

NAZARIYA

2011-2012

Stories of violence and compassion

A sizable Muslim population resides in Sangli district. In September 2009, communal clashes between Hindus and Muslims erupted over an inflammatory poster put up by Hindu groups during Ganesh Utsav festivities. These unprecedented disturbances were politically incited by right wing Hindutva factions, in an attempt to gain votes for the BJP. Formally a Congress stronghold, the intention was to cultivate anxiety amongst the Hindu population in Sangli that another Congress win would mean an overly empowered Muslim community in the district. Images of the clashes rapidly spread to each village via mobile phone clippings. A video was also circulated with the intent of inciting violence against Muslims. A ten day curfew was imposed. Muslim women have suffered extreme stress due to these threatening circumstances. With memories of Gujarat and Babri Masjid still fresh in their minds, they speak of running to the fields with children and family members, terrified of what might be about to happen. Considering it was mainly young people who were used to carry out the anti-social activities, SANGRAM has subsequently launched a youth-led campaign against communalism.