Shanti Sena (Indian Peace Brigade) intervenes in Bhiwandi riots, 1970

7 May
1970
to: 19 May
1970
Country: India
Location City/State/Province: Bhiwandi, Maharastra
Location Description: Bhiwandi is a city known primarily for its textile industry

Goals:
"The aims of the Shanti Sena are three-fold:

1. To prevent any outbreak of violence in the country

2. If violence does break out nevertheless, to bring it under control by non-violent methods

3. To create in India such an atmosphere of non-violent strength that war may be outlawed from the international field, and the spirit of cooperation strengthened"

-Narayan Desai

The goal of this campaign was to diminish violence and communal tension in the city of Bhiwandi and restore peace in the community.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 033. Fraternization
- 063. Social disobedience › Hindu Sainiks living and interacting with Muslim refugees
- 174. Establishing new social patterns

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 033. Fraternization
- 063. Social disobedience › Hindu Sainiks living and interacting with Muslim refugees
- 174. Establishing new social patterns

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 033. Fraternization
- 063. Social disobedience › Hindu Sainiks living and interacting with Muslim refugees
- 174. Establishing new social patterns

Methods in 4th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 033. Fraternization
- 063. Social disobedience › Hindu Sainiks living and interacting with Muslim refugees
- 174. Establishing new social patterns

Methods in 5th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 033. Fraternization
- 063. Social disobedience › Hindu Sainiks living and interacting with Muslim refugees
- 174. Establishing new social patterns

Methods in 6th segment:

- 007. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 033. Fraternization
- 063. Social disobedience › Hindu Sainiks living and interacting with Muslim refugees
- 174. Establishing new social patterns

Classifications

Classification:
Third-party nonviolent intervention
Cluster:
Peace
Group characterization:

- Activists
- Gandhian disciples
- civilians
- students

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:
Narayan Desai, Vinoba Bhave, Jayaprakash Narayan, Ravishankar Maharaj
Partners:

District Collector (Shri Kapoor)
External allies:
Not known
Involvement of social elites:
Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Shanti Sena

Groups in 2nd Segment:
Groups in 3rd Segment:
Groups in 4th Segment:
Groups in 5th Segment:
Groups in 6th Segment:
Segment Length: *Approximately 2 days*

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:
Communal rioters in Bhiwandi, groups creating communal tensions like the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh), Tamire Millat, and Shiv Sena
Nonviolent responses of opponent:
Not known
Campaigner violence:
None known
Repressive Violence:
Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:
4 points out of 6 points
Survival:
1 point out of 1 points
Growth:
2 points out of 3 points

After India's independence in 1947 (for example see, "Indians campaign for independence (Salt Satyagraha), 1930-1931"), tensions between Hindus and Muslims erupted in violent riots in the north of what was an undivided India. This was in part the legacy of the "divide-and-rule" strategy of the British Empire. When tensions flared, Gandhi had the idea of creating Shanti Sena, or Peace Army, an army of nonviolent soldiers that could keep the peace. Gandhi planned a conference in 1948 at his Sevagram Ashram to discuss the organization of the Shanti Sena, but he was assassinated before talks began.

Vinoba Bhave, an activist who was considered the spiritual heir to Gandhi, revived the idea in 1957. Bhave had organized the Bhoodan-Gramdan (land-gifting) movement to create united village communities that shared land. Concerned by communal riots near Gramdan villages, he proposed the formation of a nonviolent army that could protect the villagers from the rioting. It was an attempt to apply "Gandhian methods" in different conflict situations and historical circumstances after independence.

Under the leadership of Jayaprakash Narayan and Narayan Desai, the Shanti Sena became a group of about 6,000 Shanti Sainiks (peace soldiers) in the mid 1960s at the height of its membership. The Shanti Sena was an offshoot of the Sarvodaya (Uplift of All) movement, which sought to build a new society free of exploitation and oppression. The Shanti Sena was an attempt to provide the trained personnel that would be responsible for peacekeeping in the new society. Many of the Shanti Sainiks were regular rural Sarvodaya workers as well as students who would travel to nearby riot-stricken areas.

The Shanti Sena intervened in the communal riots of Bhiwanda in 1970. The city of Bhiwandi in the western state of Maharashtra, India, had been relatively peaceful in the past and did not have a history of violence despite its diverse population. However, the population had skyrocketed in the last decade and immigrants and industrial workers flooded the city. This led to strong economic competition between ethnic communities and socioeconomic classes and communal tension. Slogans such as 'Don't trust the Muslims' and 'Avenge Ahmedabad' (see "Shanti Sena (Indian Peace Brigade) intervenes in deadly Hindu/Muslim riots, Ahmedabad 1969") became popular with militant groups. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sagh (RSS), Tamire Millate, and Shiv Sena, all Hindu nationalist groups, became more polarizing in their rhetoric and activities.

The largest source of tension was the upcoming Shivaji celebration to honor the historical Hindu leader. Because of the British "divide and rule" policy, Shivaji was seen very differently in the eyes of Hindus and Muslims. For Hindus, Shivaji symbolized a noble nationalist spirit, while many Muslims associated him with the Shiv Sena political party's Hindu nationalism. Therefore, celebrations for Shivaji had to be carefully arranged and rules enforced to prevent violent uprisings between groups.

During the 1970 celebration in May, young men were arrested for shouting provocative slogans. Later when a procession of 3,000 to 4,000 Hindus entered the Muslim Machhi Market, participants began shouting pro-Hindu slogans. Presumably started by the Muslims, the crowds began to throw stones at each other. Once the procession was dispersed, widespread rioting and arson began throughout the city, with most of the damage occurring on May 7.

Shanti Sainiks from Bombay and Maharashtra spontaneously arrived in the city to defuse the tension, and began organizing relief and mediation strategies on May 9, 1970. They stayed for about 10 days with 25 Sainiks, 5 of them being women volunteers. They obtained curfew passes from the government in order to peacefully patrol the streets and prevent any violent outbursts from occurring. They patrolled the streets and refused to retaliate to provocations or threats from angry youths. While working in Bhiwandi, the Shanti Sena lived in the compound of Shri Hafiz Kuddus, who allowed the peace army and Muslim refugees to stay in his factory. The members of the Shanti Sena were mostly Hindu, and people in Bhiwandi were surprised to see that a Hindu group, particularly including women, was able to peacefully live within a Muslim community. The Shanti Sena hoped this would set an example for peaceful relations within the city.

Bhiwandi was torn by the rioting and the streets were strewn with debris and dead bodies, houses were burnt and still smoking, slums had been razed to the ground, and textile factories had been torn open. About one third of the city's inhabitants became refugees, and fear and exaggerated rumors were rampant. The Shanti Sainiks worked to clean up the city, distribute rations, and give medical aid. They also worked with the District Collector, Shri Kapoor, to communicate with the people to find and clean up dead bodies. Because the Sainiks had no political affiliation, they were able to gain the trust of the community and help clean up the streets. The peace soldiers also worked to clean up the municipal gutters, which were overflowing and clogged with debris. The government waived curfew in order for the Sainiks and over 300 people of the community to begin a collective cleanup.

Throughout the campaign, the Shanti Sena worked to mediate talks and cooperation between the Hindu and Muslim communities. They traveled from house to house making contacts and met with the leaders of both communities. The Sainiks created a forum where Muslims and Hindus could meet peacefully. By talking to both sides and collecting names of the

prominent leaders of each community to join in negotiations, they tried to facilitate reconciliation. Sainiks also went through surrounding villages and worked to dispel rumors and assess the situation throughout the city. The Shanti Sena worked on other initiatives to promote harmony, such as writing slogans on public places like 'Mazhab Nahin Sikhata Aapasmen Bair Rakhana' (Religion does not teach animosity), and 'Hindu Ho Ya Musalman, Sabse Pahle Hai Insan' (We may be Hindus and we may be Muslims but first of all we are human beings).

Research Notes

Influences:

The Shanti Sena was directly influenced by Gandhi and his teachings of nonviolent action. (1)

Sources:

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Additional Notes:

This is one of the riots where the Shanti Sena peacefully intervened. See "Shanti Sena (Indian Peace Brigade) intervenes in Baroda language riots, 1965" and "Shanti Sena (Indian Peace Brigade) intervenes in deadly Hindu/Muslim riots, Ahmedabad 1969"

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

Nancy Liu, 22/10/2011

Links:

[1] https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/category/pcs-tags/mainly-or-initiated-people-color