'Dotbuster' Trial Ends in Conviction
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New Jersey Hindus were displeased with the verdict in the Navroze Mody murder trial just concluded in April. Three of the four defendants, Ralph Gonzalez, 18, Daniel Luis Acevedo, 16, Luis Padilla, 17, were sentenced to the maximum ten years for "aggravated assault." The fourth, William Acevedo, 18, was convicted of simple assault and has yet to be sentenced. Mody's death in 1987 at the hands of the teenagers came just days after the appearance of a letter in a local newspaper from a group calling themselves "dotbusters" and threatening to attack Hindus. [HINDUISM TODAY, Nov., 1987.]

Though the Indian community felt strongly that the attack by the boys was racially motivated, no evidence was brought forth at the trial to prove so. Witnesses instead testified that the two-minute altercation began when a group of girls started taunting Mody (30) about his bald head. A sixteen-year-old girl testified she came up to Mody on a dare and slapped his head. The four teenagers saw Mody push her away. They claimed they thought he was bothering her and started the fight. Mody, a brown belt in karate, defended himself and slightly injured one of the boys. But Mody was knocked to the ground repeatedly, finally hitting his head on the curb, an injury which resulted in his death four days later.

In an interview with HINDUISM TODAY, Jersey City Senior Staff Attorney Jack Hill said they'd hoped the jury would at least find the boys guilty of manslaughter, as is frequently the case in deaths resulting from street fights. But, in the morbid logic which the legal system applies to these inhumane acts, the jury had to evaluate the extent to which Mody participated in the fight, the extent of "recklessness" shown by the defendants and the general motivation for the incident, which the defense claimed was the boys' "misplaced chivalry" in coming to the aid of the girl. Hill said that the jury may have accepted that this was a "street fight in which Mody voluntarily participated but did not initiate."

Mody's father believes the trial was a miscarriage of justice and is trying to have a

mistrial declared. He believes the jury selection was improper and states that one of the jurors was acquainted with a friend of a defendant.

Though defense attorneys were pleased that the conviction was only on aggravated assault and not murder or manslaughter, they complained that "Asian Indians and their organizations had put pressure on the American judicial system" to influence the sentencing and said they would appeal the sentences.

Hill said he knew the Indian community was upset that "the [county] did not frame the incident in an ethnic sense." But, he said, "we believe [the boys] did not know [Mody] was an ethnic Indian." He also pointed out that the boys, though juveniles, were tried as adults and have received the maximum sentence allowable.

The "dotbuster" incidents in New Jersey have created both fear and introspection among local Hindus. If there is any positive result from the tragic death of young Mody, it is that Hindus have become more aware of the need to address intercommunity relations in America.