtra.

⁵ <https://www.instagram.com/padwal2905/reel/C9L8rJTtoFOF/>
https://www.instagram.com/santya_ly55/reel/C9C_hnHifl/

During this time President of Swarajya Sanghatana and Ex-MP Sambhaji Raje⁶ declared to organize a meeting on this subject and took a meeting on 7th July, 2024 at Kolhapur. Until now many communications have taken place on this issue with administration but with no result. Then he declared that he would visit Vishalgad on 13th July and would free it from all encroachments. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj broke through Panhala and reached Vishalgad on 13th July, 1660. Also, Shiva Kashid, Bajiprabhu Deshpande, Bandal Sena and many known - unknown soldiers had sacrificed their lives. In commemoration of this inspiring day, Shri Sambhaji Raje Chhatrapati made an emotional appeal to all *Shivbhakts* (Devotees of Shivaji) of the whole of Maharashtra to ‘Come to Vishalgad’ on 13th July, 2024 and pledged to make Vishalgad encroachment free.

Sambhaji Raje was in constant discussion with the District Collector on this matter. Many people suggested to him that since this issue is sub judice, you should refrain from interfering. However, he gathered the information that only 7 people have gone to the Court. Actually, few other people were also under that process, but they had not received a stay decision till then. But despite getting this information, he decided to go to Vishalgad and remove encroachments. On knowing this, people from Muslim community gave representations to officers like Police Inspector, District Collector, Special Inspector General of Police, Deputy – Police Superintendent four days before the incident and said that Ravindra Padwal has wrong intentions, and some violence is going to take place here. Therefore, they demanded that some protection be provided to them and their families. At this, the District Collector told them that ‘you have made us respondents in the Court Case. Now what can I do?’ All people went back to their homes after submitting the said application.

Other organizations were also supposed to undertake the movement on 14th July. Hence Sambhaji Raje also changed the date from 13th July to 14th July.

At this, a ban on gathering was enforced under Section 144 of Indian Penal Code to maintain law and order at this place.

3. On 7 July 2024 Maha Aarti was done at the foothills of Vishalgad on behalf of all Hindu Samaj. Demands were made to the government that Fort Vishalgad, made holy by the stepping of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, should be freed from all encroachments, immediate hearings should be done on petitions filed on this matter in the Court. In this matter the government took the

⁶ Sambhaji Raje is the Chairman of the Raigad Development Authority established in 2017 by the Government of Maharashtra.

stand of asking about the works done from the fund of 800 crore Rupees given to ‘Fort Conservation Committee’ and taking reports from the same Committee regarding encroachments on all the forts. (In July 2021, the then MP Sambhaji Rajee Chhatrapati was included as Specially Invited Member in ‘Forts Conservation Committee’.⁷ At the same time, Chhatrapati Sambhaji Rajee demanded that funds of Two Thousand Crore Rupees should be provided by the state government for conservation of Forts.⁸) All *Shivbhakts* from all districts of Maharashtra came for the Maha Aarti Programme. It was also given the name of ‘Vishalgad Freedom Movement.’⁹

Ravindra Padwal began to make the post regarding Vishalgad encroachment viral, since then their priest became sick due to tension. Day and night he was feeling tense that something untoward is going to happen here. On Seventh July he could not bear the Maha Aarti and its threat, and he suffered a heart stroke. He was admitted to ICU at Kolhapur Hospital, and he died on 14th July.

However, after a few days the leaders of Hindutva organization Vishwa Hindu Parishad declared that they were not connected with this movement and that they would wait for the Court’s decision. This, however, was only their strategy. In fact, a large number of their followers were part of this campaign.

4. Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, while celebrating the 351st Year of Coronation of Shivaji Maharaj on Raigad on 20th June, 2024, gave assurances like ‘Presently Vishalgad issue is sub judice, but a **Correct Programme** will be undertaken. Emotions of *Shivbhakts* will be taken care of’ in his speech. During this event declarations like ‘Mother Goddess give strength, give freedom to Vishalgad’ were being made with a bang during the Coronation Celebration. The issue of encroachments was made alive during the speeches of leaders also by special announcements.¹⁰
5. Shri Shahu Chhatrapati Maharaj, the present MP of Kolhapur, appealed to Sambhaji Rajee to find a way out by discussing with administration / government. He also made efforts to arrange a meeting with Hon. Chief Minister and District Collector. But he could not get any response from the administration. Said meeting could not be fixed. After that Sambhaji Rajee decided on holding a movement against encroachments.

⁷ <https://www.navarashtra.com/latest-news/tourism-friendly-development-of-forts-committee-headed-by-cm-nrab-151109.html>

⁸ <https://www.loksatta.com/maharashtra/chhatrapati-sambhaji-rajee-demands-funds-of-rupees-2-thousand-crores-for-conservation-of-forts-in-maharashtra-css-98-4413466/>

⁹ <https://www.saamana.com/immediately-remove-encroachments-vishalgad-fort/>

¹⁰ <https://marathi.abplive.com/news/kolhapur/vishalgad-correct-program-will-be-done-chief-minister-eknath-shinde-roar-on-raigad> kolhapur-news-129200

6. Incident on Vishalgad

- Incident on 14th July 2024

People understood the gravity of the situation and instead of thinking about their houses, they first closed the gates of 'Malik Rehan Dargah' situated there and locked it. In the morning at around 9.30 AM 50-60 people gathered at Vishalgad giving slogans. They were chanting 'Jai Shree Ram'. They were shouting "Don't spare these traitors, finish them off, destroy the Mosque – Dargah'. They were carrying swords, knives and hammers. While coming they marched sabotaging only. They were breaking windows of houses, boards. However, since the gates of Dargah were locked, they could not enter the Dargah. They could not do any harm to Dargah. Hence, they went towards the graveyard. They climbed and started pelting stones on Dargah and Mosque. When some localities gathered at that place, they started pelting stones on them too. The priest there was requesting humbly that 'I do not have a house to stay in, please do not break this house in this rainy season, where will I go?' Still the whole house was razed to the ground. There are many such incidents. Four – five people got hurt in their heads. Muslim people there were scared that now they will break their houses and Dargah – Mosque also. Then 8-10 police personnel arrived. They drove them away and made them go through another route. But they did not take any action against them. Women, men and small children gathered around 'Malik Rehan Dargah' to save it. Muslim ladies mixed chili powder in water and encircled the Dargah to protect it. But not a single Hindu community member came out of their house for their help. After that no group came near Dargah. After two hours people at Fort got to know that the same mob marched down and attacked Gajapur. For the whole night, these people sat near the Dargah fearing that it would be attacked.

Muslim Community asked the Tehsildar Shri Ramling Chavhan as to how these people came on the Fort. On this he said that these people threatened that 'If we are not allowed to go upstairs, we will jump into the valley', hence they were allowed. But he did not take any action against these youngsters.

Sambhaji Raje arrived at the foothills of Vishalgad around 3.30 – 4.00 PM. People requested him earnestly to stop whatever is happening. To this he said 'I cannot stop this. This is a cry of their rage. I cannot do anything in this.' 300 – 400 people accompanied him. Many people feel that it was pre-decided that 'attackers should go ahead, and then he will follow.' He was stopped at the bridge. He gave a speech there. He said that we have gathered here to remove the encroachments. But just now the Chief Minister has assured me that action against encroachment will be initiated. Sambhaji Raje started back after stating this. He did not go to the Fort. Till then violence and sabotage was going on everywhere at Gajapur. He was there also for some time. He saw everything himself. People from

Muslim Community went to him and asked him that where is the encroachment here? Encroachment is on Vishalgad. Then why violence is taking place here? At this he said that I cannot do anything in this. This is a cry of rage of *Shivbhakts*. Around 2000 people gathered on the return route and started resorting to violence in Gajapur situated at two – three kms of Vishalgad.

7. Violence at Gajapur

There is no connection between Gajapur and encroachment at Vishalgad. All houses situated there are proper houses having ownership rights. There are around 90 Muslim houses in the village but there are 42 Muslim houses in Musalmanwadi.

A mob of around two thousand people entered Musalmanwadi holding swords, knives, hammers in their hands and started sabotaging. They broke open the doors of each house and entered inside and destroyed the things. TV, fridge, mixer, bed, chairs, mattresses, nothing was spared. They pelted stones on two wheelers, four wheelers, destroyed them with hammers and lifted them and left them at far off places. Things in kitchens, grains, flour, and meals were also thrown out. Looted money and jewelry. Burnt clothes. Looted valuables. Insulted holy religious books. Broke windows and roofs of houses. The whole locality was destroyed. While attacking the houses attackers were asking their names and names of their family members. On hearing Muslim names, attackers were abusing them and using offensive language. They were asked to say, 'Jai Shree Ram.' They were doing video recording of all this. They attacked many males.

The mob mercilessly destroyed the whole mosque situated in the locality from inside. Some people climbed the top of the mosque and destroyed it with hammers. They must have thrown petrol bombs there as the fans were burnt. Administration has tried to hide all this burning by painting it white. Because of this only outside people, journalists are not allowed in the village.

In the attacker's mob, a large number of staunch female followers of Hindutva were there. While doing violence some young women wearing saffron dresses were instigating the male attackers. They were asking the men 'Can't you hit hard? Are you wearing bangles?' They were provoking and instigating them to do more and more violence. They were challenging their masculinity. They were trying to do violence themselves. It included women from Pune, Lanja, Karad, Islampur. Some men removed their underclothes in front of ladies and performed perverted actions.

Experiences of Women

The women of Musalmanwadi experienced great terror throughout the day. A big mob attacked from outside and they were trying to stop them from entering by placing sofas, chairs, beds from inside. Due to the fear that small kids would not make any sound, they inserted dupattas in their mouths and

made them shut. They saw their households built by years of effort come crashing down within seconds. They were crying, asking for mercy. Attackers were asking them to say, 'Jai Shree Ram.' On saying 'Jai Shree Ram' the women were requesting that at least now please do not destroy our houses. When the ladies were saying 'Jai Shree Ram', attackers were recording them. Attackers asked the names of several women. On hearing Muslim names, they were abusing them. They took photos of a few young women. They touched them. They snatched ornaments from their bodies. On seeing the attack by mobs, ladies and small kids, elders ran from the back doors of their houses to save lives and hid in the farms and forest in heavy rains. All ladies of the locality had this terrible experience.

One Muslim woman told them a Hindu name on which they asked for her Aadhar card. Since she did not have it, she went inside and closed the door. Then the attackers broke open the door and came inside. They beat her up. Blood clot has appeared in her eyes where the wound is. They opened the small gas cylinder and set fire to it. The whole house is burnt from inside. For two days it was sweltering. Presently that lady is staying at the *anganwadi*.

The wife of Yakub Mujawar narrated her story. They have a paan shop. Mob beat them up. They were attacked by sharp weapons. Yakub Mujawar is admitted in Miraj Hospital now.

Many women are shaken to the core due to this sudden attack. When they saw us ladies visiting them from outside, they started crying and pulling us to come and see their houses, mosque. In just one day they have become baseless. They are scarred with pain on seeing their worlds built over years of efforts coming crashing down within seconds. Small children are scared and insecure. They are drained emotionally. They are worried about their future. They feel that nobody can protect them during such times. Many families have started to send their daughters-in-law and small kids to their relatives in other villages.

8. Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's visit to Kolhapur

On 14th July while Chief Minister Eknath Shinde was on visit to Pandharpur, he suddenly reached Kolhapur at midnight at One O'clock and enquired with IG about Vishalgad and its situation and its law and order.¹¹ He instructed to make arrangements as per requirement so that no untoward incident takes place. After this violence it came to be known through the media that the encroachments at Vishalgad which do not have Court stay are being removed. But it contains families of Hindus and Muslims, both.

¹¹ <https://marathi.abplive.com/news/kolhapur/cm-eknath-shinde-visits-kolhapur-at-midnight-took-information-of-vishalgad-encroachment-129820>

9. Release the arrested ‘Shiv devotees’ – Sambhaji Raje

Police arrested 21 attackers. Post this Sambhaji Raje stationed himself at the Police Station and asked as to ‘why the so-called *Shivbhakts* were arrested?’ He demanded that either they should be released, or he should also be arrested. However, he was not arrested.

10. ‘INDIA’ Coalition visited the affected people

Despite strong protest by the administration, under the initiative of present Member of Parliament Shri Shahu Chhatrapati Maharaj and MLA and ex- Home Minister Shri Satej Patil, representatives of ‘INDIA’ coalition met the affected at Gajapur. This was the first consolation visit at such a broad level. However, they were stopped at Pandhre Paani, 16 kms away from Vishalgad. Media representatives were also prevented from visiting the site. After struggling for one and a half hours the police was forced to give permission to few selected persons to visit Gajapur. They met and talked to the people in Gajapur. They got to know of their pain. They visited all the houses. They consoled those affected. Items of primary requirements were provided.

At the same time an open meeting was held in front of the destructed mosque. All those affected demanded immediate arrest of attackers. They accused one person from their village who showed the houses of Muslim community to the attackers and demanded his immediate arrest. The affected people also demanded immediate compensation. They expressed primary requirements of food, clothes, medicines, medical help, financial help, emotional support.

After coming back to Kolhapur all representatives of ‘INDIA’ coalition went to meet the District Collector. All representatives took administration to task about this and said that this was a failure at all levels – administration, government and police. Similarly, they asked that despite the passing of two days after the attack, why government help was not provided till now. They also demanded that the government should begin immediate help in the violent affected areas. Then the ‘INDIA’ coalition sent the first help to the violence affected on 17th July, 2024.

On 18th July, 2024, ‘*Shiv – Shahu Sadbhavna Yatra*’ was organized in Kolhapur city. A large number of citizens having comprehensive, egalitarian, secular thoughts of Chh. Shivaji Maharaj and Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj took part in this. This was the peaceful response to the violence.

11. Urgent questions of violence affected people

1. Help from various social organizations is reaching Gajapur village. But the police are not allowing anybody to Vishalgad. People living there have still not received a supply of food and medicines. People are having storage of food only for two days. Milkman comes after four

days. It is raining heavily. The roofs of several houses have been broken. Gathering is not allowed till 29th July, hence the government should supply food grains to them on an immediate basis.

2. All two wheelers and four wheelers of Gajapur citizens have been destroyed. Hence, they do not have vehicles. They cannot commute anywhere. Compensation is not given for damage done in riots from insurance. They are being told that if there is 'third party' insurance, only half the amount is paid. Therefore, they are worried. They should be guided suitably in this matter and necessary steps should be taken so that they receive compensation.
3. Media is not allowed to go to Vishalgad. Unless and until media representatives or journalists visit the place, the experiences and issues of those people cannot come to the forefront. Therefore, the media should be allowed to go there.
4. Yakub Mujawar was attacked with a sword due to which he was wounded severely. He has been admitted to Miraj hospital. His hospital expenses should be borne by the government.

12. The factual situation that has come up before the Fact-finding Committee raises many important questions.

- Encroachment issue of Vishalgad was in discussion since long. Still why could it not be resolved by communicating, discussing with all concerned bodies?
- The intentions of concerned militant Hindu organizations and their purpose was available on social media. A number of provocative, instigating videos were being circulated openly on these mediums. Identities of the youngsters in those videos were quite clear. Despite that, why did the police department not take them seriously? Why were the leaders organizing these drives not arrested? Why were they not arrested before the incident?
- Gatherings were banned, still this large number of mobs was allowed to go to Vishalgad. How? Why were they not stopped at Kolhapur only?
- Attackers carried weapons. They committed violence in the presence of police, yet they were not arrested. Violence affected people were not helped in any way.
- Even after violence when the violence affected persons did not have grains, clothes, medicines, items of basic requirement still the people wishing to help them were not allowed to enter the village. Why?
- To prevent the information from coming out, journalists were hit in front of police, they were threatened with knives. Why was no action taken on those attackers?
- Why were the affected villagers not provided immediate government help?

- Why they do not disclose information about the FIR, which offense has been registered under which Section and on which accused and so on? Offenses were registered only on 24 people, then when will the offenses be registered against rest of the hundreds of attackers? Whether offenses have been registered against molestations and other sexual advances happened on women folk?
- The original reasons for this violence Ravindra Padwal from Pune and Banda Salokhe of Sevavrat Sanghatana, Kolhapur are still on the run. How? Why they have not been found yet? Similarly, why was Sambhaji Raje not arrested?
- People from militant Hindutva organizations, public representatives of governing parties are openly demanding the Chief Minister to not to register offenses against accused. This falls under which Law? How will the affected get justice?
- Government has declared that a damage of around 2 crore 85 lakh rupees have taken place in this violence. In fact, the actual amount is still more. How will that be paid?
- It is right that places like forts and historical places should be clean. But the cleanliness should be achieved by creating awareness about and implementation of rules by making them mandatory. Is this correct to stop people from preparing meat and eating it? At several other historical places, forts etc. non-vegetarian food is allowed. This discrimination falls under which law? Can the government decide what one should eat?

Conclusion

1. Kolhapur city which once had the historical ideological legacy of all inclusive, social equality and justice of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj and Rajarshi Shahu Maharaj has been targeted by Hindutva, right wing organizations since the last few years. Similarly, secularism, social equality and freedom of expression from the Indian Constitution are being violated constantly in the district.

The politics of domination of majority and emasculation of minority for power is being played in the country and the Kolhapur incident is a part of this.

During June, 2023 in Kolhapur city, houses / shops of Muslim minority community were attacked based on 'WhatsApp status on mobile'. In this a large number of youths from outside of Kolhapur participated. No action has been taken against the accused of that incident till now.

2. None of the citizens is against removing encroachments from forts. But this issue should be resolved at the level of administration, government, Courts and concerned localites as well as through awareness and strong legal action. But this Vishalgad anti-encroachment

drive and inhuman violence at Vishalgad–Gajapur has taken place clearly with prior planning, based on religious hatred and keeping the future Assembly elections in mind creating religious polarization with political motives. It was planned to target the Muslim minority community. The purpose behind it was to create terror and fear within the minority community of society.

In Maharashtra encroachments have taken place at many forts. Vishalgad can be a trial for instigating youth regarding other forts.

3. There is no connection between the Vishalgad encroachment issue and Gajapur violence. Despite there being no encroachment of any kind at Gajapur, Hindutva organizations have taken law in their hands and have committed violence. Ravindra Padwal (Pune) of Samast Hindu Bandhav Samiti, Sambhaji Raje Chhatrapati, leaders of other Hindu organizations supported violence. They do not fear Law.
4. In this violence, all components of Maharashtra state administration and government, police were from the side of violators. The chief minister as well as other administrative officers did not show any sensitivity towards prevention of violence.
5. Women Hindutva ideology participated in this violence. They provoked their collaborator supporting men for violence, this trend is very disturbing. Religious intolerance is being imbibed in the minds of women so deeply that they are forgetting their femininity and are resorting to violence on women of other religions. This is purely a misuse of women for Hindu ideology politics.

With this background, ‘Women Protest for Peace’ Forum further demands that:

1. A Special Investigation Team may be formed immediately for investigating violence in Vishalgad–Gajapur.
2. The reasons for this violence Ravindra Padwal (Pune), Banda Salokhe (Sewavrat Sanghatna, Kolhapur), who are on the run, Sambhaji Raje Chhatrapati and leaders of other Hindu organizations who participated in this violence may be arrested. Compensation for damages done in this violence may be recovered from them.
3. Provocative videos of all people giving speeches provoking religious intolerance and communal hatred and instigating violence are available on social media. These must be immediately taken down and legal action should be taken against those producing and circulating these videos.

4. District Police Chief who failed to prevent Vishalgad–Gajapur violence must be transferred. Action must be taken against police who did not prevent attackers from violence and those who did not take any action against them.
5. Such communal and religion-based violences are constantly being planned in Maharashtra. Keeping in view the upcoming Assembly elections, the government may take initiative for nominating permanent peace committees and administrative machinery for maintaining peace and amity, for preventing violence and social oneness in all districts of the state.
6. Communal / Religion based violence is dangerous for women of all communities. They become targets for hatred and violence in any community. Hence all females of all minority communities may be safeguarded.

As secular, diligent citizens of India and women aware of future of Maharashtra, we strongly condemn violence happened at Vishalgad–Gajapur. We demand that a fair investigation of this incident be held and the facilitators, provocateurs of this violence as well as attackers must be arrested immediately, and strong action must be taken against them.

Along with this, in order that such incidents do not repeat in future and social amiability and communication remains present, discreet persons from all areas of society may be called together and this issue may be discussed comprehensively. Similarly, we also demand that in the event of such incidents concerned bodies should immediately establish a helpline for contact.

‘Women Protest for Peace’ Forum is ready to take initiative in this matter and execute an action programme.

Fact-finding Committee

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