

# DELHI MEERUT RIOTS



EDITOR

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER



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# DELHI-MEERUT RIOTS

## ANALYSIS, COMPILATION AND DOCUMENTATION

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER



1988



133849

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ISBN 81-202-0198-1

First Published 1987

by

**AJANTA PUBLICATIONS (INDIA)**  
7255/8 Prem Nagar, Shakti Nagar, Delhi-110007

**Distributors:**

**AJANTA BOOKS INTERNATIONAL**  
1 U B Jawahar Nagar Bungalow Road Delhi-110007

Printed by M.R. Prints, at Pasricha Press, Delhi-110031

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## INTRODUCTION

The Meerut riots must make us all sit up and think seriously what must be done to strengthen the forces of secularism in our country if it is to be saved from not only destabilization but also from disintegration. The ruling politicians are very fond of talking about 'destabilization' these days and thereby imply that certain elements within the country is at this game in collusion with 'foreign elements'. This may or may not be so but thing is certain : the way ruling politicians in U.P. directly or indirectly colluded with rank communalists in Meerut and allowed the administration, the police and the PAC to be communalised. It is a very serious matter. Such things, and done so bluntly, can, and do, undermine stability of the country.

Before we discuss other aspects, it is highly necessary in my opinion, to pin down the administration's responsibility for controlling a riot. An ex-chief minister of Maharashtra as well as some senior administrator from Calcutta told me that no riot can continue more than a couple of hours, if the authorities mean business. This claim is certainly borne out from situation in West Bengal today. Hardly any riot has taken place there during the rule of the Left Front Government. It has issued strict instructions to the police and the administration not to allow any riot to spread. It should be curbed immediately. This policy has paid good dividends in West Bengal which has been by and large free of communal trouble.

In contrast if we see what happened in Meerut under the Cong-I Government led by Shri Vir Bahadur Singh, is simply

unbelievable. For five days the PAC and police led mobs from 19th (morning) to 23rd (evening) looted, burned and killed. All this happened unchecked during the curfew hours. The PAC bullets protected fanatic mobs committing arson during broad day light. And all this was happening with full knowledge of the authorities comfortably ensconced in their offices. Moreover, it happened when the Chief Minister was present in Meerut. If this be the attitude of the authorities how can one expect rioting to be controlled?

Something more than worse happened in Meerut in those five fateful days from 19th to 23rd May, 1987. The PAC shot several people dead mostly those sitting in the 'security' of their houses in Malyana, a village, on the outskirts of Meerut, on 23rd May, afternoon. And no action was taken against these blood thirsty-marauders and their commannant Tripathi, but it was not even withdrawn from there. What was even more shameful was that the administration is now trying to cover up the whole incident saying that no such massacre ever took place and that of the 110 people reported missing most of them have returned and that one person who wanted to make false claims for compensation manufactured this list.<sup>1</sup>

This is of course a shameful lie. The massacre did take place in which no less than 78 persons were killed or burnt alive. This writer investigated the whole incident and included in the report "Meerut—Nation's Shame".<sup>2</sup> Also some other journalists belonging to *Telegraph*, *Calcutta* and *Sunday Observers*, Bombay, investigated the incident after this attempt at the cover up and found administration's version quite untenable.<sup>3</sup> What greater shame for a government than to protect those of PAC and the Police who killed scores of people. Can such a government have any right to rule? A government which encourages its forces to massacre innocent people. The very same PAC took around 40 people from Hashimpura, Meerut, near Muradnagar Canal, shot them and threw them into it. The floating bodies were discovered after a few days and also two survivors told the gory tale. The evidence for this has been so overwhelming that the Vir Bahadur Singh Government has so far not mustered courage to cover it up although initially it had denied it. No wonder the noted journalist Mr. Nikhil Chakravartty called it



**“Hitlerite Barbarities in Meerut”.**

If the government has such attitude one can never hope to see the end of communal violence in this country. In fact most of the political parties in India today have acquired vested interest in communal politics. It helps them generate, or so they think, vote banks. Of all these parties the Congress (I) has now much greater stakes in resorting to the politics of communalism. We do not wish to analyse this here. We have done it elsewhere.<sup>5</sup> Suffice it to say that the Governments in Gujarat, U.P. etc. are not very much interested in strongly putting down those elements which find it politically profitable to generate communal hatred and openly provoke communal violence, be it on Babri mosque-Ram janambhoomi issue or any other. No wonder than that one finds increasing projection of religious festivals, ratha yatras and personalities on Government media like the radio and T.V.

It is for no other reason that even National Integration Council has been reduced to a farce. After every major riot a ritual convening of the Council takes place where some shibboleths are repeated ad nauseum and the same reported in the papers. That's about all as far as this body is concerned. The Government never took seriously its suggestion to set up riot squads which will consist of people from different religions and that minorities will be given twenty-five percent representation on it. So many major riots have taken place after the NIC resolved to set up such squads but not a single state has taken lead in this direction. Even the Gujrat Chief Minister Shri Amarsingh Chaudhari developed cold feet on the suggestion for recruiting more in the police force from minority communities. His reason for taking this measure is that it would lead to communal reaction in the state as well as in the police ranks.<sup>6</sup>

Now Gujarat is one of the most communally sensitive states today and is often rocked with communal violence. Ahmedabad and Baroda besides many other cities have been witnessing major communal flare-ups from time to time for last several years and still the Government refuses to give adequate representation to minorities—a step strongly recommended by the National Integration Council. This is all because the

Government has no political courage to take such a step displeasing certain elements from the majority community. The Haksar Committee set up by NIC also made some highly useful suggestions to checkmate outbreak of communal violence. The recommendations, as expected, were hardly taken seriously.

The Indian Express editorially points out, "The fact is that the state is already armed with adequate powers to put down communal miscreants with a strong hand. It just does not use them. The Haksar Committee of the National Integration Council has brought this out forcefully. After noting how religious establishments have flouted various existing laws on public peace and order with impunity, the committee has aptly observed: 'Even a token enforcement of one single issue like this would bring a sense of credibility to the debates of the National Integration Council.'" The editorial further points out very pertinently, "Indeed the very fact that the Prime Minister, the Home Minister and the other eminent leaders who attended the meeting failed to highlight the report of the Committee and instead, were content to repeat the worn-out cliches about strengthening the secular fabric etc. shows that they remain stuck as if in a groove."<sup>8</sup>

This is as far as the National Integration Council is concerned. What can one expect from administration when there is no political will to curb communalism and communal violence. The petty political interests have led to developing what can be described as politics of confrontation. Both the Hindu as well as Muslim leaders are resorting to it most unabashedly. The Muslim fundamentalists took very aggressive postures on the Shah Bano controversy, The Rajiv Government went down on its knees and enacted a law on maintenance of Muslim woman which was neither secular nor Islamic. The whole movement was inspired by political, not religious consideration.<sup>9</sup> In order, therefore, to please Hindu communalists who were highly displeased by the enactment of the Muslim Women's Bill, the Rajiv Government allowed the Babri mosque to be unlocked thus raking up another very bitter controversy.

The Babri mosque/Ram janambhoomi controversy, like that of the Shah Bano case, has done greatest harm to the

secular atmosphere in the country. From both sides again deepest emotions are being stirred by the interested politicians thus bringing about confrontation between the two principal communities. This controversy has become the most major issue though it must be treated a non-issue, thanks to the pre-eminence the politics of communalism and confrontation has acquired in our country today. There is nothing wrong, I must say, in debating the issue academically. It is for leading historians of the country to debate it. The noted historian R.S. Sharma maintains that Ayodhya where Ram was supposedly born could not have existed during that period (i.e. around sixth century B.C.) as there was dense jungle around there and iron was yet to be invented to provide implements for clearing such dense forest.<sup>10</sup> Prof. Sharma's view could be contested by other historians. But it should certainly not be allowed to be politicised. It greatly weakens the secular fabric of our society.

The Muslims point out (I must say in all fairness that even some Hindus have taken this view) that in *Tuzk-e-Babri*, Babar has advised his son and successor Humayun not to hurt religious feelings of the Hindus and not to permit cow slaughter, if he wants to rule over India. How can then he himself commit the sacrilege of demolishing such a sacred temple supposed to be the birth place of Lord Rama, one of the most sacred religious figures of the Hindus? Moreover, they argue, Babar was a good Muslim and a good Muslim is required by injunction of his religion not to touch the sacred places belonging to other religions. It would be outrageous to the Quranic teaching as the Quran goes on to say: "Our Lord is Allah. And if Allah did not repel some people by others, cloisters, and churches, and synagogues, and mosques in which Allah's name is much remembered, would have been pulled down. And surely Allah will help him who helps Him. Surely Allah is Strong, Mighty."<sup>11</sup> Thus anyone who demolishes any place where Allah's name is remembered, he must be replaced by one who can protect it.

Thus the argument could go on historical as well as religious level but it should not be dragged into the political arena, as it has been done today. The issue would not be resolved even if



say Hindus have their way and are able to convert the mosque finally into a temple. It would leave a bitter taste in the mouth of Muslims and the controversy could be raked up by any demagogue in future whenever it suited his interest. The best thing in my opinion would be for truly religious minded people on both sides (and those who do not have any political interest) to sit together and resolve the issue showing full respect for each other's religious sensibilities. However, I admit, there are powerful political interests involved from both the sides and they may not permit such an ideal solution.

The Government, Central or State, would be of no help either. It is the government, as pointed out earlier, which is no less culpable in this controversy. It may either pretend to be neutral or may tilt to one or the other side depending on the political pressures or exigency of the situation. What is then to be done? One thing is to be borne in mind. We will be confronted with many more Meerut riots, if this controversy is not resolved sooner than later. I am of the opinion that there is no dearth of goodwill on either side despite such bitterness generated by the vested interests. There are quite a few, both among the Muslims as well as the Hindus who sincerely wish this controversy to be resolved peacefully. Their voice seems to be feeble yet but given strong will, it can be made much more effective. They must come together, pool their resources and organize an active campaign. It would certainly gather momentum. It would make the communalists on either side defensive. By now they have overreached themselves. All that is needed is to shake our complacency and act.

I would also like to make a point here that the politics of communnism is very tempting but not really so very rewarding. Even a quick glance at some election results would bear me out. People at large have tended to vote on secular issues rather than on caste and communal considerations. The communalists in the recent state assembly elections in Kerala, West Bengal and Jammu and Kashmir were on the run. They had adopted very aggressive postures but drew meagre results, if not altogether blank. I am aware of the percentage of votes they polled by them. In some cases they even polled little more than before. But even this percentage rise is by no means proportional

to the aggressiveness and barrage of their propaganda. No communal party has captured power and formed government of its own. At best it has shared power like the BJP or Muslim League. Apart from this menacing proportions communalism has acquired recently see no prospects for any communal party to be able to turn it into electoral advantage.

But how does one explain this contradiction? A human being behaves at different levels. At one level and under certain circumstances, our religious susceptibilities become predominant and we respond to that situation. At another level our secular interests seem to be at stake and we respond to that situation as best as we can within the given parameters or choices. Even a scientist behaves differently while in the laboratory with his apron on and quite differently while in an ordinary human situation with his apron off.

We should also remember that the Hindu-Muslim conflict is historically conditioned and has deeper emotional causes. Someone or the other is bound to exploit it for the perceived benefits, political, social or even anti-social and economic. My submission, therefore, is that while we should fight resolutely against such forces we should not get disheartened as the integrative and secularising processes are also at work in our society. The determined fight against the forces of communalism and fundamentalism is highly necessary to raise the consciousness of people, to make them realise the importance of shedding hatred against other communities in the process of nation-building and widening secular spaces. Such resolute struggle against forces of communalism would also help keeping away the menace of fascism which becomes real in certain situations.

Looking to the overall situation of socio-economic and socio-political forces in the country today it seems difficult to do away completely with communal violence. The politics of confrontation, and that of communalism and fundamentalism, let us remember, is not due only to our communal conditioning and religious sensibilities but also on account of increasing assertion for share in power and economic resources in developing situation. In other words, left to itself ethnicity is no more than prejudice and awareness of being different but when pitted in a competitive, developing, dynamic situation, it acquires sharp

political complexion. It is for this reason that no developing country (so also developed countries) is free of ethnic conflict in some or the other degree.

It is only when we begin to see the problem in this perspective that we would understand it properly. At one level we have to condemn strongly riots in Meerut as great crime against humanity and yet on the other level we have to understand them as an integral part of development process, perhaps an inevitable price of the development process. From Biafra in Africa to the Philippines in the Far East Asia it is the same story. How can the Indian subcontinent be different?

### Notes and References

1. See *Times of India* Report "Massacre that wasn't", dated 17-6-87.
2. It is included in the book vide page.... It can also be seen in *Economic Political Weekly* in its issue of 20 June 1987.
3. See in *Telegraph*, 17 June 1987, Sankarshan. Thakur's "Nobody has returned to Maliana Village" and in *Sunday Observer*, 21 June 1987, Pankaj Pachauri, "Operation Cover Up in Maliana".
4. See his political commentary in *Sunday Review of Times of India*, dated 14th June 1987.
5. See Asghar Ali Engineer, "Hindu Muslim Relations" *Mainstream* May 9 & 16, 1987.
6. See news item to this effect in *Bombay Samachar*, Bombay, dated 23-6-87.
7. See *Indian Express*, 25-6-1987 Editorial "Enforce the Law",
8. Ibid.
9. For detailed analysis see Asghar Ali Engineer, *Introduction to the Shah Bano Controversy* (Orient Longman, 1987).
10. See R.S. Sharma's interview "Historians are looking at the past from a new angle", *Times of India*, 12-4-87.
11. *The Quran*, 22:40.



# **PART 1**

## **WHAT HAPPENED : DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS**



## ON RETURNING FROM MEERUT

*Asghar Ali Engineer*

Yes, I just returned from Meerut. I am writing these lines in sheer anguish. I have no words to describe the agony of the people of that unfortunate city. What I saw is unbelievable. With all that has happened in Meerut I don't think we can call ourselves civilised, let alone citizens of a great nation with rich heritage of past. We are simply barbarians who take pleasure in killing each other. It is sheer sadistic pleasure. Loss of life and destruction of property has been unprecedented. I have investigated many riots but I have not seen the things I saw in Meerut. Believe me I am not exaggerating.

What is sad the Hindus told me how many Hindus have been killed and the Muslims how many Muslims were slaughtered. No one was genuinely concerned with human life as such. Life is, and must be treated as sacred. It cannot be compartmentalised. The malady begins with such compartmentalization. I do not say religious identities should be abolished. It is, at best, a distant ideal. All I am saying is that we must learn to *respect* life *per se*, not Hindu or Muslim life. We ought to have learnt at least this much by the end of twentieth century.

I always feel proud of that India that produced Gautam Buddha and Mahavir Jain, Nanak and Kabir, apostles of peace, non-violence and tolerance. But here in Meerut I am crossing rivers of blood, trampling here and there over human bones, smell burning flesh, see nothing but hatred and intolerance in the eyes of people. Will this hatred cease to be? Will the Hindus and Muslims of Meerut stop slaughtering each other? I have no such message of optimism. Tension can be felt,



hatred can be experienced, PAC is round the corner to slaughter, provocation or no provocation.

I try to discover the causes. It is not easy. Again, each community has its own story to tell which confuses rather than enlightens. Fortunately there are few who have retained their objectivity, it is they who help me arrive at some tentative conclusion. I can clearly see neither community is totally blameless though Muslims have suffered immensely. But Hindu losses are not insignificant though much less.

Talking to the Hindus and Muslims it appears Babri Masjid/Ram janambhoomi controversy has played havoc. The politics of confrontation has wrought this destruction. Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Babri Action Committee are real culprits.

The common Hindus and Muslims understand the real game behind this non-issue, that is what it is. It is neither mosque nor temple which is aimed at ; it is only the politics of certain vested interests. Earlier we understand this simple truth, better it is both for the country as well as for the security of the masses of people.

Let Muslims clearly understand that the rallies and marches for Babri mosque would succeed only in repeating Meerut. Let them know few irresponsible Muslim leaders are endangering the safety and security of thousands of innocent Muslims. Why after all sacrifice so many precious lives for a mosque ? Let my Muslim brothers understand mosque cannot be more sacred than human life, it is the creation of God ; mosque, on the other hand, is the creation of man. It can be built and rebuilt. Under constraint the holy Quran permits even eating of khinzir (i.e. pork). After saying that eating of dead (animal), flesh of swine and blood is forbidden, the Quran goes on to say, "Then whoever is driven by necessity, not desiring, nor exceeding the limit, no sin is upon him." (2:173)

The message is very clear. Life is above everything else. To save life in certain circumstances, one can even eat forbidden food provided of course intention is not to defy. By analogy one can say Babri mosque, even if more sacred than human life (which it is not), in the given circumstances today, can be surrendered in order to save human life. The massacre cannot be allowed to go on. Those Muslim leaders who still insist on

holding rallies and marches for salvaging Babri mosque are playing, to say the least, with innocent lives, destroying what Allah has created, to save what man has built. If they are so concerned about the Babri mosque, why are they silent about seven thousand mosques converted into stables and residences in and around Punjab during the partition riots. Does it not clearly show that it is *Politics*, rather than mosque which matters.

I would also like to appeal to my Hindu brothers not to be misled by the propaganda of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. Such campaigns would take country nowhere. It would only result in weakening of the nation and in tarnishing of its name. The process of nation building can never be complete without active and meaningful contribution of minorities. Our democracy and constitution can have no meaning if a section of Indian population feels insecure and paralysed. India cannot have the kind of international prestige it is entitled to if communal violence rocks it again and again. Is it not sheer hypocrisy to be proud of philosophy of non-violence and at the same time conniving at killing? Does this killing and communal frenzy lead us anywhere near any solution? Even Hitler's 'final solution' did not work.

Even if Muslims are not 'behaving' they should be won over, rather than killed. My own personal experience shows that little sympathy and understanding create a lot of goodwill among Muslims. Killing would only generate more hatred and bitterness and would result in killing even on larger scale. Repeated occurrence of communal riots clearly corroborates this simple observation. I earnestly hope my Hindu brothers would show maturity and wisdom and take initiative in stopping this bloodshed. We need more Ramas, not Ram janambhoomis. It is his sacrifice for the sake of his younger brother which is needed most.

I would also like to address the Central Government as well as the Government of U.P. Both have not covered themselves with glory. Rajiv Gandhi has deliberately neglected this sensitive issue. He does not want to earn odium from either community. He surrendered to the Muslim fundamentalists on the question of Muslim Women's Bill and to the Hindu fundamentalists on the question of Ram janambhoomi. The

short term interests override long term interests of the country and thus push it on the precipice of instability, violence and communal madness. The UP Government has of course been the real culprit. It has played most unscrupulous role in this whole controversy.

What is most shameful for it is that the Chief Minister Mr. Vir Bahadur Singh is no less involved in the massacre by the PAC in Meerut. All evidence goes to show that it has happened with his connivance. The least he can do is to immediately resign. He was unwilling to withdraw the PAC when it was on its killing spree. He was against handing over the town to the army. Had it been handed over to the army many precious lives could have been saved. Now that all this massacre has taken place he is not willing to withdraw the PAC, let also taking action against it. The order suspending the commandant was withdrawn. Can such a Government have faith of people? We will have more Malianas if we have more Vir Bahadur Singhs in our country.

The way PAC killed people in Meerut it raises serious question of human existence in our country. The human rights organizations should seriously pond over this matter. Where human life is decimated in this arbitrary fashion by the state security forces themselves where is the question of human rights. Human rights go with human life. In my opinion the recently constituted human right's commission should hold an inquiry into the Meerut killings by PAC and other civil rights organizations should launch an intensive campaign for disbanding PAC and trying those culprits from amongst them who are responsible for such monstrocities.

I would also like to apeal to the intelligentsia in our country to launch an intensive campaign with all honesty and integrity against communal and fundamentalist forces whichever community they belong to. Let us realise that communalism is the very negation of our composite nationalism and also of democracy. There can be no compromise with it. Let us put as much pressure on the ruling and other parties to stop the communal and caste arithmetic in winning the elections. Let them face the people with real issues. Let us also launch campaigns among people not to vote on such parochial

considerations but on the basis of the work the candidates or the parties sponsoring them do for the uplift of the people. It is only our unflinching commitment to the cause of the people that would put communalism on defensive. Communalism is on the offensive today because we have consented to give importance to the obscurantist issues, forgetting the real issues.

With all that has happened our faith in secularism should not be shaken. It is our only hope. Greater the adversity, more severe the test of our faith in secularism. Also, let us explain to the people that no religion can be above humanism. Human concerns should be valued more than the religious concerns. Applying same principle to the political arena, democratic concerns should be valued more than the party concerns. Today these concerns have been reversed and hence Ahmedabads, Bhiwandis, Moradabads and Meeruts in our country.

Will genuine secularists and humanists arise? They have nothing to loose except communalism.



## MEERUT—SHAME OF THE NATION

*Asghar Ali Engineer*

Meerut erupted again within five years. It was rocked with riots in 1982 when the PAC (Provincial Armed Constabulary), a communal outfit, had shot not less than 45 persons in Firoz building, an area where mostly bidi-workers lived. The 1982 riot was no ordinary occurrence; but the recent one has far surpassed it in its ferocity and intensity. What I saw during my stay in Meerut can hardly be described in words. The words 'barbarism' and 'monstrosity' are not enough to describe what happened there. Communal riots are shame of the nation; but the riot in Meerut would put even Hitler's acts to shame. It is rather painful for me to compare Nazi Germany of yester years with democratic India of today. May be it is a bit exaggerated and way of saying it. But those who visit Meerut and spend few days hearing the horror stories would not completely rule out this comparison.

The occurrence of communal violence has become so frequent that we have almost stopped reacting to it. I was in Chiangmai (Thailand) when I first read about Meerut riots in newspapers. When I drew attention to this of an Indian colleague he spontaneously said what is new about it. Though I was not surprised by this reply, it did shock me. We have taken communal violence in our stride, something of an ordinary occurrence not worth much bothering about. It is surely a dangerous signal. We have stopped resisting and challenging the monster who is swallowing, day after day, all our human values and national ideals. We have surrendered to it and learnt

to live with it. Who knows who would be its victim next. In 1982 Prof. Harpal Singh, a thoroughly secular soul deeply committed to humanitarian values, had done his best to establish peace and harmony along with his equally committed wife and son. In the recent riots his son Dr. Prabhat became the victim of this monster. Dr. Prabhat was his only son. Prof. Singh and his wife were distraught, but not despaired, when I met them. This is perhaps the only sign of hope in otherwise hopeless situation.

## II

Meerut is an important town in U.P., some sixty kilometers from Delhi. Its population is around one million of which Muslims constitute 4.5 lakhs, i.e. around 45%. It is known for its weaving, brassband and scissors' industries. These industries are controlled both by Hindus as well as by Muslims though the Hindus can be said to be senior partners. Nevertheless the Muslims in Meerut had made it and could be said to have had economically arrived. But all this now lay in shambles.

To begin with it is important to search for the roots of the communal trouble in Meerut. As we know the problem is extremely complex. There is no single cause which can fully explain it. Nevertheless we have to try and unearth various causes. It can be said that the nature of the trouble is primarily politico-economic. I am using these words rather cautiously, though not very precisely. It is very difficult to be precise in such a highly confused situation as it prevails today in that unfortunate town.

I would throw light on what I mean by the primary or most significant cause of communal trouble being politico-economic. Muslims in Meerut, primarily the Ansaris who control powerlooms—and there are 40,000 powerlooms in the city—had begun to become quite prosperous. These Ansaris, having made some money in cloth weaving and printing industry—branched out in some other economic areas, transport, for example. They took to other miscellaneous economic activities as well. Also, many Muslims set up auto repair workshops while large number of trucks pass through the town as it is on an important

trading route. Besides this, the Muslims also have a share in the brassband and scissor manufacturing industry. Nadir Ali & Sons are the biggest manufacturers and exporters of brassband in Meerut, though not the only one.

Many prosperous Muslims, as is quite natural, have developed political aspirations. In these days of increasing fundamentalism many of them, like their Hindu counterparts in the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, BJP and RSS, find it very easy to fulfill their political aspirations through politicised religion. In fact the politicisation of religion is all about this. Motivation for this comes less from religious fanaticism and more from political ambitions. It is for the same reason that the middle castes among Hindus which have acquired economic clout are communalised. There is another side of the coin as well. Religion, on account of its high emotive power, is used by those also who are getting increasingly sidelined in politics. Due to rise of middle castes, the Brahmins are beginning to loose their grip over the political power. Hence they are floating more religio-political organizations like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad to register their political presence.

Among the Muslims one more factor, psychological in nature, operates powerfully, i.e. their being in minority. They tend to cling more to religion both due to minority psychology and their comparative backwardness. Oil revolution in the middle east, the revolution in Iran and increasing communalization at home of certain sections of the Hindu society, have further intensified their tendency to learn on religion not as a faith but an instrument of political mobilization. This becomes great irritant for a section of Hindus, especially the communal and religious fanaticism among the Muslims and this perception feeds their own (i.e. Hindus') fanaticism. One can feel this very much in Meerut today.

If this is coupled with economic prosperity, as it has happened in Meerut, it has multiplying effect on the Hindu psyche. The ferocity with which the business establishments have been destroyed there bears testimony to this observation. Entire rows of shops including the isolated ones on Hapur road, Sadar, P.L. Sharma Road, Begum Bridge, Western Kachehri Road, Mawana stand (where nine buses and many shops

belonging to Muslims) were reduced to ashes. It is very difficult to estimate how many powerlooms were destroyed. Even barber shops and laundries were not spared. Around 50 motor mechanic shops within one kilometer of Mawana bus-stand were burnt. On Hapur road 30 shops, on Azad road 28 shops (on both sides), at Samudas Gate 9 shops and 8 workshops on the opposite side became the targets of mob fury. And all this was done in the full presence of PAC on 19 May in the morning. Most of the Muslims whose economic establishments were burnt or looted told me that economically the Muslims in Meerut have gone back by at least 25 years. They had achieved a measure of prosperity after great deal of efforts. Again they are where they were a decade and half ago.

Add to this the fact that Muslims are 45% in Meerut. This adds to their political clout. They become quite decisive in election arithmetic of any party which seriously contends elections. Even very senior Congress leaders from the area were heard saying we will not allow Meerut to become another Khalistan. And let it be noted that recently the Muslims have, through their utterances and activities created such an impression. For example Salim Ahmad Ansari likes himself to be described as 'Muslim Bkindranwale'. He feels if one crore Sikhs can become headache for the Hindus why can't 20 crore Muslims (unfortunately like the Hindu communalists the Muslim communalists also exaggerate their population).

Here it must be emphasised that the Babri Mosque/Ram janambhoomi issue is playing havoc with the situation specially in U.P. It has become highly emotive for both the communities. One does not know where this politics of confrontation would lead to. Demagogues from both the sides are having fields day. In my opinion the leaders of the Babri Action Committee who have been arousing Muslim feelings on a non-issue for their short term political interests are no less responsible for what happened in Meerut. The rally held in Delhi and the speeches made there by the Shahi Imam, Syed Shahabuddin and others have greatly angered Hindus. Meerut being very close to Delhi a large number of Muslims from there went to participate in the rally. Some of them even wore shroud. Let Mr. Shahabuddin and others understand that their demagogy on



Babri mosque issue is putting thousands, if not lakhs of Muslims in danger. The whole of U.P. today is sitting atop a volcano.

Here it is also important to draw attention to the fact that the Central Government is equally responsible for the hotting up of the Ram janambhoomi/Babri Mosque controversy. It is deliberately allowing it to be prolonged. This enables it to manipulate votes. In fact the Government gave it a new dimension by allowing the lock on the mosque to be removed and letting in the Hindu worshippers. First it surrendered to the Muslim fundamentalists by passing the Muslim Women's Bill and then to Hindu fundamentalists by unlocking the mosque to mollify their feelings aroused by this Bill. In the process it strengthened the hands of communalists from both the communities. What if secularism went by complete default. It requires vision, dedication and commitment to uphold secular and humanistic principles at ones own cost. In this sense struggle for freedom is qualitatively different from efforts at economic development. The former demands sacrifice and the latter encourages corruption. One necessitates suffering while the other promotes grabbing the fruits of development by the middle and upper classes when the development is within the capitalist frame-work as in India. Also, the democratic political processes bring in ever greater political consciousness and increasing degree of assertion on the part of weaker sections and minorities on one hand, and, more ruthlessness and greater degree of corruption among the privileged upper and stronger sections of society. And democracy today in India has become an art of manipulating for purposes of votes the consciousness of one section or the other. This is how the ruling Congress is also surviving in power. There is no longer any question of giving a definite direction to developmental process with a will to solve people's problems and resolve issues based on value premises.

The dispute about the Babri mosque/Ram janambhoomi should also be seen in this light. The Central and the State Governments has neither will nor political courage to resolve the issue on the basis of principles. On the contrary, they are deliberately prolonging the conflict with a view to extract maximum political mileage out of it. They are allowing the

conflict to sharpen, the communities to get embroiled in such non-issues so that they may rule. Our democratic rulers are no less apt in following the policy of divide and rule, a political legacy inherited from our erstwhile British rulers. Hindus and Muslims in contemporary India are as sharply divided as they ever were.

### III

This forms backdrop to the Meerut riots. The question is how it all began and how? No definite answer is forthcoming. There are as many opinions as the people you talk to. Everyone has a theory. One has to listen patiently to all these theories to construct some credible picture. Communal tension in Meerut had very much been there for long. It has all the ingredients often propounded by the theorists of communal riots for communal violence to break out : history of communal violence (communal riots having taken place there in 1938, 1946, 1949, 1962, 1968, 1973, 1982, 1987), higher proportion of Muslim population (40 to 45%), economic competition (mainly in powerloom industry there being 40,000 powerlooms in the town) and sharp political polarization (presently on the Ram janambhoomi/Babri Masjid issue) and struggle for power (within ruling Congress itself between Hindus and Muslims).

The situation had become highly explosive after the Babri Masjid rally held in Delhi. As already pointed out a large number of Muslims had participated in it from Meerut. The militancy among the Muslims was growing on this question. The Hindus were by no means less aggressive, perhaps a degree more. If Muslims raised the slogan "ham hein Muslim tees crore, lenge tera khoon nichod" (we Muslims are 30 crore, we will wring blood out of you), the Hindus shouted "Hindu-Sikh bhai bhai, Muslim quam kahan se aai" (Hindu-Sikh are brothers, where did Muslim community come from) and "Hindustan men rahna hai to Hindu bankar rahna hoga" (if you want to live in India, you have to become Hindu). These slogans were painted on the walls of Meerut.

Also, the power struggle within and without the Congress has sharpened. The high percentage of Muslim population makes it difficult for the Hindu Congress candidates to get

ticket for the assembly and parliamentary seats from here. This, and the Ram janambhoomi controversy has brought about a sharp polarization within the Congress. It has been vertically divided between Hindus and Muslims. The riot further sharpened this communal division. Also, a large section of Muslims is totally alienated from the ruling party. Even Muhsina Qidwai was elected largely by non-Muslim votes in the last parliamentary elections. The Congress bosses including the Chief Minister, it is alleged, wanted to teach these Muslims a lesson for not voting Congress. The Chief Minister, it is a fact, was not well disposed towards Muslims during the riot. He even brushed aside a Congress M.P.'s suggestion to withdraw the PAC during the riot as it was playing havoc with the Muslims. What is worse, number of major incidents of killing and burning of Muslim houses and shops took place when the Chief Minister was present in the town. He hardly pulled up the administration for its inability to control violence. Many openly allege it all happened with his connivance, though obviously it is difficult to verify. »

It is also said by many that the Chief Minister was more interested in arranging men for the Prime Minister's May 16th rally in Delhi than in taking steps to tone up administration for the possible outburst of communal violence which most observers felt was a distinct possibility. The Chief Minister was asked to arrange at least for 750 busloads of people and he is reported to have arranged for 1000 in his enthusiasm to please the P.M. It is also alleged that many of these buses returned loaded with lethal weapons and they were allowed to go to the respective *mohallahs* unchecked. All this arsenal obviously came for the riot. The police which was keeping vigil since the last riot in April was withdrawn and engaged in the mobilization efforts for the Delhi rally. This also left the field free for trouble-makers.

It was also reported to me by some well informed persons within the Congress circle that the Chief Minister was bent on preventing meetings of Shri V.P. Singh and hence he wanted some excuse to ban his meetings. Communal tension came handy to him and a limited flare up suited his purpose. However, things went out of control soon. Anyway, Mr. Singh could not

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address the meetings in Meerut district.

The 16th April communal incident also was a contributing factor. It was on the occasion of a Muslim festival *Shab Barat*. As already pointed out a section of Muslims have achieved a measure of prosperity in Meerut. It is also known that newly emergent prosperous sections, especially those belonging to lower social origins, spend part of their earnings on celebrating religious festivals with much greater fanfare. The Muslims of Meerut also tried to excell each other by display of fireworks on this occasion. There was competition between two groups of Muslims. It is said a police darogha on duty was struck with a firework piece and as he was drunk he fired and as a result two Muslims were killed on spot. Another incident is also reported to have taken place on the same night. Muslims had arranged religious sermon near Hashimpura chauraha. Nearby there was *mundan* function in a Hindu family. Some Muslims objected to film songs being played on loudspeaker and asked them to stop. There was argument followed by quarrel. Somebody from the Hindu side allegedly fired. The Muslims then went on rampage setting some Hindu shops to fire. Hindus largely suffered damage. In all 12 persons were reported to have been killed both Hindus as well as Muslims. Curfew was imposed and the situation brought under control. However, tension prevailed and preparations continued for revenge.

#### IV

The current round of violence began on 18 May after 9 p.m. Again, there is a lot of confusing reports about how it all began. The exact sequence of events is difficult to establish as there are many versions even by those who were present on the scene of events. Whatever the case the scene of action was Hashimpura locality and near by Imliyan mosque—a locality where mostly Ansari Muslims live (i.e. those belonging to the weavers' community).

It is alleged a Khola (stall) belonging to a Muslim was set on fire by some miscreants. Thereafter electricity suddenly went off. It is difficult to say whether it was a deliberate act or the usual tripping. This was followed by a loud bang. Some thought it was transformer which exploded.



Anyway a crowd collected, Hindus as well as Muslims collected in large numbers. Then there began stoning on the crowd from Surajkund side. The crowd went berserk and Muslims are reported to have set afire a sweatmeat shop belonging to a Hindu and killing its owner Brij Bhushan.

The PAC came and surrounded Hashimpura after 11 P.M. and asked the Muslims to come out of their houses so that a search may be conducted. No body came out. The PAC thereupon entered Hashimpura for making arrests. The inmates stoned PAC and it had to retreat under stoning. While running a PAC jawan dropped his rifle (some say it was snatched). The PAC now came in much greater strength after midnight and announced that all should come out otherwise there will be firing. The people of Hashimpura and Imliyan came out along with their women and children. There were more than three thousand people who came and sat on the road outside the Imliyan mosque. It was now that the light came. The rifle which was dropped (or snatched) was found outside a house. The PAC entered that house and shot dead two brothers inside.

A jeep was parked nearby the Imliyan. A police officer wanted to drive away the jeep with some arrested people. The women resisted but the jeep drove off killing a girl and injuring three women (according to another version a girl and three women were killed and yet another version has it that no one was killed, only some women were injured). There was great commotion and some people started stoning PAC which fired in turn killing several people (six according to one version). Thereupon some people entered the mosque, took possession of the mike and appealed to the Muslims to gather together to save their brethren from the police and the PAC. They also raised emotional slogans which further added to the gravity of the situation. They may have done that out of fear but nevertheless it aggravated the matter. My investigations elsewhere also show that the Muslims have lost all faith in the law and order machinery. They prepare to defend themselves and the police takes this as a clear proof of their intention to create trouble. It thus arrests large number of Muslims which leads to further panick.

Same thing seemed to happen in Meerut on that fateful night. Large number of Muslims were arrested. It was really indiscriminate arrest. This angered the Muslims and added to this the news about a girl having been killed by the police jeep. The Muslim crowd now went berserk and started burning, looting and killing the Hindus. Many Hindu shops were burnt. Also, some factories (for weaving and printing cloth) at Pillokhdi were completely burnt. Ten to twelve persons (both Hindus as well as Muslims) inside these factories were burnt alive. On Hapur road at about 5-30 a.m. Dr. Prabhat, son of Prof. Harpal Singh who was proceeding to perform an emergency operation in his fiat car was caught and burnt alive along with his car. Prof. Harpal Singh, his wife who is an educationist and Dr. Prabhat all three are highly committed to communal harmony and have been working untiringly for communal peace in Meerut for a number of years. It was indeed a great tragedy that such a person became victim of communal monster. However, Prof. and Mrs. Harpal Singh had maintained their poise, were sad but not bitter about the incident which snatched away from them their only son.

From 19th morning curfew was clamped on the entire town and now the PAC and Hindu mobs took charge of the situation. They started burning and looting during the curfew hours which went on upto 23rd May quite unchecked. It is said quarter of the town was burning. Fire could be seen anywhere and everywhere. Even the cantonment area where all top government officials live was raging with fire. It was here that the stadium and Mawana bus stand are situated. There are a number of shops belonging to Muslims near the stadium. All were reduced to ashes along with 9 buses parked at the Mawana Stand. According to Muhammad Hanif and Nawab Tyerwala who owned buses told me that the arsonists came around early morning on 19th May and set fire to their 7 buses, two trucks and three tractors along with many shops around the stadium. They claimed that total loss due to burning of the buses and trucks was around a crore of rupees.

The devastation caused during these three days is to be seen to be believed. The worst sufferers were the residents of Shashtri nagar and Miyan Mohammad nagar. Miyan Mohammad

nagar presents a sight of total devastation. There were in all 228 houses belonging to mostly poor Muslims like rikshaw pullers, vegetable vendors, mechanics, bricklayers, etc. Not a single house were left intact. All were demolished, burnt and looted. It must have been a major operation indeed. The residents, mostly women I talked to, alleged that on 19th May at about 2 p.m. PAC came and suddenly began to fire which continued upto 5 p.m. Soon the PAC was joined by the Bangis and chamars nearby and they started looting and setting fire to the houses along with the PAC. Many families lost their bread-earners along with everything they had. I listened to helpless crying women who had nothing left except clothes on their bodies. It was heart rending scene. Unfortunately the story of devastation of Mian Mohammad nagar has not been reported in the press perhaps because very poor Muslims live here. Many of them were burnt alive and their houses could still be seen when visited and many were killed in the unprovoked PAC firing.

Shashtri nagar, a middle class and upper middle class locality, was another scene of devastation. Generally in riots poor people get killed or their houses burnt. But since late this is no longer true. Many middle class Muslims were killed or their houses burnt last year in Ahmedabad and earlier in May 1984 in Bombay-Bhiwandi riots, those Muslims who were living in cosmopolitan localities. Same thing happened in Meerut too. Shashtri nagar is a mixed locality with Muslim houses strewn among Hindu houses in different sectors. Many of these Muslims here believed in living with other communities to promote better inter-communal relationship. They feel sadly mistaken now. Even the houses of a high income-tax official, a chief engineer, an executive engineer and a noted Urdu poet and a rich businessman who had recently migrated from Africa were not spared. Not less than 250 houses were burnt or looted. Here too nothing remained in these houses except four walls and the inmates either fled simply with clothes on or were killed or burnt alive.

A young girl Kahkashan Shaukat who could speak English fluently and whose house was looted in sector 4 of Shashtrinager told me that there was no tension in their area. The members of

peace committee assured them on the morning of 19th May that they need not be afraid and that in the event of trouble they would be protected. However, the trouble began soon thereafter. One Shiv Kumar Sharma living in house no. 379 was provoking trouble, she alleged. Some 20 to 25 boys set fire to Muslim houses. It all began at 10 a.m. on 19th May morning. The peace committee members then expressed their helplessness and we had to flee. Our house was completely looted and nothing remained she said.

According to Mohammad Aslam, also a resident of Shashtri nagar, one Mohanlal Kapur, an ex-MLA (BJP), Shakuntala Kaushik who runs a school in the area, Arun Agarwal and O.P. Khanna, the President of Vyapar Sangh Meerut (who has VIP connection) were openly inciting the mob to loot and burn Muslim houses. Many others also, especially those owning business establishments too complained about the complicity of O.P. Khanna but he has not been touched. He enjoys all the patronage of administration.

Many were burnt alive in Shashtri nagar. In two houses alone in which many people had taken refuge, some 33 persons were burnt alive. Some were killed in firing in the area. Isolated instances of burning have also been reported. The above residents claimed not less than 100 persons were killed in Shashtri nagar alone. But there is no way to check this figure. There may be some exaggeration which is understandable. Many girls are also missing from here. It is feared they may have been raped and killed. A shrine of Najafshah was also completely demolished. In civil lines area too five shrines have been destroyed and one has been converted into a temple. They have written "OM" in bold letters on that temple. What is most shocking is that many Congress MLAs were leading the mobs to loot and burn. Many eye-witnesses corroborated this charge.

Another tragedy of unprecedented nature occurred on the night of May 22. More than 300 persons were arrested by the PAC on that fateful night from Hashimpura, the main trouble spot and were carted away in trucks. Most of them were young and middle aged. Some were taken to jail but around hundred who were not shown on record, were taken in several trucks to



Moradnagar near Ganga canal. They were lined up near the canal and shot one by one. The horrid story was narrated by three boys who miraculously survived by feigning death. They escaped. Two of them are in a Meerut hospital under heavy guard of CRPF and are not allowed to talk to anyone. Their statement, however, has been recorded by a magistrate and is sealed. The contents are not known. The third somehow reached Delhi and took shelter with Janata Party leaders. He was presented to the press by Janata Party President Shri Chandra Shekhar. More than twenty three bodies have so far been found floating in the canal. More are being discovered. Again Heaven alone knows how many were killed. Many allege not less than 100 were shot by the PAC near the canal, as many are reported still missing.

### **Massacre in Malyana**

Another tragedy struck this sleeping village some 6 kilometers from Meerut, in fact it is situated on its outer periphery. What happened here is no less shocking than what happened near Ganga canal. Perhaps more. The brutal massacre, once again by the murderous PAC would put any civilised nation to shame. Malyana has been described by some papers as Mai Lai of India. Perhaps the comparison is not inapt.

The survivors of the massacre in Maliana narrated the harrowing story to me when I visited them on 9th June in the afternoon. It all began, according to Mr. Zaheer Ahmad, an inmate of relief camp, at about ten in the morning of 23rd May. A liquor shop was looted by the PAC belonging to a Hindu and the liquor was distributed to the Harijan population of the village. Then suddenly the PAC started shooting at about 2-30 p.m. They positioned themselves on the terraces of the Muslim houses and began to shoot inside the houses. There are around 5,000 Muslims in all out of twenty-five thousand population of the village. Most of them are poor agricultural workers or small land-holders. They live together in clusters around a pond.

There was no tension in the town before the PAC descended on it totting its guns. Even the Hindu inmates of the village

admitted. There was no-Muslim conflict either, a Scheduled Caste resident told me. The PAC came to the village on the pretext that the Muslims of Maliana were hiding some who fled from Meerut evading arrest. This charge was vehemently denied by the Muslims of Maliana. Anyway the shooting spree of the PAC began at about 2.30 p.m. and continued upto 5.30 p.m. The Harijans of the village joined the PAC to loot and burn (Liquor from the vand looted earlier by the PAC was supplied to them to make them drunk, alleged the Muslims). Almost all the houses were looted. Many got burnt alive inside the houses. Most pathetic case was that of Mr. Mahmood's family. He, his wife and 4 children, six in all, were trapped inside and burnt to death. Another child, a girl, was away with grandmother and thus survived. In all, according to the list prepared by the village Muslims, 78 died in firing and burning operations. Several are still missing, more than hundred, some of whom have been subsequently traced. Dead bodies are still being discovered. I saw the graves of the dead near the dirty pond. Two to three persons have been buried in each grave for want of space. The DIG Moradabad Range was also present during the shooting spree and subsequently negotiated with the Muslims of Malyana who had come out of their houses with their hands up and pleading either to be arrested or shot. The CRPF arrived at 2 a.m. and Muslims went back to their houses (whatever was left of them) and felt little more secure. A judicial inquiry has been ordered.

Everywhere in Meerut I was told that Chamars and Bhangis (Scheduled Castes) joined hands with upper caste Hindus in looting and burning. It is highly disturbing phenomenon and must be seriously taken by those who advocate Dalit-Muslim alliance. Probably these were given liquor and money in most cases to do the dirty job and also got the loot. Their political consciousness seems to be very low and have basically Hindu ethos. This is fully exploited by the upper caste Hindu communal leadership. It is for the BSP and other Dalit leaders to ponder over the matter and take steps to raise political consciousness of these people.

## VI

It is really difficult to estimate how many died in these

unprecedented riots in Meerut. It is the worst of all other riots I have so far investigated. It is rumoured that more than twenty thousand died. But it is ridiculously high figure. This belief gets strengthened by discovery of bodies every day from nullahs, wells and obscure corners. Two other more moderate estimates of the dead are 1500 and 350. The Government admits only little over hundred deaths which again seems far below the actual number. My guess is about 400 deaths in these riots. The Government gives its estimate on the basis of post mortem performed but that is not the reliable way, at least in the present case. Firstly, dead bodies are being discovered every day upto now. Secondly, there were many powerloom workers from Bihar who lived alone in Meerut without family. Many of them are reported missing. While some have fled to their native place, some have been certainly killed. It would be definitely known only after some time.

The arrests were equally arbitrary. Most of the arrested are innocent people with no previous criminal record of any kind. The PAC and the police arrested whomsoever they could lay their hands upon. When I visited a jail in Meerut there were scores of children of 12 to 15 years old. Even the three survivors of the Moradnagar canal massacre are of 20 years or below. I also talked to some people whose near and dear ones were arrested. It was not difficult to guess that the arrested ones were innocent and had played no role in inciting riots or taking part in it in any other way. Only a few of them may have been involved in stoning PAC which was the only way to defend themselves. This is not to say that there are no mischievous or anti-social elements among the Muslims who took part in the riot. But there are. But most of the arrested are not. The total number of arrests made according to the Government sources is between 2,400 and 2,500 but actual number is said to be around 4,000. Needless to say most of the arrested are Muslims though Hindu mobs were openly indulging in looting, burning and killing. Some prominent among them have been identified. They include MLAs and ex-MLAs also. However, none of them has been touched.

## VII

My investigations lead me to certain conclusions which others also seem to agree with. Some journalist have also written about them while reporting on Meerut riots. Firstly, the Chief Minister of UP is certainly not above board. He had his own political motives in not quelling the riots quickly, if not initiating them. He was certainly not sympathetic towards loss of life and property of minorities. Secondly the administration has been thoroughly communalised. Though there were some officers of proven integrity but they were made ineffective. Radhey Shyam Kaushik, the district magistrate, is not communal but he lacks independence and toes the line. He does the bidding of his political bosses. In fact if the administration is determined, and is not lax in any way, it checks communal violence in no time. No administration worth its salt would allow the mobs to indulge in loot and arson openly during curfew hours, much less shooting down people inside their houses.

Fourthly, the PAC's role was most shameful. It openly indulged in mass murders unchecked. No democratic government can tolerate such a rank communal force. But the force has not even been withdrawn from Meerut, let alone being disbanded and severely punished for its unpardonable crimes. Its commandant Tripathi was suspended for a day and again reinstated next day 'for fear of revolt in PAC'. The PAC's composition itself is casteist and communal in character. There are Brahmins, Yadavs, Ahirs and Rajputs in its ranks. Despite assurances given after every major riot to recruit from amongst lower castes and minorities upto 25%, nothing happens and the assurance is once again repeated after yet another riot. So much for the honesty and integrity of the Government both Central as well as the State. *If the Government has any respect for the human life it must immediately disband this monstrous force.* The communal character of the force is obvious from the fact that while minorities dread it, it is eulogised by the majority communitis, i.e. the communalists amongst it.

Fifthly, the Babri Masjid/Ram janambhoomi controversy must be immediately resolved. If early steps are not taken in that direction, for lack of political courage, or for manipulating



votes, there will be many more Meeruts. The whole of North India is boiling with rage on this issue. The Central Government has primary responsibility in this matter. It should not evade it.

If the Government does not fulfill its responsibility in this direction, the secular intelligentsia should assertively come forward and put pressure on the Government to resolve the issue. The intellectuals from amongst the minority community should also appeal to their fellow religionists not to be misled by the hyperbole of the irresponsible members of the Babri Action Committee. They are only serving their political interests at the cost of innocent lives of Muslims. No words can be minced about it.

Time has come for all secular elements to join hands together to resist the menace of communalism. The Fascism is surely on the march in this garb. Without strengthening secularism, let us remember, democracy has no future in our country.

## MUSLIM POLITICS : THE AWFUL PRICE OF THE SHAHABUDDIN-BUKHARI LINE

M.J. Akbar

Meerut, June 1 : Salim Ahmed Ansari loves the alias he himself has promoted : he is know in Meerut as Salim urf (the Urdu for alias) Bhindranwale. Around 40 years of age, he edged his way into politics through the Musilm Youth Conference organised by Javed Habib. When the Babri Masjid issue came up, he at once hitched his wagon to this cause. His road to "salvation" for Muslims, repeated in conversation after conversation with the city's youth, was, "*larhna, marna hai* (we will fight and die)". And he would buttress this line with the example of Punjab : "*Ek karor sardar hain, aur yeh to samhal nahin rahe Rajiv Gandhi sey, ham 20 karor hain, hamen kaise Samhalega* (There are one crore Sikhs, and Rajiv Gandhi cannot tackle them, how will he tackle 20 crore Muslims ?)" The accuracy of the figures is not the point, the direction of the message is. Other, more famous, Muslim leaders of this ilk have been giving their support to such preaching. Ansari organised a meeting of the Hyderabad MP Salahuddin Owaisi, and Owaisi's message to the Muslims of Meerut was : "*Taakat paida karo. Taakat maa ke gaatilon se samjhauta karwa deti hai* (Build your strength. It is strength which creates a settlement with the killers of your mother)." It does not take much intelligence to appreciate the reference points.

The new politics of these modern extremists is actually an echo of the old Muslim League politics : "Turn nationalism into

a bargaining point. Threaten the state with revolt in order to win your demands. And arm yourself to prove how strong you can be.''

This provocative challenge to India was given a kind of formal status at the Boat Club rally in support of the Babri Masjid demands. There is no proper understanding yet of the impact the speeches made there have had on excitable Muslims, particularly the youth. Meerut, being a town close to Delhi, sent thousands to that rally. Imam Bukhari's speech there, declaring that this country could not be called a legitimate home of the Muslims, has been reported, but not the more dangerous speech of Syed Shahabuddin. This correspondent has a video cassette of that speech, and the implicit and explicit call to violence that exists there has to be heard to be believed. Syed Shahabuddin warned India of the "consequences" of Muslim anger.

The reason why Shahabuddin is more dangerous than the Imam is because he provides the legitimacy of a respectable politician to these provocative arguments. When the Imam says all this, well he was a loudmouth extremist even when everyone from H.N. Bahuguna to Mrs Indira Gandhi kept tripping over one other to purchase his support. But Shahabuddin represents what secular Indian Muslim leadership should be all about : his career in the foreign service was interrupted when eminent leaders like Atal Behari Vajpayee and Chandra Shekher brought him to politics to become the Muslim leader of the Janata ranks. Today, he is an important spokesman of the Janata Party, and not the Muslim League, And if a senior Janata MP can give a barely disguised call for insurrection, then why blame the Muslim youth in a depressed *mohalla* from believing that perhaps there is no answer except violence? And if upstarts parading themselves as Muslim Bhindranwales find patronage from the Babri Masjid committee (whose most famous member is Shahabuddin), then what justice is there in picking up a poor and frustrated young man from *mohalla* like Hashimpura and condemning him as an antisocial and antinational element?

For the last two years, and in particular after the Babri Masjid controversy, this message of salvation through confron-

tation has been drilled into the Muslim mind in *mohalla* after *mohalla*, through meetings small and large, addressed by extremist leaders minor and major. A whirlwind was being deliberately sown, and we have begun reaping it. Opposition parties like the Janata condoned it because they were convinced that only Rajiv Gandhi would suffer (although the one Janata chief minister, Ramakrishna Hegde, was wise enough not to allow his own party MP Shahabuddin to hold meetings in Bangalore).

There is great political profit in death of course. Those who light the fires typically run away from the arson : Salim Ansari has spent the whole period of the riots in Delhi. Imam Bukhari can take comfort in the fact that the administration did not allow him to enter Meerut. Shahabuddin went for a couple of hours, and extracted every ounce of publicity with photographs sent to the newspapers (for some unknown reason Shahabuddin was laughing in the picture : no one has understood what there was or is to laugh about).

The tactic is a transparent one : build up passions, and provoke the community to the point of the riots which, when they come, will justify your original call for militancy.

And it is these leaders like Imam Bukhari and Syed Shahabuddin who have given fresh currency to the charge of antinationalism. That there is a powerful section within India always ready to hammer Muslims with the partition stick is not a secret. But this belief is spreading today, thanks to the speeches being made by the most prominent leaders of the Muslim community. The problem is accentuated by the fact that the traditional political machinery in small towns has been replaced these days by an aggressive lumpen element eager to fill the vacuum.

We have reached then a circle of vicious and horrible distress : on the one side political parties like the Janata giving legitimacy to leaders like Shahabuddin, and on the other criminal and communal forces like the PAC using this excuse to indulge in the massacre of innocents. And in this process, the people are getting communalised as never before. There is no Congress and Janata and Lok Dal during riots in Meerut, there is only Hindus and Muslims. Even so-called "leftist" Congress



leaders of Meerut have become great devotees of the PAC.

And the man who has used the anti-national stick against Muslims in Meerut is Vir Bahadur Singh, the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, and even when Rajiv Gandhi came to Meerut, V.B. Singh organised demonstrations in favour of the PAC, and even as non-controversial a leader as Mrs Mohsina Kidwai was insulted and abused with the tacit consent of the chief minister.

All through, the administration in Meerut has adopted an anti-Muslim attitude. And if there was any more evidence needed to prove the point then it came with the transfer of two senior police officers who had the reputation of integrity, V.K.B. Nair and Nathu Sal. The officers who allowed or participated in brutality of the most horrendous kind are being protected by the state administration. And the line is being spread that it was the Muslims who were the real aggressors.

There is truth in the charge that it was the Muslims who first provoked the riots: "Inspired" by the Bukhari-Shahabuddin loyalists, they began the trouble on the 18th. But after that the revenge has been severe. As we reported yesterday, the police and the PAC even indulged in arbitrary killing. There was Maliana. And today survivors are talking of a figure of around 200 in one incident alone near the Hindon canal.

These weavers from Hashimpura became the "*sala Pakistanis*" whom the PAC sent to their death in cold blood, all pawns in a game being played for stakes as high as power. Votes are being counted in terms of corpses, and by every player—both the Shahabuddins and the Vir Bahadur Singhs. After 40 years, our nation's acceptability level for murder and mayhem has risen to unprecedented levels: that is one of the "achievements" of our system. And yet there comes a point when the reddened mind must demand a halt, an accountability.

Imam Bukhari can perhaps be left alone in the petty world he has created. But at least leaders who claim that they feel a sense of responsibility towards the country must take action: Chandra Shekhar against his communal lieutenant Syed Shahabuddin, and Rajiv Gandhi against his communal chief minister, Vir Bahadur Singh. That will not solve the problem, which is already a monster much larger than its progenitors. But it will be a very small beginning towards that end.

## THE AGONY OF MEERUT

*Inderjit Badhwar, Tania Midha and Others*

As almost always the case, last fortnight's bloody communal carnage in Meerut began with an insignificant event. On May 16, Ajay Sharma, a resident of Kotwali, was gunned down in a land dispute—something hardly unusual in that area. A case was registered and the police rounded up four people. Following the leads they provided, a police posse, with some back-up from the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), went on the night of May 18, to Yameen from Hashimpura.

The resistance to the arrest was stiff, particularly since it was the Ramzan period and the police had ill-timed their entry to reach around Iftar, the time when Muslims break their *roza* for the day to eat the evening meal. The police tried to force their way in, and in the melee three PAC men were dragged into the lane and their rifles snatched. Initially, it was only a fight between the police and the Muslims. But the affair soon assumed communal colour as a roadside stall—owned by a Muslim, but rented by a Hindu—was set ablaze and a shop owner nearby, Shashi Bhushan was stabbed to death.

In the confusion during the melee, somebody came onto the loudspeakers of the Imiliyan mosque calling all “believers of the faith” to come out and protect their religion. Predictably, this brought not just the Muslims out but also the Hindus. According to District Magistrate Radhey Shyam Kaushik, echoes of this announcement were heard from masjids in

neighbouring localities too, and soon it was a free-for-all on the roads. Nobody knew who was killing whom and who was burning what in the dark. All we could see was fire at night and smoke for in the morning," recalled Mehboob Mian, as he huddled in his room in Hasbimpura.

In that first round alone, 15 people were killed and more than 350 shops and three petrol pumps reduced to ashes. Indefinite curfew was clamped in the area and the army conducted a flag-march later that afternoon. Yet the arson had spread. By the next day the rioting had affected nearly every part of the city. Even places like Shastri nagar, Saket and Civil Lines, which had never been affected by riots, reported incidents. Curfew was clamped throughout the city.

Soon enough, the violence spread to the walled city of Old Delhi, where eight people were killed in 24 hours and scores injured. And all of Uttar Pradesh, where the majority of India's Muslims live, became a high-tension communal wire threatening to spark off conflagrations of unimaginable dimensions. Over the next few days, Modinagar witnessed an exchange of fire in which two people were killed, four people died in a bomb explosion in Bulandshahr, another blast sent the army rushing into Hapur, and reports of tension flowed in from Gaziabad, Muradnagar, Muzaffarnagar and Moradabad. Prohibitory orders were enforced in 36 districts, and a complete ban on public meetings was imposed throughout the state.

For the next 10 days, the only movement at daybreak in Meerut was that of men in helmets and war fatigues with stenguns slung over their shoulders, inching their way out of their shelters and climbing aboard convoys of trucks. At night, the deserted streets were taken over by stray dogs chasing police vans and jeeps. Meerut's six lakh terror-stricken residents remained shuttered and bolted within their dwellings, as more than 13,000 members of the army, paramilitary forces and armed police laid siege to their city in the hope of stamping out the violence in every mohalla and bylane.

What had turned one of the busiest and most frenetic towns in North India into a ghost town, that resounded day and night to the rumbling of police trucks and the tramping of military boots, was the unprecedented communal frenzy in

which more than 150 people died and 1,000 were wounded. More than Rs. 20 crore worth of property lay destroyed, and business losses until the end of the fortnight were estimated at Rs. 50 crore. A city which had thrived on jobs provided by tailors' scissors, handlooms, and sporting goods had almost overnight, it seemed, abandoned its peaceful tools of trade and taken up guns, bombs and knives.

The gruesome and bloody carnage suggested parallels with New Delhi's holocaust in 1984 and Ahmedabad's homicidal war of 1985. Barely two months earlier, police battalions had patrolled Meerut's streets following riots in which 12 people were killed. But in the first week of May, in what turned out to be a fatal blunder, the local administration, believing the situation to be normal, withdrew the extra police force. When the fighting broke out barely 10 days later, on May 18, the district administration found itself virtually crippled in its reaction because of the shortage of reinforcements. As heavily armed and slogan-shouting mobs belonging to both communities began fighting pitched battles, the 500-strong district police, immediately available, found itself hopelessly unequal to the task of containing the violence. By the time reinforcements were deployed, the damage had been done.

The withdrawal of the extra police contingents was particularly perplexing as, during the previous two months, intelligence reports had indicated that members of both communities had begun to stockpile huge quantities of arms. The state intelligence bureau had been constantly feeding reports to the Home Ministry that the threatened show of force over the never ending Ram janambhoomi-Babri Masjid issue could precipitate communal trouble in sensitive districts, particularly in Meerut, Rampur, Moradabad, Kanpur, and Allahbad.

The administration had also done absolutely nothing about local intelligence reports that had warned of a communal colour being put on Ajay Sharma's death, and which asked for intensive patrolling of areas affected by the April riots. But not only did the administration ignore these warnings, it even released those detained for disturbing peace in the previous riots. The administration had no clue about the level of preparations that were on "in case of a spark". Indeed, the



evidence, both mental and physical, was overwhelming. There was a relay of announcements from places of worship, organised mobs in hundreds on the streets, and plentiful use of firearms. Yes the police and administration appeared oblivious of all the action.

The excuses continued till Home Minister Buta Singh, after a tour of the riot-affected areas, castigated the administration for not being geared for the riots. At that point, State Home Secretary Mata Prasad conceded : "It is no doubt our failure." Union Home Ministry sources confirmed that the state administration was taken by total surprise when the "unprecedented and un-anticipated violent activity in May" broke out.

One major cause of the flare-up, say Home Ministry sources, was the incompetence of the district administration. Its police official were suspect, most of its inspectors and sub-inspectors had been sent to Meerut under political pressure from other parts of the state and even the city Superintendent of Police B.K. Chaturvedi—who was finally transferred out and replaced by B K. Gupta along with Varanasi's senior superintendent of police, G.L. Sharma, flown in as additional senior superintendent—was considered a controversial official. Although no changes were made at the civil administration level, the district magistrate was rendered virtually redundant when Minister of State for Home, Surender Singh Chauhan, pitched camp in Meerut and proceeded to take charge of the situation.

But as the riots continued even after the mobilisation of additional forces, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi summoned Chief Minister Bir Bahadur Singh to New Delhi for emergency consultation. Talking to newsmen at the Iftar dinner hosted by Union Tourism Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayed, Rajiv admitted that "communal conflicts were posing a grave danger to the country" and disclosed that he would visit Meerut the next day to take stock of the situation. But the following day it was Buta Singh who helicoptered to Meerut for a three-hour visit to the city. He ordered the confiscation of all arms, house-to house searches and the immediate arrest of 'bad characters'.

The administration was also asked to re-establish communication with community leaders, and political leaders were instructed to form peace committees. These directions were

given only after Union Minister for Urban Development Mohsina Kidwai complained to the Prime Minister—following her own visit to Meerut—that the district administration was treating the ordeal as a law and order problem and had failed to take such steps as convening regular peace meetings between community leaders.

For the first time in Meerut, house-to-house searches were conducted in all the sensitive localities, including Sohrab Gate, Jali Kothi, Shahpir Gate, Gudri and Kotla. These searches, conducted on a massive scale, involved a complete cordoning off of entire localities by the army, which would position itself in every lane, on rooftops and at every entrance to the locality. Then announcements would be made over the loudspeaker asking all male members of the house to come out with their licensed arms. Hundreds poured out and were escorted to nearby compounds. Then the CRPF women companies would move into houses and search the entire area.

There were large-scale seizures of firearms, including telescopic guns, pistols, single and double barrel guns and rifles with plenty of ammunition. Within a week, more than 2,500 people were arrested in Meerut alone, which has a total jail capacity of just 800. Detenus had to be shunted off to jail in Fatehgarh and Agra.

But just as things appeared to be returning to normal, there occurred a massacre that will probably go down in police history as one of the worst cases of police brutality. The news of this caused fresh eruptions in neighbouring areas in the state. Maliana, a small cluster of villages 5 km from Meerut, had not yet come under curfew. A PAC platoon had been sent there to keep the tension under control. The area has a population of around 35,000, of which 4,000 are Muslims. At 2.45 p.m. in the afternoon of Saturday, May 23, the PAC contingent arrived. Joined by some Hindu residents, they began burning down Muslim houses. It took them precisely two hours to complete the task they had assigned themselves. At the end of those two hours nothing stirred in Maliana as people sat huddled together, gripped by fear as the stench of smoke and human bodies rose around them. Those who ran out to escape the inferno were showered with gunfire by PAC men positioned on

rooftops. Scores fell to the bullets.

This happened just 70 km from the capital, but news of the massacre began to filter through only on Sunday evening. Monday morning's newspapers carried the official toll of "seven killed in police firing". In silent outrage the survivors pointed to charred parts of bodies in burnt houses. They pointed to blood trails and marks showing that bodies had been dragged out of houses down the lane. The PAC unit was quietly withdrawn and army sent in, but officially the toll remained seven. Army officers admitted on condition of anonymity that they had personally counted over 50 bodies when they had arrived in Maliana.

While officially Meerut remained calm for the third day running and Id passed off peacefully, the remainders of the brutal killings in the town were still floating down the Ganga canal 30 km away. The Government said 16 bodies had been recovered from the canal, but once again the unofficial toll was far higher. All the bodies were naked, many had bullet injuries in their backs. In a two-hour drive along an 8 km stretch of the canal from Muradnagar to Massooree, *India Today* reporters saw two bodies floating down the canal.

Shaheed of Nahal village said the bodies had been floating past for the previous eight days. He had counted 40 bodies in one day. Yusuf Mian, an irrigation department worker of Jhal Massooree claimed to have seen 10 bodies a day in the canal for four days. But the most gruesome account came from Mehdi Hussain, a contractor who runs six *atta chakies* at the canal weir at Jhal Dasna. Hassan, who supervises his *chakkies* by the canal the whole day, said that on May 26 he had counted 9 bodies and many more in the preceding days. At times, four or five bodies together would come floating down and get stuck in the iron grating across the channel weir. They would get the Irrigation Department's *bhanghi* to pull the bodies out with a hook and dump them in the canal beyond the weir gate.

What made this potentially explosive was the fact that the Ganga canal runs through predominantly Muslim territory through Ghaziabad district which adjoins Delhi. Inevitably, communal hatred was spreading into the rural countryside too.

## *The Agony of Meerut*

But in Lucknow, M.C. Dwivedy, PAC deputy inspector general, the de facto chief of the force, insisted that he knew nothing of any massacre at Maliana. And there was no official information on which company from which battalion, and under the charge of which officer, was sent to Maliana. But as the bodies started floating down the canal and the tethered cord of tolerance came close to snapping once again, the chief minister finally announced a judicial inquiry.

But the PAC brutality was not the only element that cast its deathly pall over Meerut. In many ways Meerut today resembles what many Delhi localities looked like in the aftermath of the November 1984 riots. The town is pock-marked with burnt-out shops and houses, charred skeletons of dozens of buses and trucks still litter the main roads. And there were clear signs that some organisation and preparation had gone into fuelling the uncontrollable communal frenzy which swept the town.

But when compared to Delhi in 1984, there was one significant difference. In Meerut, both communities seem to have been gripped by a *junoon* (madness) and struck out at each other with equal ruthlessness. Selected Muslim shops in Hindu areas were looted and burnt down while Hindu shops in Muslim areas met the same fate. In past riots, the fringe elements of both communities and goondas were involved. This time almost all the Muslims are ranged against all the Hindus. "Political party labels have ceased to have any meaning in Meerut. Today, you are either Hindu or Muslim", said Mirajuddin Ahmed, 28, president of the Meerut Youth Congress, drawing a picture of a communally polarised society.

There was little scope left for humane behaviour, as two doctors belonging to the two communities discovered to their cost. Dr. Atul Bhatnagar is a well-known surgeon who runs a nursing home in the town. Many of his Muslim patients were awaiting treatment when a Hindu mob surrounded the nursing home and demanded that the doctor hand over all the Muslim inmates of the nursing home. Bhatnagar refused and spirited away his Muslim patients to a hospital. The mob vented its anger on the nursing home itself, causing extensive damage.



A less drastic fate met Dr Sirajuddin Ahmed, who donated blood, a rare AB group, to save the life of a young Hindu, Rishi Ram, who had been grievously injured by a police bullet. The blood saved Rishi Ram's life but Ahmed was abused and pilloried by his own community members for saving the life of a Hindu.

Hakim Saifuddin Ahmed, a recipient of the Padma Shri and an honorary physician to many presidents, including Zail Singh, said most of the *nafrat* (hatred) between the two communities had been caused by the Babri Masjid and Ram janambhoomi action committees. "It has become so bad that if two buffaloes get into a fight, one will be labelled Hindu and the other Muslim," he said.

But why Meerut? There were several answers. With its proximity to Delhi, the town is particularly susceptible to national communal politics emanating from here. Every ripple in the capital is first felt in Meerut. "Any activist from Delhi with a few hours to spare, slips in to spread his message," said a political worker.

There is also acute trade rivalry in Meerut, known for its textile trade as well as local crafts like scissor-making. In textiles, it has traditionally been the Hindus who have owned the factories, and Ansari Muslims who have provided the labour force. The friction between the owners and workers adds fuel to the fire each time there is a communal flare-up. Demographically, the six lakh population of the city is divided almost equally between Hindus and Muslims. And they are both equally prosperous. The tensions are inevitable as each is intolerant of the other's well-being. Add to all this a weak administration, and the weight of the Babri Masjid dispute. A flare-up was inevitable. After last carnage, confidence building was clearly important.

And the postponement of Rajiv Gandhi's planned visit to Meerut was a negative signal. "Why didn't Rajiv come here? Why does he only go visiting tribal areas?" asked a caustic official in Meerut. But prime ministerial visits apart, there was little doubt that communal tension could not be eased in the State and several parts of the country without a way being found to untangle the Babri Masjid issue, or taking cover

behind the fact that it is a court matter. And there was equally little doubt that unless determined efforts were made to turn the tide against communalism in politics, with political parties taking the lead, the communal problem would continue to fester.

—Excerpt from *India Today*,  
June 15, 1987

## HITLERITE BARBARITIES IN MEERUT

*Nikhil Chakravartty*

What we normally understand by a communal riot is only half the story of what happened in Meerut last month. A communal riot has come to be known in common Indian parlance as the outbreak of a clash between members of two communities—very often between Hindus and Muslims—in a city or in a part of it, which often results in breaking of heads, a number of stabbing incidents, some looting of shops and sometimes arson.

It may last a few days or a few weeks, and then by the exercise of an extra dose of police enforcement combined with some efforts at mutual understanding initiated by the local elite of the two communities, normalcy returns.

But the full story of the Meerut happenings in May is something which far oversteps this traditional dimension of a communal riot. Once the curfew cordon was relaxed and the place ceased to be totally out of bounds, the news of the ghastly happening began to come out; the special feature of Meerut 1987 has slowly begun to seep into our consciousness. But it is still a slow process, and few have yet grasped its fearsome implications.

By the run-of-the-mill journalist's yardstick, there is perhaps nothing extraordinary in the Meerut happenings, however deplorable these may be. There is evidence of inflammatory incitement. There was the collection of small arms, not just brickbats. There were the goonda gangs interested in looting shops and settling scores with their rivals and adversaries. There were the usual stories of harassment of innocent citizens, the curfew, etc.

But *something more* has happened in Meerut which has never happened in this country. It has now come to be known that at a certain place the PAC gangs suddenly descended, knocked and burst into the hutments of poor Muslims, picked up whomsoever they could grab (mainly young), packed them off into PAC trucks, took them far away and pushed them out of the trucks and lined them up. They then shot them down and threw the dead bodies into the river.

All this happened not at the height of a battle royal, nor were the goondas rounded up and shot down, though even that would have been reprehensible and untenable under any rule of law. The points to note are : First, those picked up and packed off were not treated this way because they were culprits involved in rioting and killing, but were victims of an indiscriminate round-up of all and sundry. Secondly, there was absolutely no pretence of bringing them to justice or detaining them under extraordinary laws meant to deal with large-scale communal violence, but to kill them in cold blood and dispose of their corpses by throwing them into the river.

Nowhere was there any attempt whatsoever to implicate those picked up with any specific allegations of any criminal act. The ghastly operation of shooting them was meant to strike terror and nothing but terror in a whole minority community—not to single out those suspected to be involved in riots or in inciting riots. This is the stark, simple fact. The message is unambiguous.

The serious implications of this PAC killing seem to have been missed by both the government and political parties. Here is a clear case of an organ of the state going out with cold-blooded calculation to raid and round up a whole group of citizens, whisk them away, shoot them while in custody and then throw their bodies into the river. Such fiendish acts have never taken place before. Let it be repeated—these persons were not arrested while actually engaged in any violent act ; the police produced no charges against them ; they were not told where they were being taken, and then they were liquidated. Doesn't this remind one of the Nazi pogroms against the Jews ?

There are, of course, innumerable cases of the police



bumping off individual prisoners in cold blood and then passing them off as having been "killed in an encounter". This has become common practice against Naxalite prisoners in some parts of the country. There are other cases of a large number having been gunned down for having put up resistance against arrest. But the PAC in UP has excelled in all this.

And what has the government done to meet this situation? The UP chief minister was camping at Meerut. The prime minister after putting off his trip once did visit Meerut. But the PAC was not reprimanded, nor the officer-in-charge suspended. Rather, the chief minister was at pains to disabuse the press that the PAC commandant had been suspended as reported earlier. A judicial enquiry has at least been ordered. But can the government give the minority community its sense of security back by holding a protracted judicial enquiry? For any government aware of its responsibility of ensuring the citizen's security, the least it can do is to disarm and reprimand on the spot this terror gang in the employ of the government.

The PAC of Uttar Pradesh has of course a shameful record of communal brutalities. More than once the government both in UP and at the Centre had stated they would discipline it and reorganise it along secular lines. Nothing of the kind happened. Instead the PAC this time has broken its own record in Hitlerite barbarities.

Political leaders have condemned communal violence in Meerut. Some have tried to prove that the Muslims started the riot, others have pointed out some of the slogans raised such as "Pakistan Zindabad". It is also said that the total damage due to loot and arson hit the Hindus more than the Muslims. This is because the Hindus there are better off than the Muslims.

Some have of course criticised the PAC's high-handedness. But the serious qualitative change brought about by the PAC picking up citizens from their homes, herding them into trucks and killing them, has not yet been sharply brought into focus. If this is not nipped in the bud, there will be these deadly pogroms. It will be not the death of secularism but the birth of fascism.

This is the danger signal from Meerut.

—Excerpts from *Times of India*

## A POLITICIANS' RIOT

*Ajoy Bose and Pankaj Pachauri*

As Meerut and adjoining riot-affected areas limped back to normalcy this week, there was growing concern at the realisation of the ominous and unprecedented nature of the 10-day-long orgy of murder, rape, loot and arson, which slowly came to light.

On all counts, the riots in Meerut this month stand out in the entire history of communal violence in the country. They have been surpassed in sheer savagery only four times in the past—the Partition holocaust, the Assam massacres, the anti-Sikh carnage after Indira Gandhi's assassination, and the Ansari Baug massacre in Bhiwandi in 1984.

There are few takers in Meerut and elsewhere for the official death toll of 133, as reports show that in Maliana village alone, the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) along with Hindu hoodlums slaughtered over 100 Muslim men, women and children in cold blood. While unofficial estimates of more than 20,000 dead may well be exaggerated (not unusual in the aftermath of such a bloody riot), it would not be surprising if the actual death toll is well over the four-figure mark.

Yet, the number of victims, however gruesome the toll, is less horrific than the criminally manifest negligence of the Central as well as state administration in checking the wave of communal violence. Equally horrendous has been the blatantly communal role of political parties, most notably the

Congress (I) in the riots. Most frightening of all, normal law-abiding citizens, both Hindu and Muslim, for the first time actively participated in the frenzy of killing and depredation.

The colossal administrative failure to stop the spiral of violence in Meerut is highlighted by the fact that top ministers, politicians and officials were palpably ineffective despite being on the spot. Home Minister Buta Singh, Minister of State for Home Affairs P. Chidambaram, Urban Development Minister Mohsina Kidwai (whose Parliamentary constituency is Meerut), Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Veer Bahadur Singh, UP Home Minister Gopinath Dixit and State Director General of Police S.K. Bhatnagar were all present in the city and had first-hand knowledge of the orgy of violence. Yet, the riots continued.

Chidambaram for instance, reached Meerut on the third day of the riots. He has visited the city twice since but has still failed to provide a correct assessment to the Central government about the extent of the rioting and what needed to be done to bring it under control. Buta Singh arrived on the fifth day when the official toll had already reached 54. Despite repeated requests by local officials he felt it was unnecessary to hand the town over to the army. The day after he told journalists that the situation in Meerut had been brought under control, the Maliana massacre took place.

Mohsina Kidwai who normally should have played a key role in defusing communal tension, proved to be a virtual liability and in fact a source of added tension herself. As soon as she arrived, a large number of prominent Hindu citizens including many local Congress (I) leaders warned that there would be more violence if the MP from Meerut was allowed to visit curfew bound areas. Mrs. Kidwai was greeted with filthy abuse by her own partymen in front of Chidambaram and chief minister Veer Bahadur Singh. She was later sidelined completely and not allowed to either go around Meerut or participate in official meetings between Central leaders and Local administrators.

If the Central leaders proved wholly inadequate in dealing with the situation, the state level leadership was embroiled in its own political games. Several officials in Meerut complained about

the way the chief minister showed amazing complacency about the mounting violence in the city. Many believe that he deliberately soft-pedalled the taking of drastic measures against rioters because the violence fitted in well with his bid to divert attention from the public enthusiasm which VP Singh was arousing.

The chief minister is also believed to have taken particular pleasure in carrying out a slander campaign against Mohsina Kidwai and reportedly egged on local Hindu Congressmen to humiliate and insult her in front of Chidambaram. Singh is believed to be an old political rival of Kidwai and has been seeking an opportunity to cut the Central minister down to size.

As far as ministers and officials like home minister Gopinath Dixit and S.K. Bhatnagar are concerned, they seemed to be unaware of even elementary details of the law and order situation. Persistent attempts by reporters to get their assessment of the riots met with the standard answer, "The District Magistrate is the spokesman of the administration, you talk to him."

The District Magistrate, RS Kaushik, overwhelmed by the presence of such top Central and state dignitaries and pressurised by local communal lobbies, looked a tired and broken man by the first few days. Soon his lack of authority was apparent from the way he was being openly pushed around by junior police officers and small-time local politicians.

It is not surprising, therefore, that despite the deployment of the army from the second day of the riots, the violence continued for more than a week. Army officers privately complained that troops had received no clear-cut orders and sounded confused on the extent of their authority. They were also aghast at the level of communalisation of the local administration.

An army Major, preparing his men to launch a house-to-house search in the Suraj Kund of Meerut was so exasperated by the behaviour of a Sub-District Magistrate who kept insisting that only the Muslims were responsible for the violence, that he finally told the latter to shut up. "Even educated, responsible officials here have been affected by the communal madness," the Major remarked bitterly.



Further, a lack of coordination between the troops, para-military forces, and the local police was evident. Central Reserve Police Force Commandant AS Khan waited in his hotel for four days before he was called for a coordination meeting for the first time. "The riots could have been contained within the first few days had the local administration gone about it in the proper way," he said.

In the confusion, the true communal colour of the PAC, notorious for its anti-Muslim bias all over Uttar Pradesh, was exhibited with gruesome consequences. Apart from the ghastly outrages committed at Maliana, the PAC was involved in innumerable other communal attacks all over Meerut and in many cases it was an open confrontation between them and Muslims. The communal frenzy of the PAC did not even spare itself: according to one report, a PAC unit turned against its solitary Muslim member and butchered him on the spot in the Shastri nagar area of Meerut.

As far as political parties and groups are concerned, almost all have reportedly played a dirty role in either directly or indirectly whipping up passions. The Congress (I) which has traditionally controlled the city's politics by winning every single Assembly election from Meerut since Independence, is the most guilty.

The party is divided vertically on communal lines. Mohsina Kidwai for instance, has been actively encouraging Muslim groups and leaders in Meerut for several years now. Her own assistant, personal secretary Anwar Ahmed is a close friend of some notorious anti-social Muslim activists in the city and has often pulled strings to get them out of trouble.

The Congress(I) Rajya Sabha member Shanti Tyagi, also from Meerut, and the local MLA Jai Narain Sharma on the other hand, have been active in fomenting Hindu militancy in the city. It is under their protection that the Shiv Sena, the Hindu Sena, Manav Dharam Samaj and other fundamentalist organisations have mushroomed in Meerut in the past few years.

Hindu and Muslim communalists, both claiming Central and State patronage, have not surprisingly gained increased legitimacy amongst their respective communities in recent

months, even though Muslim fanatics have been distributing guns and bombs in various Muslim areas their Hindu counterparts, trishuls and other deadly weapons in theirs.

This mounting tension had already resulted in a round of communal clashes in April leaving 10 dead and scores injured. These, however, had been largely manipulated by a few hoodlums who took advantage of the Muslim festival Shab-e-Baraat. This time the riots succeeded in sucking large sections of ordinary citizens from both the communities.

Loudspeakers in mosques (which number around 120 in Meerut) were used for communal propaganda, which thereby reached all classes of Muslims immediately. The sloganeering during the first few days of the riots was nerve-chilling. Dr PP Sharma and Dr K Gopal, owners of city clinics, have tape recorded what they claim are excerpts of some of the slogans issued from mosques. "*Mar kar liya Pakistan, hans kar lenge Hindustan*", "*Hindustan mein rehna hoga to Allah-o-Akbar kahna hoga*" (a reversal of the Hindu fanatics' slogan: "*Hindustan mein rahna hoga to Vande Matram kahna hoga*") "Police dogs, you have got a bashing in Punjab and now you are trying to show your teeth to us", "Muslims, Islam is in danger, if you die for religion you will go to heaven, if you win, you would have reached Mecca" and "Let rivers of blood flow" are just some of the less obscene slogans.

Muslims on the other hand claim they have tape-recorded filthy communal abuses hurled at them by PAC jawans and local Hindus threatening them with among other things, complete genocide. They alleged that a common rallying call of the PAC on the rampage in Meerut was, "Orders from Veer Bahadur Singh are to kill every Muslim in sight."

What frightens an outsider is the fact that the ugly communal mood in Meerut continues even after the worst of the rioting is over today. Groups of Hindus and Muslims huddle in separate groups cursing each other's community. In one shocking instance, a reporter of a Delhi-based weekly newspaper was told to shut up by agitated Hindu local journalists and officials when he tried to ask the District Magistrate at a press conference what the death toll at Maliana was. "Why are you people so bothered when Muslims are killed, why don't

you ask about the death toll of Hindus?" they shouted.

In this communal madness' the voices of sanity have been increasingly stifled. One of the most tragic instances of religious fanaticism during the Meerut riots was the murder by Muslim mobs of Dr Prabhat Kumar, son of Dr Harpal Singh, a highly respected local Communist leader who saved the lives of countless Muslims during the 1982 Meerut riots, the professor, who with his wife, had helped noted human rights activist Asghar Ali Engineer compile an analytical study of the 1982 riots, said sadly, "My personal loss is nothing compared to the loss of Meerut and the nation; thanks to the mixing of religion and politics."

Another progressive poet Basheer Badr, whose house was burnt by Hindu mobs, lamented, "The communal polarisation is so complete in Meerut that it is difficult to sustain your secularism. You have to hide in the lap of one communalism or the other to live in this city."

Meerut has been a hotbed of communal tension for the past many decades. There is little doubt however, that since the Rajiv Gandhi government decided to blow hot and cold over the communal question, there has been a qualitative change for the worse.

The backing given by Rajiv Gandhi to Muslim communalists through the Muslim Women's Bill has to a large extent led to the respectability of Islamic fundamentalism not only in Meerut but elsewhere in Uttar Pradesh too. Fundamentalist preachers, intellectuals and politicians have come to New Delhi and been greeted with great fanfare by the prime minister. They have had their photographs taken with him and gone back to parade their increased clout to their community.

Rajiv Gandhi's ad hocism in Punjab is also one of the reasons behind the rising tide of communalism. Many Muslim fanatics have sought to use the example of Sikh militancy and what they see as New Delhi's capitulation in the face of it, as a model for their own community. In Meerut and other places, the most frequent slogans being used by Muslim fundamentalists is, "If the Sikhs can hold the government to ransom, why can't the Muslims, with their larger numbers do the same?"

On the other hand, Hindu fundamentalists have been cleverly playing on the same Punjab theme to whip their community into a communal frenzy. Masquerading under the guise of nationalism, Hindu militancy has been taking cruder forms. The mushrooming of organisations like the Shiv Sena all over the Northern India and the increasing use of the trishul as a symbol of 'Hindu national unity' is a proof of this.

Significantly, the Congress (I) which has been encouraging Muslim fundamentalism on the plea that this would promote communal harmony, is at the same time egging on this newly spread Hindu chauvinism as well. So much so, that the RSS, which earlier had a virtual monopoly over such communal propaganda, is being sidelined by local Congress (I) bosses !

Thus, whatever the immediate catalyst to the communal madness at Meerut this month, there is little doubt that its roots lie in the basic policy of the Government in appeasing communalism of whatever hue.

Said Ved Aggarwal, a veteran freedom fighter in Meerut, "Rajiv Gandhi is trying to walk a tightrope by appeasing both the communities at the same time. It is a dangerous game. Once people see through this game they will stop cutting each other's throats and turn against the government."

Excerpts from *Sunday Observers*  
31st May, 1987



## INEPT LOCAL GOVT. CAUSED THE RIOTS

*Askari H. Zaidi*

Talking to the newspapers on May 22, Mr. Buta Singh, Union Minister for Home, admitted that the local administration was not fully geared to deal with a situation of this dimension.

A candid confession indeed. But Mr. Singh did not say why the administration was not geared even when the city was communally charged and there was every possibility of a major communal flare-up.

One day later in Lucknow, the principal home secretary of the U.P. government, Mr. Mata Prasad asserted that the intelligence network had not failed. This means the administration had been alerted. In fact, there was no need of intelligence report to make an assessment of the situation. That isolated incidents of communal nature had been taking place in the city was common knowledge.

A senior civil servant, who requested anonymity, said the local activists of the Babri Masjid action committee and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad had been stoking religious passions for quite some time.

However, there was hardly any effort on the part of the administration to prevent the communal polarisation. The local leaders also chose to exploit the situation to further their political interests, instead of helping the authorities in containing the increasing communalism.

The result was that on the day of Shabe Barat on April 14, riots broke out over the playing of loudspeakers. The disturbances took the toll of over 10 lives, besides destruction of property worth lakhs of rupees. This should have been alarming enough for the administration to take stern measures to curb the growing communalism and activities of the mischievous elements.

However, it did the opposite, the curfew was lifted on April 27. The charged atmosphere warranted police presence and strict enforcement of section 144 for at least the statutory three months. But the authorities thought otherwise. Not only this, most of the 800 "miscreants" who were arrested during the riots, were also released on bail.

"Meerut has been a communal trouble spot. The district administration should have considered this before releasing them," said Mr. Ajit Singh Sethi, the Congress MLA from the Meerut cantonment constituency.

Giving details of the sequence of the events which later developed into one of the worst riots this country has ever witnessed, the district magistrate, Mr. R.S. Kaushik, said on May 20 that the killing of a resident of Mohalla Kaichiyan, Mr. Ajay Sharma, over tenancy dispute was interpreted in communal terms as the FIR lodged by the brother of the deceased charged six persons of the minority community. Four of them were arrested within two days.

The next day passed off without any trouble. However, on May 18, Mr. Kaushik said, around 8 p.m. the explosion of a country bomb in Chipiwada sparked off a clash between two groups belonging to two different communities. About the same time, a "khokha" was set on fire in Surajkund area, about two km. from Chipiwada. "Police contingents were rushed to diffuse the situation at both the places," Mr. Kaushik said.

The incident should have alerted the authorities to increase the vigil in the sensitive areas. "Police pickets should have been posted at all the trouble spots as during the month of 'Ramzan' when Muslims gather in large numbers in mosques for collective 'namaaz' and 'tarabi' (collective recitation of the Quran), a resident of Mausampura, Mr. Mohammad Azhar said.

However, the police made the mistake of going to make

some preventive arrests from the Mohalla Imliyan at the time of 'Sahari' about 3 o'clock in the morning of May 19. Mr. Kaushik told me that the arrests were made between 2.30 a.m. and 5.00 a.m. at 'Sahari' when Muslims have their meals before starting the next day's fast. "The coming of the police at the time of 'Sahari' was enough provocation for the residents to come out of their houses to defend the attack on their faith", a resident of Imliyan said at the Medical College.

Moreover, "due to our bad experience while under police custody during the April riots, we all decided to prevent the police from making the arrest," he added.

Lanes were blocked with drums etc. At some places, the residents lied down on the road to prevent police entry. Mr. Kaushik admitted at the press briefing on May 20 that at least one child was crushed to death by a police vehicle.

The Imliyan resident said, that rumours were heard that Hindus had surrounded the area. This led to announcements from the loudspeaker fitted at a mosque, calling upon the residents to come out to fight in the name of religion.

A small police contingent which had come to make the arrests, soon took to heels as the crowd kept swelling. Then started the large scale destruction and rioting which soon engulfed a large part of the city.

This historic city had never witnessed violence of this magnitude. Besides the official death roll of more than 100, over 600 houses and commercial establishments have been destroyed in the riots. The judicial inquiry ordered into the Malyana "carnage" will establish the chronology of the events and the circumstances leading to, among other things, the recovery of the dead bodies from the Hindon and Ganga canal.

But the larger question is, can the Meerut riots be explained away merely as a "total failure of administrative machinery? Doing so would amount to skirting the basic issues. Because, besides local factors like business rivalry in the handloom trade and lapses of the administration, there are many other issues which emerge from the Meerut experience which are pointers to an extremely grim future scenario.

A major part of Uttar Pradesh has witnessed tremendous communalisation ever since the issue of the Babri Masjid—Ram

janambhoomi surfaced. Both the minority and the majority communities have used the issue to whip up passions. The recent rally in Delhi was indicative of the growing aggressiveness of the minorities.

The Babri Masjid Action Committee and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad have not lost a single opportunity to stoke the fire. Attempts were made during the Meerut riots to use mosques in the same way as Gurudwaras are used in Punjab to spread political messages. Most ominously, following the unlocking of the disputed shrine by the order of a judicial magistrate, the propaganda of the leaders of the minority community that the judiciary too had lost all credibility has found increasing adherents.

With both communities emotionally charged, the present month of Ramzan has been the most tense in recent history. Thus, when violence erupted in Meerut and later spilled over to other parts of western UP and Delhi, observers were not exactly surprised because tension had been prevailing in this part of the country for quite some time.

The significance of the Meerut riots lies in the changing nature of the communal violence in the country. As was witnessed during the November 1984 riots in Delhi and elsewhere, several persons were burnt alive in Meerut. Houses were set on fire with mobs waiting outside to shoot down those who tried to run out of the house. Inquiries at the hospitals in Meerut revealed that most victims had suffered gun-shot injuries. Such brutality is a recent trend.

Another new and ominous development was the active involvement of middle class youth in acts of violence and arson. In fact, the riots would not have spread to middle class localities like Shastri nagar, had the educated middle class not participated in actual violence. This reporter is a witness to many such incidents in State Bank colony, Chhipi Tank and Shastri nagar. Houses of a particular community were selected in these locality for attacks. The famous Urdu poet, Mr. Bashir Badr, is one such victim whose house in Shastri nagar was burnt to ashes. Fortunately, he was away in Delhi, and his family members were given shelter in the house of a Hindu neighbour.

These riots were different also in that they spilled over to the



adjoining rural areas. Except for the Malyana incident, in which the PAC apparently went berserk and killed many, all other incidents reported from the villages like Abdulpur, Jataoli and Kaseru Khera were of a minor nature. Yet they were the grim reminders of the partition riots which had affected the rural areas as much as they did the cities.

*Times of India, 26 & 29 May, 1987*

## **'POLITICIANS POURED OIL ON FIRE'**

*Riot Analysis*

The mayhem of Meerut caused by a weakkneed administration lacking proper perspective and comprehension of a dangerous situation has been compounded by a panicky political leadership characterised by its immaturity and inexperience.

Meerut, is a ghost city today and it would take a long time for its people to recover from the trauma and at last a decade for its shattered economy to recover from the colossal loss it had suffered.

As and when peace is restored, it would remain fragile because of the unprecedented loss of human lives and property in communal riots which assumed dimensions of a communal war—overtaking even rural areas where communal harmony was not eroded before inspite of periodical communal eruptions in the town.

The enormity of the bloodcurdling communal violence has been attempted to be matched by a deployment of military, paramilitary forces and the police on a scale not witnessed ever before in any other riot-torn town. However, the situation could not be described as completely under control. Hardly a day passes which is not marked by case of arson, murders, looting or firing.

Senior officers of the Government, serving and retired and experienced politicians who have occupied positions of responsibility just feel flabbergasted by the caravan of the Chief Minister, Minisier of State for Home and more ministers and their cronies along with the Director General of Police, camping in Meerut.

In between, Central Ministers including Mr. Buta Singh, Mrs. Mohsina Kidwai, MP from Meerut and Mr. Chidambaram visited the town and each of them spent two days.

Never before in the history of communal riots in Uttar Pradesh were the Chief Minister, Home Minister or any other Minister advised to visit any town on the eruption of violence. They had been prevented from going there as their presence is considered a hindrance rather than help by those entrusted with responsibility of controlling riots and restoring peace. "They have no business to be there. They do politics and not administration when they are there. They divide the attention of officers who are in the thick of battle, says Mr. S.C. Dixit, a former Director General of Police and now president of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (eastern region).

More than a dozen administrative and police officers who had the experience of controlling communal riots expressed their bewilderment over the continued presence of political leaders. They blamed them for the escalating trouble. "The job of political leaders is to go and do the healing after we have crushed the riots ruthlessly and restored normalcy", most of them said on condition of anonymity.

It is the politically motivated refusal to face facts which has maimed Meerut town and threatens to trigger off a bigger conflagration by stoking the powder keg, which Uttar Pradesh has become after the deep communal divide over the Ayodhya shrine.

Communal violence flared up in Meerut on the night of April 14 over competition of fireworks on the occasion of Shub-e-barat.

A row started over the use of a loudspeaker by a Hindu family but violence erupted when a sub-inspector hit by a cracker fired three shots. Twelve persons were killed and 22 others injured and the curfew which was imposed the same night was completely lifted after 12 days on April 27. Neither was any post mortem held nor the police or administration set-up reorganised. All those arrested in connection with violence were released and the incident was forgotten as usual by the powers that be, after normalcy was restored.

The Delhi rally on May 16 became the preoccupation of the

powers that be and it was decided that about 5 lakh people from Meerut alone would participate. The administrative machinery was geared up to fulfill the commitment of the Chief Minister to his party bosses. There was no time to give the healing touch to those who had fought a pitched battle barely fortnight back.

The intelligence set-up kept on informing the administration of incidents, and the tension building up in some localities, which have been the scene of savage communal flare-up of last month. However, the local administration preoccupied with the Congress (I) rally on the Boat Club lawns preferred to ignore the warning and the government in Lucknow was on a holiday in Delhi.

Two bombs were exploded by Muslims resulting in injury to one person on May 15. In the same locality a young man was assaulted on May 16 in Tirthraj locality of Kotwali police station when he was returning from the house of his brother Mr. J.P. Sharma in Chhiptola. He was removed to hospital where he died around 1.15 a.m. This resulted in serious tension in three localities. His body was taken in a procession to Surajkund for cremation the next day – May 17. Most of the mourners were young men and according to intelligence reports “anger was visible and some of them even talking of revenge”. The tension further mounted.

The administration took both incidents lightly. The bomb explosion were dismissed as bursting of crackers and the killing of Mr. Sharma was linked to a dispute between his brother and his landlord over tenancy.

The only step taken was to impose prohibitory orders under Section 144, a ritual repeated off and on, without increasing the deployment of force. In the wisdom of the top brass, police was reduced to seven companies only where as it should have been around 15 companies during the month of Ramzan and soon after the lifting of curfew last month. Similarly, no preventive arrests were made.

The result was that next day (May 18) two crackers were exploded around 8.30 p.m. in Dhobiwada locality. A Muslim khokha was set on fire near Saraswati Mandir of Surajkund by hurling a burning tyre around 10.15 p.m. Muslims who had gathered for their night prayers in a nearby mosque came out



and indulged in arson, setting fire to two Hindu khokas (kiosks). brickbatting, hurling molotov cocktails, and kerosene soaked cloth missiles. A boy who was injured died around 1.30 a.m. in the hospital. The police reached the scene of occurrence a bit late and controlled the situation.

The administration ordered round up of criminals, anti-social elements and those who were involved in the April rioting late in the night. Around 2.30 a.m. policemen entered the Imliyan locality for searching and effecting arrests. To this there was strong resistance. Muslims pelted brickbats and fired from rooftops forcing the police force to beat a hasty retreat after firing a few shots.

Loudspeakers fitted on a mosque exhorted Muslims to come out on roads as Islam was in danger. It was Shahri time (taking meals before the sun rise for fasting during the day).

Armed Muslim mobs came out on the roads as if ready for the signal and started an orgy of arson, loot, brickbatting, stabbing and firing. Similar calls of "Har Har Mahadev" were given from a few temples but the Hindus were not prepared for the type of resistance they encountered.

The local administration collapsed and by the time reinforcement was rushed and army staged a flag march, Hindus had suffered a terrible loss of life and property. Mr. Chidambaram and Mrs. Mohisina Kidwai and the Union Home Secretary reached Meerut but Lucknow had only a sketchy picture of "one killed and five injured". When the Chief minister and Home Minister left for Meerut late in the afternoon, the Home Secretary was already informing pressmen that eight persons were killed, 22 injured and 200 houses and shops were destroyed.

Since then violence has been spreading and death rapidly rising. Dead bodies removed by the police to keep casualty figures down are yet to be recovered and accounted for, after discovery of 17 bodies in the Muradnagar canal.

Violence continued unabated infiltrating into rural areas because now it was the turn of the majority community with its greater striking power to settle its scores.

*Indian Express, May 27, 1987*

## OLD DELHI TOO IN THE GRIP OF COMMUNAL FRENZY

*Asghar Ali Engineer*

In big cities, old walled areas are usually more riot prone for variety of reasons. It is true of Delhi, Hyderabad Baroda and several other places. Firstly, these areas are very thickly populated with a maze of narrow winding lanes and bye-lanes. It becomes easier for mischief makers to operate in these narrow lanes. Secondly, low income group people with high level of unemployment, low level of education, self-employed petty traders with closely knit communal relations live in these areas. Mostly there are separate communal enclaves, with less scope for wide range of inter-communal relationship (however, recent experiences show that now even areas with much wider scope for inter-communal relationship are becoming riot-prone in a number of places. These conditions are comparatively more congenial for breeding communal violence. Thirdly, such highly populated areas with narrow lanes and bye-lanes prove securer havens for anti-social elements to operate which are always on the increase in fast expanding urban areas. Crime is integral part of urbanization specially in capitalist societies and crime tends to become integral part of politics, both secular and communal, specially the latter as it also helps legitimise crime as well as criminals. All this explains to some extent why walled parts

of certain cities easily become riot prone, given certain other conditions.

Walled part of old Delhi, especially around Jama Masjid falls into the above category. Some parts of this area have separate communal enclaves whereas some have mixed population. Most of the houses and shops are located in very narrow lanes and bye-lanes with high density of population. Of late there have been communal clashes in these areas and thus this part of Delhi has its own history of communal riots. Also, communal tension in Delhi, especially in the walled area, has been on the increase since the formation of religious senas like the Shiv Sena, Bajrang Sena, Adam Sena etc. The Ram Janambhoomi/Babri Masjid controversy has added its own bitterness between the two principal communities. The Sita Ram Bazar in this area is a hotbed of Hindu communalists and trishuldhari Shivsainiks whereas the Shahi Imam holds sway in the Jama Masjid area with his son's Adam Sena though it is not as coherent and strong as the Shiv Sena. However, it makes its own contribution to communal tension.

The current riots in Delhi started on 22 May 1987 in the aftermath of riots in nearby Meerut. All sorts of rumours were afloat about what happened in that unfortunate town. These rumours acquired added significance as large number of Muslims from this area have close interaction with the Muslims of Meerut both on business as well as family level. Hindus too were seething with anger as they were fed on rumours that a large number of Hindus have been killed in Meerut by Muslims. The Delhi riots must be seen in this backdrop.

## II

In such a situation any event, small or big, was good enough to trigger off the events. Two days before the riot started there was a rumour that a Muslim molested a Hindu girl in Ballimaran. It is difficult to verify this but rumours have their own explosive role in communally tense situation. Main incidents took place on 22nd May, the last Friday of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting and prayer. However, some incidents preceded the incidents on Friday.

There is a small mosque near the Hauz Qazi Police Thana.

This mosque was attacked on 19 May at night. The Imam of the mosque was killed by a mob of about 20/25 persons. The nephew of the Imam, however, escaped and lodged a complaint with the Police but, it is alleged, the Police took no notice of the incident. The Imam had died on the way to hospital. There was another incident in a place called Charkhewalan on the same night. Fifteen to twenty people attacked a mosque when the late night prayer was going on. The mob tried to break open the door. The Muslims tried to escape by jumping off the other wall. They ran towards Ballimaran and heard a firing shot. A boy called Ashok was killed when the police fired to control the situation.

The Muslims set fire to a number of paper godowns belonging to the Hindus in Baradari Sher Afghan. One press was also set alight by some Muslim miscreants. In these disturbances, place like Sita Ram Bazar, Zeenat Mahal, Lal Kuan which is a Harijan colony, were mainly affected. Like Meerut here too the Harijans were used by the upper caste Hindus against the Muslims. Here too many Muslims alleged that the upper caste Hindus give liquor and money to do the dirty job. They do not come directly into the picture. In many areas of Old Delhi Muslims and Harijans live close by as both the communities live in poverty and are faced with high levels of unemployment.

### III

The main incidents, as pointed out above, took place on 22 May, the last Friday of the sacred month of Ramzan. It all started after the Muslims came out of the Jama Masjid after saying their afternoon prayer (*Namaze-Zuhr*). It is alleged that the Sahi Imam delivered a provocative sermon and provoked Muslims came out of the mosque and began to stone Hindu areas. This was unfortunately uncritically accepted by various newspaper reporters. The police also dished out a highly biased version of the events. However, close investigation show that this does not seem to be the case. In any case it was not as simple as that. The Shiv Sena and its followers do not seem to be that innocent as they make it out to be.

Many Muslims who were present in the Jama Masjid on



that fateful day told me that far from delivering a provocative sermon the Imam had implored the Muslims to remain peaceful and go home with their eyes downcast, if they are true Muslims. This is born out by sources who are by no means sympathetic to him. The Muslims allege that when they came out of the mosque at about 2.30 p.m. they were surrounded by the Hindu mob from two sides near Hauz Qazi and were stoned. Many were injured in this incident. Similarly there was incident in the Chowri Bazar area from where too Muslims were passing after prayer. In Chitli Qabar area some Muslims tried to loot a Hindu shop but some other Muslims foiled the attempt. Nevertheless some damage was done. The other four Hindu shops in the area remained safe.

In the same area police resorted to lathi charge but some Muslim boys snatched lathis from two police constables and beat them up. The policemen ran away but one constable remained behind and fired in the reverse direction. Two boys were injured and all the shops in the area downed their shutters. Similarly in Kuch Chalan some Muslims tried to break open the Hindu shops which had been closed down earlier but they could not break them. The Rajasthan Police fired (there were 10/12 of them) on round and then threw tear gas shell. Then again firing began at about 3.30 p.m. and continued upto 7.00 p.m. The firing was continuous and many fires were shot at those looking from the windows but here (i.e. in Kucha Chalan) no one was fortunately injured. Again from 7 p.m. to midnight there was intermittent firing. Many Muslims were arrested while going for their evening prayer.

In Gali Mochiyan the police shot dead a Muslim boy on 22 May after afternoon prayer. The name of the boy killed was Zahid Ali. He was around 16 years old. In fact, Zahid Ali was not even peeping out of window. He was inside the room behind the cooler. The bullet struck him after piercing through the cooler. This incident took place around 6 p.m., his elder brother Majid Ali told me.

The worst incidents took place in the Chandni Mahal police station area. All the Muslims told me unanimously that the SHO of this police thana Mr. Ram Kumar Sharma is highly prejudiced against Muslims. He made indiscriminate arrests of

250 Muslims from his area, most of whom were quite innocent and had nothing to do with rioting. He also got almost all the gates which were installed in 1947 for protection of mohallahs removed without any reason or rhyme. No explanation was given. Mr Mohammad Abid, the president Yuva Janta, Chandni Chowk District, also told me that Ram Kumar Sharma is highly anti-Muslim and he makes no bones about it. In the Chandni Mahal Police Station area there are many Hindu shops but not a single one was damaged and even then Mr Sharma harassed Muslims. He has ordered firing thrice in last fifteen days, he said. Even Hindu-Muslim relations are quite cordial in this area. There was no tension of any kind in this locality. It was nothing but anti-Muslim action by the police at the instance of the SHO Mr. Sharma, he alleged. Not a single Hindu has suffered in this locality and yet maximum number of Muslims have been arrested from this area. He is not being transferred under pressure from some communal Hindus, Mohammad Abid maintained.

It was in Chandni Mahal area again that one Rashid Ahmad, aged about 21 was killed by the police bullet. He was on the roof of the house when he was hit at about 3 p.m. on 22 May. Rashid was removing his shirt when he was hit. The shot was fired with an intention to kill. His brother Rafiq told me that for last several days there was so much terror among Muslims that such terror was not witnessed even during 1947 riots and all this despite the fact that there is no Hindu-Muslim tension in the area. It was all doing of the SHO Mr. Sharma.

One old Urdu journalist Raziullah told me that Hindus in fact helped us a lot in this vicinity. They are like our near and dear ones. We have no complaints against them. It was all due to Mr. Sharma. Rounds (1700) were fired during a couple of days, he alleged. Even on 19 May 30 rounds were fired from the corner of Chandni Mahal to Sui walan. In the Chandni Mahal police station area 4 young boys were killed on 22 May disturbances, thanks to Mr. Sharma, Raziullah said. The names of the boys killed are Muhammad Said, Rashid Ahmed, Qamarul Hasan and Yasin Allah Rakha. On the same day one boy Mohammad Shafiquddin, aged 23, was killed in Kucha Anarkhan. It is also in the Chandni Mahal police station

jurisdiction.

Thus there is overwhelming evidence of anti-Muslim bias against the SHO, Mr. Sharma and yet he remains unharmed. Repeated complaints and Urdu Paper reports did not draw the notice of the authorities. This has made Muslims very bitter indeed. Those arrested were not released until the day of our inquiry, i.e. 7th June. They were subsequently released on 12th June under pressure from Shahi Imam who kept the Jama Masjid closed from 28th May onwards in protest and opened it only after assurance to meet his demands. We will talk about the closure of the mosque a little later.

On the day of the disturbances, i.e. 22 May extensive damage was done to Sima Lodge in Churiwalan where mostly those coming from Pakistan stay. It was special target of wrath. Many Pakistani inmates were injured and were evacuated to other places nearby. Each and every room in the lodge was damaged. However, the Muslims in this area retaliated by burning Hindu shops. More than 13 shops were burnt, among them were the shops of foodgrains, pan-cigarette, gram roaster and milk vendor. These shops were also badly damaged.

Kucha Pandit is highly congested, narrow street and has mixed population of Hindus and Muslims. It was in this lane that firing took place for several hours and people were struck with terror. It is really miraculous that despite such prolonged firing no one was injured or killed. It was being talked among some sections of Muslims that "God sent His angels to intervene and take the bullets on their bodies." This folk-talk about miracle is indicative of the kind of firing that took place there that day. A few shops were looted and damaged in this lane. Shamshad Ali, a fruit vendor and few other shops were damaged. He sustained a loss of around Rs. 10,000. One Hindu shop was also set ablaze in this area. About two hundred thirty-eight Muslims were taken into custody under section 238 from Kucha Pandit, some of them have been charged under 15 different sections and were not released until 11 June when I was investigating.

In Turkman Gate area too Hindu and Muslims fought against each other. There was mutual stoning. A Hindu shop selling silver ornaments was burnt in Sita Ram Bazar area by

some Muslim miscreants. Police resorted to firing. One Muslim boy was standing on the terrace of fire house. He was warned by the police to go into the house but he did not move and was shot dead. These incidents took place on 22 May evening.

One similar incident took place near Gali Kundla Kashan which is adjacent to Katra Ghulam Mohammad. Gali Kundla Kashan is mostly inhabited by the Hindus. One Mr. Anil alleged that there was incessant stoning and pelting of other missiles for more than two hours from this Gali on the afternoon of 22 May. There is big oven for roasting vermicelli (siwayyan) in Katra Ghulam Mohammad. Many Hindus from Eastern U.P. work here. All of them fled when stoning started. When they were running away a cauldron of ghee (clarified butter) fell down into the oven and it caught fire. There is the house of one Mr. Qamarul Hasan adjacent to this oven. It caught fire too and was filled with smoke. Qamarul Hasan, in order to save his family used a window overlooking a mosque and brought out through the window several members of his family. He was the last to come out. While he was descending from the window an armed police on the terrace of a house opposite to his house took aim at him and shot him dead. He was quite innocent, had nothing to do with the disturbances around and was the sole bread earner in the family. His tragic death left shattering impact on the Muslims around and mourned by all. He was just 21 year old. It was alleged that a Shiv Sena leader from the area was actively associated with the police and was instrumental in getting many Muslims arrested. About 18 Muslims were taken into custody from this area.

### III

In these disturbances in Delhi on 22 May in the wake of Meerut riots some 15 persons were killed, twelve of whom died by police bullets and were mostly young. The remaining died due to stabbing, three or four of whom were Hindus. One Hindu boy was killed in the police firing.

There was an atmosphere of terror among the Muslims when I was investigating around the Jama Masjid area. These widespread disturbances, no doubt, have left shattering impact



on the Muslim mind. Most of those killed in police firing were quite innocent. The arrests were also one sided and quite indiscriminate. Hundreds were in the police custody until 11th June, many of whom were tortured. The Muslims in general have come to believe that law and order machinery is for not protecting them but for killing them. They have no faith in it any longer. It leads them to defend themselves and they tend to collect some crude weapons towards this end. This becomes evidence of 'preparation for rioting' in police searches and leads to large scale arrests. It has really become a vicious circle for them. They do not know how to break out of it.

A group of social activists led by Shri Purushottam Agarwal of Delhi University was also carrying on investigations in the area. They fully corroborated what many Muslims told me. Purshottam Agarwal described to me the sufferings of the Muslims of Katra Ghulam Mohammad who had been arrested in large numbers. It was impossible for them to get bail. The whole police machinery is prejudiced. The political authorities are equally indifferent. Their complaints fall on deaf ears.

The Shahi Imam closed down the mosque on 28 May by way of protest. In the face of these police excesses the measure proved tremendously popular among the Muslims in the disturbed areas of old Delhi. Most of the Muslims in the area applauded it. A large banner outside the mosque proclaimed in bold letters :

“Protest against extreme atrocities & barbarism Jama Masjid, Delhi shall remain closed till guilty police officials are severely punished, all innocents arrested are immediately released. Not verbal but practical assurance for the security of life and property for future is made. May 28, 1987.”

The measure of course proved highly controversial in different circles. Some Muslims also criticised it and opposed conversion of place of worship into a political arena. Some *fatwas* (religious opinion) from the theological seminary of Deobann were obtained against the closure. There was heated debate among the Muslims even about these *fatwas*. The affected Muslims of course despised those 'sarkari mauvis' who

issued these *fatwas*. The opinion in favour of the closure was so strong that those who issued the *fatwas* had to retreat and explain why they issued the *fatwa*.

The closure of the mosque proved highly embarrassing for the Government. Its image was getting tarnished in the Muslim countries. Ultimately, it accepted these demands and released those arrested on 13th June. The mosque was opened after getting the assurance for the release of the Muslims. Here no one would dispute the fact that places of worship should not be misused for political ends and hence in that sense the closure of the mosque was not justified. But the important question is why the Government turned deaf ear to the Muslim demand to release the innocent. If the Government had taken timely action there would have been no need to close the mosque and the Imam would not have acquired the popularity he did.

The politics of communalism is already very deeply embedded. It is no longer peripheral to our polity; in fact it is tending to become an integral part of our mainstream politics, thanks to opportunistic manipulations of communal sentiments for mobilising votes by secular parties as well. It is for this reason that Babri Mosque and Ram Janambhoomi has acquired such tremendous significance, something which normally should have been treated as non-issue. I would venture to say that these are wages of sins of secular parties. Had they honestly fought for the real issues facing the people and worked for their solution our polity would not have been communalised to such an extent. Though it is quite late in the day, still it is not too late not to learn any lesson.

## DELHI WALLED CITY RIOTS

### I. Introduction

The immediate trigger for the riots was a series of innocuous local incidents, often blown out of all proportion by fast-traveling rumours. These initial sparks carried the potentialities of a conflagration since they were taking place in an atmosphere which had already been surcharged by communal dispute over the Babri Masjid—Ram janambhoomi controversy, and widespread communal riots in Ahmedabab, Allahabad, Baroach and other places. The outbreak of riots in Meerut a day earlier (on May 18), also contributed to the fuelling of tensions in the walled city. As a result, while in normal circumstances, a local dispute would have been settled amicably and faded into oblivion, in the present situation it always threatens to assume lasting communal dimensions. Our investigations into the incidents which sparked off the riots on the first day—May 19—confirm the belief that several extraneous factors at the national level like the Babri Masjid dispute, the Shah Banoo controversy and the Ahmedabad riots, have sharpened the alienation between the two communities even in those localities of the walled city, where there have never been communal riots on this scale since 1947. Thus, the soil was already fertile enough to breed the riots.

Our findings also indicated other political and socio-economic factors which could have interrupted the traditional harmonious relations between Hindus and Muslims in these

areas. The rise of a younger, articulate generation of Muslims, who voice their grievances against discrimination in educational facilities and jobs, some of whom have made good by competing with the Hindus in modern business enterprises, is often perceived as a threat by Hindus. The traditional Hindu mercantile community which dominates in the walled city is found to be resenting the Muslim intrusion into its commercial enclave, and the Muslim assumption of symbols of upward mobility. Hindus tend to raise their eye-brows at the assertion of an equal status by a community which they have been used to look down upon as their inferiors in the post-Independence era. The Muslims, quite rightly, are offended by this.

In the absence of conscious efforts by secular political forces in the locality to reconcile these growing differences and integrate the two communities, members of both the communities in their political choices are tending to fall back on their respective religious fundamentalist platforms. Hindu communal organizations like the Vishva Hindu Parishad and their Muslim counterparts like the Adam Sena, have been successful to a large extent in rallying their respective followers through the technique of demagogic intimidation, and their ability to ascribe nefarious motives to the other community. We found elderly Muslim politicians and intellectuals who had been traditionally Congressmen, pushed to the wall by the indifference of the ruling party to the genuine grievances of the Muslim population. Similarly, we found elderly Hindu Congressmen, including freedom fighters, who had become disgusted with and alienated from the ruling party because of the growing incorporation into the party of anti-social elements and Hindu communalists. Their retirement from the scene left the walled city an ideal breeding ground for communal and religious fanatics as well as the local underworld—the touts, druggeddlars, hired killers who swoop down upon any chaos to settle old scores. In such a situation, the sane and secular elements in both the communities appeared to be rendered immobilized by their inner frustrations as well as by the overwhelming communal frenzy that prevailed outside.

We feel that the mutual distrust and hostility between the Hindu and Muslim residents of the walled city, built up all these



days by the changes in the socio-economic scene in the localities as well as by the estrangement reinforced by the happenings outside, played a large part in the eruption of communal riots that enveloped the walled city during the period (May 19-24) under our review. At the same time, we cannot ignore the role of the administration, including the police, in augmenting the communal tensions by their behaviour during the riots—a behavioral pattern which was marked by a deliberate harassment, persecution and provocation of the Muslim minority.

## **II. The Background and the Sequence of Events**

The May 1987 communal flare-up in the walled city occurred within a span of little over year, after a similar outbreak in the same area, which indicates the continuity of communal tensions for quite some time in the walled city.

On February 14, 1986, which was a Friday, Muslims at the call of their religious leaders observed the day as a day of protest against the court judgement on the Babri Mosque-Ram janambhoomi dispute. After the prayers at the Jama Masjid, the devotees were returning to their respective homes, when a dispute arose over the display of a Hindu banner on the top of a temple at Lal Kuan which congratulated the Hindus on the liberation of Ram janambhoomi. As the Muslims shouted slogans against it, the police overtook them and chased them into Gali Qasim Jan. An SHO, Jag Pravesh Kaushal was alleged to have shot down two Muslim youths—Mohammed Zakir and Subhan Ullah—who were actually trying to persuade the people to go back to their homes to prevent a communal confrontation. At some spots, members of both the communities fought each other and indulged in arson and looting. The indiscriminate firing by the police leading to the death of the above-mentioned youths, combined with the authorities refusal to punish the guilty police officer, had left a bitter trail in the minds of the residents. (See Delhi PUCL report on the incidents, in PUCL Bulletin, April 1986).

Tensions again ran high in the area in September, 1986, when curfew had to be imposed in Chandni Mahal, Jama Masjid and Hauz Qazi, following resentment among the Muslims against the reported entry of some Sunday picnickers, with their shoes

on, into the Mosque at Ferozeshah Kotla, on September 7. At least one person was killed in the flare-up. In September again a Bajrang Dal rally, a trishul armed display of Hindu militancy, was held which turned violent, assaulting people on roads and buses. On the 4th of October, mobs again went on the rampage in the walled city when the Ram Lila procession was not allowed to pass through its traditional route due to communal tensions in that area. At least 50 persons were injured.

In the meantime, the controversy over Babri Masjid—Ram janambhoomi had been hotting up all over India. A massive gathering of Muslims in the Boat Club lawns was addressed by the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid, Syed Shahabuddin and other Muslim leaders on March 30, 1987. Shahi Imam was reported to have urged the Muslim Ministers and MP's in a highly emotional speech, to open their eyes and ears to the danger faced by Islam, and warned that otherwise their houses would be looted and burnt. Syed Shahabuddin was found trying to restrain the latter.

Fast on the heels of the Muslim rally at Boat Club came the Ram Navami procession on April 7, organised by the Hindu communal groups. What used to be a peaceful religious demonstration in other years, was turned this year into an occasion for raising Hindu communal slogans and displaying gestures of militancy containing all the potentialities of a violent outbreak.

As passions ran high on both sides in an atmosphere overloaded with mutual suspicion and distrust, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi chose to address a rally of his partymen in the Boat Club lawns on May 16 this year, where he cautioned his followers against efforts of 'destabilization' by foreign powers and their agents in India. Referring to these agents and the US arming of Pakistan, he thundered: "*Unko hum karake ka jawab denge, aisa jawab denge ki unke jo maa baap bane huay hain unki naani yaad kara denge hum*" (We will give them such a fitting reply that those who are their godfathers will remember their grandmother).

(In the course of our investigations and interviews with the residents of the walled city, while the Hindus felt that the Shahi Imam's speech at Boat Club inflamed Muslim passions, the

Muslims said that the Prime Minister's Boat Club speech was interpreted as a war-cry against the Muslims by the Hindu miscreants).

In the meantime, in the walled city, religious bigots of both the communities continued to step up their propaganda. A few weeks before the outbreak of the May riots during the Ramzan a three-wheeler scooter was observed moving around Nai Sarak area with a loudspeaker blaring forth the following slogans: "*Ab ki Id Hogi Kaise? Moradabad Jaise*" (How will you observe your Id? As it happened in Moradabad, i.e. warning the Muslims about attacks on them during the Moradabad riots); "*Agar Hindustan me rahna hai, To Vande Matram kahna hai*" (if you want to live in India, you will have to chant Vande Mataram); "*Jo mangeka Babri, Uska wakht hai aakhri*" (Whoever wants Babri (masjid) will find his days numbered).

A large number of leaflets were distributed by the Indraprastha Vishwa Hinna Parishad questioning the patriotic loyalties of the Muslims and urging the establishment of a Hindu Raj.

The May 19 riots came as a climax to these sustained efforts, made by both Hindu and Muslim fundamentalists to stoke communal passions.

Our investigations into the sequence of events on May 19, and later, revealed how rumours, or distorted versions of an incident in a surcharged atmosphere could provoke communal violence.

The first incident occurred in the evening of May 19 when a dispute took place between a cyclist and a motorcycle driver—both Hindus—on Nai Sarak in the walled city. The wife of Vijay Kumar Sharma, the motor cycle driver, complained that the cyclist, Balakrishna, had misbehaved with her, which led to a scuffle between Sharma and Balakrishna. Two passers by travelling in a rickshaw, who happened to be Muslims, intervened to separate the two. Soon the police arrived and took all of them to the Town Hall police station. The woman was reported to have told the police that the Muslim passers-by had intervened in the dispute to protect her. Within the police station a reconciliation was brought about. But on Sharma's complaint Bala Krishna was detained. Meanwhile, outside the

rumour had spread that Muslims had misbehaved with a Hindu woman. Mobs descended on the streets, and soon sporadic clashes between the two communities broke out in different parts of the walled city.

At around 9.30 p.m. in Ballimaran, a Hindu, On Prakash Kashyap was shot. Twenty-two year old Om Prakash was standing on the third floor of Dharamshala Bissomal when he received bullet wounds in his stomach and arms. He came down running, and according to his relatives, he cried : "*Ali Mahammad ne mujhe goli mara,*" Om Prakash lived with his mother and five brothers in a small two-roomed house opposite the Dharamsala. His brother, Naunihal informed the police and took him to JP Hospital where he died at 1.30 a.m. the next morning. Ali Mohammad, the person named by Om Prakash is the son of Fazal Ilahi, the landlord of Om Prakash house, with whom he had a long-standing dispute over rent. Subsequently, Fazal Ilahi, his four sons including Ali Monammad, and his brother Ahsan were arrested. But according to the local residents, they were released at the intervention of Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid. When we later asked the DCP (Crime & Railways), Mr Amod Kanth, about the incident, he said that Om Prakash could have been bit by a police bullet, since the police at that time were firing in the air to disperse warring crowds.

Here again, what was presumably to start with a landlord-tenant dispute, took on the ominous colours of a communal discord, the popular mood being what it was.

The next serious incident of the day was, however, of a more direct communal nature. At around 11.45 p.m., Shauqat Mia, a watch-maker and Imam of masjid Hakim Baqi in Hauz Qazi, was stabbed repeatedly by assailants who raided the masjid. While Shauqat died, and two of his associates were injured, one of them escaped and informed the police, who came and arrested five local Hindus.

As intermittent clashes and arson continued in Ballimaran, the police clamped curfew in the area. The curfew was extended to the Turkman Gate area also, where till then there had not taken place any serious incident. Residents of the area later in the course of our interviews with them, blamed the police for "such a reckless action which not only created unnecessary



harassment for the inhabitants, but also encouraged to a large extent the riots that broke out there on Friday". It is possible that the curfew was imposed as a precautionary measure in view of the tension already present in other areas. We shall deal later with the Turkman Gate area incidents.

On May 20, which was Wednesday, the army staged a flag march through the walled city.

Both Wednesday and Thursday (May 20 and 21) were comparatively calm, although tension prevailed. The curfew was relaxed for four hours—two in the morning and two in the evening—on Thursday. Continuing arrests of people, many among whom were described innocent by the neighbours, news of deaths of those who were injured on May 19, as well as of the escalation of riots in Meerut, fuelled the tensions that were building up among the residents of the walled city, who were already feeling the pinch of the curfew. Shops had remained closed for the last two days. Whether little foodstuff was available for sale when the curfew was relaxed on Thursday, were sold at nearly twice their usual prices; children in many areas had to go without milk.

Meanwhile, late on Thursday night, at a meeting with the Lt. Governor of Delhi, where political leaders, local leaders of the riot-affected areas, and police officials were present, it was decided to lift the curfew for the whole day on Friday to allow the Muslims to go out to offer prayers at mosques on Jamat-ul-Vida, the last Friday of Ramzan. This appeared to be a crucial decision in view of what happened later on Friday.

Although the Bharatiya Janta Party later claimed that they had opposed the lifting of the curfew at the meeting with the Lt. Governor, our interviews with many among those who were present at the meeting revealed that the BJP representatives never made any such observation. While one observer at the meeting told us that the BJP representatives might have had expressed some "feeble" opposition to the decision to lift the curfew, another observer said that the BJP was in favour of entrusting the police with the decision to maintain, or lift the curfew.

From our talks with those who attended the meeting it was evident that the decision to lift the curfew was to a great extent

influenced by the pressure of the walled city's trading community, which consisted of both Hindus and Muslims, which had been suffering economically because of the disruption in commercial activities due to continuous curfew. The BJP, apparently did not want to lose their traditional support among the trading community (mainly Hindu) by opposing the lifting of the curfew at the time of the meeting with the Lt. Governor. But later on, when violence flared up in the streets, the BJP politicians found it convenient to dissociate themselves from what obviously was a unanimous decision at the Lt. Governor's meeting. Taking up an 'I-told-you-so' pose, the BJP picked up the curfew issue as a handle in its political fight against the ruling party.

A few residents of the walled city with whom we talked later, felt that the authorities should have relaxed the curfew for a few hours on Friday to enable the devotees to go to the mosques and return home, instead of lifting it throughout the day. Some others felt that the curfew should have been lifted in phases, instead of continuing it for days together which brought hardship to the residents.

Friday saw the worst of the riots. From what we could piece together after interviewing a cross-section of residents of Ballimaran, Jama Masjid, Baradari and Turkman Gate areas, it appears that the first wave of violence began after the end of the Jamat-ul-Vida prayers in the afternoon, and its epicentre was the Hindu dominated Chawribazar area. As the 'namaazis' (the devotees who offered prayers) were returning from Jama Masjid, trouble broke out in that part of the city. According to one eye-witness, Md. Zahir, a spinning machine dealer, as the crowd of 'namaazis' neared the Standard Sweets shop in Churiwalan, stones were hurled upon them from its top. In the melee that followed, Seema Lodge, a Muslim hotel, was set on fire. Lathis, spears and bottles were freely used by both sides.

While most of the Muslims we interviewed more or less corroborated the above account, the Hindus had a different version. A resident of a Dalit Slum in Gali Magazine in Churiwalan who claimed to be an eye-witness, said that it all began when one of the 'namaazis' picked up a stool outside

Baba Dudh Bhandar and banged it, which acted as a trigger. Several shops and restaurants—Rajeev Restaurant, Golden Restaurant, Shivdhan Dudh Bhandar—were attacked, and many were injured.

According to another account, the disturbances started in Hauz Quazi, where the 'namaazis' became violent when they reached the spot where the Imam of Masjid Baqi was killed on Tuesday. The mob looted and burnt shops while the police stood watching, according to Tarachand Chandelwal of the BJP.

The trouble soon spread to the adjoining lanes and bye-lanes, where shops were looted and burnt and people stabbed and beaten-up. Members of both the communities were involved in the incidents. But in our interviews, while the Muslims sometimes acknowledged the participation of hooligans from their own community, the Hindus invariably stuck to the position of being innocent victims. While the Muslims' main target of criticism was the police, the Hindus were usually all praise for the police. The failure of both the communities to provide an impartial account—even by those who claimed to be eye-witnesses—of the origins of the trouble, indicates to what extent the wall of prejudice and suspicion separates the two communities. Dalits whom we visited in their quarters in Katra Khawaspura under the Chandni Mahal police station, repeatedly asserted that they had never had any contact with their Muslim neighbours who lived cheek by jowl in Kuchachalan. Similarly, Muslims in the Turkman Gate area described to us the Dalits as "chamars" who did not come from a "good caste". Caste-Hindus were often too eager to describe the Muslims in the walled city as Pakistani agents. In such an atmosphere of communal divide, versions of incidents were bound to be influenced by the particular bias of respective communities.

We, therefore, tried to check and cross-check accounts of some of the major incidents that took place during the May 19-25 period, and visited those spots to assess the nature of handling of the problems by the administration and the police, and to examine the impact of police action and curfew.

We began our investigations on May 23. Saturday, when

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the injured and the dead were being brought to hospitals from riot-affected areas. We interviewed the doctors who were attending them and the injured who narrated their experiences.

We followed this up by visiting the area of major incidents on Sunday, May 24. One such incident took place at Kucha Nahar Khan, a twisting lane behind the Golcha cinema house at Daryaganj. A predominantly Muslim residential area, it has a couple of Hindu families and one Sikh family. The residents told us that on Friday, following the disturbances after the prayers, the retreating mob entered the area and set fire to two Hindu shops, belonging to Pannalal and Shambhunath. Zamiruddin Khan, who is a prominent Congress (I) leader of the area, and a special police officer, told us that the miscreants poured petrol from a scooter to set fire. Zamiruddin intervened and saved the Hindu shop-owners by removing them from the burning shops. He rang the police, but they arrived half an hour late.

We visited Baradari where two godowns and a Press belonging to Hindu Businessmen were burnt on Tuesday. We earlier interviewed the Hindu residents of Pandit Kucharam who had been stabbed. These included several women. While the victims of stabbing and arson had been mainly Hindus this time, the victims of police firings and high-handedness were Muslims.

On Saturday, at about 1.45 p.m. a 34-year old Muslim, Shafiquddin, who was washing his hands in the ground floor covered verandah of his house (2060 Kucha Nahar Khan), was shot dead by the CRPF. We visited the house of the victim, who was the only earning member of a family of one handicapped brother, one unmarried sister and their mother. The relatives and neighbours told us that before Shafiquddin got hit police appeared to be chasing some one in the streets. Shafiquddin came out in the verandah and went to the water-tap to wash before reading his 'namaaz', when the CRPF personnel posted on the roof-top of a school building opposite took aim at him and fired five rounds. One bullet entered his body, and he died. We saw the holes made in the ground by the other bullets, blood stains and a pair of slippers still lying on the floor.

Residents of the area told us that the police had behaved in an extremely high-handed fashion with the Muslims. They accused a police officer of shouting at the Hindu neighbours: "Why didn't you kill a few Muslims?" The police made a house-to-house search, but could not find any firearms. To prevent the police from entering the lane and terrorizing the people, Zamiruddin and the other residents locked from inside the massive iron gate that stood at the entrance of Kucha Nahar Khan at its crossing with Kucha Chalan—the road where police pickets were placed. They reassured the Hindu and Sikh families of protection.

On Sunday, after we had finished our investigation in Kucha Nahar Khan and had come out, within minutes the CRPF and the Delhi armed police arrived at the spot and with welding instruments took down the gate. We saw gun toting policemen entering the lane and beginning a house-to-house search. They aimed their rifles at us and asked us to leave the area immediately.

On the same day we visited the Turkman gate area. Residents told us that on Friday between 2.30 and 3.30 p.m., a crowd of 'Dalits' came from the direction of Kali Masjid, Bazar Sitaram (a Hindu area), and started looting shops, owned by both Hindus and Muslims. They included a shop owned by one Ram Kumar Vilas, and 'Shabana Tailors'. The residents could recognize among the miscreants, sons of a former Deputy Superintendent of Police, who were also now employed in the police.

Although the local Muslims told us that the nearby Deriwale Masjid had been set on fire by the miscreants, we checked and found that it was not burnt. In response to our later inquiries, while some said that it was stoned, others said that attempts were made to set it on fire.

As the looting continued, some of the residents rang up the police. But the police did not arrive for the next three hours. Around 6 p.m., people from the top of Hindu houses next to blocks A, W, X and V, started stoning the Muslims. Soon after that the police arrived, with a crowd of Hindus following them. They fired several rounds, though no one was injured. The residents described to us in graphic terms how



when they were just about to break their day-long fast, the police started firing. "Women and children started screaming. We remembered those days of 1975, (when during the Emergency, the police demolished houses in the area) . . . Then they began the arrests. They just barged into homes, beat up men and women and children . . . The ASI, Mahender Singh of Turkman Gate chowki took the children and shouted at them saying they were "Pakistanis". Although most of the children were released on the intervention of a senior police officer, we were told that there were still some children in jail. One of them was 12-year old Mohammad Sakir. "This is how the future of our children is ruined," commented one of the residents.

The residents also complained to us that the police indulged in looting. In one case, the police raided the house (No. A-13) of Islamuddin, arrested him and his son, and took away a VCR set. Islamuddin is a heart patient, who had just been released from Bansal Hospital.

We met several people who had been beaten up by the police. An old man showed us his back and his hands swollen with marks of rifle butts. We saw women and children who had been victims of police assault. From the FIRs we examined we found that all the 115 persons arrested from the area were Muslims.

When we went to Gali Wazir Beg in the Turkman Gate area, we met residents who had the same story to tell us—the unprovoked attack by police on men, women and children; their indulging in looting, and their blatant communal bias directed against the Muslims. We were told that when on Friday, people gathered to offer prayers at Masjid Pulaowali in the Gali Wazir Beg, the police suddenly entered the mosque, broke two windows and the loudspeaker. They challenged the 'namaazis' and said: '*Tum me se jo bahadur hai, wo bahar aye, hum shikar karega.*' (Anyone from you who is brave enough, come out, we'll play hunting). They then began a rampage. They opened the lock of Rafiq Tea Stall and took away Rs. 2,500, threw out all the things, drank all the soft drinks and broke the bottles on the road, and carried away about a hundred butter packets.

During our talks with the victims of police atrocities in the Turkman Gate area, a few names kept cropping up repeatedly. The residents named them as the main perpetrators of the violence. Among the police they identified the ASI Mahender Singh of Turkman Gate chowki and two constables Rajinder Singh and Mahesh. They also mentioned the names of Ashok Jain, Metropolitan Councillor of Turkman Gate belonging to Congress (I), Swaroop Singh who runs a dairy in the area, and Yadeshwar of the Vishva Hindu Parishad as those responsible for the arrests of innocent Muslims.

While the police remained tight-lipped about our inquiries, Ashok Jain and Swarup Singh agreed to talk to us. Mr. Jain denied being anywhere near Turkman Gate at the time of arrests there. "If arrests were made," he said, "it was wrong, because local people were not involved. It was all the work of outsiders." He informed us that on a previous occasion, the name of Sardar Swaroop Singh, a Sikh, had been linked with riots. His son Surrender, in particular, was alleged to have involved in the past. Mr. Jain asserted, this time they were not involved.

In spite of the past record of Swaroop Singh and his son, they appeared to be important enough in the eyes of the Lt. Governor's Secretariat to be invited at the Thursday meeting at his residence where the crucial decision of lifting the curfew was taken. When we met Swaroop Singh, he informed us that his son attended the meeting.

On Monday, the 25th, we went for a visit to Katra Khawaspura, inhabited by Dalits. The previous day during our investigations in Kucha Nahar Khan, we were told by the Muslim residents that the Dalits from Khawaspura (which is adjacent to Kucha Nahar Khan) had pelted stones on the Muslims after the Friday prayers.

The Dalit families of Khawaspura, however, had a different story to tell. They said that on that eventful Friday at around 3.30 p.m. a woman of their community, while standing on the rooftop of her house, was suddenly attacked by a knife-wielding Muslim, who had climbed on to the Dalit house-top from the adjoining Muslim school which is in Kucha Chalan. The woman came running down and alerted the rest of the colony (a wide area with a courtyard surrounded by double storied

houses). The menfolk were then out on work. The Dalit residents showed us broken utensils and charred remains of other household things on their terraces, which they said were results of intermittent stoning and throwing of kerosene-soaked burning rags by their Muslim neighbours from Kucha Chalan. The Dalit residents, however, all praise for the local police, who they said were prompt in intervening in stopping further attack—in marked contrast to what we heard about the police from the Muslim in Kucha Nahar Khan. There was one lone dissenter in the Dalit colony who complained about the late arrival of the police. Others, however, shouted him down. When we asked the residents why the broken utensils and burnt household property had been kept on the terraces, we were told that the police had asked them to keep it there.

From our interviews with the Dalit families of Katra Khawaspura, and the Muslims of neighbouring Kucha Nahar Khan and the Kalan Mahal area, it appeared that the two communities, although neighbours, and their houses neck to neck, had little contact with each other. Further, there were frequent sources of friction. The Dalits told us that the Muslims objected to their going up and sitting on their terraces, since the terraces on this side overlooked the inner courtyard of the Muslim houses on the other side, where the privacy of the Muslim women seemed to be always threatened by outsiders. The Muslims of the adjoining streets on the other hand, complained to us that the Dalits, after consumption of liquor, often tossed the empty bottles into the courtyard of the neighbouring Muslim houses. Thus tension appeared to have been built up all these years over private altercations which are inevitable in any crowded locality where the residents always feel threatened by incursions into their tightly bound world of privacy.

From Katra Khawaspura, we moved into Gali Jamunwali, a predominantly Muslim inhabited lane, where we found the residents highly agitated over the recent dismantling by the CRP of the old iron gate at the opening of the lane. (Incidentally, such gates, known as 'phataks' are a part of the traditional town planning of Old Delhi. They are locked from inside during the night to prevent the incursion of anti-social

elements from outside). The Muslim residents of the lane complained to us that while the gates elsewhere in the Hindu areas were left intact, the CRP people were systematically breaking down the gates of the Muslim-inhabited lanes. On being asked why they were doing so, the police came up with the laconic reply : "we are working under orders from above."

We made inquiries, and found that the lone Hindu family residing in Gali Jamunwali was safe and being looked after by their Muslim neighbours. Thus, there did not appear to be any immediate need for evacuating the Hindu family which could have been an excuse for the police to break down the gate.

We felt, therefore, that the way in which the old iron gates were pulled down in the Muslim areas—in Kucha Nahar Khan and Gali Jamunwali—amounted to unnecessary provocation to Muslim sentiments and further aggravated their feelings of victimization.

Our next stop was at Haveli Azam Khan in the Chitli Qabar area opposite Jama Masjid. We visited the house of Zahir Ali, a 17-year old boy who was shot dead by the police on Saturday. Zahir was sitting in a room on the first floor of the house, when a bullet flew into the room, penetrating the wall and killed him. We saw the hole made by the bullet at the corner of an air-cooler fixed on to the wall. We peeped down from the window of the room, and found that the CRP police were still stationed in the street down below and were pointing their rifles at the houses above. The houses in the street were all inhabited by Muslims.

Residents of the area complained to us that while the police failed to apprehend the real culprits, who came from outside and indulged in rampage, they harassed the residents and terrorized them by indiscriminate firing. They showed us the few Hindu shops and a Hindu temple in the area, which had remained unharmed. Here also an iron gate, 40 years old, was pulled down by the CRP men.

The riots left 88 injured and nine dead. Our inquiries at the hospital and interviews with the injured, threw further light on the composition of the victims, the methods of assault adopted by the rioters, and the nature of police retaliation.

The Saturday evening—by when the maximum number of



casualties had taken place—we traced 14 patients in the JP Hospital. There were three women victims. The majority suffered stab wounds in the abdomen, chest and back; acid burns; lacerated wounds as well as injuries from lathis on heads.

From our interview with injured we gathered the impression that they were innocent victims of both the communal frenzy and indiscriminate firing of the police. The preponderance of Hindus among those who suffered stab injuries and non-bullet inflicted wounds, indicates that they were victims of direct assaults by Muslim miscreants (which in many cases was confirmed by our talks with the injured Hindus) who might have attacked them with daggers, lathis or acid. Among the injured Muslims also there were some victims of similar stab and lathi attack—inflicted by Hindu miscreants. Our later inquiries revealed that many Muslims did not go to hospital but got treated by local doctors. But a substantial portion of the injured Muslims sustained bullet injuries, which suggests that they were direct targets of police firing. We should add here that among the injured we found at least eight police personnels—most of them constables, including one Muslim. The nature of their injuries indicated that they might have been bit by stones or brickbat.

From our interviews with the injured, we could form an idea of the methods of assault used by the rioters (both Hindus and Muslims), and the methods used by the police, ostensibly to control riots. Let us give a few illustrations.

We interviewed two patients in Ward No. 6 of J.P. Hospital. One was Bhagwan Singh, a 16 year old Hindu, and the other was Islamuddin, a 28-year old Muslim. Ironically, both were sharing the same bed (No. 28) at the time of our interview, since there was no extra bed available in the Ward because of the rush of victims.

Bhagwan worked in a sweets shop in Churiwallan. While he was working in the shop on Friday, the assaliants entered the shop and hit him with lathis on his head and shoulders. Islamuddin, who came from Purnea in Bihar, worked as a tailor in a shop by the side of a mosque at Sitaram Bazar. He and his three colleagues were attacked in the shop. The shop was set on fire. His two colleagues were burnt alive. Kerosene



was sprinkled on them before the fire was set. Islamuddin managed to escape with stab injuries in his thigh and a broken hand.

In the same ward, 19-year old Jameer was lying with a bullet injury in his back on bed number 21, while just by his side on bed number 20 was lying middle-aged Mulk Raj with five stab injuries: Jameer told us that on Saturday, he was standing on the doorsteps of his house in a lane, when he heard sounds of firing. As he turned to go back inside, he received a bullet in his back, another victim of reckless police firing. Mulk Raj on the other hand, was a victim of Muslim communal frenzy. He owned the Amar Printing Press in Lal Quan area. On the first night of the riots (May 19) a mob attacked his press, beat up the workers and cut off the telephone wires. On the fateful Friday, May 22, again the mob came. This time they destroyed his press and stabbed Mulk Raj. He described his assailants as "Mussalmans of the same mohalla with whom I everyday eat lunch, and have tea together." They shouted "Kafir hai, kafir hai, maro, maro." (He is an infidel : Beat him up).

In Ward No. 5, we came across 23-year old Abdullah of 2398 Gali Gudriyan of the Turkman Gate area, who was lying with bullet wounds on bed number 6. He told us that on Saturday, the fifth day of the curfew, having been without food all these days, he wanted to get some bread. From the rooftop of his house he asked the policeman on duty in the streets, if he could go out to buy bread. The policeman gave his approval. But as soon as Abdullah came out on the street, the same policeman took aim at him and he received bullet wounds on his waist and left hand.

Abdullah's experience once again confirms the allegations of police bias against Muslims that were voiced wherever we went during our investigation.

### **III. Police Terrorization and Impact of Curfew**

From our interviews with the residents of the walled city, as well as from what we ourselves saw during our tour of the curfew-bound parts, it was evident that the police had behaved in an extremely discriminatory manner, making the Muslims in

the main, face the brunt of their persecution. A sadistic desire to humiliate the Muslims in every way—from bullying and abusing elderly people to arresting and cold-blooded killing of younger people—marked the behaviour of both the local police and the CRPF.

While it is yet to be proved how many among those arrested were the real culprits, it is obvious from our findings so far that those who were shot by the police were innocent, like the two who were killed—24-year old Shafiquddin of Kuch Nahar Khan, and 17-year old Zahir Ali of Haveli Azam Khan (described in the previous section).

In similar cases of cold-blooded murder by the police in the past, the guilty police personnel were let off without any punishment. As we have mentioned earlier (in the previous section), the SHO Jag Pravesh Kaushal, who killed two innocent Muslims at Gali Qasim Jan in February 1986, was not even suspended in spite of repeated demands by the residents for his proper punishment,

This time also, the residents of Haveli Azam Khan named certain policemen who, they alleged, had behaved brutally, and demanded that they be punished. We were told that the SHO of Chandni Mahal police station, Ram Kumar Sharma, took particular delight during the curfew to patrol the streets with his men, firing every now and then in all directions. On Friday, he was seen by the local people waving his revolver and shouting: "I am going to teach every Muslim a lesson." We heard from 18-year old Md. Asim, who was lying wounded on Bed No. 5 and ward No. 9 of J.P. Hospital that on Friday when he was coming out from a mosque after his prayers, it was this same SHO of Chandni Mahal police station who fired at him and injured him in his right leg.

We should add, however, that SHO Ram Kumar Sharma seemed to enjoy a different reputation in Gali Jamunwali of Kalan Mahal, where a prominent Muslim gentleman, Dr. Khalif Anjum gave him a clean chit and added that he had helped to quell riots there.

Later, on May 27, when a Hindu was shot dead in the Chandni Mahal area SHO, Sharma intervened to assert that the dead man was not a victim of communal clash but of a family

feud, and claimed that he had saved the situation from taking a communal turn. (See *Indian Express*, May 28, 1987).

Because of the controversy surrounding this particular SHO, we feel that there should be an inquiry into his actions—relating to both his role in different areas during the riots and his intervention in the May 27 shooting incident (which still remains a mystery as it is yet to be found out who shot the man—his relatives, Muslim or the police?).

One of our team members happened to be present as an observer at a meeting in the office of the SHO of Turkman Gate on Sunday, when the police officer met the Muslims of the area to take stock of the situation. Almost with one voice, the Muslims there complained about police partisanship and brutalities. They alleged that the police sided with the Hindus quite openly so much so that they shot in directions pointed out by the Hindus. There were cases of theft right in front of the police who did nothing to protect either the Muslim shops or the mosques. Muslim women and children were beaten up and innocent people were arrested. Because of police terrorization, many families from Blocks A, F and W had left their homes.

After having listened to their complaints, the SHO pleaded innocence about the culprits, whom he described as outsiders and anti-socials. Evading the responsibility of his own police force, he advised the Muslims to hand over trouble creators and guard their areas. In reply to his advice, a Muslim gentleman assured the SHO that the Hindu neighbours and their properties were safe in their area, and that the Muslims would pay with their lives to protect them. But, he added, if any unpleasant situation arose the Muslims wanted to be assured that the police would not be partisan and that they would get justice. To this the SHO, however, did not have any reply.

When we later met Mr. Amod Kanth DCP (Crime and Railways), and drew his attention to the allegations of looting by the police in the Turkman Gate area (see previous section), he dismissed it as "nonsense", and asserted that police had never behaved in a communal fashion anywhere. Defending the arrest of Muslims only in that area (see previous section), he said that it was because "most of the damage had been done

by the Muslims”.

About the allegations against the Chandni Mahal police station SHO Ram Kumar Sharma, Mr. Kanth said that those were attempts to malign Sharma because of his drive against the drug peddlars of the area.

It appears from the above that senior police officers in Delhi are unwilling ever to consider allegations brought against their colleagues and subordinates by the citizens. Yet, it is not unknown that the police have a long tradition of communalism, as corroborated by the strictures passed on them by several judicial commissions set up in the wake of communal riots. The National Police Commission in its Sixth Report in March 1981, noted several instances where “police officers and men appear to have shown unmistakable bias against a particular community while dealing with communal situations,” and referred in this connection to the composition of the police force, “which is heavily weighted in favour of the majority community”.

Given this unequal composition of the police force we feel that it is all the more necessary for senior police officers to be responsive to allegations of communal partnership against the police, and to take immediate action against the guilty to correct the mistakes. The National Police Commission in its Sixth Report recommended : “. . . whenever . . . allegations are made they should not be brushed aside by senior officers, but should be carefully examined and if specific instances of misbehaviour on the part of any policemen are found to be true, such policemen should be punished in an exemplary manner so that the credibility of the police organization, as such, with the people, is not impaired.”

But judging by both past and present experiences, when policemen found indulging in criminal activities like cold-blooded murder of innocent people, or looting of shops, are allowed to go scot-free, it appears that the senior authorities in the Police are bent on ‘impairing the credibility of the police organization’ with the citizens at large.

The police terrorization not only led to direct physical injuries like fatal wounds, but also to indirect sufferings to thousands of residents of the walled city. The continuous



curfew became a matter of considerable hardship to the residents all the more because of the rigid way in which the police imposed it. Here also a policy of discrimination was followed. While in the Hindu areas like Charkewalan, Dariba Kalan and Esplanade Road (which were also curfew-bound), the people were allowed to come out on the lanes and chat in the Muslim areas like Chitli Qabar, Matia Mahal, Ballimaran, the streets were completely deserted with the armed police patrol being the only conspicuous sight. Anyone venturing even to peep out from the roof top could be a ready target for the trigger-happy policemen of the streets. A number of casualties in these Muslim areas could have been the results of such innocuous curiosity on the part of the residents, particularly the younger members of these households.

Discrimination was also noticed in the issue of curfew passes. While Ashok Jain, a Congress (I) Metropolitan Councillor told us that it was quite "easy" to get a pass, we found that Mirza Mohammad Osman, a Janta Party Municipal Councillor from the Hauz Qazi area, was denied a curfew pass.

But the worst effects of the curfew were on the civic services of the area. When we visited Pañari Bhojla on Monday the 25th—the sixth day of the curfew—we found it almost impossible to enter the lanes because of the stench from the garbage that had accumulated. Since the conservancy lorries did not enter the lanes, and the conservancy workers would not come to remove the garbage as often they were not allowed by the police to enter the lanes, the residents heaped them up at the opening of the lane. They feared that if it continued to accumulate, there was every possibility of epidemics breaking out.

The problem was aggravated by the dearth of water supply and lack of essential commodities. The curfew was relaxed initially for one hour between 5 a.m. to 6 a.m., and later for two hours only in the morning. But no private shops were allowed to be open during those hours. Curfew was relaxed in the evenings only after May 28.

By imposing and retaining the curfew for more than a week without making any arrangements or earmarking any agency to provide the trapped residents with essential services and



commodities, the authorities betrayed an extremely irresponsible and callous attitude. It appeared to be a form of collective punishment inflicted on an entire population of an area, for no fault of theirs, but for the unwillingness or failure of the police to make a distinction between the real criminals and the law-abiding common citizens.

Even the curfew pass often did not help the residents. We were told of cases of CRP personnel picketing the streets often tearing off curfew passes issued by the Delhi police. They did not appear to recognize the authority of the local police, which again underlines the perennial tussel between para-military force and the police creating problems for the ordinary citizens in the process. In this connection, we should mention the case of Md. Inam, Lecturer in Commerce in Atmaram Sanatan Dharam College. On Friday, May 22 at about 7 p.m. he was returning home in Suiwallan, next to Chandni Mahal. He had a curfew pass and his college identity card. As he reached Chitli Qabr, he was attacked by the police from behind. In spite of showing his curfew pass, he was badly beaten up and was kept in the lock-up. The FIR says that Inam was indulging in rioting and was arrested at 2.45 p.m. on Friday.

#### **IV. Living Conditions in the Walled City**

The impact of police action and the curfew on the residents of the walled city cannot be fully measured unless we have an idea of the socio-economic conditions that prevail in this part of the city.

The external symptoms of the living conditions in the walled city are overcrowded and deteriorated houses, an environment polluted by industrial units dens of criminals, drug peddlars and smugglers and high rates of unemployment and disease. The internal symptoms are resentment, hostility, despair, apathy, self-depreciation.

Built in the 17th century to house a population of 60,000 the walled city of Shahjahanabad today contains at least ten times the original population. In the total area of 1,240 acres that it spans, the density of population is one of the highest in the world. The majority of households live in single-room dwellings, primarily because of low income levels. Rent paying

capacity is extremely low, and some families have been living in rented houses for decades paying the same amount as rent that their grandparents paid. This often leads to tensions with the landlords who want to hitch up the rents, or oust the old tenants. Om Prakash, who was killed on the first day of the riots (see Section II), used to pay Rs. 8 for the two-roomed house where he stayed with his family—a bone of contention with his landlord.

Most of the households do not have basic amenities like water or toilets. Long queues before public tubewells are a common feature in this part of the city. Scramble for water often leads to disputes among the residents.

The walled city's environment is polluted by the numerous small industries (a large number of which are chemical industries) which are concentrated here. This area also serves as a major commercial centre, both wholesale and retail, for entire northern India. Over the years, there has been a large scale invasion of traditional residential areas by the commercial activities. The narrow and congested streets prevent administrative detection both of illegal industrial growth and of criminal activities.

The emotional ill-health that stems from these environmental and economic problems of the walled city is manifest in a continuum that ranges from the anxious resident seeking an escape to some other area, to the frustrated unemployed becoming criminally psychotic. The entry of all sorts of persons—either through commercial activities or in search of an ideal haven for criminal activities—into the walled city, has disturbed the old social cohesiveness of the various localities.

What is the role of the police in all this? The close association, collaboration, and at times identity, of criminals and the police is the pattern of day-to-day life in the straggling streets and lanes of the walled city. The young people come to know and accept it. No only do they not respect the police but they see the police as part of the entire nexus of the under-world.

Living in a kind of unstable equilibrium, the younger members of the lower income groups, find it difficult to resolve the conflicts in which they are caught up. The shadow of persecution and suspicion that always hovers over the Muslim youth, particularly if he is unemployed, makes it even more

difficult for them to adjust to the environment. Some among them find means of escape in directive and assertive anti-social behaviour, the underworld gang to which they might adhere themselves, providing them with the necessary protection. Others gain satisfaction through temporary identification with the verbal militancy of charismatic Islamic fundamentalists.

Given this socio-economic backdrop of the walled city, one can understand how the miserable lot of the residents can get worse at moments of crisis, like the outbreak of a communal riot bringing in its trail police harassment, firings, curfew, withdrawal of civic amenities among other things.

#### **V. The Role of Politicians and Political Parties**

We had suggested earlier that the gradual withdrawal of secular political forces from the social and political scene of the walled city had created a vacuum which is being filled up fast by the increasingly powerful religious fundamentalists of both Hindu and Islamic varieties.

Our findings revealed that the changes in the policies of the Congress (I) leadership and in the composition of the party's local cadres in recent times, had to a large extent alienated old Congressmen (both Hindus and Muslims) who at one time wielded considerable influence on the population of the area, and could intervene effectively at times of communal tensions.

We found that the position of Muslim Congressmen in particular was extremely pathetic. Typical is the case of Dr. Khaliq Anjuman of Gali Jamunwali in Kalan Mahal, who is a former government officer and is a prominent personality of the area. He told us that his repeated telephone calls to the Congress (I) leaders to stop the dismantling of the 'phatak' in front of his lane, did not yield any results. None of the central Congress (I) Muslim leaders cared to visit the riot-affected area and find out the problems that the residents were facing. Narrating his experiences with Congress (I) leaders of his community, a frustrated Dr. Anjuman said that they were hesitant to voice the grievances of the Muslims before the party's central leadership. "They are more afraid of Rajiv than 'Khuda'," he said. When someone suggested that the present riots could blacken Rajiv's reputation, he exploded, "One has to have a clean face to

get it blackened" (*Kalik un par parti hai, jinka muh safed ho*).

The feelings of being let down by the Congress (I) leaders of their own community were quite widespread among the Muslims of the walled city. While some like Zamiruddin Khan, of Kucha Nahar Khan, gave somewhat muted expression to the feeling, others like Dr. Anjum were more outspoken. The latter appeared to move to the conclusion that the Congress (I) was becoming a Hindu communal organisation—a feeling shared by both Hindus and Muslims.

We found that a number of Muslim politicians of the walled city who were once with the Congress (I) had left it in recent years and had chosen to join some other party. Mirza Mohammad Osman, an ex-Congressman who is now the Janata Party Municipal Councillor, squarely blamed the Congress (I) for the riots. He said that the main representatives of the Congress (I) in the area was Swaroop Singh (mentioned in Section III in connection with the Turkman Gate incidents), who was a known 'goonda' in the area. Mirza Siddique Ali, another prominent Muslim leader of the Janata Party felt that there was a deep conspiracy to provoke the Muslims to violent actions so that it helped the Government to prove its theory of destabilization. Syed Hamid Hussain Khizer, another ex-Congressman who is now the Muslim League Municipal Councillor, said: "It is unfortunate that the people who have joined Congress (I) are such that no good Hindu or good Muslim would join the Congress (I) now." He also accused Swaroop Singh of supplying bottles from his godown for use as missiles during riots. "Congress (I) is now like a 'nakli' (adulterated) vanaspati," he said.

The estrangement of traditional Muslim Congressmen from the present Congress (I) is not only because of their growing perception of the Congress (I) as a Hindu communal organisation, but also because of the increasing attraction towards it of anti-social elements. This was evident to us when these Muslim leaders repeatedly drew our attention to the local 'goondas' who were dominating the Party organisation in their areas.

This revulsion against the new breed of Congress (I) men was also shared by old Hindu Congressmen. We met Jawala Prasad of Naya Bans, who is in his late sixties and was at one time a



Congressman, but now belongs to no political party. When asked whether he perceived any change in the functioning of the Congress today, he narrated an experience as an example: "During the riots in 1947, Nehru heard that there were riots at Jamia Millia. He rushed there in his car. Today this does not happen." His son at this point interrupted and came up with a comment that summed up the difference between then and now: "In those days, there were 'jan-priya' (popular) leaders. Now we have bullet-proof leaders."

Elderly people like Jawala Prasad still retain the spirit of communal harmony of the past. During the present riots, elders of both the communities of the lane where he lives, got together and decided to prevent any disturbances. Old Jawala Prasad demanded that he be carried on his 'charpoy' to the gate of the lane so that he could guard it.

But the influence of these elders on their respective communities is already on the wane. Among the Muslims in particular, the increasing feeling of injustice fuelled by discrimination in jobs and the communal partisanship of the police, is straining the patience of the younger generation. As an elderly Muslim gentleman put it bluntly at the meeting with the Turkman Gate SHO (described earlier in Section III): "If shots are fired into your house, and a hundred-year old man comes and asks you to take it easy, even I will not listen to him."

The decreasing influence of the elderly leaders of the communities was also corroborated by other political leaders, like Premchand Gadodia of Kucha Sanjogiam, Naya Bans, who is the senior joint secretary of the Mercantile Association and member of the Home Guard. He said that in the past coordination between the various communities in the locality was maintained through regular meetings of the community representatives. But such meetings had stopped for the last 15 years. There was no regard or respect for the old leaders among the new generation.

Besides the Congress (I), and the Janata Party, the other major political force represented in the area is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP member elected to the Delhi Metropolitan Council from the Jama Masjid area is a Muslim—Begum Khurshid Kidwai. But the Muslim residents of the area

did not appear to have any confidence in her ability to intervene in their favour. They felt that the religious orientation of the BJP (pro-Hindu) could restrict her capabilities.

BJP leader of the walled city, Vaid Vidyaratna, expressed the view during our interview with him that the riots were pre-planned. But he would not elaborate on 'who planned it', beyond saying that it all started because 'Rajivji got embroiled in factional squabbles'.

But Vidyaratna's son, Atul, who is an RSS supporter, was more explicit in his views. He said that the Muslims were pro-Pakistani, and felt that in 1947, Indian politicians should have said that if there were no Hindus in Pakistan, no Muslims should be allowed to live in India. About the recent riots he said that the Muslims wanted to scare away the Hindus from the old Delhi areas and capture them for themselves. His opinions and militancy were echoes of the numerous leaflets that were distributed by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad on the eve of the riots.

The first time the BJP came out with a public statement was on May 20 when its leader Madan Lal Khurana said that the riots appeared to be pre-planned, arms stocked in houses were freely used in the riots and that the failure of the Delhi administration and the intelligence agencies were responsible for the riots. We have already referred to the next step of the BJP—its ambiguous role at the meeting with the Lt. Governor the next day (May 21) on the issue of lifting the curfew (see Section II). After that we find the BJP Delhi unit holding a protest demonstration on May 25 demanding the resignation of the Lt. Governor for his decision to relax curfew on the previous Friday. Led by its Delhi unit president Madan Lal Khurana, the demonstrators originally decided to stage their protest action at the Prime Minister's residence, but they were prevented from going beyond Feroze Shah Road, where about 115 persons courted arrest.

It is significant that on the same day (May 25), several other Hindu organizations like the Bajrang Dal, the Indra Prastha Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Hindu Manch, the Sanatan Dharam Mahasabha and the Arya Samaj held demonstrations at various places in the capital, voicing the same demand—'Resignation of the Lt. Governor for allowing the relaxation of curfew'.

It appears that the BJP, for certain reasons, is unwilling or unable to identify the actual sources of the conflagration and the real culprits. It has not yet been able to substantiate its allegation about the stocking of arms in houses.

We next tried to ascertain the views of left and secular political parties whose members are active to some extent in the walled city. Among them the major parties are the CPI and the CPI(M). A CPI spokesman with whom we talked explained the riots in terms of the increasing number of unemployed people who, he said, formed the anti-social elements in both the Hindu and Muslim communities. About the role of the Congress (I), he felt that it was basically a secular party but sometimes it went "astray". He attributed the causes of the riots to forces interested in breaking up the unity of the country. But when asked to identify those forces, he would not name them. A CPI leaflet released soon after the riots, blamed imperialist forces' for helping the communal elements in the country to break up the unity of the country. (An Appeal to the Delhi citizens from the CPI ; signed by Prem Sagar Gupta, Secretary, Delhi State Unit, CPI, Delhi ; no date given).

The CPI(M) appeared to be less ambiguous in identifying those responsible for the riots. In a press handout released on May 20 (which was not carried in full by the national newspapers), it attempted to trace the roots of the inflammatory communal propaganda indulged in by the religious fundamentalists in both the communities. It released to the press photostat copies of communal handbills brought out by the Indraprastha Vishva Hindu Parishad, to which it had earlier drawn attention of the Delhi Administration which, it said, "chose to turn a blind eye". These handbills described the Muslims as unpatriotic and extolled the superiority of a Hindu Raj. The CPI(M) at the same time, referred in its handout to the '*fatva*' (mandate) issued by the Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid to keep eating shops closed during the day in the month of Ramzan, and to attempts to forcibly implement the '*fatva*.' (According to information collected by our fact-furnishing team this was a meeting of Muslim eating-house owners at the Jama Masjid, where they collectively took a decision to keep their shops closed during the Ramzan hours of fasting—a

decision which was announced in posters carrying the signatures of the eating-house owners. We request the CPI(M) to verify the matter). The CPI(M) press handout described this as a "direct interference in the rules governing commercial activity in the walled city and other Muslim majority areas". Describing the role of the "two big political parties, viz. the Congress(I) and the BJP", the handout accused the former which controls the administration, of being totally indifferent to the communal menace, and the BJP of trying to encash it for its "opportunistic ends".

From an analysis of the role of the major political parties in the recent Delhi riots, it seems that neither the leaders nor the cadres of these parties effectively intervened at any stage to stem the deterioration of communal relations in the walled city. Residents told us again and again about inflammatory speeches and distribution of provocative leaflets by religious fundamentalists on the eve of the outbreak. But few appeared to be aware of any efforts having been made by secular parties or groups to counteract effects of such communal propaganda. Although the CPI(M) in its press statement (referred to earlier) claimed to have held street corner meetings and public rallies before the riots, in the lanes and by-lanes that skirt Jama Masjid and Turkman Gate, few residents were aware of such meetings. The CPI spokesman whom we interviewed said that his party could not hold meetings because of the curfew but had distributed leaflets. But we fail to understand why the secular-minded political parties could not organize a peace rally (with the permission of the administrative authorities, through the affected areas on Wednesday and Thursday (May 20 and 21) which were comparatively calm days, and from local peace committees with members of both the communities in vulnerable spots, for the observance of a peaceful Jamat-ul-Vida the next day. At least, we are not aware of any efforts that were made by these political parties in such a direction. And yet, such a preparatory step could have gone a long way in preventing the violent clashes that erupted on Friday.

We agree at the same time that mere efforts of the political parties could not have been enough to contain the wide spread conflagration. The responsibility of Delhi administration



assumes importance in this context. It allowed for days together, right under its nose, the uninterrupted flow of open communal propaganda which bred mutual hostilities that were awaiting a small spark to explode into a communal riot. It did not take any action against those who were coming out daily with provocative leaflets which were not clandestine but carried the names of publishers and press

We were also amazed to find the Delhi administration legitimizing the position of such blatantly communal organizations like the Vishva Hindu Parishad. Among those who were invited to attend the meeting at the Lt. Governor's place on Thursday, May 21, was Yadeshwar, a leading member of the Vishva Hindu Parishad.

## **VI. Conclusion :**

While we do not claim that the above account is an exhaustive analysis of the causes, and a comprehensive record of the events during the Delhi riots of May 19-25, we do assert at the same time that our investigations have thrown light on certain major factors that contributed to the riots and aggravated tensions between the two communities both during and after the riots.

In this connection, we squarely blame the Delhi administration for ignoring the open communal propaganda that had been going on both within and outside the walled city for months together before the riots and for refusing to take firm steps against those indulging in such propaganda among both the communities.

We also hold the Delhi police and CRP responsible for antagonizing the Muslim minorities by discriminating against them and terrorizing them while tackling the riot situation, and later while implementing the curfew. In this context we would like to draw the attention of all to the warning we sounded in December 1984, in our report on the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi at that time, entitled 'Who Are the Guilty?' Referring to the apathy and hostility of Delhi administration and police against the minorities who were forced to live under a shadow of perpetual suspicion and terror, we warned: "Muslims and Christians fear that a similar outrage can be perpetrated

against them also at any provocation.” We find that instead of heeding to this warning and correcting its mistakes, the Delhi administration had remained apathetic towards the rising communal tensions in the walled city, and when the riots broke out the police acted in a way that was definitely hostile against the Muslims.

In the course of our investigations we noticed certain alarming trends which have grave political implications for the future of our country in general, and Hindu-Muslim relations in particular. We found that over the years, attitudes on both sides—Hindus and Muslims—had hardened due to several factors. First, among the Muslims there is a feeling of discrimination against them, sometimes overt, sometimes subtle, in service and education—a feeling that was voiced by many Muslims in the walled city. Refusing to accept such discrimination, a new rising generation of Muslims are becoming increasingly articulate against such behaviour of the majority community. A number of young Muslims are venturing into business in the area. Both the articulations and the initiatives of the Muslims are often perceived by the traditional and orthodox Hindus of the area as signs of aggression. The Hindu hostility is further reinforced by the constant propaganda by communal organizations like the Vishva Hindu Parishad and irresponsible Hindu politicians of various parties which had built up a Muslim stereotype in their minds. This stereotype is that of a pro-Pakistani Muslim. In the eyes of these Hindus, every Muslim is a potential Pakistani agent !

Such prejudices of the majority community are also often boosted by irresponsible and indiscreet circulation of news by the Centre. At the height of the Delhi riots, the Union Home Ministry chose to release figures of Pak nationals who had come to India and were ‘untraceable’, implying that they were all Pakistani agents who had gone underground and fomented the latest riots in Meerut and Delhi (see *Indian Express*, May 24, 1987). One could well imagine the impact of such news on both the communities especially when widely read evening newspapers like *Veer Arjun*, known for its communal bias, carried editorials and articles blaming ‘Pakistani agents’ and ‘pro-Pakistan Muslims’ for the riots in Delhi and elsewhere.

The Muslim grievances, against the majority community and the latter's suspicion about the Muslims—each feeding upon the other—have been further aggravated by the social distance between the two communities in the walled city. Although living side by side for many years, Hindu and Muslim families hardly intercommunicate. Women from a Hindu family in Nayas Bans told us categorically that they had no contact with the Muslim women next door. Whatever little relationship there might have existed between the male members of the communities, is also likely to disappear after the recent riots. A Dalit daily wage-earner from Gali Magazine in Churiwala told us that they used to play cards with their Muslim neighbours. But now, that would be over. Old residents of the area regretted that the past custom of holding occasional meetings of the elders of both the communities in the localities was no longer followed, resulting in widening the distance between the two.

In a situation already befouled by mutual suspicions and social distance, some recent developments at the national level led to further complications in Hindu-Muslim relations in the walled city. The Shah Bano judgement and the Babri Masjid-Ram janambhoomi controversy were two such developments. In the absence of a secular-minded strong leadership among the Muslims, the Islamic fundamentalists sprang into the scene and raised the bogey that Islam was in danger. For the common Muslim, the bogey gained more and more ominous dimensions as he saw the mushrooming of numerous Hindu militant organizations like the Vishva Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal, Hindu Shiv Sena, etc. who began to claim almost every Muslim mosque or monument as the site of some old Hindu temple. The explosion of communal riots, one after another in Moradabad, Aligarh, Ahmedabad, Meerut, drove the Muslims increasingly into the lap of Islamic fundamentalists, who were perceived as their only protectors against the '*trishul dharis*'. The growing identification of the Congress (I) run administration with Hindu communalism (evident during the 1984 anti-Sikh disturbances and in communal riots in Congress-I ruled states), as well as the failure of the secular political parties to win the confidence of the Muslim masses, put the

secular-minded Muslim leaders in a difficult situation. They became more and more isolated from the mainstream that was developing in their community. Their place has been taken over by the fundamentalists who by their flamboyant speeches can rouse religious frenzy, by local ambitious politicians who assume postures of militancy, and by anti-social elements who are out to settle old scores and are bent on personal aggrandizement.

These trends could explain to some extent the pattern of the Delhi riots this time, where the Muslims often made the first offensive, as evident from the large number of Hindu casualties on the first day. But we should hasten to add that the figures in the hospital, from which we came to the above conclusion, may not give us the total picture. During our tour of the walled city we learnt that many wounded Muslims did not report to the hospitals, either out of fear of being harassed by the police, or for some other reasons. They got treated by their local doctors. Some cases of death of Muslims may not even have been reported, like the burning alive of two tailor shop workers in Sitaram Bazar, as disclosed to us by the lone survivor of the arson, Islamuddin (see Section II).

The real victims of the riots, as usual, were the poor of both communities. Om Prakash, Shaukat Mian—the Imam of Masjid Hakim Baqi—and Shafiquddin were the sole earning members of their respective families. Their families now face economic ruin which the measly Rs. 20,000 compensation announced by the government can hardly mitigate. The trading and business community, mostly Hindu, lost a lot of property, but the large number of rickshaw pullers, thelewalas and the daily wage earners of both the communities suffered worse, not being able to earn even the Rs. 8 to 10 a day while the walled city was under curfew.

The impact of the riot has been to further sharpen the communal divide. Our impression is that the communal divide is becoming total, not only in the walled city, but outside also. Even people in responsible positions among the majority community appear to have developed closed minds, as evident from the biased news reports and editorial commentaries in some of the national dailies, and the venomous outpourings indulged in



by many against the Muslims in their day-to-day conversations. Typical is the attitude of Amrish Saxena, a young Hindu trader, whom we met while waiting for our curfew passes at the Daryaganj police station. His comment on the Muslims who had made good: "Yeh kal ke gadhe jo khachar par chadha karte the, aaj dhai-dhai lakh ki jaidad bana kar baithe hai" (Asses of yesterday who used to ride on mules only the other day, and now they are sitting on lakhs of rupees).

We cannot at this stage venture to suggest ways and means to tackle the wider communal problems that are besetting our nation as a whole, since it is beyond the purview of the present investigation. But on the basis of our findings from the inquiries about the recent Delhi riots, we propose to make a few recommendations.

First, we feel that there must be a sustained campaign by political parties and secular-minded groups, like civil liberties or social welfare organizations, demanding the punishment of the police personnel who are found to be responsible for the killing of innocent people during the riots. This is urgent in view of the common practice among the police to resort to indiscriminate firings whenever there are riots anywhere, leading to the killing of citizens, often children and women, who had nothing to do with the riots. Since they have never been punished for such acts of criminal irresponsibility (barring occasional suspension followed by reinstatement after a certain interval, or transfer to some other police station), they can indulge in these murderous shooting outs with impunity. It is about time that they are made accountable to the public for their actions.

Secondly, we urge the secular forces—political, social and cultural groups—in both the communities, to come together and evolve regular mechanisms for positive intervention in inter-community disputes, and for lessening tensions in the walled city. A vigorous campaign to isolate the religious fundamentalists in both the communities is of vital importance, in this connection. Permanent bodies like peace committees, or 'mohalla' defence squads consisting of both Hindu and Muslim residents could go a long way in preventing the communal elements and anti-social outsiders from disturbing communal harmony. It is important for secular-minded, democratic

elements within both the communities to have firm control over such committees or squads so that they do not fall into the hands of the local politicians or gangsters (which we understand from our inquiries, had often been the fate of similar bodies in the past). Given the communalization of the police and administration, the insecure citizens instead of going to communal organisations, may find an alternative avenue of seeking redress from these local citizens' committees.

From the Report Prepared by P. U. D. R. Delhi

## IMAM CLIMBS DOWN TO VICTORY

*Bharat Bhushan*

Immediately after the Shahi Imam ordered the reopening of Jama Masjid, there was a mad rush into the mosque. Having been denied the opportunity of praying at the mosque for two weeks, people seemed pleased that they could offer prayers there this Friday at least.

They were laughing, shaking hands and congratulating each other. One of the devotees shouted to a bearded man at the door, perhaps an employee of the mosque, "Kyon Bhai Khomeini, kya haal hain (So, how are you, Khomeini)? "Khomeini" smiled, shook hands with his friend and went inside with him to pray.

The very fact that even friendly banter is so immersed in the religious idiom is so indicative of the influence of religion on the people. And no one knows this better than Syed Abdullah Bukhari, who became the first Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid to close down the mosque.

Ever since the Jama Masjid was completed in 1656, it has been closed only twice. To crush the local resistance to them and as a punishment to the Muslims who were at its forefront, the British closed it down from 1957 to 1862. But this time the mosque was closed by its own keeper to "punish" the government.

The Imam has indeed managed to force the government to accede to his demands. Action, including a departmental inquiry, is being initiated against the station house officer of Chandni Mahal police station and all the Muslim youngsters

arrested during the riots are to be released on bail.

Most of them are expected to be freed by this evening and if there is any hitch, a vacation magistrate or a special magistrate will expedite the bail proceedings tomorrow. Apparently, a committee would also be set up to examine each case to decide whether the charges are fake.

The Imam seems unsure in victory—still suspecting that the government may be up to some tricks even in agreeing to his demands. Hence, his claim that “I am only 75 per cent satisfied” and the declaration that the black flags and banners put up in the Masjid and the black cloth covering some of the domes and minarets would not be pulled down just as yet.

And hence also the threat delivered minutes before reopening the mosque : “Aai meri quam too sun le! Agar choti-choti baton mein dhoka hua to mein kal subah phir se Jama Masjid band karwa doonga (Listen O members of my community, if there is any betrayal on the small assurances given, then I will close down the Jama Masjid tomorrow once again.)

One reason why the Imam is unable to stage a complete climb-down is that only till yesterday evening he was busy rejecting government overtures. He dismissed the setting up of government inquiries as “the cold-storage approach,” which he rejected completely. His cronies were feeding his belligerence and he was describing the issue as “international” claiming that “15 to 20” journalists from London and “10 to 15” journalists from the U.S. were coming to see him every day. And perhaps it is not easy to accept the overnight resolution of “international” issues.

In any case, the issue had certainly become national. The Muslim clergy had got divided on the legitimacy of the Shahi Imam's action and a poster war had begun. Two muftis of Deoband had issued fatwas (edicts) against the action of the Imam, another from Madarsa Ameenia of Delhi had done the same but then beaten a retreat under pressure.

Posters appeared condemning the Deoband muftis. They were asked in one poster whether it was not true that they were issuing fatwas against the same Muslims of Delhi who give them donations, 40 per cent of which the muftis use for eating murg-mussallam at home?



They were also shamed by quoting the instance of a similar fatwa in Spain which had apparently resulted in the martyrdom of the Muslim General Tariq-Bin-Ziyad.

If "history" was not being bandied about, then it was sympathy. Here was a cause no one could question. (Indeed, even avowedly secular social workers in the walled city confirm the charges against the police and brand its behaviour in the recent riots as partisan).

It was a cause that all kinds of elements could cash in. Thus even the redoubtable Haji Mastan put up a poster only this morning, describing himself as a dardmand (sympathiser), claiming that blood drops instead of tears were flowing from his eyes because "the blood of Muslims had become cheaper than dirty water."

This poster juxtaposed the picture of Haji Mastan, Sadar, Dalit Muslim Minority Suraksha Mahasangh, to that of the Shahi Imam. Thus clearly, even those desirous of becoming a part of the sympathy wave were not hopeful of a solution so soon. So how did it come about?

Although no one questioned the path adopted by the Imam in public, many, including some influential younger elements close to him, thought that his unilateral decision to close the Jama Masjid may become counter-productive if the situation persisted. And it would persist because the Imam was leaving to room for compromise. These forces seem to have prevailed upon the Imam to give up his intransigence which finally made the solution possible.

Thus if the resolution of the Jama Masjid crisis is outwardly a victory for the Imam, it is also in fact a victory for the younger elements who have his ear. This is significant because it shows a movement, although small at present, towards the emergence of a new and younger political tendency.

It is perhaps too early to comment on the various elements of this incipient tendency. But it is significant that for the first time this year all the Muslim hotels and restaurants in the vicinity of Jama Masjid remained closed during the day in the month of Ramzan. A number of youngsters claimed that they helped in appealing to the owners to close shop.

It is equally significant that most political observers believe

that the Naib Imam Syed Ahmad Bukhari, the Shahi Imam's son, may be coming out into his own as an important leader. His claim that he would be the first to disband the Adam Sena if the government banned all the religious senas and dals—was described by an old inhabitant of the walled city.

From *Times of India*, 13 June 1987

## **PART II**

**THE ROLE OF PAC AND MALIANA  
MASSACRE AND THEREAFTER**





## WHEN THE SO-CALLED GUARDIANS TURN INTO COMMUNAL ARMIES, ORDER CRUMBLES

*M.J. Akbar*

Meerut, May 31: This is the same story that one wrote from Varanasi and Pune and Jamshedpur and Ahmedabad and Moradabad and anywhere else. Two communities start a slow pirouette of confrontation which gradually builds up to the moment when the tension must explode into violence. Then the beat of a drum near a mosque, or a stone thrown on a procession, or a knife slipped into the side of a stranger in the darkness of the night. The frenzy of battle, and then a rogue section of the police takes sides, presiding over murder, loot and worse to teach these "sala Pakistanis" a lesson, amidst the familiar echoes in the background of treachery and sinister motive. Passion spent, the frenzy abates: the same elements of the state machinery reassert themselves, the rogues are brought under some control, relief is distributed amid the familiar complaints of discrimination, rumour and the anger of revenge keep hearts simmering, and only slowly, very slowly, the living stop counting the bodies of the dead. All that remains at the end is memory: the clutching sob of the simple, bewildered, ageing mother unable to understand why her 25-year-old son is dead today when he was living yesterday, and the liquid sparkle of an old father's near-blind eyes, bearing a permanent

pool of tears, which will neither course down the white stubble on a dark face or go back to the wells inside his heart from which they sprang.

But news is often nothing but the latest twist in an old tale. So, for better or for worse, read how the bodies from the town of Meerut were found floating down the Hindon canal.

The silhouette is easily recognisable despite the drapes, but the statue of the last Prime Minister at the Indira chowk remains unveiled because the official ceremony has not been organised yet. The high street curves at the chowk towards the Gulshan Cinema on one side and a new and rather pretty mosque on the other. Small lanes, like quicksilver rivulets, run off from the main road, and in these lanes survive as best as they can those who serve the needs of the middle class and the poor : the weavers and lower income wage earners. It is appropriate that the colony of Bihari Ansari weavers called Hashimpura should be near the Indira Gandhi chowk, because it was during her memorable 1969-71 phase that they were first given loans and concessions which helped these weavers to reach the status which is best described in Hindi : "Khaata-peeta". It was the welfare programmes of those days which rescued this particular lot from destitution. They have pukka houses now, each with its set of looms on which the family works to earn its livelihood.

Abdul Majid's house is atypical for only one reason ; there is a very beautiful neem tree rising at the centre of the courtyard. The old man and his wife were not particularly upset when the Provincial Armed Constabulary came to their house at five that Friday afternoon : after all, they were doing the same search in every Muslim house along this lane. They told the police they would sit near the tree while they looked wherever they wanted : there was nothing to find in any case, in the two dark rooms of the house. In the end, the only thing which the police could find in this home was a young man, the son, Din Mohammad, in his early twenties, and now the principal bread-earner of the family. They accepted their fate when the son was arrested. Once again, virtually every able-bodied young man in the lane was taken away as a potential or actual rioter.

When six nights later, on May 28, the police came to Abdul Majid's house and told him that his son in jail was anxious to meet his father, they could barely understand this spasm of generosity, there was a tinge of anxiety, the fear that their son might be in pain after torture. They reached the jail at around nine that night. It was also the night of the Id moon, the happiest evening in the Muslim's calendar, but thoughts of a celebration were far away as the old man waited for the police to let him know what fate they had in store for him. He learnt the truth finally at around 2.30 in the morning. His son Din Mohammed was dead. And the father had only been called to take away the body and bury it before dawn. The orders were strict: they had to bury the body right away, before Id the next day, and a grave had even been dug. As best as he could, Abdul Majid, with the help of a friend who had come with him, offered the last prayers and interred the putrefying body of his son in the darkness. He was not alone. There were three other fathers come to bury bodies that night.

These four Muslim youths were not victims of riots but of cold-blooded murder by the police in lock-up.

The district authorities have now given up trying to deny these four deaths. In answer to how, the police say they have no explanation. And the civil service administrator for Meerut airily waves away charges of discrimination by saying that it is always the administration, is it not, which becomes the goat in such matters (it slipped his burdened memory that the word is scapegoat, but no matter).

### **Arbitrary Killings**

A fear and horror is running through the Muslims of Meerut that such deaths in police custody could be substantial. More, and gruesome reports are surfacing about how the brutal and communal force known as the PAC has been taking its revenge on Muslims.

More than two dozen young Muslims picked up from the Hashimpura area by the PAC on the bank of Hindon canal in Ghaziabad that night were shot dead and dumped into the water where their bodies floated down stream till they were fished out next morning. And it might never have been known that these

men had died at the hands of the Provincial Armed Constabulary rather than in communal clashes were it not for a miracle. Two of those young men who were shot and thrown into the canal survived. Mujibur Rahman and Badurddin (whose relatives were in Hashimpura when we visited it) were shot in the chest and thrown into the canal, but they did not die. When the Muradnagar police picked them up 10 kilometres downstream they were still breathing. They are in the Narinder Mohan hospital now, under heavy security, but with breath enough to narrate their awful story.

Who knows how many became victims of the PAC that night.

The administration says calmly that 2,568 people were picked up from about 70 mohallas. Is that the figure which was picked up or only the number which was finally lodged in a number of jails dotted across Uttar Pradesh from Agra to Fatehgarh (which is 400 kilometres from Meerut)?

The riots, and the toll they have extracted, were indescribably bad, but perhaps nothing compared to the arbitrary murder committed by the PAC.

There is a point beyond which it is impossible, at least for this correspondent, to describe death: you have to leave it as a statistic and be done with it. And though it is far from adequate, the only available answer we have for crime is punishment. It may not bring back the dead, but it does become a message for the living. In the first wave of revulsion after news of the PAC's behaviour spread, there was talk that the superintendent had been suspended, that the PAC might be withdrawn. Only days later, the gestures are being heavily diluted. Because the Provincial Armed Constabulary has become the hero of the Hindus. One slogan which greeted Rajiv Gandhi continually during his visit to Meerut on Saturday was "PAC zindabad". This morning as we were walking through the deserted, curfew-struck streets of Meerut, we met a khadi wearing chief warden who described himself as a Congressman doing his duty for the nation in these arduous times. There was one thing which we must never forget to write, he said. "Everyone in Meerut wants the PAC to stay." He insisted, "Ask anyone." Had it not been for the fact that the Prime Minister decided to drive him-

self and stopped wherever he noticed groups of Muslims on the streets, he would have returned to Delhi with only the orchestrated part of the story.

The truth about a communal riot has so many shades that it is rarely possible to define anything in black and white. As far as the battles between the people are concerned, there was enough guilt on both sides, the Muslim no less than the Hindu. But the partnership of the involved people is to be expected: that, after all, is why the riots began in the first place. It is when the so-called guardians turn into communal armies that order begins to crumble. To allow guilty policemen to escape is to condone a police state. And the consequences of that will be far, far larger than just death in Meerut.

*Telegraph, 1 June 1987*



## 117 MISSING IN MALIANA, PRESUMED DEAD

*Pankaj Pachauri*

Corpses have no religion. They either have names, or as happened in Meerut in the last fortnight, they only have numbers. But in the sleepy hamlet of Maliana on the Meerut-Bagpat Road, khaki-clad men from the 44th battalion of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) tried their best to snatch even these numbers from the dead.

Survivors of Malliana are trying their best to identify those who were butchered by communalists in khaki or others, on the afternoon of last Saturday. The task is heart-rending, gruesome, and almost impossible.

Impossible because the two sackfuls of bones extricated from a kuchcha well in Abdul Sattar's courtyard cannot tell you whom they once belonged to. The PAC men dumped a gunny-bagful of salt into the well alongwith 11 family members and two young girls who had come to attend the marriage of Sattar's daughter.

After the rotting flesh and bones were retrieved from the well this Wednesday, Meerut's district magistrate, Radheyshyam Kaushik, announced at his press conference : "One more body was recovered from a well in Malliana today. The toll now is 15."

The administration counts the dead by the postmortems done at the Medical College mortuary where bones cannot be sent for autopsy. Likewise, the rotting dead bodied which floated

downstream on the Upper Ganga Canal and the Hindon river were also never sent for autopsy.

On Friday evening, Salim Ali, an electrician, was doing the rounds of the deserted, grave-like village with a list of 117 people who have been missing since the madness descended on Islam nagar, Sanjay nagar and Kalyan nagar, where the Muslims of the village were concentrated.

Eighteen persons from the missing list have been identified and buried in the middle of the village under army vigil, the rest are presumed dead. "No one got the chance to flee", Salim said. Kaushik does not entertain questions on the subject: "Now the enquiry commission will give its final word on Maliana", he hedges.

The massacre at Maliana was almost clinical in its swiftness. Within four hours the PAC executed their multi-pronged operation of besieging the Muslim hamlet, moving down villagers with their 303 rifles, inciting Harijans from the nearby Multan nagar area to burn the houses with the corpses in them, and finally, dump bodies in the canals about eight kilometres away from the village.

After their operation, the PAC men and their commandant, RD Tripathi, vanished from the scene. No one, including the state home minister Gopinath Dixit and the Uttar Pradesh Director-General of Police, SK Bhatnagar, knows where the battalion under RD Tripathi is stationed now. "They have been removed from Maliana", is all they are willing to disclose.

The PAC men started entering Maliana on Saturday morning. Initially there was one truck posted at Transport nagar, about a kilometre from the hamlet. The auto-parts and mechanic shops lining the main road had been burning since Thursday night. Some of the shops here belonged to the Maliana residents, a majority of whom are petty businessmen and mechanics.

With the first truck reaching the village came rumours that "PAC is coming to arrest people". The village, especially the Muslims, became paranoid at the mention of the PAC—the force has a reputation of being anti-Muslim.

Interview with a number of survivors and those nursing

bullet wounds at the medical college surgical ward provided eyewitness accounts of what happened at Maliana that fateful afternoon.

The tense villagers had gathered at the main Maliana mosque for their afternoon namaaz at one o'clock. Fleeing was out of the question, as Meerut was under curfew. During the namaaz the villagers heard shouts from nearby villages inhabited by Hindus.

Soon after namaaz four more PAC trucks were seen winding their way into Maliana through the dusty kuchcha approach road. A jeep was also seen leading the cavalcade.

One truck was stationed about 200 meters from the main road. PAC men left the trucks, spread out in the hamlet in pickets of four and six. One such picket headed towards the mosque after learning that most of the males in the village were congregated there. That was at 2.30 p.m.

The first shouts were heard from near the mosque accompanied by the cries of people falling prey to the gunfire. As if on cue, the other PAC men started firing indiscriminately at anyone in sight. The village reverberated with bullet-shots and screams.

"I saw from the rooftop, about 2,000 people coming down from the Multan nagar side. The PAC men were calling them and waving to them," 14-year old Gulfam said. He saw nothing after a bullet tore through his elbow and he crumpled into an unconscious heap.

Aizaz Ali Siddiqui took over where Gulfam left off. PAC men led the lynch mobs to the houses belonging to Muslims, goaded them to kill people and set fire to the houses. For the next three hours, the madness continued.

Fearing that the entire Muslim community in the village would soon be wiped out, some of the villagers who owned trucks or were drivers, took their vehicles out and asked the people to pile into them. "We wanted to leave the villages with our lives. Let them set fire to our houses, we could always build more", Vakil Ahmed, a tailor reasoned.

But the people who had huddled into the trucks were asked to disembark at gunpoint by the PAC men. They ran again towards their houses, only to be intercepted by the blood-

thirsty mobs.

These houses, their occupants dead, are strewn with tell-tale signs of what occurred : caked, dried blood, blood-soaked stones, half-burnt clothes in the courtyards and ravaged, gutted rooms with fires still smouldering on the third day after the massacre.

The trucks which were to take the villagers away from the carnage were ironically used by the PAC men to carry their bodies to be dumped into the canals. All these trucks are now untraceable. There were at least five of them in the village according to survivors.

When the Senior Superintendent of Police reached the village around 7.30 p.m., an eerie silence met him. About 2,500 villagers had gathered in an open place near the village pond, surrounding the 10 dead bodies they had refused to hand over to the PAC. "You either kill us or take us prisoners", villagers told the policemen who reached there later.

At first, the PAC men had the nerve to justify their deed on the pretext that their men were fired at from the mosque, but they soon realised that the excuse was a very feeble one. None of them could show any injury, nor any arms were recovered from the village.

The PAC modus operandi of dumping the dead into the canals shows striking similarity to the behaviour of the administration during the fortnight-long riots which ravaged Meerut. To keep the number of the deaths low, the police and PAC have been frequently dumping dead bodies on the outskirts of the district.

This is substantiated further by the fact that some of the bodies recovered from the canals were declared ten days old at the autopsy. A home guard's jeep was seen leaving the Jali Kothi area with three dead bodies. When questioned, the driver replied that he was going to the mortuary, but enquiries at the mortuary revealed that the jeep had never reached there. It was last seen heading towards Bagpat Road in the opposite direction.

The police have evolved a code name for this operation : "*Samman taiyyar hai?*" (Is the luggage ready?). The police men ask each other on the wireless network. If the answer is

*“readymade maal taiyaar hai”* (the readymade luggage is ready), vehicles are despatched from the Kotwali head-quarters to dispose of the bodies. Some wireless operators jokingly referred to the goings on as *“operation readymade luggage”*. District control room chief, SS Yadav dismisses the allegations as mere *“rumours”*.

In such a scenario, it is difficult to even start counting number of deaths in Maliana, let alone the rest of Meerut.

From *Sunday Observer*, 31 May 1987



## A MASSACRE THAT WASN'T

*Anil Saxena*

This is a story of a massacre that wasn't. The toll in the so-called Maliana massacre of May 23, it is now clear, was only 15. And of the 15, only three persons died of bullet injuries, the rest succumbing to burns and other injuries.

The initial reports, based on a list put out by Maliana residents, had hinted that anything between 78 and 111 people had been killed in a holocaust ostensibly perpetrated by U.P.'s provincial armed constabulary (PAC).

The figure of 111 had been provided to U.P.'s home minister, Mr. Gopinath Dixit, and to media persons on May 24 by two residents of Maliana, Mr. Bashir Khan and Mr. Salim Akhtar Siddiqui. However, the list given to the Prime Minister, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, when he visited Maliana on May 30, mentioned only 76 names—22 of whom had been buried while the others were missing. The Meerut police continued to dispute these figures but did not give any definite figure.

According to the new senior superintendent of police, Mr. Girdhari Lal Sharma, of the initial list of 111 people, 84 have been located at Kalanjari village, about 14 km. from Maliana off the Meerut-Baghat road. Further, 12 others had escaped to Kotri, a village adjacent to Kalanjari. This brings the toll down to 15, which, according to Mr. Sharma, is the exact figure of the post-mortems done of Maliana's dead.

Mr. Sharma's version was confirmed by this correspondent

who visited Kalanjari yesterday. Some of the reportedly missing persons that this reporter met were: Abdul Aziz, Khatoon, Hakim, Zafri, Imran, Nizam and Asmat. According to them, they were evacuated from Maliana by the local police on May 23 and were later brought to Kalanjari.

In fact, according to Mr. Chand Prakash Singh, a Kalanjari resident, the group of 84 were originally inhabitants of Kalanjari, who had migrated to Maliana in search of work. When trouble broke out in Maliana on May 23, they simply went home.

The police have confirmed the genuineness of those who have settled in Kalanjari and their names have been verified by the DSP, Mr Awaz Ahmed, and other policemen. The signatures of these people have also been taken.

It is learnt from reliable sources that the initial FIR lodged by the people of Maliana had no mention of the killings by the PAC and the police. The persons named in the FIR were mostly Harijans belonging to the same village.

Mr. Bashir Khan, officials say, was motivated purely by the lure of grabbing the compensation. Mr. Chand Khan, among those presumed dead, has complained to Mr. George Joseph, commissioner, relief and rehabilitation, that Mr. Bashir Khan had claimed a close relation with Mr. Chand Khan and received Rs. 20,000 as compensation. Mr. Bashir Khan had been absconding for several days.

What really happened at Maliana on May 23? The exact sequence of events will be known only when the report of the judicial inquiry ordered by the government comes out. But, according to government officials and residents of Maliana, the deaths that day were largely a consequence of a communal riot in which the PAC's role was more in the nature of providing protection to one community.

Maliana is a large village (population: approx. 30,000) with a significant Muslim population (approx. 3000). Though on the out-skirts of Meerut, Maliana has never had any communal violence even as Meerut has been repeatedly wrecked by riots.

But tension had been building up in Maliana after communal riots again erupted in Meerut on May 18. Loudspeakers from mosques were repeatedly issuing calls to the faithful to come to the aid of an embattled faith. It was then that a PAC company

headed by Mr. R.D. Tripathi was posted there.

The tension boiled over on May 23, and following a clash between two communities, a constable of the PAC was hit by a bullet. From all available sources, it appears that the PAC did then take sides. For one thing, all the dead belong to one community.

But, as the number of deaths due to bullet injuries makes out, there is no evidence to suggest that the PAC indulged in a large-scale massacre.

As Meerut city, which still has curfew during the nights, limps back to normal, Maliana wears an abandoned look even during the day. It is unlikely that the deserters will come back to this village in the near future.

*Times of India, 17 June 1987*

## LEARNING TO LIVE WITH OFFICIAL LIES

*Neena Vyas and Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay*

Even while the relatives of those killed in the riots and atrocities by the Provincial Armed Constabulary at Maliana, a hamlet near Meerut town, mourn for the dead, the Uttar Pradesh Government and the Central Government are trying their best to hush up the truth. The graves are there for all to see, but the State Government claims that the people supposed to have been killed have returned to the village. They have not.

On June 23, the villagers submitted to the district authorities a list of 67 people who, they say, were killed during the riots in Maliana. Of these, 36 died during the rampage by PAC jawans on May 23. When these two reporters visited Maliana, the villagers pointed out to a cluster of graves near the village pond. They said 22 victims had been buried there including 19 "whose bodies were handed over to us by the district authorities". Yet the district administration says that only 15 persons were killed in Maliana. "The graves are not a figment of our imagination," the villagers counter.

If the Union Home Minister, Mr. Buta Singh, is to be believed, only 10 persons were killed in Maliana. He told the National Integration Council meeting in Delhi on Tuesday that "86 of the 96 people alleged to have been massacred in Maliana have been traced."

The following day Mr. D.S. Yadav, additional district

magistrate, said: "Fifteen people were killed in Maliana. After post mortem, the bodies were handed over to the relatives." In another office, 15 yards away from Mr. Yadav's room, sits the deputy commissioner for relief and rehabilitation, Mr. Govindan Nair. According to him, 19 people were killed in Maliana. "The list was given to me after verification by Mr. G.L. Sharma senior superintendent of police", he added. In fact, the Rs. 20,000 compensation ordered by the government for the next of kin of those killed in last month's violence has already been paid to the relatives of 19 victims.

The death toll in Maliana has become a game of numbers. The government is desperately trying to dilute the enormity of the atrocity in which PAC jawans went berserk, firing on unarmed villagers and setting fire to property after looting valuables. The police has claimed that the villagers had fired upon the PAC jawans when they had gone to conduct a search. But this is an untenable excuse as till date neither the police nor the district administration has been able to provide the names of PAC jawans injured in the "firing".

"Operation Cover-up", to hide the truth from the public, has been going on for a month now. The incident took place on May 23. It was not mentioned in the day's official briefing. The next day curfew passes were not issued to reporters, neither did the officials mention the incident. On May 25, the Prime Minister called a meeting in Delhi after reports of the massacre appeared in a section of the national and foreign Press and a judicial inquiry was ordered.

Four days after the massacre, the State Home Minister, Mr. Gopinath Dixit visited Maliana and was handed over a list of 111 people "feared killed". He was told that the people were "missing". The list was passed on to the police through the district administration and the police "traced" 85 of "missing" people at Kalinjri and Sewal Khas villages, a short distance from Maliana. That would mean 26 still remain "untraced" and are presumably, dead.

Sixty-seven? Fifteen? Ten? Nineteen? Twenty-six? What is the actual toll? Maliana's residents told these reporters that the initial list of 111 names was "incorrect because hundreds of people had fled the village and the names of the missing or dead



were collected from hearsay.” They insist that the fresh list of 67 names is based on special FIRs and investigations by village elders.

The villagers also feel that the onus of tracking down the number of those killed should rest on the government. Islamuddin, a villager, said: “Isn’t it the government’s responsibility to find out how many people died?”

The government does not feel so. Disinformation was fed to newspapers and part of it was carried. One such bit of disinformation claimed that the compensation for a person called Chand Khan, said to have died in the rioting, had been claimed by his relatives. But later, according to the “source” who fed the “news”, Chand Khan was found alive. When confronted, both Mr. Yadav and Mr. Govindan Nair denied that anything like that had occurred. They said Chand Khan was injured and a compensation of Rs 500 was handed over to him. But Mr. Yadav cannot explain who fed the “news” and why the government did not bother to deny it.

Who are the 85 people “traced” by the police? These people were not among the 111 mentioned in the list submitted to the administration. They are not even residents of Maliana. For instance, Mohammad Anees Saifi, one of the 83 “traced” by the police, is a resident of Multan Nagar. He fled the village along with others after “some houses were burnt on May 22-23”.

He said: “All of us ran away to our ancestral homes in Kalinjari. I come to work at Multan Nagar every day now, but return to Kalinjari for the night. No one from Maliana is in Kalinjari”. Saifi was never on the list of 111 missing people to begin with. The 85 people “traced” are not the people who were missing at the time the list was submitted.

The fresh list of 67 names which has been submitted to the administration does not include anyone from Multan Nagar. Even earlier the residents of Maliana had never claimed that there were residents of Multan Nagar among the victims, though one person is said to have been killed in that locality on May 22.

The 67 names include those of 36 killed in the PAC rampage on May 23 and those who died in the rioting preceding the atrocity. The 36 victims of the PAC rampage were residents of

Maliana, Islamianagar and Sanjay Colony which are all adjacent to each other.

Till the Maliana massacre took place, the district administration had claimed that no incidents of violence had taken place in the Transport Nagar police station area, which includes the greater Maliana area. The truth is that even before the May 23 rampage, arson and violence had taken place in Multan Nagar, Chanderlok Nai Basti, Kishanpur and Shekhpur. According to a special FIR lodged with the police in Chanderlok Nai Basti, an entire family was killed by a mob on the night of May 21. Only three children had survived. Killings had taken place in Shekhpur and Kishanpur too. But curfew was clamped on the Transport Nagar police station area only after the Maliana massacre.

*Statesman, 27 June 1987*

## THE COVER-UP

*Sankarshan Thakur*

If the Uttar Pradesh government's judicial inquiry team ever visits Maliana, it will find this village deceptively commonplace. A massive white-wash operation is underway ; an army of labourers is working overtime to rebuild the rows of demolished or gutted houses ; bullet marks on the walls are being erased and painted over. In the guise of relief work, all evidence of the May 23 massacre is being cleverly and quickly removed. No wonder the administration is so keen on the "repair work" and has deputed so many of its officials to finish off the job.

But then, the residents of Maliana will always be there to tell the story. There is Parvez Ahmed Siddiqui, just 28, who saw fellow villagers being gunned down by the men of the Provincial Armed Constabulary and the accompanying hordes who looted and set fire to houses ; there is Naseem Bano, a broken woman of 55, whose house was ravaged by the PAC-led mob ; there is Wahidan, a widow whose son Ashraf was killed in the firing and now goes around the labyrinthine streets of Maliana looking for him behind every door. The people of Maliana have given her up as mad. "Her son is dead, we saw him die, where will he return from?" people ask.

The Meerut administration claimed last week that 85 of those reported missing from Maliana had "returned" to the village and with this, "new facts were emerging on the alleged

massacre." Police officials also began asserting that "no massacre took place in Maliana, only 15 people were killed".

Indeed, it was made out that the entire Maliana operation was "planned to defame the PAC". Officials called newsmen individually and fed them stories of how those presumed dead in Maliana had been "discovered alive and well in village Kalenjari" and how the "malicious exaggerations" of the press had been exposed. Boasted the additional district magistrate of Meerut, Mr. D.S. Yadav, "We have found 85 people; the others will also be found soon and the real story will be out."

Investigations, however, reveal a situation quite to the contrary. Sure, there are 85 persons, including several women and children, taking refuge in Kalenjari, about 10 km from Maliana, off the Meerut-Baghpat highway. But they do not belong to Maliana. They come, instead, from Multannagar which is some distance from Maliana. And the reason they are hiding in Kalenjari is that they have heard what the PAC did in Maliana.

"We escaped from Multannagar after the attack on Maliana. The police and the PAC tried to harass us on the way but we were somehow able to reach here because we have relatives in Kalenjari and they came to our rescue," says Nandu Mian, one of those taking shelter. All the (15 or so) families in Kalenjari are from Multannagar. This fact they make very clear. "We belong to Multannagar, not Maliana village," says Ikram, "and we are not returning unless the conditions become all right."

These people neither belong to Maliana and nor have they "returned" as the district administration contends. It is an unabashed and obvious cover-up. The Meerut administration's executives should have known that they would be caught—people would go to Maliana and Kalenjari to check. But the cover-up was, perhaps, more mischievous than it was obvious. Their basic attempt was to project Multannagar as a part of Maliana, and then say that people from Maliana were alive and returned.

Maliana is part of a cluster of semi-urban settlements. Some 10 km west of Meerut, and since it is the biggest locality in the area, even other settlements like Sanjay Colony, Indira nagar

Islamnagar, Shekhpura and Multannagar, are often referred to as Maliana—a “greater Maliana” of sorts. What is crucial is that in the May 23 incident, the PAC action was concentrated on Maliana village and not in the entire area referred to as Maliana. Some other settlements like Sanjay Colony and Kishanpura were also affected but not so badly. Multannagar was spared the wrath of the PAC but as the fugitive residents in Kalenjari have affirmed, they ran away apprehending trouble.

The administration also made a big show of the fact that 33 families of Maliana had “returned” to their houses. They made it sound as if members of these families too, had been proclaimed dead by the “sensationalist” press. The truth about the return of these 33 families is very different. These were the people whose houses had either been broken down or burnt, and who had been forced to live in a makeshift relief camp in the middle of the village. A few weeks after the May 23 incident, they just returned to their houses.

What has actually happened in the aftermath of the Maliana massacre is that the administration has been aided in muddying the water while some unscrupulous elements who have been politicking with variously exaggerated lists of the dead and the missing—one Basheer Ahmed Khan is even said to have collected a huge compensation in the name of people who do not exist (although it is not clear how the administration release the compensation amount if it had no record of the dead person). Some of the lists of the dead prepared by self-proclaimed guardians run into several hundred names. This has made the administration’s complaint about “exaggerated” accounts of Maliana seem convincing.

In this welter of accusations and counter-accusations, the real issues have got lost. If indeed, as the administration says, there was no massacre in Maliana, if indeed the entire operation was “planned to defame the PAC”, how is it that close to 70 houses were either burnt down or demolished in the village? Why did the administration resort to such a huge repair operation in Maliana? Were the Army officials, who said they counted close to 50 bodies when they came into Maliana, lying? And the most clinching, if there was no massacre in Maliana, why did the Uttar Pradesh government hurriedly have to order a judicial inquiry?



It is, perhaps, not a coincidence that the Uttar Pradesh government has chosen a time when the PAC is under severe censure to leak a portion of the inquiry commission report of the 1980 Moradabad riots which it had kept under wraps for several years. The substance of the two lines leaked is that the PAC was not to blame for the Moradabad riots. Consider now what a report on the Moradabad riots in *Sunday* (September 1980) had to say:

“Once again this was a case of police brutality pure and simple. The forces of law and order unleashed their fury on thousands of Muslims who had come to offer prayers on their day of joy and celebration. Hundreds died, including many children....Both the Hindus and Muslims of Moradabad are telling anyone who will listen that what happened on August 13 in their city was a straight clash between the police and Muslims. But the police in order to throw a cover on their brutal misdeeds, are telling lies about what precisely happened and building up false trails that might shift the focus of attention....”

What was said of Moradabad seven years ago fits well into what has happened in Maliana and other parts of Meerut. The same PAC acting with the same brutality and resorting to the same devious means of cover-up. The PAC lobby in Uttar Pradesh is working overtly and covertly to somehow shift the blame. The shrill and stage-managed pro-PAC demonstrations in the presence of the Prime Minister and the volley of pro-PAC statements from various quarters are examples.

The shrill and stage-managed pro-PAC demonstrations in the presence of the Prime Minister in Meerut and the volley of pro-PAC statements from the local MLA, Mr. Jai Narain Sharma (there will be devastation in Meerut if the PAC is removed, he has said) are only part of an organised campaign. So is the leakage of “telling” parts of the report on the 1980 Moradabad riots.

It is not strange that while the administration readily allows unfettered pro-PAC campaigns, it blindly refuses to entertain even a word against it, much less take action? There was an announcement from Lucknow immediately after the Maliana story broke that Mr. R.D. Tripathi, commandant of the PAC battalion which was involved in the massacre, had been sus-

pended. But this was promptly and firmly denied.

Instead, forthright officials like Mr. B.K.V. Nair, the senior superintendent of police in Meerut, who had played a positive role during the riots, were sent packing. The chief secretary of Uttar Pradesh, Mr. Mata Prasad, who quoted higher figures of the dead and missing in his briefings in Lucknow than what the Meerut administration was claiming, is now awaiting transfer orders. Professor S.A.P. Rizvi, chief proctor of Meerut's D.N. College, who asked the district magistrate to give details of the number of dead and missing in a peace committee meeting last week, was arrested under the National Security Act (NSA). His only fault was that he had asked uncomfortable questions.

While the administration is making bogus noises about the "return of those presumed dead" it has kept silent on several crucial questions about Maliana as well as PAC operations in other parts of Meerut. For instance:

\* What was the provocation for the PAC to raid Maliana which has never seen communal disturbances and which was calm even as Meerut burned?

\* Where are the missing people from Hashimpura and other neighbouring localities who are alleged to have been picked up by the PAC during the search operations?

\* Where did the dead bodies in the Hindon and Ganga canals come from?

\* Is it true that there were two major massacres in and around Meerut for, the bodies were recovered from both canals and there is no linking channel between the two?

\* What is the truth in the allegations of Zulfikar Nasir (who said he had a providential escape) about the coldblooded PAC shooting on the banks of the Ganga canal killing dozens of persons near Muradnagar?

\* What do Babuddin and Mujibur Rehman, two other survivors of similar operations, have to say in their report to the Ghaziabad police?

\* Why are the two being kept incommunicado under heavy guard at the Mohannagar hospital? Is there a threat to their life? If so, from whom?

\* Is it a mere coincidence that the headquarters of the 41st battalion of the PAC (which is said to have been involved in the

killings) is just a few minutes' drive from the scene of the massacre which Babuddin and Mujibur Rehman survived?

A large number of people from Hashimpura and its environs are still missing—their exact number is impossible to pinpoint as there has been a proliferation of lists of missing people giving varying estimates. The administration, despite repeated inquiries from relatives, says it has no record of them. But to name just a few: Ashraf (20), Qamaruddin (24), Siraj Ahmed (22), Naeem (15), Islamuddin (21) and Ayub (17). Nobody seems to know what happened to them nearly a month after the PAC trucks took them away.

Some of those who were in different jails of Uttar Pradesh have been released on bail but they have come with broken bodies and horrifying tales to tell. Merajuddin, whose arm and leg were fractured in the police beating, said he was shifted from one police station to another before finally being thrown into the Fatehgarh prison. "At every place, we were beaten up mercilessly. I would faint, they would give me water and then beat me again."

According to Ahmed's account—his arm is broken and his fingernails are blue from beating—the PAC and the police never offered any food or medical aid to the prisoners. Neither were they produced in any court. "They had just taken us away to teach us a lesson, that is what they kept saying as they beat us," Syed Ahmed despairs.

Dr. Zahiruddin Asri, a Hashimpura resident, who has been treating the victims, says very few escaped with minor injuries. "It appears the torture has been very severe. Some have come back with near fatal head injuries and are still serious. I would not be surprised if some died in the jails," he fears.

The administration and the police, of course, have an obvious alibi: These people were not beaten up by the police, they were injured in the riots and the police saved them. That is the line they will take. That is the kind of cover they have always found and got away with.

*The Telegraph, 21 June 1987*

## **MALIANA MASSACRE : EVIDENCE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S COVER-UP**

*Sankarshan Thakur*

This story is for the benefit of Mr. Buta Singh, Union home-minister, who told a meeting of the National Integration Council (NIC) that the allegations of a massacre at Maliana by the PAC was "disinformation" and that the "missing" were returning home.

This story is meant for the eyes of the chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mr. Vir Bahadur Singh, who has launched a massive cover-up of one of the most shameful episodes in our independent history.

This story is meant for the district magistrate of Meerut, Mr. Radheyshyam Kaushik, a government officer who has been lying blatantly in an effort to hide a brutal massacre of innocent people.

This story is meant for the conscience of those bureaucrats who claim that they are now confused about what happened in Maliana after the Uttar Pradesh government's "clarification".

All these men of power and authority have been trying to persuade the nation that nothing much happened in Maliana. And the government of Uttar Pradesh, through its information officer in Delhi, has been planting stories on the media to spread such an impression.

We print here the death toll—a list of people who were

killed by the murderous jawans of the Provincial Armed Constabulary and the mobs that accompanied them only in Maliana. (The massacre of those picked up from Hashimpura is another story. So far, this callous administration has not tried to cover up that accusation, at least.) We have reason to believe that the number of the dead in Maliana could be higher than this.

This is a list of 67 names given by relatives and friends who witnessed the massacre and, therefore, the margin of error is minimal. The final tally could well be higher because many bereaved have run away in fear and have not yet returned. On page five we print pictures of individuals who have lost close relatives, and who will be eager to provide witness of their horror to an honourable and independent body.

Here is the list of the dead: Mudassar Ali (26), son of Liaqat Ali; Mohammed Ashraf (40), son of Karim Baksh; Gulfam (22), son of Anwar Ahmed; Tasleem (20), son of Hanif Ahmed; Nasir Ahmed alias Munna (24), son of late Bashir Ahmed; Kaniz Fatima (42), wife of Mohammed Yaseen; Bablu (6), son of Ali Hasan; Shahjehan (12), daughter of Umar Deen; Mohammed Ali (70), relatives unknown, Ibrahim (11), son of Abdul Sattar; Yusuf (22), son of Abdul Sattar; Yunus (15), son of Abdul Sattar; Noorjehan (10), daughter of Abdul Sattar; Shabnum (8), daughter of Abdul Sattar; Zebunnisa (20), daughter of Abdul Sattar; Ballo (24), daughter of Abdul Sattar; Asgari Begum (40), wife of Abdul Sattar (45), son of Mohammed Ali; Munni (20), relatives unknown; Sanjeeda (10), daughter of Shareef Ahmed; Mehmood Ahmed (35), son of Aziz; Naseem Bano (30), wife of Mehmood Ahmed; Mohammed Arif (15), son of Mehmood Ahmed; Mohammed Waris (8), son of Mehmood Ahmed; Aftaab (3), son of Mehmood Ahmed; Tarannum (12), daughter of Mehmood Ahmed, Mehmood Ahmed (60), relatives unknown; Mohammed Akbar (65), son of Itwari; Bilkees (17), daughter of Mange Khan, Mange Khan (40) son of Kabul Khan; Raessa (13), daughter of Mange Khan; Kashmiri (38), wife of Mange Khan; Rashid (45), son of Mohammed Shakura; Eedan (40), wife of Rashid Ahmed; Akbari Begum (50), wife of Khairati; Jumma (50), son of Ahmed Karim; Saeeda (30), wife of Ismail Ahmed; Shakoora (80), son of Alla Mehr; Rafiq Ahmed (26), son of Bashir Ahmed; Kallu



(45), son of Hussain Baksb; Bashiran (40), wife of Alimuddin; Zeenat (35), wife of Naseem Khan; Razia (40), wife of Sageer Ahmed; Sageer Ahmed (45), son of Ismail Khan; Usman (28), son of Subhan Ali; Jumma (age unknown), son of Abdul Karim; Rafiq Ahmed (48), son of Allahdiya; Husnoo (45), wife of Rafiq; Nafees (26), son of Rafiq; Rabisu (20), son of Rafiq; Neemo (22), wife of Nafees; Sabia (18), wife of Rabisu; Gudiya (5), daughter of Nafees; Babli (3), daughter of Nafees; Munni (2), daughter of Nafees; Zulfikar (1), son of Rabisu; Farooq (35), son of Kallu; Muneza (32), wife of Farooq; Jullo (14), daughter of Farooq; Mumtaz (12), daughter of Farooq; Sartaj (9), son of Farooq; Alisa (4), daughter of Farooq; Guddo (5), daughter of Farooq; Rukhsana (12), daughter of Anis Ahmed; Shehzad (2), son of Anis Ahmed; Reshma (1), daughter of Farooq; Bablu (4) son of Munni Begum.

Special FIRs have been registered by relatives and village elders for each of the 67 dead. Islamuddin, a Maliana resident, who has been maintaining records of the PAC massacre and its aftermath, showed this correspondent copies of the complaints, duly stamped and signed by the authorities. "If the government says nothing happened here and very few people died, we are ready to agree. Only, they should return our people. The government is lying."

*The Telegraph* could verify the death of 49 persons by speaking to close relatives and neighbours of the dead in the Maliana area. Several affected families have abandoned Maliana in fear after what happened on May 22 and 23—their houses, the ones that still stand, lie empty.

The Meerut administration, in its report, is believed to have said that nothing much happened in Maliana. The district magistrate, Mr. Radheyshyam Kaushik, himself boasts that "the administration has come clean with the return of 85 of the missing persons. There was no massacre in Maliana as reported in a section of the press." The simple question to ask him is: If nothing much happened in Maliana, how were 70 houses in the village, which his own administration is now repairing at a cost of over Rs. 2 lakhs, burnt down or demolished?

And the claim that 85 of the missing persons from Maliana had "returned", or been "traced", too, is a cover-up for the

crime. The 85 persons who have taken shelter in Kalenjari village are not from Maliana but Multannagar. And Islamuddin of Maliana makes it very clear that the list of 67 dead has nothing to do with the people in Kalenjari. "They are different people, we never named them in our list. Perhaps the government prepared its own fake list and then said people had been found."

The government's attempt to confuse the entire affair is only too evident from the different figures they have been quoting on different occasions. Officially the administration says only 15 persons died in Maliana but the same administration has given compensation claims for the deaths of 19 people.

The Uttar Pradesh government claimed that "85 of the 111 missing persons have returned," and yet, some days later, the home minister, Mr. Buta Singh, tells the standing committee of the NIC that "86 of the 96 persons have been traced". How did 111 become 96?

The people in Maliana are still there in fear and dread, because the PAC is still around, and the chief minister is still around, and the lying district magistrate is still around. And this story is, in the end, an appeal to the conscience of India to stand up and cry against the horror and fascism.

*Telegraph, 28-6-87*

## BLOOD-HOUNDS WITHOUT LEASH

K.M.

Over two decades ago, when Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo was killed in his Jagdalpur palace, it was stated that the SAF deployed there went berserk when its Naik fell to an Adivasi arrow, stormed the palace and killed the Raja.

Since this story of armed constabulary running amock has been repeated at many places in the country during these two decades it would be better to remember that the common man who is not paid or trained to be disciplined has no right to run berserk if his near and dear ones are butchered—all that the law permits him is to lodge a complaint with the police and wait for two decades or more for justice to be done. Why should a trained, armed, disciplined force should get away with this story, is beyond comprehensions. But, all the same, this force has so far got away with it.

An IAS officer had stated privately, at the time of the Bastar killing that, that was the price one had to pay for keeping a bull dog (SAF) as a pet.

But to keep a bull dog as a pet, one has to train it and keep it and keep it in leash. At least two Prime Ministers—Morarji Desai and Indira Gandhi—publicly articulated the urgent need to re-organise the PAC of Uttar Pradesh to train it in a fashion that it acquired not only a human face but human behaviour as well.

In fact, after the Moradabad 'riots' about six years ago, the UP Government stated that it would raise a new battalion of PAC under a new recruitment policy (with liberal representation of the minority communities in the force).

The State Government is now content with saying that the minority representation in the police force of the State is gradually looking up. But if an IAS officer is to be believed (again in private conversation), the prospect of being posted in

every riot-torn town raised the "recruitment fee" (bribe) immediately. If a person had to pay Rs. 10,000 to be taken on the police force, he had to pay Rs 20,000 to get into this PAC battalion.

The argument is simple. A civil police constable has an opportunity everyday of the year to make a fast buck. He can be posted at a road-crossing and collect his "fee" from every that passes that way. He could collect his "hafta" from all the street vendors. He collects from both sides in every case of crime. But these opportunities are just not available to a man in the PAC because he comes into direct contact of the people only when there is a breakdown of the law and order machinery—like a riot. That provides him with the only opportunity to earn a little on the sly (the looting spree in every riot-torn area). If a battalion was to be rushed to every disturbed area, its opportunities to earn would be immense.

Jamshedpur, Basti, Varanasi, Barabanki, Moradabad, Aligarh, Meerut—wherever there have been communal flare-ups, almost the unanimous demand from the minority community has been for the immediate removal of the armed police from the area. At many places Muslims have publicly stated that they had been protected by their Hindu neighbours from the police atrocities.

Why is the Armed Constabulary an anathema to the minorities? Perhaps, its composition would afford a clue. The bulk is semi-educated young men from the Backward communities—the first generation literates. The strength of these constabularies was raised when the Jana Sangh was in power in the States in northern India.

The situation could perhaps have been retrieved later by training the PAC all over again—not in the use of their heads. Perhaps, the authorities could realise that mere chest measurements are not enough for recruitment—that is the outlook, the behaviour, commitment to secularism, the need to keep calm in moments of stress were also important. But something held the authorities back.

Was it the spectre of 1973? There was a PAC revolt in UP there and poor Kamalapati Tripathi, the then Chief Minister of UP, had to pay the political price for it. Since then, the

official policy about the armed constabularies in the States seems to be to handle with care with gloves—as though it was combustible material. There must be sound reasons for not listening to two Prime Ministers, representing almost the entire political spectrum in the country.

Whatever the reasons, the price is being paid now. Meerut has had a qualitatively different one from other riots. For a few years, communal riots were quelled expeditiously and peace was resorted everywhere in a couple of days. In Meerut, however, the members kept smouldering and occasionally throwing up flames for a long time. It was different in another aspect. For the first time, perhaps, men were picked up from their houses during the curfew hours, taken outside the locality and shot down. A friend of the minority community said bitterly—the PAC is the sword arms of Hindu communalism.

There were other symptoms of the difference in Meerut. One such was that men like, Shanti Tyagi, blamed only the Muslim communalism. Then Congressmen openly accused their own MP of a bias. These are the wages of inaction of the secular forces in the country. For years, now, communal sentiments have been roused systematically and political parties have looked at the development merely as a law and order problem.

Above five years ago, a commentator had written about the rising divide between different communities. He had said that somehow a Hindu is more of a Hindu now, a Muslim more of a Muslim. They tended to look at the problems from the communal angle. It was because there was no other angle before them. Because nobody had shown them the Indian angle.

Precious years have been lost since then—precious years since Indira Gandhi suggested the reorganisation of the PAC, since the Vishwa Hindu Parishad took out Ekatmata Rath and Ram-Janaki processions, since communal venom began to be spouted from public platforms, since secular forces went into hibernation.

Now the blood-hounds are in the street without the leash.

*Excerpts from Mainstream,*  
13 June 1987



## GANGA CANAL OF DEATH

*Sanjay Suri and Rahul Pathak*

It has become a canal of death. Not a life-giver, but a grave for Maliana's dead. The Ganga canal is not holy today, it is deathly. It brings no purification, only putrefaction.

The canal became the carrier of corpses four days ago. Estimates of the number vary from 50 to a few hundred. Everyone has seen the bodies, no one has counted.

Everyone has seen the bodies, except the police, so they say. The District Magistrate, Mr. Nazim Zaidi said, "I have no information about any bodies found in the canal."

The police at Munsoorie say it's all rumour. "We have not seen any body in the canal," said a sub-inspector at the police station. "Nor has anyone else. They are just making stories."

People from the village said they saw several bodies today. "The bodies sometimes get stuck at a dam downstream," they said. We drove along the bank downstream to Dehra.

Armed policemen were patrolling the bridge. "They have just cleared the crowd," said an elderly resident. "A body floated down a moment ago," he said. "It got stuck at the dam, and the police had to push it along."

A policeman rose to stop us as we went further, but we found the body. It was the body of a man with his legs hunched up. Two crows were perching on the body, while pecking at the rotting flesh.

The sub-inspector from Munsoorie had followed us on his

motorcycle. He drove off as we walked up to approach him. "There are no bodies here," he said, as he went.

Half an hour's drive along the bank upstream and we reached Barkha village. Here, as a dairy worker was talking about the bodies in the canal, another body floated up. It was the body of a woman, floating upside down. A blue sari was wrapped around the bloated body.

Everyone in the area was talking of the bodies, except the police. The canal flows down to Bulandshahr before it splits into smaller canals. At Bulandshahr, the town was full of talk of the bodies. On Monday night, several bodies had got stuck at a dam. They were pushed out by the police in the morning.

From Muradnagar to Bulandshahr, people stood on bridges, watching for bodies. The police stood with them, to make sure that the bodies did not get stuck, and to clear the bridges of the crowds that collected to watch.

Policemen were posted at every dam down the canal. The instructions were clear. They were to get the bodies out of their area. "We have been instructed not to try to stop them," said an official at a dam. "We are told that if we do, it will lead to problems for us."

At Samota, near Sikandarabad, an old man was given the task of clearing bodies that got stuck in the dam there. "I am frightened," he said. "I cannot look at the bodies, I cannot bear the stench. And still I have to push them through the gaps."

The police, who do not let people enter Meerut, are now circulating the remains of Meerut's dead along the countryside. The result is visible. Tension has spread to all these areas, up to Bulandshahr and beyond.

—From *Indian Express*, 27 May 1987

## TALE OF TWO SURVIVORS

*Samita Gupta and Rahul Bedi*

Twenty-nine persons of Hashimpura in Meerut, all members of a community, were rounded up by the police on May 22, driven 15 km to the Gangnagar, shot one by one at point blank range, and hurled into canal.

Only two of the 29 are alive today—in the male surgical ward of Narinder Mohan Hospital here, an hour's drive from Meerut.

The two are Babu-ud-Din, 17, and Mujibur Rehman, 25, powerloom workers in Hashimpura. The authorities, fearing another attack on these, the only surviving witnesses to the pogrom by the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC), perpetrators of the massacre, have placed two guards each inside and outside their room.

According to their statements, the two men, along with 27 others, were rounded up at around 4 p.m. on May 22 in riot-torn Meerut, loaded into a truck and driven to Jani, on the banks of the Gangnagar. Shortly, after nightfall, all 29 were lined up, shot and thrown into the swift-flowing waters.

Mujib, shot in the right lung from the front and Babu-ud-Din, shot in the left lung from the back, were chanced upon by the Muradnagar police at around 4 a.m. on May 23, about 10 km downstream from Jani. Around 6 a.m., the blood-spattered men were admitted to the hospital, at least 10 hours after being shot.

The two survivors' injuries indicate that the shots fired upon them were well-aimed and passed clean through their lungs. The weapon was reportedly a small bore handgun.

Initially, the two were guarded by the Uttar Pradesh police. When word of their being alive spread, the U.P. police were replaced by the CRPF, on May 24 evening, as the Union Home Ministry feared attempts to eliminate them. The panic-stricken Uttar Pradesh Government, desperate to blank out the Jani carnage, also wants to ensure the survivors' silence.

The U.P. Government is also scared that evidence of carnages other than the one at Jani may surface, since the number of bodies fished out of the Gangnahar and the parallel Hindon river are conservatively estimated by the Union Home Ministry at 38.

Given the amply corroborated fact that bodies were seen continuously for six days, starting May 21, it is plausible that there were carnages similar to the one at Jani in Meerut district, aimed at a minority community. The number of victims of such PAC barbarities could be substantially higher than the conservative Union Home Ministry count of 38.

Till May 26, the State Government refused to admit that bodies had been sighted in the two waterways. But surprisingly a CID inquiry into the bodies floating in the Gangnahar and Hindon river was ordered a day earlier, on May 25.

Not having any survivors to depose would definitely help the Chief Minister, Mr. Bir Bahadur Singh, and his Home Minister, Mr. Gopinath Dikshit, to continue in office.

Another survivor of PAC excesses, Mohammad Usman, similarly shot and dumped into the Gangnahar, is in the All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). He, too, is under heavy guard and not permitted to talk to anyone.

At the Narender Mohan Hospital, the authorities were evidently desperate to keep the identities of the two injured men secret. Even the doctors and nurses attending on them have to enter their names in a special register each time they visit them. These reporters were aggressively turned away by the CRPF men at the door when they attempted to meet Mujib and Babu-ud-Din. Requests to photograph the guards were greeted by the snatching of the camera. And the window

overlooking the courtyard outside was hastily closed.

A stream of senior police officers armed with fruits have been paying solicitous visits to the only closely guarded room in Mohan Hospital. The two injured are reported to be on the mend.

Along the Gangnahar, from Muradnagar, where the two injured were found, to Jani, the scene of the crime, there is fear and hostility.

In the villages along this 10 km. stretch of canal, residents have been told not to talk about the bodies flowing past for six days till May 26. Since the bodies began appearing on May 21, the inhabitants here have organised vigilant groups to protect themselves. The insecurity was apparent when the escort of a burka-clad woman, obviously Muslim, identified himself as a Hindu.

Queries regarding the floating corpses were met either with suspicion or directions to seek information upstream. All, however, seemed to be well aware of the bodies. At the water-headworks in Jani, there was open hostility. A clutch of residents belonging to the majority community not only claimed ignorance, but told gory tales of the massacre of Hindus in Meerut.

The village Pradhan, accompanied by henchmen and the waterworks keeper, turned up to prevent any of the locals from giving these reporters information about the bodies. Shooing away villagers eager to tell stories of the body count, he claimed that corpses floating in the canal were "common". "An average of at least 25 floated past every month from Haridwar", he said.

—From *Indian Post*, 30 May 1987



## PAC JAWANS SHOT DEAD 200

*Sankarshan Thakur*

At least 170 to 200 men belonging to a community who were picked up by the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) from Hashimpura in Meerut on May 22 are feared dead. Most of them were packed off in PAC trucks, driven to the Ganga canal near Muradnagar, shot at point blank range and thrown into the water.

The exact number of those suspected killed is not clear—nobody seems to have taken count of those rounded up by the PAC in Hashimpura and loaded into six trucks—but now that they have been untraced for more than 10 days, it is assumed that they are dead. More than 50 bodies with bullet injuries were recovered from the Ganga canal during the course of last week but survivors have affirmed that the PAC had taken away no less than 170 to 200 old and young men from Hashimpura, separating them from the women and children after the house-to-house searches on May 22. None of them has returned home.

The Janata Party MP, Syed Shahabuddin, who is sheltering Zulfikar Nasir, a 17-year-old survivor of the massacre, wrote a letter to the Prime Minister today expressing his apprehension that close to 200 people had been killed by the PAC in what seems to be the most cold-blooded and gruesome police massacre. He demanded that either the government declare the whereabouts of the missing or admit guilt. He is also filing

a habeas corpus writ in the Supreme Court on the missing men of Hashimpura.

### **Feigning death**

Zulfikar Nasir, who was in one of the PAC trucks taken to the Ganga canal but escaped by pretending to be dead after a bullet pierced his right armpit, says he was in the second of the six trucks brought to Hashimpura. "There were 30 to 35 men in each truck and when we were driven away, the other trucks were still being loaded. They were taking away all the young and old men of our locality."

The trucks left Meerut around seven in the evening but its occupants had no idea where they were being driven to or why because they had been instructed to squat with their heads down. "The only thing I know is that we were brought down near a canal late in the night. The dozen or so PAC men then discussed something, loaded their rifles and began shooting people one by one." Yaseen, an old man, and Ashraf, a young boy of Zulfikar's age, were shot dead in front of him. He himself was third in the queue but had a miraculous escape.

"I did not see the others being killed with my own eyes as I lay, feigning death, in the thicket besides the canal, I could hear the shots ringing out continuously and the sound of the bodies splashing into the canal," says Zulfikar. He managed to trudge to the main Muradnagar road with two other boys—Arif and Kamruddin—who too had lived. They drew some water from a handpump near Muradnagar but the clank of the handpump woke up people in the neighbourhood who said they would call the police. A frightened Arif ran away. Kamruddin, who had injuries nearer the heart, died there and Zulfikar hid in a urinal near the Muradnagar checkpoint where he remained till 6 pm the next evening. "When I came out, I was lucky to find some relatives in Muradnagar who took me to a hakim for first aid."

The Ghaziabad district president of the Janata Party, Mr. Ansari, then brought him to Mr. Shahabuddin in Delhi.

Zulfikar is one of the five known survivors of the massacre. Two, Mujibur Rahman and Babuddin, are struggling for life under heavy CRPF guard at the Narendra Mohan hospital at

Mohan Nagar near Delhi. Another, Mohammed Usman is in the casualty ward of the AIIMS in the capital and the fifth, whose name is not yet known is reported to be in the hiding in Ghaziabad.

Mujibur Rahman and Babuddin have been able to file first-hand reports which corroborate Zulfikars' version of how the PAC massacre were conducted: people lined up, shot and dumped into the canal. But obviously, the two were brought in another truck for Zulfikar does not remember having heard of them. Nobody, apart from policemen and officials has been allowed to see the two.

### **Don't Trouble him**

Mohammed Usman, the stitches raw on his stomach which was riddled with bullets, reclines in obvious pain in the surgical ward of AIIMS. A plain clothesman who describes himself as "an official from thana," stand guard, eyeing Usman sternly. Usman is eager to speak about what happened to him but the plainclothesman butts in to say, "He is not in a position to speak. Don't trouble him. At the most you can ask him his address." Usman gets the message and shuts up, obviously terrorised. "I am from Bakre ka Paith in Hashimpura. Please inform my parents. Please," he pleads. He looks at the plainclothesman, perhaps to steal a moment and tell his tale but the policemen has been staring hard at him all along. It will take some time yet for the full Hashimpura story to be told.

*From Telegraph, 2 June 1987*

## **PART III**

**WHAT EDITORS WROTE AND  
READERS OPINED**





## HOLOCAUST IN MEERUT

The continuing communal conflagration in Meerut, just 80 kilometres from the capital, must send alarm bells ringing all over the country. Meerut speaks of the tragedy that is threatening to overwhelm the country. And the explosion of hate comes in the wake of what has been happening in Ahmedabad again and again. Meerut has, of course, not been an oasis of communal harmony. Quite the contrary. The last communal riot took place barely a month ago. The district administration was myopic in withdrawing a major part of the para-military contingents called in then. But there is no guarantee that their presence could have prevented the present disaster. The army has now been out there for nearly a week, and yet the killings continue. The official death count has already crossed 75. The true count must be much higher. The holocaust in Meerut is not an isolated development. It has taken place against the background of a grave deterioration in the relations between the majority community and the minority community not only in Meerut but the whole of U.P. after 1947-48. Both the Hindus and the Muslims have convinced themselves that they are in a siege ; they do not need much provocation to get at one another. Apart from long-standing cause for communal tensions, the Babri Masjid-Ram-janambhoomi controversy has seriously aggravated the sense of insecurity and aggressiveness among both communities.

Meerut had been tense following a stabbing incident, but the conflagration followed a face-to-face encounter between the Muslims and the police in the wake of a bomb explosion. Unwisely perhaps the police decided to launch combing operations in the early hours of the morning when Muslims congregate for the pre-dawn meal ("sahari") in the Ramzan period. Determined to prevent arrests, and angry at the alleged partisan role of the police in last month's riots, the Muslims offered resistance the police had apparently not anticipated. The police force, denuded by last month's withdrawals, was soon on the defensive and could do little as Muslim mobs went on the rampage. Their targets? Mostly the business establishments of the Hindus. The revenge of U.P.'s infamous Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) was to come later. Two more facts need to be noted. This time, unlike in the past, more deaths have been caused by sniper fire than by stabbings. Communal killings spread from the walled city area to the middle class suburbs. In a situation such as the one in Meerut, it is facetious to suggest solutions. All we can do is to limit the damage. For that limited and realistic objective, it is necessary to post good administrators in communally sensitive places, withdraw the PAC immediately from Meerut and other similar places, replace it with Central para-military forces, set up the proposed specially-trained force to deal with communal violence and extend the duration of the ban on religious processions and use of loudspeakers.

—From *Times of India*, 27 May 1987

## WHEN WILL WE LEARN ?

In just a few days the violence in a single city, Meerut, has already claimed over 110 dead. The extent and pattern of killing, of arson, of hatred reflect the ever deepening problems of our state, of our society. Meerut has often witnessed communal flare-ups in recent years. But the acts of violence hitherto used to be confined largely to the Walled City. We all assumed that it was easy for rapid elements to set it aflame at the slightest provocation. But this time the communal frenzy that first held familiar parts of the city in its grip spread quickly to the outskirts. New residential colonies, by no means congested, soon became the targets of arsonists and looters. And now, what is even more ominous, the adjoining rural areas, too, are being sucked into this vortex of violence. The most disturbing symptom has been the traumatic experience of the hamlet of Malian, ten kilometres from Meerut city. Its 2,000 inhabitants have had a hard time escaping from the clutches of a platoon of an arm of the state itself, the Provincial Armed Constabulary. The discovery of sixteen bodies in the Hindon Canal in Ghaziabad, Noida and the Delhi suburb of Kalyanpuri is further proof of the widening trail of death and destruction in the wake of the outbreak of violence in Meerut. And as reports of mounting tension in the neighbouring towns of Muzaffarnagar, Modinagar and Hapur come in, no one knows when the authorities will manage to restore a semblance of order. It is not that this time round or in general the killings

and riots are "pre-planned". But hundreds seem to be perpetually prepared for them with arms, with networks of associates beyond the reach of, in many ways more "efficient" than the machinery of the state.

The things that need to be done have been listed *ad nauseum*. The police should be reformed and reculturated ; people should feel involved in the affairs of the community ; we should prevent politicians and priests from misusing places of worship ; the ever-widening nexus of criminals across cities should be smashed ; the nexus of criminals and politicians, and now priests, must be broken : our leaders must be such that the community listens and responds to them ; as one cannot set a policeman to check every person and a policeman to check every policeman, and therefore, as Governments can run only when the people hold them in esteem, our Governments must be legitimate. All this has been listed time and again, but we have almost given up the attempt to attend to these fundamentals. Our horizons have shortened ; at each moment we are relieved if only we can get through the latest, the present crisis. And yet these fundamentals are what have to be attended to. And that can be done only by more and better persons devoting themselves to public and community life. How much greater travail will the country have to bear before that happens ?

—From *Indian Express*, 27 May 1987

## STATE AND COMMUNALISM

Meerut town in western UP has been twice engulfed by communal violence within a month. The death toll in the first bout which lasted six days from April 15 was officially put at 10 while other estimates are that the figure was more likely 14. In the latest round of mayhem, which began on May 16 and is hopefully just being brought under control as we go to press, the number of deaths is estimated to have exceeded 200 already though, true to form, the government's count is still less than half that figure. Communal tension and violence in UP have been growing since the unlocking of the Babri masjid/Ram Janambhoomi temple in Ayodhya in January last year. More than a dozen episodes of communal violence have occurred this period in different parts of the state and a number of new communal organisations, both Hindu and Muslim, have emerged and gathered strength. The Babri Masjid Action Committee organised its massive rally of Muslims on the Boat Club lawns in New Delhi on March 30 to demand that possession of the place of worship in Ayodhya be handed over to the Muslims. Just the previous day the Vishwa Hindu Parishad had called a UP-wide bandh by Hindus which it followed up with a mass pledge-taking rally (*sankalpa samaroh*) in Ayodhya on April 5 to "protect" Ram Janambhoomi and erect a temple there at a cost of Rs. 25 crore.

It would be natural, therefore, to see the communal holocaust in Meerut against the above background of mounting communal tensions. However, what comes through most strikingly in the reports of the tragic events of the last few weeks



in Meerut is not so much their undoubted connection with the larger communal tensions as the part played in them by the administration and the police forces. Most infamous, of course, have been the doings of the notorious Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC). On May 23, in the most brutal episode of the Meerut riots, personnel of the PAC—according to one report, inebriated after consuming country liquor earlier looted from a shop—launched a murderous attack on the muslim section of Maliana village in the vicinity of Meerut.

Huts were set on fire with entire families inside them and people fleeing for their lives were indiscriminately fired upon. This carnage is said to have lasted about three hours. Many of the dead bodies were apparently dumped into the Ganga canal and have been spotted floating in the canal at different places, some near Delhi. In Maliana certainly there had been no pre-existing communal enmity and the violence was entirely the handiwork of the PAC. Maliana was not, however, the PAC's only contribution to the Meerut mayhem. Other reports speak: "PAC jawans joined the mobs in looting and burning shops. When shopowners tried to protect their establishments, the PAC even provided fire cover to the arsonists." The PAC carried out house-to-house searches: "There were complaints that it was going about them in a most brutal manner, beating up men, abusing and molesting women."

The PAC's past record in regard to communal riots—in Aligarh and Moradabad, for instance—should have prepared everyone, including the government, for its bloody performance in Meerut. And yet as many as 30 companies of the PAC were deployed in Meerut and it is on this force that the government has relied the most for containing the communal violence. So the culpability is not of just the PAC but of the administration as a whole. In any case, the other branches of the administration have been scarcely more exemplary in their non-partisanship or in their earnestness in controlling the violence. (Incidentally, a former director general of police of the state is now president of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, eastern region.) What for instance, is one to make of the provocation explicit in the despatch of the police to make preventive arrests from a Muslim locality of the town at around 3 o'clock in the morning at the

time of 'sahari' when during Ramzan Muslims have their meals before starting the next day's fast? And after the April riots in Meerut, the UP home minister lost no time in declaring, pointing by implication to the Muslims, that the disturbances had been carefully planned. More recently, through a widely publicised announcement the state government banned the entry of eight well-known Muslim leaders into Meerut. The insinuation is once again plain enough, just as it is in the speculation, attributed to the Union Home Ministry, about the role of Pakistani agents in the Meerut riots.

The relevance of these facts extends beyond the apportioning of blame for the killings and violence in Meerut. Their significance really lies in the questions they raise about the hitherto much-vaunted secular credentials of the present Indian state which has to be a central issue in any consideration of the phenomenon of communalism and growing communal tensions in our society.

—From *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30 May 1987

## A DEADLY CONFRONTATION

Aligarh in 1978, Jamshedpur in 1979, Moradabad in 1980, Hyderabad in 1981, Meerut in 1982, Bhiwandi in 1984, Ahmedabad in 1985, now Meerut again. And the canker is spreading. All of Uttar Pradesh has been a communal power keg these last several months. Gujarat has been transformed from a peaceful industrious state, to a place where communalism has taken deep and seemingly permanent root. Punjab has a problem of a different sort, fundamentalism has raised its head in Kashmir, unlikely states like Kerala see communal forces test their strength at the polls in one state after another.

It is not a new problem—the first recorded communal riot in the country dates back to 1714—and Meerut is not the worst that the country has seen. As many as 1,500 died, for instance, in the 1969 riots in Ahmedabad, and even more in the anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984. But never before has the country witnessed such a prolonged period of tension of this nature, nor such a dangerous and rapid spread of the communal virus. Religious places have become major foci of dispute, and religious issues have come to the forefront in several ways (the Muslim Women Bill, for instance). The 'Hindu backlash' has been a political talking-point for three years and more. Large rallies have been organised by bodies associated with one community or another. As the tension mounted and was sustained, a Meerut almost had to happen. And if temperatures aren't lowered, it will almost certainly be another town

tomorrow.

Several questions now need to be asked, and answered. What should be done to reverse the surging tide of communalism before it swamps the country? Why did the administration fail in Meerut, although notice had been served (so to speak) with a smaller riot a month earlier? What are emerging contours of the problem?

It was easy to argue, before Independence, that the occasional communal riots were the result of the British policy of divide and rule. Now the reality is known to be more complex, taking in both the communalising of politics and the politicisation of religion, the jostling by different communities for a better share of the cake, the tensions created by cases of mass conversions, and the emergence in the forefront of organisations and leaders who speak only for their community. And a country that prides itself on the secular character of its politics has no effective answer to the menace.

Certainly, it is the mishandling of issues by the Government that has partly resulted in today's situation. The Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid issue should not have been allowed to fester in the manner that it has, and the Muslim women's bill brought about a further divide, with a reliance on fundamentalist opinion as opposed to more forward-looking schools of thought. For good measure, secular political parties have not hesitated to team up with communal counterparts, lending them a certain respectability. And although it was obvious even a year ago that tension was building up, little was done to defuse the situation.

Some of the old responses to the problem are now obviously inadequate. Tired bodies like the National Integration Council (though well-intended) have proved to be ineffective, and traditional strategies like peace marches have fallen into disuse. Periodic reviews at the highest levels have resulted in decisions to draw up lists of sensitive places, to form special peace squads and so on. All of this quite apparently, has had little effect. Even in Meerut, a town with a history of violence of this kind and a riot as recently as a month ago, the administration withdrew police forces too quickly, a mistake that was repeated in Delhi.

A solution must of course include gearing the administration to be more sensitive to such flashpoints, and to take advance action. But corrective measures must go well beyond this. Culprits who indulge in rioting have so far been getting away scot-free, despite the ritual appointing of commissions of inquiry. This record in enforcing the law must change. Religious processions (which often provide the flashpoint for riots) cannot be banned in all cases, but they should be discouraged. Public address systems should be prohibited in places of worship, and the encroachment on public land for building places of worship prevented. The police itself is often affected by the communal virus, and the only effective solution is to have a proper mix of communities in the recruitment of policemen. In the field of education, textbooks and syllabi must be carefully screened to weed out any overlap of communalism. And in politics, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) has shown the way in Kerala by refusing to have truck with any of the communal parties, and other should do the same. They also must choose candidates for elections carefully so as to pack Parliament and the assemblies with people who have a secular outlook.

The initiative for all this must come from the top. And the leadership must be seen to be serious, not issue empty threats as Rajiv Gandhi did on Meerut, only for the riots to continue for five more days. Chief Minister like Bir Bahadur Singh must accept the responsibility of failure. The country needs to be reassured that the Government is serious about tackling the communal curse.

—From *India Today*, 15 June 1987



## A DAY OF SADNESS

Every minority has its problems, and India's Muslims have more than their legitimate share, thanks to the many tragedies which have marked their history. But it is, by and large, not a community which allows its problems to depress it beyond a certain level : they may have not one but a hundred reasons for anger ; and they may have not one but a hundred complaints about economic discrimination, but they still have resources within them which prompt a smile as easily as a frown. For 40 years, since partition, they have suffered from suspicion, and a wide range of its consequences. They have learnt to live with the accusation that they are traitors or (more fashionable these days) agents of foreign interests. But no matter what their dilemmas and frustrations, there has been one day of the year on which they have chosen to forget their problems and enjoy what should indeed be considered a normal requisite of existence : happiness and good cheer. This is the day of Id, marking the end of the holy month of prayer and fasting, Ramzan. Id is a day which every Muslim, no matter how far his intellect or his environment may have taken him away from his religious roots, keeps aside for the enjoyment of brotherhood and love which are such important elements of the faith. This year, even the happiness of Id has been snatched away from Muslims. As city after city of the north broods under the weight of curfew, and as memories of yet another brutal and arbitrary massacre by the hooligans of the Provincial Armed Constabulary turn the heart bitter, Id loses all its traditional flavour of gaiety and joy. It is not the thought of just riots—bad enough as that may be—that destroys the Muslim's confidence : no one is so romantic as to believe that in a country like ours social tensions will not erupt into violence. After all, there are enough mischief-makers on both

sides of the communal divide. It is more the thought of the completely inhuman irresponsibility and brutality of the guardians of law and order that shakes the community. Nor is this the first time that the thoroughly notorious PAC of Uttar Pradesh has behaved in this manner. It has a justified reputation of being a rogue force. The problem is that no government, neither at the state nor at the central level, has ever been courageous enough to take action against a force which not only is criminal in behaviour but so utterly harmful to the national interest and unity. Why? What great constituency or interest does this PAC represent? Why are politicians so afraid of this body of scoundrels in uniform? We learn now that the superintendent of the force which committed such crimes in Maliana has been suspended: is that sufficient? The PAC is being accused of nothing less heinous than deliberate murder. Is one officer's suspension all that will be done?

Home Minister Buta Singh has now virtually admitted to the Opposition leaders he met that the Uttar Pradesh government ignored the warning that the Centre had given to the state about impending communal riots. Will the chief minister of the most populous state in India be allowed to get away without an answer to this charge of sheer irresponsibility? New Delhi cannot afford to become a victim of a paralysis of will: it must do what it has been elected to do—rule. Silence is not a solution in this the gravest of times. The Prime Minister does not have a magic wand by which he can make all communal riots disappear, but he does have the authority, vested in him by the people, to administer the land and protect the lives of its citizens. There is no more time really for the luxuries of longwinded commissions: what we need is the firm hand of administrative justice which can restore the confidence of the people in the rule of law, and make the potential culprit apprehensive and wary and afraid of the consequences of his mischief. When a state government has failed, the Centre must step in to protect the weak. The time has come for Delhi to tell Lucknow that this misrule cannot go on.

—From *Telegraph*, 29 May 1987

## WARNING OF MEERUT

The DRIVE TO DESTABILISE INDIA is not any nearer its end with the relaxation in tension in the relations between the President and the Prime Minister following reports that the President, though still unwilling to accept the Cabinet's interpretation of the constitutional provision regarding his right to be informed and the Prime Minister's duty to keep him informed, would rather leave the issue for his successor than take a precipitate action.

For one thing, even now it is not clear whether the reports emanating from Rashtrapati Bhavan, which have induced a feeling of relaxation, should be taken to mean what they seek to convey, or they represent a change of tactics. If uncertainty persists, it is because of the apprehension that Gianiji might strike once again and take his adversary by surprise. The Prime Minister's side is, therefore, not lowering its guard. And rightly so.

For another, destabilisation operates at many levels and is not a uni-dimensional operation. Differences between the head of state and the head of government were being manipulated by the Hershmans and the Swedish Radio operators from far away. But on the ground, here in this country, communal conflicts have been so manipulated that today the entire fabric of our society is faced with the danger of being torn as under. Developments in Fiji show how operations at these two levels can converge to oust a government within a month of its election.

Fiji is a small country. Ours is much bigger, and our society is far more complex with deep-rooted internal tensions and far greater variety of diversities. And yet, our freedom

struggle was disrupted, our country partitioned, and an imperialist base built on Indian soil in the shape of Pakistan.

Our Independence itself was bedevilled with destabilisation. Destabilisation works most effectively, even if in the manner of slow poisoning, at the level of our thinking as individuals, as social groups and as a nation-in-the-making; and it speaks volumes of our shameful lack of vigilance that despite the traumatic experience of the Partition we are again faced with the danger of Khalistan, and worse, almost a civil war on communal lines in parts of the country—in the UP and Gujarat, in particular.

It would be wrong to dismiss what is happening in Meerut as a local affair or to explain the communal riots in Old Delhi as an extension of the Meerut disturbances. As in Gujarat, where the communal virus has permeated into all parts of the state, in UP communal violence has erupted in one town after another during the last one year.

Whatever the reasons for the simmering communal volcano that Gujarat has become,<sup>9</sup> in the UP it all started with the Ram-Janaki Yatras organised by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, which is led by the RSS and patronised by opposition (Lok Dal and Janata) as well as Congress politicians. Wherever the yatras spent the night, whether in a big village or a small town, Rajrang Dals were set up consisting of professional bullies and unemployed peasant youth. In no time, rival Adam Senas of the Muslims emerged. The small sector illegal arms industry has since then been in a state of boom which knows no end.

Both in the case of Meerut and in that of Delhi, the authorities are unjustified in claiming that they were taken by surprise. Even a casual passerby through the lanes and by-lanes of the walled city could sense not only the tension in the air but also the preparations going on for a confrontation. This is also true of Meerut.

In both places, what we are witnessing is organised violence, and if U.P. authorities do not wake up in time there will be a Meerut in every big and small town of the state. That precisely is what destabilisation is aimed at.

—From *Blitz*, 30 May 1987



## ENFORCE THE LAW

The frequent and heated debates on communalism have been of little avail in combating the evil. This has been one of the more dispiriting aspects of the problem. There have been prescriptions galore. The Government apparatus in turn has responded to each wave of violence by demanding more powers. The fact is that the state is already armed with adequate powers to put down communal miscreants with a strong hand. It just does not use them. The Haksar Committee of the National Integration Council has brought this out forcefully. After noting how religious establishments have flouted various existing laws on public peace and order with impunity, the Committee has aptly observed: "Even a token enforcement of one single issue like this would bring a sense of credibility to the debates of the National Integration Council." The Central Government itself has still not realised the importance of concentrating on effective enforcement of the relevant laws instead of organising meetings and seminars on communal harmony. Otherwise, it would have taken good care to give the widest publicity to the report of the Haksar Committee of the National Integration Council. Characteristically enough, an official spokesman was more interested in publicising the speeches of the members of the Standing Committee of the NIC at its meeting on Tuesday. Indeed, the very fact that the Prime Minister, the Home Minister, and the other eminent leaders who attended the meeting failed to highlight the report of the Committee and, instead, were content to repeat the worn-out cliches about strengthening the secular fabric etc. shows that they remain stuck as if in a



groove.

As the Committee has pointed out, Section 153A of the Indian Penal Code empowers the Government to punish a person who promotes feelings of enmity, hatred and ill-will between religious groups or castes. This Section also deals with misuse of places of worship. Action can also be taken under this Section against organisers of and participants in processions if any of them by word or signs attempts to create disharmony or a feeling of enmity among various communities. Yet, all these offences continue to be committed with sickening regularity as though there is nothing like a Government in existence. More often than not it is because Ministers and party leaders find it politically rewarding to shield the religious leaders who violate the laws that the police can take neither preventive nor punitive action. Again, Ministers have obliged some religious leaders with all kinds of favours including lucrative business arrangements. This is yet another reason why the religious leaders think nothing of indulging even in such offences as asking the faithful to encroach upon public land in the name of religion. It is because of the political patronage enjoyed by these law-breakers that the police force, too, finds it safe to play at best a passive role. To make matter worse, as has been revealed particularly in Gujarat, the police have developed close links with the leaders of the underworld who find it profitable to kindle communal disturbances on the slightest pretext.

The Haksar Committee's Report ought to be placed before Parliament and the State Legislatures. Extensive public discussion on its contents will create an atmosphere in which the allies of the diehard communalists entrenched with and outside the Government will find it difficult to treat the laws on the maintenance of public order as though they were mere scraps of paper. Simultaneously, the Prime Minister and the Chief Ministers should ensure that neither they nor their Cabinet colleagues attend religious functions as guests, chief or ordinary. They must also ask the official media not to publicise them. Last but not least, there should be no hesitation in taking firm and prompt action under the law against newspapers that are found to be wilfully fanning communal hatred.

*From Indian Express, June 25 1987*

## HIDING THE CRIME OF MEERUT

All good things, as we have learnt, must come to an end. So, hopefully, must also all bad things. The Chief Ministership of Mr. Vir Bahadur Singh too, consequently, will come to an end some day. But if Delhi has any instinct for self-preservation then this will happen sooner rather than later. The damage that he is doing to the party and to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi is so enormous that not checked at once it will be impossible to retrieve the situation after a while. If people like Vir Bahadur Singh are going to be the guardians of the Congress interest till the next elections then the party should be prepared for a Haryana-style wipeout. He began his term with an error whose consequences have seared the nation badly—the reopening of the Babri Masjid. The price the country has had to pay in terms of communal tension for this one bit of mischief should have been sufficient to drive anyone from office. But he remains. And his last bit of idiocy will go down as one of the most inexcusable ever. The chief minister of Uttar Pradesh had no business stopping Mr. V.P. Singh from addressing his rally at Gorakhpur. It is irrelevant whether Mr. V.B. Singh agrees with the former finance minister or not; it is even more beside the point that he might be wanting to buy an extra lease of life through sycophancy. He simply has no business to try and fetter any political voice. This is a free nation, and everyone has the right to be heard. And those who tamper with this right, either through manipulation of the

law or the manipulation of administration, do so at huge risk to themselves.

But of all the acts of omission and commission which taint the present government in Lucknow nothing is more heinous than the enormous cover-up operation that is going on to hide the guilt of Meerut. What happened in Maliana and Hashimpura should be a lesson in shame and humiliation. Any decent chief minister would not have waited to be asked to resign, but would have gone voluntarily. But then we cannot expect any standards from the present incumbent. If, however, that was bad, what is going on now is far, far worse. Stories are being planted that the "so-called" dead are "returning" to Maliana (incidentally, no one is even trying to suggest the same for Hashimpura, because the extent of the brutal killings from this area are really beyond imagination). And advertisements, which can only be called cruel, are being placed in newspapers to express "concern" over the welfare of minorities. The government of Uttar Pradesh is trotting out lies in a desperate attempt to save its skin. Worse, a few journalists are participating in this exercise. But while we cannot expect any better from Lucknow, surely Delhi should step in if it has some respect for the norms of civilised existence left. The exigencies of the present mood, and the impending presidential elections may hold Mr. Rajiv Gandhi's hand at the moment, but the restraints should get over after the presidential elections. To allow Mr. Vir Bahadur Singh to get away with this would be to condone fascism. And the price for that will be far higher than anyone can assess at the moment.

—From *The Telegraph*, 20 June 1987

## MEERUT MASSACRE—A FORE-TASTE OF FASCISM

Meerut is an extreme case of communal polarisation which encompasses the elite and the masses alike, pervades the state machinery and distorts the political will. Fascism thrives on falsehood. The campaign of disinformation and misinformation has made us deaf and blind; it has paralysed our hands and feet; it has brutalised our hearts and frozen our souls. In the face of bestial and inhuman brutalities, women have been demonstrating in favour of the killers; youth have been shouting 'PAC Zindabad'; the administration has proclaimed its pride in the PAC; the Central Government has been hesitant to order the PAC out; the political parties have by and large taken little or no notice of the atrocities; the conscience has gone to eternal sleep. Does the Nation have a conscience?

### **This is Genocide**

Mass deportation and mass liquidation should remind us of Nazi Germany; they were the strategic objective of German Fascism. When citizens are taken out of their homes at gun point, entire localities are lined up or made to squat with their hands up; when all able-bodied males are forced into trucks; when some trucks proceed to secluded areas and their occupants are taken out one by one and systematically shot in cold blood, their bodies flung into a river or a canal, are we far behind Nazi Germany? Yes, the scale varies but the impulse is the same. The Hashimpura youth, the Maliana people—all citizens of the Republic of India—were sought to be liquidated

not because they were criminals or had committed a specific offence but because they professed a particular faith. This is genocide, nothing more, nothing less. This is the negation of the Rule of Law. But the defenders of human brotherhood and rule of law do not open their mouths!

### **PAC has Political Backing**

Could the PAC have committed these atrocities, acted so blatantly, threatened to turn Maliana into Jalianwala Bagh, openly professed its objective of massacre, without political support? Where does the chain of command lead us? To the Collectorate in Meerut, to the State Secretariat in Lucknow or to the Central Secretariat in New Delhi? Where does the trail of blood end? Let those who, in the darkness of night, oblivious of their oath of office, ordered the PAC to 'teach the bloody rascals a lesson', have the courage to own their responsibility. Let those in high positions who gave clearance to the Gauleiter of Uttar Pradesh speak out. But these ruthless rulers, these small men, will not speak. They have no courage; they will launch a campaign of disinformation; brow beat the recalcitrant officials; intimidate the victims; destroy evidence and conceal the crime. They may even shed a few tears; parade their benevolence, make some cosmetic changes but behind the facade, this band of killers pat each other on the back and plan yet another holocaust.

One day history will catch up with them and tear off the mask of hypocrisy they habitually wear. When the book of their plots and conspiracies shall be widely read and when all of us will have to answer the question, what were you doing then?

### **Alibis, Excuses, Lies**

Is there any limit to self-delusion? The Muslims rose in revolt. Well, then why did they choose the last days of Ramzan? To spoil their Id! The Muslims planned simultaneous attack on 19 May morning. Why did the thickly populated Muslim areas of Meerut remain quiet? The Muslims launched a premeditated attack on the Hindus. Why are then four Hindu families in Hashimpura still safe? But one may ask why did the police force its way into Imliyan in the early hours



of the morning when, because of Ramzan, the entire mohalla is awake and crush a child under its jeep, kill woman and arrest hundreds?

There is a law to regulate search and detention. Which law sanctions police firing without magisterial order? Which law sanctions beatings and humiliations in police custody? Which law sanctions putting dwellings to torch and looting them? Which law sanctions police firing without warning before lathi-charges or tear-gas, to scatter a riotous mob? They speak of snipers. How many policemen were killed or even injured in the 'operations'? They speak of communal violence. Yes, but that is a very limited view. There was the Muslim mob on Hapur Road and the Hindu mob in Shastri Nagar. Where else? PAC did not invade Hashimpura or Maliana, did not burn and loot Sadar Bazar and Kutchery Road shops and Mian Mohammad Nagar huts to save Hindu lives or property. PAC invaded those Muslim localities and laid them desolate to strike terror in the Muslim community. They behaved as if they were in a war zone and dealing with an enemy. The PAC acted with the felt blessings of their masters. It was not a wayward force in mutiny. It was a disciplined force carrying out orders.

### **Spontaneous Muslim Reaction to PAC Raid**

Yes, the unprovoked, inexplicable early morning raid on Maliyan (where no Hindu lives) was followed by the formation of a Muslim mob from neighbouring colonies, after they not only heard the SOS call but also the firing. They could do nothing to save the people of Imliyan. In their anger they burnt down vehicles, attacked shops and showrooms, damaged factories, big and small in Hapur Road and in Pilokhri. They also killed some innocent persons including Prabhat, the son of that great fighter for communal harmony, Prof. Harpal Singh. Within hours, there was a massive Hindu retaliation fuelled by rumours spread by the Administration then about the State Bank Colony being ravaged by Muslim mobs. The raging fire then consumed all decencies, all moral restraint, all Shastri Nagar. The anti-social elements were herded by the police and deployed against Muslim shops and houses in a systematic campaign, a helping hand and providing fire cover, as an

effective response to any resistance.

I do not justify the acts of the Muslim mob in Hapur Road and Pilokhri. I consider such acts not only morally unjustifiable but also stupid and counterproductive but I can see the how and why of it and I can say that it was a spontaneous reaction. And there is no other evidence of depredation by a Muslim mob thereafter anywhere in Meerut; there might have been sporadic acts of violence. Had the PAC acted promptly in Hapur Road and killed some rioters that dark morning of 19 May, they would have been justified. But how does one justify their crimes in Muslim Mohallas from 25th onwards?

### **State violence not just communal**

Meerut is the only marginally a case of communal violence ; it is a case of state violence against a people. Some sections of the Hindu community may have applauded, some may have rejoiced, some may have felt satisfied, some may have been misled, some may have cooperated, some may have given moral support but few Hindus actually participated in the killing. And many saved their neighbours.

### **Truth : the only antidote**

This is the only silver lining in the dark cloud. If only the people assert themselves, if only they know the truth, if only they know that contrary to common belief, 90% of the victims are Muslims, that 90% of the over 3000 arrested are Muslims, that 90% of the dwelling units or shops burnt and looted are Muslim, they would be forced to change their false impression created by official propaganda. Had Maliana not broken into headlines, had the Ganga Canal floated away the dead bodies, the crime would have gone unnoticed. All visiting dignitaries were shown the devastated Hapur Road where all shops were depicted as Hindu property ; they were told of the Muslim attack, without being told of the PAC attack on Imliyan and of a woman killed and of the child crushed under a jeep. They were not told that not one Hindu shrine or place of worship has been touched in Meerut ; while at least a dozen or more mosques and shrines have been destroyed or damaged, that Muslims have been killed by police bullets in Muslim mohallas

or beaten to death in police or judicial custody. No Hindu has fallen to police bullets in Muslim mohallas, no Muslim in a Hindu mohalla, why ?

### **Terrorism or Social Peace**

Yes, there is anger, there is bitterness, there is desperation in the Muslim mind ; this anger, bitterness and desperation can easily ignite the fire of revenge and retaliation. That may be a natural reaction but would that be wise reaction ? Violence must be contained ; violence must be stopped ; the area of violence must not be widened ; the cycle of violence must not be prolonged. That is fine but what, if violence is adopted by the State as a policy ? What, if Hashimpura and Maliana are sought to be re-enacted all over the country ? What, if Hindu fascism descends on our benighted land ? What, if racial memories are systematically revived to burst into volcanic fury ? In despair and helplessness, does a human being care whether he lives or dies ? Terrorism is born out of oppression, when there is no court of appeal, no mechanism of redress. Will the cruel regime rethink its strategy ? Does it want war or peace ? Does it want a civil war ? Does it want the country to be dotted with forts and fortresses in constant conflict with each other ? Does it understand the meaning of terrorism on a national scale ?

### **India : A Moral Wilderness**

Meerut is not only a test of our secular profession but of our human sensitivity. History will record that in a moment of trial, no Gandhi undertook a fast into death, no Nehru ran into a mob, no J P. jumped into the fire, no Gandhian, no liberal, no democrat, no humanist, no leftist, made it a question of conscience or even of political priority. Brutalised and power-hungry, our generation has let down the spirit of India, the land of Mahavira, Buddha and Gandhi, of Chishti, Kabir and Nanak. Our land has turned into a moral wilderness, the landscape littered with the charred bones of the innocent.

Our secular intellectuals are unfortunately looking at the problem through tinted glasses and from the wrong end. Hindu communalism, parading as nationalism is on the offensive ; Muslim communalism there is, but on the defensive. To seek

social peace through economic or educational development of the Muslim, even if sincere, indicates a wrong and myopic diagnosis. Those who equate the killer and the killed are morally blind and politically motivated. They say that Meerut is a sequel to Muslim protest over conversion of Babri Masjid into a temple. So the Muslim should surrender his mosque to save his life. In free India, is it a fair choice?

### Message of Meerut

What should be the message of Meerut, of Maliana and Hashimpura for Indians, for Muslim Indians and for Hindu Indians, for the Government, for the political parties? That it shall not happen again. But I see no sign of repentance, of remorse. This is worse than the original sin, more deadly than the crime. Then no power on earth, not all our guns and missiles, our tanks and submarines, can save the country. And who lives if India dies?

To save India, a reaffirmation of the basic values of our Freedom Movement and of our Constitution, is needed. The creation of a truly secular state and the establishment of a non-partisan administrative machinery, which have the will and the means to curb Hindu Fascism—the biggest threat to the integrity of the country today—and protect the minorities and the weaker sections from its constant onslaught. But the ruling elites preoccupied as they are with projecting a Hindu face for electoral reasons, are unfortunately only fond of mouthing professions of secularism. The Question that Meerut poses is: Do they really mean them? The Challenge that Meerut constitutes is; Will they rise above short-term gains?

—From *Muslim India*, July 1987



## ONE MORE EXAMPLE OF GUILTY ACT

One more incident of criminal neglect of the ill reputed administration and police of Meerut. In Meerut in Chandralok locality 23 persons in a house are attacked on 31 May night and out of them 20 persons are burnt alive and the three which somehow survive go to the Police Station for lodging complaint next morning of this barbaric act of murder and arson; the police which itself is part of the crime not only refuse to take down the complaint but detain them in the lock-up for two days and then give them "grand amount" of Rs. 15 and advise them to go to Muzaffarnagar at their relatives' house.

When the Police was not ready even to note down the complaint what these hapless people struck with calamity could have done. Obviously all the three (Anis Ahmad, Mehbub and Mumina) went to Muzaffarnagar. When the condition returned to a bit normalcy, they returned and once again tried to lodge complaint against the murderers but this time also they failed. They knew the murderers of their 20 family members because they were none other than their own neighbours. But the Police perhaps did not want that its office should become storehouse of criminal record in Meerut and it should become for it difficult to own the responsibility. Perhaps the filth of communalism has penetrated their minds and they might be avoiding arrest of members of the majority community. Otherwise it is difficult to explain such a conduct on their part.

The Indian Muslims do not raise hue and cry without any reason that in the communally sensitive areas and districts their life and property are not secured. From Moradabad to Maliana the administration and Police and the PAC's criminal neglect and inefficiency and their turning away the eyes from



crimes and more often their own participation have become so common and the hands which were given guns to protect the lives of weaker sections and minorities, if those very hands are smeared with blood of the innocents, then not only Muslims but all secular minded and justice loving people protest and demand that the police be representatives of all sections of people.

Now it is no longer a secret that as far as the Meerut riots are concerned the character of the Chief Minister of U.P. Veer Bahadur Singh and his Home Minister Gopinath Dixit is not above board and these two should not continue to occupy for a minute these high posts in secular India (if India has at all remained secular upto now). But one does not know what are the compulsions of the Rajiv Government at the Centre that it is being compelled to tolerate this notoriety. But the Rajiv Government will have to think when the Chief Minister of U.P. and its Home Minister have committed such crimes that they cannot be exonerated then why should they not be removed and why it does not accept the demand for dissolving the PAC for ever? Now not Veer Bahadur Singh but Rajiv Gandhi will be answerable for this.

When Rajiv Gandhi was introducing the Russian people to the Indian culture, art and artists in Moscow through Festival of India that time many parts of Meerut were again burning due to communal riots and the greater part of the city had come under the shadow of curfew. Before this we were given good news that the Rath Yatra has passed off peacefully but within three hours of this that little peace which was established with great difficulty also vanished in thin air. . . .

The Muslims and minorities are quite restless and this restlessness can go only when political changes take place in U.P. but also the administrative machinery is thoroughly overhauled and the home ministry and all its departments are not purged of all shortcomings. Earlier Rajiv and his party does this, better it is for them because tomorrow may be decisive not only for Meerut or U.P. but for the destiny of whole of the country.

Translated from *Editorial Board of Urdu Times*  
Bombay, 4 July 1987.

## IS CHIEF MINISTER OF U.P. A DEMOCRAT ?

The Chief Minister of U.P. Mr. Vir Bahadur Singh has, in order to hide his sins, and restoring to outright fraud has caused Mr. Agarwal, the Director General of Police to retire. By retiring him he wants to show that we are quite democratic as we have suspended the Director General of Police in the matter of Meerut and Maliana.

- (1) Whereas the reality is that he was already due for retirement.
- (2) Even if the time was not over and he was removed for his responsibility in Meerut riots, we do not want to go into this aspect ; responsible he is, but not only the Director General of Police ; responsible is also the Commandant of PAC under whose supervision the PAC and the Police functioned in Meerut and at whose instance innocent Muslims were martyred by the official bullets.

First of all they (i.e. the PAC) deserve punishment and punishment not the one meted out to the Police Chief Mr. Agarwal but punishment according to the Constitution and Law of the country. They should be suspended and tried under section 302....

Justice demands that those who violated the law, are guilty of dereliction of duty and massacring innocent Muslims under inebriation of communalism be hanged, nothing less would do.

If our Government and Vir Bahadur Singh are sincere, they should not hesitate to discharge their duty. (Mere suspension would not do) as if they are suspended today, they can be promoted tomorrow. This is the old game the administration has been playing.

Is it not a joke that if some communalist belonging to the majority community is killed, the Government goes mad, the national press goes astray, but (even) if thousands belonging to the minority are massacred, no one is disturbed. What kind of democracy is this? What kind of Constitution and Law is this? It is something for the majority and something else for minority. This dualism should end and the Government must fulfill its responsibility in a proper manner. If Vir Bahadur Singh wants to hide his crime he must, without any inquiry, put to trial the PAC and the Police which was on duty in Meerut and Maliana under section 395-97 and 302 and also they should be relieved of duty and sent to prison. Nothing less than this would inspire confidence among Muslims nor would they tolerate anything else.

—From *Faisal (Jadid)*, Delhi, 11 June 1987

## OPINIONS

### Communal Riots

Sir,—What we have witnessed in Meerut, Gujarat and Bihar is nothing but the ugly face of religious lunacy. These so called religions, on whose altar thousands of innocents are sacrificed, are paradoxically professing and propagating the message of love and not hatred. An analytical and impartial approach would show that the so-called communal riots are the result of various other factors which have no connection with any religious faith.

In India one's communal feelings can very easily be instigated and provoked. The victims are normally innocent and gullible people who happen to belong to a particular religion or caste. A glaring example of this is the riot in Broach (Gujarat).

There it started with the Prohibition Squad's surprise raids on well-organised liquor dens, on whose payroll the local police force and anti-social elements are included. And the immediate consequence was a riot with a communal colour. The driving force behind this riot was, of course, the underworld kings. The nexus between these underworld kings and politicians is well-known.

In this situation the need is to educate the masses and enlighten them on the modus operandi of these anti-social elements who have been taking undue advantage all through these years. Some of the following steps could be considered by the concerned authorities.

To identify the pockets where frequent communal riots occur and find out the root cause of the same.

To form a citizens' cell consisting of people of high esteem from various walks of life to educate the masses.

To eliminate the nexus between law-enforcing authorities and anti-social elements at all levels and effect periodical transfers of police officials.

To set up a special police force exclusively trained for effectively tackling communal riots. While deploying these forces in riot-affected areas, care should be taken not to include policemen of that area. This will ensure proper and impartial exercise of their duties. As soon as normalcy is attained, these forces must be withdrawn.

All religious leaders should abstain from making inflammatory statements which would provoke a particular religion or caste.

Religious leaders should propagate virtues like peaceful co-existence, tolerance, love, amity and cooperation among their followers.

The above steps, I am sure, can create a congenial atmosphere where the sacred teachings of the Geeta, Quran, Bible and other religious books will flourish and thus pave the way for a new India, free from communal riots.

—A.G. Augustine

### Communal Riots

Sir,—It is clear that all secular-minded Indians are gravely concerned about the recent happenings in Meerut, Delhi and elsewhere. However, such riots will continue to occur and may soon become as common place as any other piece of statistics—so many dead, so many arrested, so much loss to property—unless the opinion leaders and the government show the necessary will and determination to do the following things :

1. Stop canvassing for votes on the basis of religion and caste—no more Muslim votes, Jat votes, Harijan votes etc. for election to any office.
2. Ban all communal parties immediately.
3. Ban all religious processions—in a secular society religion should be confined within the home or place of worship.
4. Arrest and detain under N.S.A. all communal leaders



who provoke and incite their communities against others.

5. Create Anti-Riot squads comprising specially trained personnel from all communities, who will be able to quickly defuse any communal build-up.

6. Act quickly upon the recommendations made by the various enquiry commissions, such as Justice Madon, Justice Saxena, etc.

Finally, one can only hope for better all-round education through which understanding, peace and harmony will result.

*Bharati Jaffrey*  
*Hameed Jaffrey*

### Riot Remedy

Sir,—Any conflict has two perpetrators and on each side invariably, there are faults which cause and worsen conflicts.

If one party withdraws, the other will have none to fight against and the conflict will disappear. On the other hand, if each side waits for peace initiatives to come from the other, before making its own conciliatory moves, then mutual mistrust grows and the inevitable result is escalation.

Hindu-Muslim communal riots are examples of such conflicts. They can be ended only by unilateral action. There are examples in the life of the Prophet of Islam which show that it is Muslim who must take the initiative.

Rivalry and conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims the world over means that the latter are unable to see Islam in its true light and see it through the tainted vision of their own prejudices. The over-riding concern for Muslims should be that the true message of Islam should reach people in all its purity and in an atmosphere conducive to dispassionate consideration. This atmosphere cannot be generated where there is conflict and mistrust. Hence, to end conflicts, Muslims must take unilateral steps for peace, without waiting for the initiative to come from the other side.

This is exactly what the Prophet did at Hudaibiya in 6 A.H. by refusing to be provoked by the Quraish's harassment and ending a 20-year old conflict by accepting all the demands. In doing so, the Prophet defused tensions between Muslims and others. This seemingly capitulatory action, the Quran tells us,

was a "clear victory" for Muslims.

If Muslims are to defuse the bomb of communal riots, they should, like the Prophet, refuse to be provoked, even in the face of grave provocation.

(Maulana) Wahiduddin Khan  
Editor-in-Chief, *Al Risala*, New Delhi

### An Appeal

Sir,—We are deeply disturbed by what is happening in Delhi, Meerut and other places in U.P. and Gujarat. This is one of the gravest crises the country has had to face since 1967 and the genocide that has taken place at Maliana by the PAC is one of the worst holocaust. We do not think we are using excessive or sensational language. A judicial enquiry commission has been appointed. At this grave moment, we suggest the following :

(1) We appeal to all religious and political leaders to refrain completely from issuing communally inflammatory statements. This applies particularly to utterances from all places of worship and other platforms.

(2) We appeal to the police to exercise utmost tact, humanity and discretion while searching places where hoarding of arms is suspected.

(3) The pattern of recent riots has shown that small incidents have been blown out of proportion and given a communal colour, it should be the duty of the residents of the locality to meet immediately and defuse tensions.

(4) We appeal to editors, editorial staff and reporters not to put one particular community in the dock, while commenting on or reporting riots.

(5) We appreciate that Ramzan I'd is one of the two holiest feasts of Muslims. However, we would earnestly request Muslim religious leaders to consider whether large assemblies this year for the I'd are in the interests of Muslims themselves. (This applies equally to the religious festivals of other communities in the near future).

(6) The government of Maharashtra, at present, is preoccupied with the octroi dispute. We feel the communal situation in Bombay and in the districts of the state is much

more menacing than the octroi. We request the state government to concentrate on this matter and work out short-term and long-term measures to resolve tensions and protect the minorities. In particular, we would recommend that it set up a protective machinery which could be activated by the would-be victims of the riots before the riots take shape. This protective machinery should be made accountable for failing to respond to appeals for help.

(7) We would make a general appeal to all genuine secular-minded citizens to come together in a positive manner and set up citizens' organisations geared towards both prevention of a riot and resolution of a riot situation in the course of its occurrence. We feel that we have had enough of post-riot reports and analyses.

*Jean Kalgutkar, Anand Patwardhan,  
Sagar Sarhadi, Iqbal Masud*

### **Cure for Communalism**

Any conflict has two perpetrators, and there are invariably faults on each side which cause and exacerbate it. It takes two to make a fight. If one party withdraws itself from the conflict, the other will have none to fight against and the conflict will disappear.

If, on the other hand, each party waits for peace initiatives to come from the other before undertaking conciliatory moves of its own, then the mistrust between the two will continue to grow.

Hindu-Muslim communal riots, which have become a regular feature of Indian life, are an example of such a conflict. They can only be ended by unilateral action from one side. There are examples in the life of the Prophet of Islam which show that it is the Muslims who should take this initiative. Worldly rivalry and conflict between Muslims and non-Muslims means that the latter view Islam not in its true light, but through the tainted vision of their own prejudice: Muslims are their enemies so they adopt an antagonistic posture towards Islam as well.

This is a situation which should be intolerable to Muslims, whose overriding concern should be for true message of Islam

to reach other people in all its purity, and in an atmosphere conducive to objective and dispassionate consideration. Seeing that such an atmosphere cannot be generated where there is conflict and mistrust, they should ensure an end to conflicts with other people; they should take unilateral steps for peace, without waiting for the initiative to come from the other side.

This is exactly what the Prophet of Islam did at Hudaibiya (6AH). By refusing to be provoked in the face of harassment from the Quraish, and accepting all their demands, he put an end to conflict which had been raging for 20 years. In doing so, he defused the tension which had marked relations between Muslims and their non-Muslim compatriots. The result of his seemingly capitulatory action, as the Quran tells us and history verifies, was a "clear victory" for the Muslims.

If the Muslims are to defuse the sitting bomb of communal riots, as it is their duty to do, they can only do so by following the example of the Prophet, and refusing to be provoked, even in the face of provocation from the other side. Failure to do this can only result in further escalation in a conflict which serves to distort Islam in the eyes of others, especially their adversaries.

*Maulana Wahidudin Khan, Editor-in-chief,  
Al-Risala, New Delhi*

While in one part of the world the "Butcher of Lyon" is brought to trial, in India the butchers of Hashimpura are roaming scot free. Our leaders undertake padayatras to restore peace and amity in Punjab, yet none is undertaken for the Muslims of Meerut. We express our sympathy for the Tamils in Sri Lanka and then go about killing our fellow citizens in India. Even after four decades of Independence we still behave like savages. We have always dreamt of living in Bapu's India, but at present we are living in Hitler's India.

*Faiz Ahmed Faizi, Calcutta*

We share the pain and anguish expressed by Mr M.J. Akbar, in "When the so-called guardians turn into communal armies, order crumbles" (June 1). We particularly agree with the comment, "To allow guilty policemen to escape is to condone



a police state." The consequences of such partisanship can be nothing short of disastrous.

*Ashis Bardhan, Asok Ghosh, Alauddin Ahmed,  
Atghara, M-Parganas (N)*

As a peace-loving citizen of India, I am ashamed that despite 40 years of Independence we are still divided. We still kill our brothers in the name of caste, creed and religion. We must do something to stop communal violence before it is too late.

*Shibli, Fatmi, Jamshedpur*

We seem very concerned over happenings in South Africa and Sri Lanka but care little when Muslims in our own country are butchered and their hearths and homes destroyed by trigger-happy policemen. Our preaching of non-violence is nothing but propaganda to hoodwink the world. Our conscience is blunted and hearts steeled, which is why not a year passes without the blood of Muslims being spilled in one part of India or another.

In order to restore the confidence of Muslims, the Vir Bahadur Singh ministry must be dismissed and President's rule imposed in Uttar Pradesh. The PAC must be disbanded and in its place, a new force consisting of secular minded people should be formed in which the minorities must be given adequate representation. Those involved in the Meerut killings should be tried for murder. And the next of kin of each riot victim must be given adequate compensation and suitable arrangements must be made for their employment.

These steps would not bring back the dead, but would wipe the tears from the eyes of the riot victims to some extent.

*Dr Sayeeduddin, Calcutta*

Communalism cannot be brought under control in Uttar Pradesh so long as a man like V.B. Singh and a force like the PAC continue to be the guardians of law and order in the state. A mere inquiry will not help ease the problem. The Centre should instead take drastic steps to curb communalism.

*Md. Khalil, Calcutta*



I would like to express my heartfelt sympathy to the Muslims who have suffered at the hands of the PAC in Meerut. M.J. Akbar's report, "When the so-called guardians turn into communal armies, order crumbles" (June 1) was hardhitting. It is vitally necessary that the PAC is punished for its inhuman deeds. How can we think of advancing into the 21st century without settling our communal problems? We were better off under the British rule, where we were all treated equally—for we were equal in our sorrows. Our only hope lies in our children, who shall grow up and learn to laugh at our follies.

*Abhay Sobti, Calcutta*

You have rightly expressed the feelings of the aggrieved Muslim community in your editorial, "A day of sadness" (May 29). I am puzzled as to why the central and state governments have not taken stern action against the culprits.

There is no dissimilarity between the PAC and the Punjab terrorists. In fact, the terror unleashed by the PAC is the worst form of terrorism. The new law against terrorism must be enforced against those involved in looting, carnage and arson in Meerut.

*Syed Ejaz Ahmad, Burnpur*

Your editorial, "A day of sadness" (May 29), deserves praise. I agree with you that what we need is a firm administrative hand, not any paperwasting inquiry, to quell riots and restore law and order.

The Uttar Pradesh government has proved totally inefficient in containing communal violence. The Centre should take prompt action against the V.B. Singh ministry. Those behind the massacre should not be spared.

*Md. Masud, Calcutta*

Thank you for your timely editorial, "A day of sadness" (May 29). It is time that the V.B. Singh ministry in Uttar Pradesh is dismissed and the PAC and those involved in the Meerut and Delhi riots are punished. The government should also provide adequate compensation to those who lost their

relations in the riots and extend loans to those whose property and business were destroyed.

*Syed Abul Hayat, Burnpur*

The Adolf Hitlers of this world do not die easily. Some are reborn in the shape of Mr Botha, a few are reincarnated in the form of President Jayewardene, the lucky ones emerge as Mr Vir Bahadur Singh and the power-hungry Syed Shahabuddin. And, of course, the less fortunate ones are recruited by the PAC.

The recent massacre of 200 men belonging to a community in Hashimpura only goes to show that the horrors of Nazism are not a thing of the past after all.

With successors as worthy as Mr. V.B. Singh and Syed Shahabuddin, Adolf Hitler must be really resting in peace.

*Abhik Dutta, Calcutta*

We have been plagued for a long time by the problem of communal riots. Yet, the greatest culprit, the PAC—the so-called peace-keeping force—has always been let off without punishment. In fact, now-a-days the government seems to support its heinous crimes, like in Maliana where PAC jawans indulged in a killing spree.

*Ashish Datt, Calcutta*

### **Three Points**

Sir,—This refers to Ms. Asha Rao's letter (IE, June 5) titled "One-sided advice" which was in response to our "Earnest appeal" (IE, May 30). Ms. Rao has specifically asked us to clarify three points in our appeal.

We have been asked why we did not direct our appeal to the Shahi Imam Bukhari who "fired the first salvo". Our reply is that in a developing situation like a communal riot it is entirely wrong to raise questions of this type.

Without doubt, the Imam should not have made the intemperate statements that he did at the Boat Club rally. However, this rally was held quite some time before the Meerut and Delhi riots, and no press report has traced a nexus between the two events. Tension was building up on both sides and there

was calculated negligence on the part of the police. In this situation instead of appealing to any one individual we appealed to all concerned, including those speaking from places of worship and other platforms.

Basically, our appeal was not a post-mortem (which Ms Rao seems to require), but an appeal to all communities and the Government to avoid the recurrence of such riots and specifying remedial measures.

With regard to the second point—police searches—raised by Ms. Rao, we submit that Doordarshan in its evening bulletin on May 28 carried a report of seven people having been killed at Maliana during house to house searches made by the PAC. A day earlier, the national dailies (including this paper) carried a report of the massacre of more than 50 people at Maliana, also by the PAC. Our reference was specifically to this incident.

The atrocities committed by the PAC in Maliana have been by now well documented by several journals, including "India Today," and, therefore, our appeal for "tact, humanity and discretion" in these searches is justified.

The third point raised by Ms. Rao is the apportioning of blame for the riots. She places the minority community squarely in the dock. We feel this is a side-stepping of the basic issue, which is whether there was any political will on the part of the administration in Meerut and Delhi to stop the situation from developing into a large-scale riot.

All press reports, without exception, argue that no such resolve was evident; neither was there any evidence of political will on the part of the Central Government to solve the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy to the satisfaction of both communities, which is clearly the major cause of communal tension in Meerut, Delhi and other places.

We maintain that in view of this conclusion, to try and blame one community is to play into the hands of communalists.

Almost all riots in post-Independent India are the result of collusion between the administration and communal elements, the most recent and obvious case being the anti-Sikh riots of November 1984.

The response to our appeal has been very positive and heartening—judging by the letters received directly by us. With all

due respect to Ms. Rao, her letter should not be taken as an indication of the general feeling among more thoughtful and concerned citizens.

One more flash-point may be reached when, according to reliable reports, the Rath Yatra will be taken out in early July in Gujarat. We would request the State Government to take every step possible to avoid a recurrence of riots—a blood-bath in the case of Gujarat—which are generally sparked off by religious processions.

*Jean Kalgutkar, Sagar Saradhi,  
Anand Patwardhan, Iqbal Masud  
45, Nair Road, Bombay-400008*

### **Painful Silence**

Sir—The death of seven people in the police lock-up at Meerut is not an isolated case. Between that the police had many other similar achievements, the most infamous being the Bhagalpur blinding case. What was shocking was the timing of the crime (on the eve of Id), not to speak of the painful silence of our leaders whose compassion for the community spills over on the slightest pretext and who leave no stone unturned to champion their cause in the Shah Bano and personal law issues.

I did not find the women's wing of any party voicing sympathy for the mothers who received the bodies of their sons on the eve of the happiest day of the year, with a warning to bury them before dawn. I did not find any Arif Muhammad Khan resigning or Mr Justice Masood or Dr. Anwara Khatoon condemning the brutality. Perhaps they want to keep intact their "holier than thou" image.

Communalism is diffused throughout India. There is no place where we might hope it would cease to exist. Something should be done to check this and save our country from ruin.

—Yours, etc.,  
*M. Jameel, Calcutta*

### **Deny Publicity to Communalism**

Sir—On May 24, Mark Tully, the BBC correspondent in India, gave a vivid and detailed description of the riots in Meerut and Delhi. According to him, they are due entirely to



the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi controversy. But linking a motive to problems and events does not seem to be justified.

True, leaders of the two communities have not yet come to a settlement. But if the media goes on identifying the Mandir-Masjid issue as the origin of all communal conflicts, that could be interpreted as an attempt to give it more publicity, to the detriment of national unity.

The Ayodhya dispute is a test case which, if settled carefully and generously, will bring glory to both communities. Fanatic segments should realize that violence to end this controversy will only prolong it indefinitely.

Those searching for an amicable solution may look for a precedent in Kerala where a site was claimed by both Hindus and Catholics. Hindus took their stand on the basis of a temple nearby while Catholics pointed to an ancient Cross found standing there.

Communal feelings ran high and violence was expected any day, any time. But the Catholic Bishops were able to convince their people that they had a moral duty to show greater generosity to opponents who belonged to the majority community. The dispute was settled peacefully by stipulating that the church would be given another site. This way politicians were prevented from playing their dirty game.

Leaders of other communities in India would do well to keep this good example in mind. The media should also try to suppress communalism.

Yours etc.,

*S.G. Mampilli, New Delhi*

### **Communal Riots**

Sir,—Mr. Rajiv Gandhi and Mr. Buta Singh have come out with the expected condemnation of the communal riots in Meerut and Delhi. As usual, the administration has reacted late to the situation. Mr. Buta Singh acknowledges as much in his statement that “the happenings were of such a dimension that the administration was not fully geared for it”.

Are the authorities ever properly geared to react appropriately to any of the “happenings” that disturb the peace and progress of the nation? I seem to recall that the “restructured”



20-Point programme had made much of the concluding point, which spoke of "a responsive administration". I wonder why the well advertised "managerial approach" to governance which Mr. Gandhi once used to trumpet (and which is presumably being used) has not yet created an administration that is properly responsive to the signs and portents of such incidents in a community.

A properly responsive administration can, in most cases, nip such happenings in the bud or at least minimize their severity. Perhaps Mr. Gandhi is using an ineffective version of such a "managerial approach"—which is why his Government is so incomplete in everything it has tried, whether the issue be to eradicate corruption, or to create an effective "new educational policy", or to help the drought-stricken in Orissa, or properly to manage relations with the President.

*G.S. Chandy, Bangalore*

### Drastic Steps Needed

Your coverage of the recent riots in Delhi and Meerut was excellent. The question now is, what are the steps that the government is taking, or at least contemplating, against those responsible for the gruesome violence? And when is chief minister Vir Bahadur Singh going to resign?

Both the violence in Meerut and the recent massacre in Bihar call for drastic step from the Centre. But while Mr. Bindeshwari Dubey, Bihar chief minister, has reportedly been put under pressure to relinquish his office, no similar action seems to have been initiated against the Uttar Pradesh chief minister. There is no doubt that the general state of lawlessness in Bihar is assuming very serious dimensions. But the massacre by a part of of the law-enforcing machinery in Meerut was far more dastardly. Yet the government responded only with empty promises of inquiry.

The government cannot hope to heal the wounds of the affected people with long-winded inquiries that ultimately serve no purpose. Such callousness only increases feelings of insecurity among the minority community.

*Md. Adnan, Salmaan Ali,  
Jamshedpur*

Communalism can never be expected to be brought to an end in the State of Uttar Pradesh as long as a man like Mr. V.B. Singh remain at the helm of affairs and a communally motivated force like the PAC continues to be the guardian of law and order there. It is puzzling as to why the Union government has not initiated stern action against those responsible for the massacre of innocent people in Meerut and Maliana.

It is obvious that the state government has bungled in its duties towards the people of Uttar Pradesh judging from the way it has handled the riots. It is high time that Mr. V.B. Singh was dismissed by the Prime Minister and deserving punishments were meted out to the culprits. The failure of Mr. Rajiv Gandhi to do so would only mean that gruesome violence had his tacit support.

*N. Ahmed, Jamshedpur*

Casteist, ethnic and communal tensions are threatening to tear our country apart. People are not only getting used to but also growing impervious to news of violence emanating from Bihar, Punjab, Meerut or Delhi. This is most unfortunate considering that India was once held in high esteem the world over for its unique characteristic of unity in diversity.

Before independence, people of 11 communities—Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis, *et al*—stood up unitedly under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi to achieve freedom from foreign rule. In independent India, this bond of communal amity has been greatly undermined.

If things continue going this way there is no future for this country. It is now for the present generation to rebuild the bridges between the different communities.

*Gurvinder Singh Dhillon, Calcutta*

Over 150 innocent Muslims were reportedly killed by PAC jawans during the recent disturbances in Uttar Pradesh. The only punishment that was meted out for this was that a PAC officer was called back by the state government and asked to provide an explanation.

In contrast, when eight Hindus were burnt to death in mob violence in Ahmedabad, the Gujarat Sessions court judge,

sentenced five Muslim residents of the disturbed locality to death. It remains to be seen how many of the guilty PAC men treated the same way.

*Y. Patel, Calcutta*

Apropos of your editorial "V.B. Singh must be sacked" (June 2), I would like to point out that riots are not new to Meerut and its surrounding areas. Prior to independence there were riots in and around Meerut which did, to some extent, contribute to the waning of the British power in India. However, the riots that take place now only contribute to the destabilisation of our nation.

The recent riots which took a huge toll of innocent lives can leave no one in doubt regarding the level of efficiency of V.B. Singh government. Instead of performing its assigned duty of maintaining law or order, the PAC went on the rampage killing innocent people and destroying property. Yet the Uttar Pradesh government, for all practical purposes, just sat back and watched. The failure to tackle the situation swiftly amply proves that the administration in the state has virtually collapsed. It is time that President's rule be imposed in Uttar Pradesh.

*Sudhir Kumar Mishra*  
Tarbha, Orissa

Your report regarding the recent riots in Meerut as well as the editorial, "V.B. Singh must be sacked" (June 2), were eye-openers. It is most shocking that state government officials should be involved in such a gruesome carnage, either through direct assistance or indirectly by closing their eyes to the crime and trying to hush it up.

Since the Uttar Pradesh government will obviously not take any action on its own, the press must take it upon itself to ensure that proper and immediate action is initiated against the PAC hooligans in uniform. For murder so foul, mere suspension or transfers would be too lenient a punishment.

*R. Bhattacharji, Shillong*  
—From *Telegraph*, 23 June 1987

### **PAC not Culpable**

Syed Shahabuddin has, while talking to Jyoti Malhotra (May 31), poured venom on the PAC. But it was he and

Bukhari who ordered the Muslim youths to fight on the streets. No armed forces are expected to remain silent when confronted with sophisticated arms like sten-guns, machine-guns and bombs. The PAC deserves all praise for restraint under heavy pressure.

*Tatya Tendulkar, Kolhapur*

— Interviews with communal persons like Shahabuddin do not serve any purpose.

*Nirmal Singh, Bhopal*

— Shahabuddin's suggestion that recruitment to the police force be made on a communal basis is a remedy worse than the disease itself. It must be recalled that towards the end of the British rule in India, all government services were communalised with the Muslim representing around 50 percent, which eventually brought about the partition of the country.

*V.V. Phatak, Bombay*

### Disband PAC

I refer to Shankarshan Thakur's report "Terrified villagers recount rampage by PAC jawans" (May 26).

The role of this notorious force has always been a terrifying one, be it at Moradabad, Allahabad, or now Meerut. Even children, the sick and the very old are not spared by these organised bunch of thugs.

Armed men posted in Meerut have severely criticised the role of the PAC jawans, who were actively involved in killing and looting. Has the time not come for the authorities to seriously think of disbanding the PAC before it is too late?

*Imran Ahmed, Calcutta*

I write with deep regret and stock on the role of the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC) in the recent riots in Meerut. Do they deserve the title "constable" when they kill, loot houses, molest women and remain a silent spectator to the sufferings of the common people?

The Uttar Pradesh government was quick to restrict the movement of the Shahi Imam and other Muslim leaders, but is satisfied with the PAC. The virus of communalism is being

allowed to spread by the administration and helpless people are falling victims to this communal game.

*Mrs Shamim Ahmed, Jamshedpur*

There is no need for us to feel threatened by the Islamic bomb. India is being destroyed by its own communal bomb.

*B.R. Rao, Jamshedpur*

Nothing is more harmful to our national integrity and secular status than the rapidly increasing communal forces. I appreciate the Prime Minister's warning of firm action against the rioters and anti-socials in Meerut and Delhi. Drastic action is certainly needed against those involved in looting, arson and butchering of the innocent. But I would like to know what our Prime Minister thinks of the negligence of the Uttar Pradesh government and the despicable game of the infamous PAC in the riot-torn areas. Is Mr Gandhi contemplating action against them?

The Prime Minister should immediately take firm action against the troublemakers and also punish the lax administration of Uttar Pradesh. He should also take steps to reorganise the PAC.

*Syed Ejaj Ahmed, Burnpur,  
The Telegraph*





**PART IV**  
**INTERVIEWS**



*Syed Shahabuddin*

**WE CAN REFORM THE PAC, BUT WHEN THE  
INTELLIGENTSIA TURNS COMMUNAL, WHERE  
DO WE GO?**

*Jyoti Malhotra interviewed Janata MP, Syed  
Shahabuddin, on Friday on the Meerut riots.*

*Do you feel the Meerut riots were in any way different from the other riots that have taken place since partition?*

Over the years the phenomenon of communal violence in our country has changed. And, therefore, not only Meerut but in most places riots have taken on the colour of a confrontation between the Muslim minority and the state police force. Thirty/forty years ago riots were primarily confrontations between Hindu mobs and Muslim mobs. Or you had Muslim mobs attacking Hindu localities or Hindu mobs attacking Muslim localities. The law and order machinery, with exceptions, was more or less neutral and they used the force at their command to quell violence. I noticed the change in Moradabad. I found there that the police had used its bullets but the casualties in Muslim mohallas were Muslims. So I asked this simple, commonsense question: I said, obviously it was not Muslim mobs which were attacking Muslim mohallas, it must have been a non-Muslim mob. And if the police came there to suppress violence, then the victims largely should have been non-Muslims (in Muslim mohallas, as in Hindu mohallas under Muslim attack the casualties would have been Muslims); but no, here there are Muslim casualties in Muslim mohallas, how do you explain that?

From there I began probing and came to the conclusion that basically it is not the Hindu masses or the Muslim masses which are involved today in communal violence. There are anti-social elements in every community and they avail of every opportunity of looting, killing, etc. But basically the casualties in a riot arise when the police supports anti-social elements, when the police provides the fire power....

*The anti-social elements may be Hindu or Muslim....*

Of course, I cannot rule out the possibility of Muslim anti-social elements attacking wherever they have a chance. For example, in Meerut itself, on Hapur road most of the arson has been committed by Muslims. But in most instances today, the casualties in riots as a whole are due to police firing, and they are largely one-sided. It is the police vs the Muslim community.

Look at Maliana. The victims are hundred per cent Muslim. And you ask them—after all human life is valuable and in every civilized society you give information about who has been killed. When? Where? How? This information is simply not available here.

So you ask a basic question, have the riots undergone a change? My answer is that largely the configuration of the riots today is not mob vs mob or mob vs. locality. It is largely a community faced with state violence. And this is a very horrifying state of affairs because if a community loses confidence in the law and order machinery, if it looks upon the police as an enemy, then it is bound to make its own preparations. And this is what is happening all over the place. The PAC, particularly in Uttar Pradesh, has acquired such a notoriety—in 1972 Mr. Madhu Dandavate inquired into the PAC's role in the Ferozabad riots, in 1982 he alongwith a parliamentary team went to Meerut and denounced the PAC, in 1980 I enquired into the Moradabad riots and it was wholly the PAC's brutality—and yet it remains as it is, untouched, unrepentant.

The National Integration Council (NIC) passed a resolution that the armed constabulary should be restructured so that it reflects the population in the area. It did not mean that any-



body was calling for a reservation, but that the people were conscious of the fact that a police force should be a composite force. You cannot bring peace to Punjab by having purely a Sikh force. You cannot bring peace to UP by having purely a Hindu force, it must have a Muslim face also.

*What did you find in Meerut when you went there?*

You know the real trouble started on 18th morning. The police went to arrest some people in connection with the April disturbances. I don't know why they chose to do so now when the situation had become normal. But anyway, they went at 4 a.m. during *sehri*. They arrested some people, it created a commotion. Women and children came out of their homes and lay down before the police jeeps, the jeeps over-ran them. One child was killed on the spot, women were fired at.

After this, naturally when there is lack of confidence and the Muslims say, 'This PAC has come to burn us, to loot us' — and the PAC enters Muslim mohallas as if it is entering a war zone, it is invading a foreign country — the result is confrontation. And then there was an announcement from the mosque addressing the police force, 'We are warning you, don't enter our area, if you do so then we shall also do whatever we can.' And that was the beginning. So where was the Hindu mob?

Then within a day they sealed off the Muslim mohallas, and in the mixed bazaar area the police got the anti-social elements to collect together to pick and attack, burn and loot Muslim shops.

Is this a riot? This is not a riot. So how do I blame my Hindu brothers? I cannot blame my Hindu brothers. I only blame this government or its machinery.

*But is this state machinery synonymous with the Hindu fanatic element?*

Well, the government or the party in power may have a political purpose, but if after the decision of the NIC or after Mrs. Gandhi's 15-point directive which was issued after the 1982 Meerut riots that the minority should be better represented in the police force etc., if nothing happens, what conclusion can you draw? I know nothing can be done overnight, but five years

have passed. Obviously then the government wants to say one thing and do another. Everybody says the PAC behaves in a communal manner, in a criminal manner and yet you do nothing about it. So I can only draw the conclusion that you had a certain purpose.

Look at Maliana. What the PAC has done is now well-known. Is there any civilized country in the world where such a force would not have been disbanded and asked to go back to the barracks, placed under arrest and then tried? We talk about atrocities in South Africa, in Sri Lanka. You tell me, does human life have no value? There are eyewitness reports that people were brought in trucks to the Hindon river and shot. One person who fled into the bushes is alive and I will produce him before the press. Dead bodies are coming out all over the place in two canals, the Hindon and Ganges canals and the government knows nothing, sees nothing.

How can we be proud of being Indians. Nobody has been permitted to go into the Muslim mohallas until day before yesterday. In Meerut do you know that the Muslim women I met in the collectorate told me that they had gone without food or water for seven days. May be Maliana shall touch our conscience and bring into sharp focus what needs to be done. It is a mere hour's drive from here, but so was Nellie only 35 km from Guwahati and yet 3000 people were killed.

*So you feel that there should be a Muslim component to the police force?*

I'm not talking about a Muslim component, I'm talking about a composite force. In UP, for example, the tradition has become that the force does not comprise only of Hindus, but even among the Hindus it is made up of a particular caste. So when the PAC goes to a Harijan locality it commits the same atrocities.

We cannot afford this segmentation. When our Hindu brothers were fleeing from Punjab I spoke to Barnala. I said that the only way you can prevent this from happening is to take all the Hindu policemen and put them in the thanas in the four most affected districts—the Hindus will automatically have confidence in them.

*There were three Central ministers in Meerut : Buta Singh, P. Chidambaram....*

(Interrupting): But what did they do there? That's what I want to ask. I have charged that everytime Mr. Veer Bahadur Singh goes to where a riot has taken place his visit exacerbates the situation. Instead of quenching the fires he gives the police a pat on the back and says, 'You are great, go ahead, give them a good, sound beating.'

*But Mrs. Mohsina Kidwai is the MP from Meerut....*

I don't want to speak about Mrs. Mohsina Kidwai. Do you know that she wasn't even allowed to participate in consultations. If she had the slightest sense of self-respect she should have resigned from the Cabinet. But these Congress men and women are devoid of self-respect. It is her constituency, it is her voters who are being killed and what has she done? Has she gone to any locality which has been riot-affected? When she went there she went to the Circuit House, from there she apparently went to the hospital and then she came to Delhi. And I am receiving call after call from Meerut that we are besieged.

*Apart from the PAC, who else was significant in Meerut....*

One, that people were killed, some of them burnt, in localities like Shastri Nagar, which is not a locality inhabited by anti-social elements. These are upper-middle, upper-class people, educated intelligentsia. I don't mind if Hindu goondas fight Muslim goondas. I don't even mind if the PAC commits atrocities because tomorrow we can reform the PAC. But after all the communal virus, like war, begins in the minds of men and if our intelligentsia is affected by this virus then what, where do we go from here? This is the essential question of Meerut. How could a poet like Bashir Badar's house be burnt, how could a son of Dr. Harpal Singh (a doctor who has lived there for decades) be killed? This is the question.

The other aspect of Meerut is that when people are in distress, they have nowhere to go to. So that is why in a statement I appealed to the secular forces, 'put yourself between the people and the administration'.

*There have been charges that in Meerut the Muslims have hoarded weapons over a period of time and used them in the riot?*

I don't buy this theory of large-scale hoarding, but, if I am afraid, if I face a threat and if I don't have trust in the forces of law and order, then what shall I do? Shall I not make a defensive preparation? Hindus told me that every house in Meerut has weapons, whether you search Hindu or Muslim localities. The problem is that if you search only Muslim areas then obviously you blame only Muslims.

Tell me, if out of desperation and out of frustration, the police is hitting you from one side and you don't know where to go and some men in anger say, 'All right if we have to die, we shall die but we shall burn up this place'. Do you blame them? After all, anger and desperation comes out of frustration. And this is what happened. On the 19th morning after Imliyan Mohalla was attacked the Muslim youth came out on the other side and burnt up Hapur road. There is no doubt in my mind that was done by Muslims. ➤

*What should you do now, with Meerut?*

Firstly, you should open up the place, because there is no better disinfectant than sunlight. And there is no better curative than truth. And then in every locality make it a rule that it is the responsibility of the local majority community to be responsible for the life and property of the minority. You must create a vested interest in social peace. Secondly, please take away this monster of a PAC, its very sight inspires revenge. I tell you, then Meerut will have peace. And if you want to inspire confidence at least catch the culprits of Maliana because you must know who they are, disarm them and try them in a proper judicial manner. Fourthly, let the government be generous, go and rebuild their homes, give the widows a job.

*From Sunday Observer, 31 May 1987*

*Bir Bahadur Singh*

## **“WE NEVER EXPECTED THIS”**

The 52-year-old Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Vir Bahadur Singh is known for his political acumen and ability to survive crises. But last fortnight when communal violence in Meerut, for the second time in less than eight weeks, threatened to spread to other parts of the state, he was faced with the worst political crisis since he took office 20 months ago. Singh, who has recently been flying all over the country in search of new capital, found himself confined to the riot-torn city for a week. Curiously, the high death toll hardly seemed to have affected his morale. He spoke to visiting politicians and journalists with confidence, giving the impression that nothing new or serious had happened there. Senior Editor, Prabhu Chawla talked to him for more than an hour. Excerpts from the interview :

*Q.* What do you think was the cause of the riots ?

*A.* I can't give you a specific answer on this now. I have ordered a CID inquiry. But I must clear the impression that it is the worst-ever riot. In 1982, the riots continued for over two months and more people were killed then. We have been able to restore normalcy in Meerut in less than two weeks.

*Q.* How many were killed then ?

*A.* I don't have the exact figures with me but the toll was definitely higher.



*Q.* Do you also agree with the Union Home Minister Buta Singh's view that the riots were pre-planned ?

*A.* I can only say one thing. Both the communal and anti-social elements exploited the religious sentiments of the people to create a law and order problem.

*Q.* It is believed there was tension in Meerut since the last riot. What preventive steps did you take ?

*A.* We never expected this. It had cooled down. But now it appears that plans were quietly being made. The CID and the Administration always maintained that nothing would happen. They had arrested the anti-social elements.

*Q.* The State is acquiring a bad image now ?

*A.* I don't know why only Uttar Pradesh is making headlines. It is not the only State which is affected.

*Q.* On the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid issue, you have been accused of following a pro-Hindu line.

*A.* This is an absurd allegation. Did I take any personal or administrative decisions in this case ? Courts in the country are independent and can't be forced to work on communal considerations.

*Q.* What have you done as Chief Minister in this regard?

*A.* I have given directions to restructure the entire police force, including the PAC, in the state. Their training programme is being reworked so that the policemen acquire a secular outlook. Special battalions are being raised in which all the communities will be proportionately represented. We are also reviewing school-books to see that they are free of communal content.

*Q.* But politicians always pander to communal elements during elections.

*A.* That is not true of our party. We don't encourage communal elements. We believe in the protection of the rights of the minorities.

*Q.* But your state police is full of communal elements.

*A.* The entire force is not communal. We are looking into some specific complaints and will take stern action.

*Q.* It seems that you are losing grip not only on the administration but on your cabinet colleagues as well.

*A.* I don't think this is true. I enjoy the full support of my party and the Cabinet.

*Q.* Don't you feel that your image as a business-like chief minister suffered ?

*A.* No. I meant business when I took over. I took disciplinary action and dismissed senior officials. I directed all my cabinet colleagues to be in office by 10 a.m. and not to leave the city without my permission.

*Q.* But the law and order situation has worsened.

*A.* Absolutely not. In fact, it is the best during the last five years. There have been no gang killings, roadside robberies, daylight murders and dacoities. Ours is the most peaceful state today.

*Q.* As far as communal situation is concerned, is the worst over?

*A.* Yes. But we have to guard ourselves against any eventuality. It can be done through dialogue and persuasion. We are going to sort out the Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid conflict with the help of local people.

*Q.* Is there no immediate threat to your leadership?

*A.* Yes, I believe so. I enjoy the full support of the party high command and have complete freedom to handle any political and administrative situation. There is no political crisis.



**PART V**  
**WHAT APPEARED IN THE**  
**LANGUAGE PRESS**





## ALAM BHAI'S SLAP ON THE FACE OF DELHI COMMUNALISTS

Those who hold any one community responsible for the Old Delhi riots and spread communal poison should meet Kanchan, a seven year old girl and his 40 year old mother Jaya Tiwari in the emergency ward of Jay Prakash Narayan Hospital (Irwin Hospital). They should be sent to Rekaraganj, behind Delite Cinema where on the night of 22 May during curfew hours 100,125 Hindus and Sikhs enjoyed the hospitality of Muslims who had sought refuge in the mosque and spent the night there.

What Vijaya Tiwari of Kucha Pandit says with the head of her injured daughter in her lap and what Maulana Muhammad Yaqub Qureshi and Kashmirilal say is a big slap on the face of those who want to creat cleavage among those families who have been living together for generations.

Kanchan was hit with a bullet on the head during the disturbances. The person who took this Hindu child to hospital risking his life amidst the barrage of soda water bottles, stones and bullets, his name is Alambhai. Kanchan's mother also does not know what is the full name of Alambhai but she says he is like my father-in-law, or my father. There is no relation greater than this. Had Alambhai's family not saved us, none of us would have survived. He called us to his house the moment disturbances began. Our whole family (Vijaya's family) is still in their house. They eat there and sleep there and Alambhai after getting the girl admitted to the hospital has been

living here and there. He sleeps in the mosque and prays for Kanchan's recovery. Curfew has prevented him from going home. On the day of disturbances the police arrested five brothers, sons and nephews of Alambhai. He is searching for members of Corporation so that they may help him getting them released from the clutches of police. But the leaders and corporators are busy issuing statements against the riots. Alambhai every day comes to the hospital to inquire about the girl. He consoles her mother and asks her to have trust in God.

Kanchan's family lives in house no. 3453 above Amar Press in Kucha Pandit. Just behind it is Alambhai's house, said Kanchan's mother. "When the Friday prayer was over peacefully on 22 May, we heaved a sigh of relief. But the crowd passing through the lane did not seem to be well-intentioned. Suddenly we heard the sound of attack and hue and cry. People were running helter-skelter. We did not know what to do. Then Alambhai jumped into our house from the side-terrace and told us, "Outside miscreants are rioting. You immediately come to our house otherwise you may not be safe." And then Alambhai hurriedly took Kanchan and her 17 years old sister Beli and her mother and Father Amarnath Tiwari to his house via his terrace. He also, at his own risk, took 8 employees of Amar Press below to his house. Kanchan's mother said that when we reached Alambhai's house his daughter-in-law told us to remove sari and put on *shalwar kamiz* (North Indian Muslim dress) so that the rioters should not recognize.

"We were all sitting with Alambhai's family behind closed door. On the terrace were the men of armed police and CRP. Suddenly a bullet fired from a terrace pierced the door and fell down after hitting Kanchan's head. Her face was covered with blood. We were sitting with our injured daughter for more than one hour. Police was not allowing us to go out. After one hour the police knocked at the door and as soon as the door opened they arrested sons, nephews and brothers of Alambhai. I kept on pleading that they have done nothing. They are all sitting inside. This family has saved our lives. But no one listened to me." The suffering mother said that Alambhai took injured Kanchan to hospital and did not allow

anyone to accompany. He reached the police-van hiding himself here and there and got her admitted into the hospital. . . . When she reached there (i.e. Kanchan's mother) she was being operated.

Many such Shams Arif and Alambhais are also found in Rekabganj of Daryaganj mohalla who (i.e. the Qureshis of the area) gave refuge to hundreds of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims in the nearby mosque. They used to bring food from their houses to feed these distressed people. The Imam of Badi Masjid, Muhammad Yaqub Qureshi, Muhammad Shafi Qureshi and others are witnesses to the fact that how many Hindu women were taken safely to their houses. Kashmirilal said that in this mosque people of all religions took refuge. The unity which we have would be hardly found elsewhere. We celebrate all festivals together. Imam said solemnly, "Don't be surprised. He is Hindu and is sitting inside the mosque at night despite tension outside. You would not like to know more than this perhaps." Kashmirilal has been living here for generations. He has his toy factory in Karol Bagh known as Rekha Toy Industries. He said that we have not seen any riot here after 1947. The Qureshi butchers and the Jats have set an example of communal harmony.

—From *Bebak*, Malegaon

(Reproduced from Hindi Daily *Jansatta*, 25 May 1987)

## AN ATTEMPT TO HIDE PAC'S CRIME

*Virendra Sengar*

When PAC's butchery at Meerut could not be suppressed inspite of all the efforts of officers of UP government including those of its Chief Minister, efforts are being made to distort the facts. So much so that when the Prime minister Rajiv Gandhi visited Meerut, he had to face "PAC Zindabad" slogans. The "official butchers" are being given all protection and efforts are being made to suppress the voice of relatives of PAC victims of Hashimpura Muhalla.

When the facts could not be suppressed, the administration made all efforts to present a distorted picture of actual happenings. During this campaign the investigating journalists were fed with the information by the administration that all those killed by PAC were Pakistanis who were in Meerut to create troubles and some of them might not be Pakistanis but were very dangerous.

This reporter after investigation learnt that there is no truth in official report. All those killed were the residents of Hashimpura area and belonged to one community.

Janata Party President Shri Chandra Shekhar presented before the reporters at Delhi a young man named Zulfikar Nasir on June 1st who was carried on the truck at Hashimpura and he was thrown in the Ganga Canal after being shot. Fortunately he was slightly injured and alive. He narrated the entire incident.

Next day when the above news was flashed in newspapers, the District collector of Meerut Mr. Radheshyam Kaushik contradicted the report and said to the local newspaper reporters

on 2 June that Zulfikar is not a resident of Hashimpura and the person presented by Shri Chandra Shekar is not real.

The District Collector's statements proved completely false after investigations. Zulfikar is a resident of Hashimpura and this Reporter met his family members. Nasir's mother kept on weeping and his father Abdul Jabbar is behind bars. In this context the District Collector could not be contacted inspite of several telephone calls.

I met several persons who lost their near and dear ones in this mansalughter. Let us hear Zulfikar Nasir's own version of the happening's before we rekon the report of other affected families.

The 17 year old Zulfikar has studied upto High School. Even after a lapse of 12 days, his eyes are full of fright. He said that PAC Jawans fired for three hours on 22nd May in our Hashimpura Mohalla. The residents of our Mohalla at first retaliated for some time by throwing stones—thereafter they ducked out of fear.

Few hours after the firing stopped, the Army and the PAC made people sit outside their houses under the pretext of taking search. About 500 people were made to sit on the road. Then they screened the old, the sick, and the children. Then the remaining, about 200, were loaded on five PAC trucks. The truck which was loaded last, I was made to board it.

The truck had started in the evening, I do not know along which path it proceeded but when the truck was parked near Ganga Canal some people had said that this is the Murad Nagar Canal . . . . First Yasin (50 year old) was made to get down and was shot dead. Second Ashraf was shot and I was third to be shot when they were lining me up for being shot I was shivering. For this reason they missed the shot. The bullet passed bruising the lower part of my hand. I fell down, immediately after I was hit and I tried to hold my breath to save myself. As soon as I fell down I was thrown into the canal. Therefore, I could not see who among others were shot though I was hearing the sound of firing and cries of the people.

When I started flowing in the canal I caught its side-wall and kept on hanging on to it. I remained in that position for half an hour and kept on waiting so that I could come out after



the truck leaves.

When the truck left I crawled out. Blood was flowing from my hand. I had seen many people being thrown into the water but I was not in a position to do anything. After sometime my fellow boy Arif came near me. He was not hit with the bullet because when people were being shot he had jumped from the truck into the canal. Many bullets were fired at him after he jumped but he remained safe. We both were greatly afraid. When we were coming out of the canal we saw that injured Qamruddin was crying with pain at some distance . . . . Qamruddin was hit with many bullets. Lot of blood had flown from his body. He was saying again and again, "Nasir you run and save your life. I will not survive." At last I ran away seeing an opportunity. I began hiding when people followed me. And then I hid myself in a urinal near an electric house on Murad Nagar Road. One Darogha kept on searching for me until morning. I was hearing his voice 'Sala Kaha Bhag gaya' (Where the swine has run away). I hid myself for full fifteen hours . . . . A Janata party leader Shri Ansari took me to Delhi. ʻ

Among the survivors there is another youth called Naim. He had also jumped into the canal from the truck. He stayed with the Uncle in Razapur near Ghaziabad after the incident. His statement about the incident fully corroborates Zulfikar's statement. He says for sure that he saw 15-16 people being shot. When he saw there was no way to survive, he jumped into the canal from the truck. Naim gave the information that along with Arif in all three persons jumped but, one was hit with the bullet in the water itself. Naim has also given the name of the boy hit with the bullet.

Naim is so terrified that he is not sure whether he will be able to survive in future.

In order to know what happened to Kamruddin who was left behind by Arif and Zulfikar, Saleem Ahmed kept on visiting Ghaziabad police Station for 10 days. But no one gave any information to him. At last a Darogha from Muradnagar police station took pity and told him that when the police party was taking injured Kamruddin to Hospital he died and the body was sent for postmortem. It was from

police that Jamaluddin, father of Kamruddin got photo of his body and the last ray of hope was also extinguished.

When the hapless Jamaluddin went home with the confirmed news of his son's death to Hashimpura, this reporter was present there. A pall of gloom fell on the whole lane and a wave of cry went up hearing the news of death.

One D.M. Khan of this Mohalla said that since this PAC massacre all those who are missing from their homes are being suspected to have died.

On enquires it came to light that many who were loaded on trucks on 22nd May, many of them are in jails. A list has also been sent from the jail. But those people who are not in jail or police station, it is difficult to know the exact number of such people but there are about hundreds of such persons about whom nothing is known. People suspect that the PAC has slaughtered more than 40 youth.

From *Chauthi Duniya Weekly*, 13 June 1987

## WHAT WE SAW IN MEERUT? WHAT WE SAW IN SAYHANA? TWO SIDES OF COIN

*Peace March by Sadiya Dehlavi*

It was the fifth day of riots in Meerut. There was dreadful and painful silence. There was no one on the roads for miles except the police. There was bullet marks on the walls of the houses. It was the scene of day of reckoning inside the mohallahs. We saw with our own eyes the shattered pieces of human heads struck with bullets. Innocent widows were crying and asking why did it happen. Who will look after their children now?

The powerlooms inside the houses were burnt. One 80 year old man told us weeping that his young son and grand daughter both became victims of bullets. We could not even go out to burry them due to curfew. He burried his children in the lane outside. There were strewn bodies of dead animals inside lanes. They died because of starvation. People had nothing to eat inside mohallahs ; people were not venturing to go out of their houses due to fear.

Seeing such soul-searing conditions, neither could I swallow anything nor could I sleep at nights. I felt totally helpless. We are killing each other even after 40 years of independence. Alas, we have kept our identity as Hindu, Muslim and Sikh rather than as Indians. Why such aggressive communalism spreading in a country for whose freedom all fought together? It is weakening the very roots of our country.

We have resolved to fight against this fast spreading communalism. To revive Gandhiji's ways we decided to go on peace march to Meerut. We collected youth of different religions and started from the Boat Club, Delhi, for Meerut, on foot. In the searing sun and intolerable heat we kept on walking. For the first time we saw some regions of Jamuna. It was difficult to believe Delhi has spread so much. It was evening before we left the boundaries of Delhi. On the way people kept on walking with us for some distance. We reached Mohan Nagar at about 6.30 P.M. where we stayed for the night. . . . We got up at 4 in the morning and came on the highway after bathing at 5. . . . We passed through some villages also. We felt very happy to visit Sayhana in Ghaziabad district. We felt as if we had reached an oasis after losing our way in a desert. Hindus and Muslims live in perfect unity there. Hindus contribute for the *madrasas* there. With great pride the people of that village told us that not a single person has been killed here since 1947. In such a village we see bright future for India and we tend to be convinced that humanity is still alive.

In cities where fire of prejudice and communalism is spreading, in villages people's conscience is still like a minaret of light. There is fraternity, sympathy and love among them. There is still sincerity and simplicity among the people in villages. . . . We were pleased to see the political consciousness of these village people. . . . Everywhere we gave the message that we should adopt non-violent ways of Gandhiji and should unite to fight against injustice and oppression.

That day we walked 23 kilometers in scorching sun. Due to intensity of heat our lips went dry and our feet developed sores. But we neither felt pain nor the scorching sun. . . . We reached Meerut at about 1 P.M. There many people had collected to welcome us. In the evening we went to many mohallahs with the message of peace. We were relieved to see that tension was decreasing. We were also convinced that if people have noble motive, God gives them courage, fortitude and energy.

Translated from *Qaumi Tarjuman*, Lucknow

## TEN IMPORTANT QUESTIONS ABOUT MEERUT

1. When tension had spread in Meerut city on the death of Ajay Sharma, why efforts were not made to defuse it by showing it as a consequence of mutual enmity and why arrangements were not made to stall the possibility of riot.

2. Why the 38 companies present in Meerut for riots which continued upto 17 April were withdrawn when the possibility of eruption of riots was very much there ?

3. Every child in Meerut knows that usually there is communal tension there. Why then no arrangement was made for the same ?

4. Meerut city and district have been under communal tension for the past several years. Why then licences for arms were issued. Presently there are 17 thousand licensed arms in Meerut. One additional district magistrate issued maximum number of licenses for money. Complaint was lodged against him with the Government. What action was taken against him?

5. When it has been decided in the National Integration Council not to appoint PAC in riot-torn areas, why was it then posted ?

6. Despite strong possibility of riots why only three fire-brigade vehicles were in fit condition. It was for this reason so many incidents of fire took place. Last year 70 vehicles of fire-brigade used to be in ready condition. Why all were not in working condition ?

7. Why the Meerut district administration did not emphasise reinforcement of police force ?



8. Why the district administration did not take suitable steps when the local intelligence unit had warned about the possibility of communal riot and bringing in of weapons from Delhi? Were vehicles coming from Delhi checked? Not only this but even after the rioting broke out, only the vehicles on Delhi-Meerut road were checked whereas all the vehicles coming from outside should have been checked.

9. Knowing fully well that in Ramadan at the time of *sahri* (meal just before dawn), there is always large crowd of Muslims, why the police went to arrest the killers of Ajay Sharma at that hour?

Apart from the above questions there have been many other faults on the level of district administration and Meerut city became victims of lawlessness and disorder. Akashwani and Doordarshan (television) also were presenting the news about Meerut in such an exaggerated way that it was felt the Government media are deliberately taking interest in riots. There was an explosion in Bulandshahar in a fire-cracker factory in which four persons died. Similar incident took place in Aligarh and in Ghaziabad; there was quarrel due to mutual enmity. But the Television presented these news alongwith the news about Meerut riots as if in these place also riots have broken out....

—From *Raviwar Weekly*, Calcutta



**PART VI**  
**DOCUMENTATION**



## **“I REGRET YOUR LEADERSHIP”**

*Here is a translation of the entire text of the letter, which has created a commotion in Congress-I circles, with its sharp attack on the leadership and its style of functioning.*

My dear Rajivji,

I am writing about the communal disturbances which have recently occurred in various parts of the country. I hope you will consider seriously the facts which I have mentioned in this letter and with national concurrence you will take necessary steps against communalism and separatism.

During communal riots, such as the one in Meerut, the violence and arson shocked all Indians who had faith in secularism, communal affinity, national unity and integrity. Once again the country which has been propagating the message of truth, non-violence and universal brotherhood has had to bear the agony of witnessing its principles being mutilated. Innocent persons have been butchered and feelings of hatred are being spread among brethren, resulting in an atmosphere of violence which seems to be a nightmare. Such violence has been condemned throughout the country. You too in your statement expressed your anxiety about ascertaining the basic responsibility of the government so as to protect the minority as well as the majority community.

But the question arises, how can we solve the problem by merely showing concern and condemning the communal violence? The intensity of communal violence has awoken the national conscience. Even while Meerut is limping back to normalcy, suitable steps must be taken to maintain communal



harmony, before such an incident is repeated. I understand that communal riots are subjects of shame and anxiety for the whole nation. But the communal riots are only symptoms of the disease which is called communal feeling. If we want to be free from communal violence, we must get rid of communalism. If we want to protect the innocent people, we must act against communal forces and communal politics. Communal violence is a communal disease. It is an administrative duty to quell communal disturbances. But actions against communalism can be taken only on a political basis.

If you take a look at the history of the last 40 years, you find that the Congress governments have been doing such work. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, Shastriji and Mrs. Indira Gandhi always cautioned the nation against the dangers of communalism and they fought tooth and nail against communal forces. During this period due to efforts made on various fronts we have seen popular sentiments against communalism. That is why on the eve of the parliamentary elections in 1984 the whole country supported your determination to fight against the communal and divisive forces. But it is not known how you have distracted yourself from the popular policy of secularism and compromised with communal and divisive forces.

I don't want to remind you about old wounds. But to solve a problem it is necessary to find out its cause. During the last two years, in the name of harmony a compromise has been made with all kinds of communal, destructive and divisive forces which threaten us with violence. I understand that behind all these compromises you must have aimed for peace. But such bargaining failed to bring peace. On the contrary, communal and divisive forces gained a lease of life and authenticity and consequently increased their power to threaten us. That is a great challenge to us.

If we learn a lesson from the history of communal politics in India, it is not profitable for the nation to have any compromise with the communal forces, which become strong and destructive by mere encouragement. The evil of communalism cannot be controlled either by talk or compromise. We must face the challenge for the sake of national integrity, and effective confrontation with communalism can bring real national unity

and integrity.

I would like to bring to your notice your statement after the communal violence in Meerut. Your appeal to maintain communal cordiality was very much appreciated. It was proper to warn the violent communal forces. But over and above you mentioned the responsibility of the government to protect the minor and major communities. I understand in view of constitutional provisions, religion cannot be the basis to provide safety. Any citizen belonging to any caste and creed deserves to be protected by the government. I do not understand how long Indians will be seen as fragmented religious groups. The day is still awaited when every Indian will be equal as per rights and protection guaranteed by the Constitution and laws.

When there are communal disturbances, the capacity of the administration to maintain a peaceful atmosphere is very doubtful. Impartiality and duties of responsible persons are not without complaint.

In the case of Meerut, allegations against a section of the police are shocking. But according to knowledgeable sources, the administration and the police acted as per the political leadership. On the one hand, a central minister is alleged to have put political pressure to remove police *bundobust* from the sensitive areas, and on the other hand atrocities occurred after the disturbance in the presence of the chief minister.

According to my personal knowledge a senior police authority in Meerut expressed his inability to obey the orders of the chief minister at a meeting. Within four days he was transferred. I have come to know that the said authority has sent complete details of the meeting to the central home minister.

It is a great pity that a secular congressman who was considered a symbol of communal cordiality is now in the clutches of communalism. Allegations may be made against lower employees and authorities, but it cannot be denied that the ultimate responsibility lies with the political leadership for moulding the human attitudes in the country. We may have complaints against administrative authorities and the police but the fact is that we have allowed responsible partymen to encourage communalism. Action should be taken against government employees who have been partial.

But would you think of taking action against those who not only talked of communalism in Parliament but also ridiculed the Indian Constitution and the Judiciary? Effective action must be taken against a partisan and a communalist whether he is a minister or a government employee or an ordinary citizen. Only then can a repetition of Meerut be avoided.

If we decide to fight against communalism we have to change our methods of work and principles. Communalism is a great danger to our national unity and integrity. We have to see that our decisions and work do not encourage the communal and divisive forces.

If you see some of the decisions taken during your administration, it will be quite clear what the main cause is for the unexpected increase of communalism. Since independence till the death of Mrs. Gandhi, the government has tried to keep communal forces at a distance. Men involved in communal politics made tall promises but did not have the capacity to fulfill these promises. That's why they failed to enthuse their respective communities and gain their confidence. But this has been done during your administration and communal leaders have been able to fulfill their promises. The distance between the government and communal leaders has disappeared. Consequently, communal forces and communal politicians have achieved a new lease of life and authenticity.

The danger is that the problems are getting more and more difficult due to our mistakes and we do not have the courage to rectify them. It is necessary to keep a distance from communal forces and we should not have any pact with communal political parties such as the Muslim League in Kerala and Ittehadul Muslemin in Hyderabad. We should not encourage the formation of new organisations on a communal basis. I have recently seen a circular wherein as per your instructions, Mr. Tariq Anwar has organised a new group of Muslim members of Parliament and MLAs under the name of Kaumi Tanzim.

The group has been asked to give a solution to the Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy. This controversy has created tension and uneasiness everywhere in the country, specially in Uttar Pradesh. The cause of this controversy is well-known. The solution to the problem must be found out imme-

diately. But is it possible for an organisation comprising one community to give the solution to such a problem?

Still there is time. You must go deep into the matter ; and believe me there is no dearth of such people who can bring about communal harmony between the two communities and they can help us to find a solution which will be acceptable to all of us. But for this, communal leaders must be left out of the limelight. Until the communal forces are disintegrated and weakened, the danger to national unity will persist.

Why are there communal riots? Why does communalism spread? Why are innocent people being butchered? Being the prime minister you are responsible for stopping such disturbances. Whatever may be the causes of violence—administrative inefficiency or foreign hands or increasing communalism—nobody is interested in clarifications. You must make your administrative set-up very effective. If it is a foreign hand, it must be broken. The struggle against communalism has been part and parcel of our national movement. Basically, communal riots and communal political leadership are symbols of fragmented popular faith. Inefficiency and failure is due to political leadership.

The following couplet of an Urdu poet is very logical in the present context:

Don't give me all these excuses  
 Tell me why the caravan has been looted  
 I have no concern with the robbers  
 It's a question of your leadership.  
 Shall I tell you why the caravan was looted?  
 Because you were in league with the robbers.  
 I have no complaint against the looters  
 But I regret your leadership.

I understand that we should accept the challenge in time to save national unity and we must start a war against communal forces so that we shall be able to protect our national unity and integrity. Communal politics and national unity cannot be maintained together. To keep national unity intact we must be free of communal poison. To do so we may face political inconvenience for the time being. We may have to offer some

sacrifices, but as a result of this the nation will benefit. In this context I would like to draw your attention to an interview given by Jawaharlal Nehru to the *Bombay Chronicle* on 26 August 1936. He said, 'Success is not merely winning a few seats in an election, by compromising principles and ideals. Success is following your ideals, even if you have to pay a price for it.' I believe that in future the principles and ideals of Panditji will inspire us to fight against communalism.

With thanks.

Yours sincerely  
Arif Mohammad Khan



## POLITICAL PARTIES

### **CPI(M) Politbureau Statement on Meerut and Delhi Riots**

The Polit Bureau of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) expresses grave concern at the riots that have rocked Meerut city and which have affected the capital city of Delhi also. The protracted nature of the riots, the intensity of violence and the break down of the administrative machinery in Meerut is truly disturbing. Scores of persons of both communities killed, large-scale arson and organised looting, all point to the failure of the U.P. Government to restore a semblance of order and security for citizens since the last round of serious rioting in April. The army has had to be called in to control the situation. In Delhi also, the relaxation of curfew in a tense situation has led to the recurrence of violence with arson and looting and deaths of four persons.

These riots are taking place in an overall situation of growing communal tension in the country. Gujarat continues to be gripped by communal violence with the latest round taking place in Broach. Various centres in Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra have also witnessed communal incidents. Every time such violence breaks out, pious determinations are made by the leaders of the ruling and some other political parties: The authorities solemnly pledge themselves to curb the communal forces. These, however, do not lead to practical actions. Hence the riots recur.

Once again, the Prime Minister has declared that the communal forces which are out to create tension and organise riots will be "firmly dealt with". The question is not of

administrative measures alone, but a combination of administrative and political measures. The preparations by communal elements continue for a long time before the actual outbreak of communal violence. A firm and uncompromising fight against these forces and a giving up of the opportunistic policy of appeasing them on explosive issues is necessary on the part of the ruling party. Only this can help in a united campaign against both majority and minority communalism (23 May 1987).

**CPI: Statement of Indrajit Gupta, M.P. & N.E. Balram, M.P.**

We visited Meerut on Saturday (23rd) but were refused curfew passes which would have enabled us to meet the people in some of the riot affected areas of the city. The Collector claimed, on the one hand, that since the night of the 22nd May no fresh incidents of violence had occurred in the city; on the other, he obviously did not want Members of Parliament to see things for themselves.

Our queries as to how press reporters were free to go about and even to publish inflammatory accounts of incidents and casualties while MPs were being discriminated against, were not replied to.

We found Meerut a dead city under total curfew, which is probably effective only along the main thorough-fares but flagrantly violated inside the congested localities. A virtual civil war is being waged with a surfeit of fire arms, and rioters of both communities running amok.

The indescribable agony and suffering of the common people are further compounded by the depredations and communal ferocity of the notorious PAC, about which we heard many stories from people who had come to the collectorate.

Meerut is in the grip of a callous, bureaucratic and inefficient administration, which is responsible for the huge loss of life and property. The Congress Party and its government at the centre as well as in Lucknow, will have to pay dearly for their irresponsible and opportunist game of appeasing the avowedly communal and fundamentalist forces for the sake of so-called electoral advantages.

Despite the tension which was in the air ever since the April disturbances in Meerut, the administration did not take

even the most elementary precautions like prior rounding up of well-known criminals and anti-socials, seizure and confiscation of unlicensed arms, setting up of joint citizens' committees, etc., the intelligence system was paralysed. What happened to the oft-repeated assurance given in Parliament that District Magistrates and Police superintendents will be held responsible for communal outbreaks in their areas?

Innocent persons of both communities are being tortured and massacred while the government goes on issuing futile "appeals" and "warnings". Those forces responsible for planned and organised rioting are playing the game of national destabilisation and deserve to be suppressed with an iron hand. But Rajiv Gandhi fiddles, while the country burns.

New Delhi, 25 May 1987

New Delhi, 9 June, 1987

#### **CPI : Rajeshwar Rao's Letter to Prime Minister on Communal Situtaion**

The communal situation in the country is alarming. The ghastly incidents that have taken place in Meerut, Delhi and Gujarat are a grim warning to all of us who hold our country's secular democratic set-up and unity dear to our heart.

The rapid communal and religious fundamentalist parties and organisations of various hues are out to fan communal riots and polarise the people on the basis of religion in order to destroy our secular democratic set-up and unity of the country.

Some of the self-appointed religious leaders have the gump-tion to issue hukumnamas/firmans and edicts which challenge the very basis of our secular democracy and impose them on the people and even on the elected representatives of the people and high dignitaries.

If effective steps are not taken, the communal conflagration is bound to spread and engulf the whole country.

The imperialists are encouraging these forces in order to destabilise and balkanise our country.

The background of the present wave of communal violence is, of course, the Babari Masjid-Ramjanambhoomi controversy

which had erupted with the unlocking of the Babari Masjid complex as a result of the Faizabad district judge's verdict.

I must say that the central government and the UP government cannot escape responsibility for this.

Now it is necessary that all patriotic and secular minded parties, organisations and forces should unite, setting aside petty partisan considerations, to defeat the game of the religious fundamentalists.

A two-pronged approach is needed to meet the menace of communalism. A united political campaign is needed to counter the communal poison, along with stringent administrative measures against the mischief-makers.

In conclusion, I have to bring to your notice the utter failure of the Meerut district administration in controlling the situation and allowing the rapid communal forces to run riot and cause immense damage to the lives and property of the people.

25 May 1987

### **CPI (ML) : Statement on Communal Violence**

The CPI(ML) expresses its grave anxiety at the spurt of communal violence in large parts of the country. The foci of the Meerut and Delhi where the worst crimes against humanity have been committed in the form of ghastly murders, rapes, burning and looting. The police and administration have not only stood as silent spectators but have actively participated in the massacre of Muslims. In Meerut the PAC was responsible for murder of hundreds of people through firing and burning.

The Muslims all over the country are asking the question : Is any Muslim safe in his person in today's India ? People who care for the unity and integrity of the country and boast of our great secular tradition must come forward at this gravest moment of India's history with a positive reply to the above question and accompany action. While Rome was burning, Nero was fiddling. Today, when Meerut and Delhi are burning, the third chieftain of the Nehru dynasty is busy in covering up his corrupt regime. At this critical juncture, the people should come forward to say a firm "NO" to the communal programme of Rajiv and his regime.

The CPI(ML) demands that the UP Government should resign immediately bearing moral responsibility for the massacre in Meerut.

The CPI(ML) also demands that the Central Government should appoint a commission led by a Supreme Court judge to enquire into the recent riots in Delhi and Meerut.

Sd/- Santosh Rana, General Secretary  
25 May 1987

**Indian People's Front (Uttar Pradesh) : Statement on Communal Violence**

Indian People's Front (IPF) expresses its grave concern over the continued communal violence in Meerut and holds the communal policies of Congress (I) governments in the Centre and Uttar Pradesh ..responsible for this holocaust.

. . . . Last year a conspiratorial decision to unlock Babri Masjid-Ram janambhoomi was taken at the behest of the Central government and with the active cooperation of the State's Chief Minister, Bir Bahadur Singh. This decision swept the whole country with a new communal frenzy, and Meerut has become its victim.

. . .To divert also the attention of the people from the issues of corruption and anti-national activities of the political leaders sitting at the top of power in the centre, Congress(I) has engineered the riots in Meerut with the help of communal forces.

The IPF demands the dismissal of the State government and appeals to all democratic forces to combat unitedly the divisive policies...enforced by the collaboration of the government and communal forces.

Lucknow, 25 May 1987

**CPI(M) : Politbureau Resolution on Meerut Disturbance**

The Polit Bureau of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) views with serious concern the fact that the communal conflicts and tensions are not subsiding in Meerut but also spreading to neighbouring areas. The State Government and the Centre have obviously failed to come to grips with the serious situation. They have allowed the PAC a free hand in Meerut and this force has once again revealed its partisan and vicious character.



On the other hand, it is shocking that the authorities have prevented opposition leaders from visiting the affected areas to get a proper report of the developments.

In this situation, it is strange that the Prime Minister has not found it necessary to convene a meeting of the National Integration Council. This narrow approach must be given up. The CPI(M) demands the immediate holding of a National Integration Council meeting to take stock of the situation.

27 May 1987

### **BSP President Kanshi Ram on Muslim Community**

**Q.** What is your relationship with the Muslim community?

**Ans.** We feel that they are also becoming victims these days. They are also having problems. So those victims need our help and we will be able to help them and protect their constitutional, social, human and political interests.

A staunch follower of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Mr. Kanshi Ram believes that the root of all ills in this country is *brahmanvaad*—the domination of 15 per cent Brāhmins, Thakurs and Baniyas over the 85 per cent scheduled castes, backwards and minorities.

(Source : *The Telegraph*, Calcutta)

### **Janata Party: Joint Statement of Central Parliamentary Board**

“The terrible communal holocaust in Meerut has continued for over a week resulting in the killing of hundreds. Even more tragic are the atrocities in which the PAC has indulged in Meerut culminating in the Maliana massacre and the killings on the Hindon river. Delhi has also been convulsed by riots. Such tragic happenings bring profound agony to the people and put the whole nation to shame.

“We are constrained to say that the Government has compounded its irresponsibility by arresting the prominent Opposition MPs who went to visit the disturbed areas. Thereby it has sought to draw a veil on the realities, and has only exposed itself.

“As the situation continues to worsen and casts its ominous shadow on other parts of the State, the Central Government

must intervene immediately and take effective steps to save further loss of life and property. We would also suggest that the PAC should be reorganised expeditiously in accordance with the National Integration Council.

“We would humbly urge all citizens to help ensure the peace and work for communal amity and brotherhood.

New Delhi, 28 May 1987

**Chandra Shekhar : Press Conference, New Delhi,  
1 June 1987**

The Meerut tragedy is the “most shocking incident in my political life”. The police arrested 100 to 400 people on May 22, took many of them in five trucks to different places from the Hashimpura locality and some of them have been reported killed on the canal bank and their bodies thrown into the canal.

....The law of the jungle prevails. “The tyranny of the PAC is evident. How can a police force inspire confidence if it works in a partisan manner?”

“If Mr. Rajiv Gandhi has any compassion, or any sense of duty he should have the cold-blooded murder of scores of youths investigated. We cannot be silent spectators to the tyranny and callousness of UP Government and the Centre”.

I request the Bar and People’s Union of Civil Liberties to “assure the people that this sort of thing will be looked into, so that it will not be allowed to happen again”.

....If the Pakistanis were there in Meerut and responsible for the riots...the Government has a duty to find the spies and foreigners and expel them. If they cannot, the Home Minister and the Chief Minister have no right to continue in office.”

I got to know of the shocking killings along the canal when I met 17 year old Zulfiquar Nasir, one of the survivors. I then tried in vain to get in touch with the Home Minister, Mr. Buta Singh and Mrs. Kidwai. The incident occurred ten days ago, bodies have floated down the Ganga & Hindon canals. The Government is yet to explain the circumstances in which these persons were killed. Both the Union and state government are silent on the complaints made against the PAC.

If the whole country is being managed by foreign forces, what is the Prime Minister managing? The forces of the Government of India are seen only in Fair fax and Bofors affairs”.

#### IUML: Memorandum of 5 June 1987 to President

2. It is abundantly clear that the responsibility of the communal violence at Meerut in U.P. and the inhuman, heart-rending massacre at Maliana rests on the local administration and the U.P. Government.

There are innumerable complaints of shocking excesses indulged in by the Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC). While at several places the rioters enjoyed the patronage of the PAC at various other places like Hashimpura, Imliyan and at several others, the PAC itself broke open the doors of houses and indulged in a spree of loot and arson. Many were beaten up and there were mass arrests of Muslims dragged from their houses in various mohallas. The massacre at Maliana and the dead bodies with gun shots flowing down the Hindon river and the Ganganahar for nearly five days, have no parallel in the history of violence. There are reports that the dead were those who had been rounded up by the PAC.

4. It is a matter of grave concern that the arrested lodged in jails have been humiliated and mercilessly beaten, in some cases by the other prisoners in jail. A number of them had then to be taken to hospitals while some have died in jail.

5. In all fairness the present Chief Minister and the Council of Ministers be dismissed.

6. It is absolutely necessary that the PAC be totally withdrawn from Meerut, etc. and the army and the central forces be put in total and effective charge.

A complete restructuring of the PAC with heavy participation of Muslims and other minorities be undertaken without any further delay.

10. The shocking, unfortunate communal holocaust needs to be discussed fully in all its aspects by the Parliament. We, therefore, request that the President be advised to summon an immediate session of Parliament.

**Mushawarat Demands withdrawal of PAC from Meerut, Induction of Army and Dismissal of U.P. Government**

Statement by Mr Shahabuddin (M.P.), Working President of AIMMM.

"The massive communal conflagration in Meerut has resulted from the initial failure of the administration and its subsequent inability to check the excesses of the PAC. It is surprising that peace-keeping has so far been left largely to the same unreformed and unrepentent force. It is well known that the PAC, notorious as a brutal and communal force, has lost the confidence of the Muslim community which has, therefore, good reasons to suspect its intentions when it moves towards or operates in a Muslim locality. It is not understood why the CRPF and other central forces have been deployed on peripheral duties and the PAC has the charge of sensitive areas. If the continuing cycle of confrontation, retaliation and repression is to stop, the PAC must be immediately withdrawn and replaced by the CRPF or BSF, and the Army must not remain on stand-by orders but should take control of the riot-affected areas.

There is a strange coincidence between the visits of the Chief Minister of U.P., be it Allahabad or Meerut, and the aggravation of the communal situation. Perhaps they serve to make his police force still more brutal and partisan in their behaviour. In any case his incompetent and inefficient government has failed to control the situation and is responsible for the loss of hundreds of lives and crores worth of property. This government must be immediately dismissed.

Secondly, the communication gap between the administrative machinery and the Muslim community in Meerut is near total. Their SOS receive no response. Their leaders have no access to visiting dignitaries. Their localities have been sealed. Their lines have been cut and they cannot even reach the DM or SSP. The secular forces must immediately establish a permanent presence in Meerut by deputing a team of responsible leaders to act as a buffer as well as a media and to secure prompt and effective action when Muslim areas are under attack and plead for help and assistance.

A section of the local press is fanning communal fire by publishing concocted and exaggerated reports. Immediate steps should be taken to control such irresponsible writings.

The Mushawarat demands immediate visits to Meerut by the Prime Minister and the Home Minister. They should talk to the leaders of both the communities and all political parties and take effective steps not only to restore law and order but to lay firm foundations for communal peace and social harmony.

S. Shahabuddin, New Delhi, 22 May 1987

### **Statement on Meerut Situation**

The All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat strongly denounces the brutal massacre of the Muslim community in Meerut and its environs by the PAC and holds the Government of Uttar Pradesh wholly responsible for the Meerut situation and demands its dismissal and the proclamation of Presidential rule in the State.

The Mushawarat demands that the PAC be immediately withdrawn from riot affected areas; its past behaviour should be inquired into by a high power Commission: it should be disarmed till criminal elements are screened out and it is reorganised in accordance with the provisions of the National Integration Council.

The Mushawarat demands immediate relief measures for the victims of police brutalities in Meerut, beginning with adequate supply of essential provisions to the curfew-bound areas, in accordance with the guidelines of the Central Government.

The Mushawarat also demands adequate precautionary measures for the protection of the Muslim community on Id-ul-Fitr, which falls on 29 May 1987.

The Mushawarat calls upon the Muslim community all over the country to observe Id-ul-Fitr in a simple and dignified manner and refrain from usual festivities as a mark of sorrow after the Meerut massacre.

The Mushawarat Central Council shall meet immediately after Id-ul-Fitr to take stock of the situation.

New Delhi, 27 May 1987



### **NUBC: Statement by Chandrajit Yadav**

A Delegation of the National Union comprising of Ch. Brahm Perakash, Chandrajit Yadav, Syed Shahabuddin MP, Maulana S.A. Hashmi, Sh. K.R. Sunda, N.G. Uke and Prof. M.K. Saini visited the riot affected areas of Meerut City and met hundreds of people belonging to all sections of the society in several riot affected areas. The Delegation also met the District Authorities including the District Magistrate and SSP Meerut.

It was admitted by all that since Independence unfortunately Meerut City has seen the biggest communal riot which has completely shattered the secular fabric and created a deep communal divide. Life of the city has been so seriously affected that it will take years to restore the harmony between the different communities and also the economic life of the common people. Hundreds of people have been killed and several crore worth of property has been destroyed. The traditional industries, such as, handloom, sports good manufacturing units, scissors have been severely affected. Hundreds of units have been fully destroyed and burnt to ashes. Thousands of residential houses and shops have also been burnt. It is a great tragedy that the district which was the centre of our freedom struggle and which had produced thousands of valiant patriots has, unfortunately, now become the centre of communal riots.

There is a big gap between the number of deaths given by the District administration and the people of Meerut City. The general assessment is that not less than 500 people have been killed. Some say the figure might reach 1000. About 3 thousand people have been arrested since the riot started and only 60 of them have been released, mostly children in the age group of 8 to 12 years. A few old people whom we met were severely beaten by police in police lock-ups. All of them were above 60 years of age.

Rumours, as usual, in every communal riot played havoc in Meerut city. That affected both the communities and later on invariably in all cases it was found that all rumours were baseless and no effective measures have been taken even till today. In our opinion the Administration dealt with the situation in the

most unimaginative manner. The mishandling of law and order situation was one of the major factors which aggravated the situation and angered the people.

The District authorities deliberately did not seek the cooperation of the local leaders and respectable people in Mohallas. This, in our opinion, has become the accepted norms in UP with law and order authorities that they shun the cooperation of the public and depend only on their administrative machinery which, unfortunately, is looked upon with suspicion as it has lost the image of impartiality. Their rude behaviour with common people and unbecoming behaviour with women folk and indiscriminate beating creates an allergy against the UP PAC when they reach the spot of the trouble. This is what exactly happened in Meerut. In Meerut even opposition leaders and MPs were prevented from visiting the city including Syed Shahabuddin MP. This is highly deplorable.

UP is sitting on a volcano according to the admission of UP Government. 32 Districts have been identified as sensitive districts. One must give serious thought to why the communal virus has spread over almost two-third area of U.P. We feel that for many years the ruling party leaders and administrators have indulged in creating a communal atmosphere for their political advantage. This infected the entire atmosphere and provided a golden opportunity for anti-social, rowdy, communal and biased elements in the administration to create this unfortunate condition.

During our visit, we came across several shining examples which instil hope in secular values and harmony between various communities. There were people in both the communities who came forward and saved the lives of the people belonging to other communities even at the risk of their own lives. One such shining example is of Prof. Harpal Singh whose son, by profession a doctor, became the victim of rowdy elements. Prof. Singh and his wife, the entire family even after the loss of their only son, has great faith in secular values and are anxious for restoration of peace and normalcy in the city. Without even an atom of bitterness even after this great tragedy, they offered their service for restoring communal harmony in the city. Such people must be publicly honoured.

### **Suggestions**

Our suggestions are as under :

1. In Meerut City and District, Peace and Harmony Committees should immediately be formed from Mohalla, City to District Levels where respectable people of all sections of the society should be taken. They should meet and tour their respective areas and appeal to the people for restraint and calm.

2. The list of arrested people should be displayed at the Police Station and also the important people in the Mohalla should be invited and shown the names so that there is no scope for rumours that people are missing or killed. This will go a long way in pacifying the people and creating normalcy. We suggested it to the District Magistrate and they promptly agreed to one suggestion. It is hoped that it will be done.

3. For a few more days the Army should be allowed to stay in the City and PAC should remain in the background. There were serious complaints against the PAC Platoons and we were told that even two PAC Platoons were withdrawn on the basis of these complaints.

4. UP Government has announced two enquiries—one Judicial Inquiry of the incidents in Maliana area and another Gyan Prakash Inquiry Committee for Meerut Communal riots. In our opinion only one High Level Judicial Enquiry Committee should be appointed and asked to submit its report within 2 months.

5. Facts have been brought to our notice that people arrested by PAC platoon in Hashimpura Mohalla were taken outside the City and shot dead by PAC Jawans. Some survivors have harrowing tales. We demand that Hashimpura incidents should also be included in the Judicial Enquiry.

6. There is a big gap between the figures of deaths as given by the District authorities and as given by the people of Meerut City. We demand that on the pattern of Moradabad, if the kith and kin submit an affidavit that some one has been killed in his/her family, in the riot affected areas, they also furnish an indemnity bond, and in all such cases compensation should be given to those families.

7. On the pattern of 1984 Delhi riots, compensation and aid should be given to all affected families that will also help rapid rehabilitation of industries and business.

8. Our demand is that PAC should be overhauled and re-organised. It should rather be replaced by 'Anti riot Force,' with a composite particularly having adequate representation from all sections of society particularly minorities, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes.

9. During the last few years there has been mushroom growth in the formation of Senas and Dals on the communal divide. We demand that such organisations, Senas, Dals should be immediately banned.

New Delhi, 4 June 1987

### **A Joint Statement of Intellectuals**

Like most of our compatriots we feel deeply disturbed by the recent chain of the communal riots. The orgy of violence has destroyed innocent lives and inflicted an all round misery.

The brutal conduct of some men in uniforms has disturbed us the most. Their mad spree of killings, torture and disgracing the citizens should cause concern both on humanistic grounds and endangerment to stability of the secular state. If administration gets divided on communal and caste basis and the paramilitary and police forces are permitted to endanger the lives and property of the people, then how do we sustain the Nation's cohesiveness and unity?

The political leaders must tell the nation as to why they did not neutralise well in time, the communalists and the fundamentalists who were organising the yatras and the rallies and arming the Senas and rousing communal passion?

Unless some credible and preventive steps are urgently taken, we may still see repetitions of these ghastly deeds.

Foremost, the government must prosecute all those members of the P.A.C., and police who have disgraced their uniforms. Their misdeeds must be treated at par with treason and tried by special courts. The judicial enquiries will, as in the past, take long time and end in nothing.

Even at this late hour recommendations of the National Integration Council regarding creation of composite anti-riot

forces be implemented to infuse confidence.

The Ram Janam Bhoomi-Babri Mosque syndrome has been exploited by both sides to rouse passions. This must stop and the issue be settled by negotiations, arbitration or judicial process. In the meantime all demonstrations must be banned.

This is the moment when all secular minded citizens and institutions must assert and unmask the communalists and the divisive elements in all communities who misuse the name of religions and cause havoc to our unity. They are the ones who are destroying our Nation.

I.K. Gujaral, former Union Minister

P.N. Haksar, former Chairman Planning Commission

Rajinder Sachar, former Chief Justice

Subhadra Joshi, Former M.P.

Kuldip Nayar, Journalist

Badar Ud din Tyabji, Retd. Secretary

M.K. Rasgotra, Retd. Foreign Secretary

M. Farooqi, Secretary C.P.I.

D.R. Goyal, Journalist

Brij Mohan, former President D.P.C.C.

Inder Mohan, President P.U.C.I.

Yunus Dehlvi, Journalist

Qamar Rais, Professor

Joginder Sharma, CPI(M)

A.R. Shervani, Journalist

Rashid Talib, Journalist

**National Federation of Progressive Writers:  
Statement on Communalism**

After studying the first-hand reports of current riots in Meerut and Delhi, the Secretariat of the National of Progressive Writers notes with profound grief and indignation that the governments at the Centre and in Uttar Pradesh must squarely bear the blame for unprecedented loss of lives and property in the communal carnage.

For the last many months, Hindu and Muslim communalists were not only openly building-up communal tensions, but were also preparing for launching murderous crusades. In many towns and cities, the communalists were collecting firearms and



other weapons, and bandit groups were being organised in the name of various senas.

The government knew about it, but took no preventive steps either to physically disarming the miscreants or to diffuse the situation by solving the Babri Masjid problem through political and also the deteriorating economic between the two sides in dispute.

The secretariat of the NF PW is constrained to view this criminal negligence as a deliberate attempt of the circles to create a diversion for the people who were quite agitated by some cases of corruption at the highest level and also by deteriorating economic conditions, thanks to the ruling groups' commitment to the ill-intentioned advices of the US controlled World Bank.

It is now revealed that even when the riots lurked round the corner, the law and order machinery was knowingly weakened in the riot prone areas in the name of sending additional police force for the ruling party's rally in Delhi. Afterwards when the riot broke out there was an unexplained delay in refurbishing the law and order machinery.

The ill-famed PAC was posted in Meerut in predominantly Muslim areas without taking into account its past communal and predatory record. With PAC around, a tragedy like that of Maliana, could have been very well predicted.

The secretariat of the NF PW considers the imperialists conspiratorial threats of destabilisation quite serious, but warns the government that it cannot hide its efficiency and sins behind it and the people would not allow to use it as a shield to deprive the working people of their bread and to enrich the exploiters.

The secretariat of the NF PW calls upon the government to at least return to its professed policy of secularism and restore its credibility in controlling the law and order situation. It must ensure that Meerut is not enacted elsewhere. It calls upon the government to immediately put an end to the Babri Masjid-Ram janambhoomi controversy by declaring it a protected National Monument and putting it under the Archaeological Department.

It appears to all sections of the secular people to energetically support our demand and join the struggle to bring sanity

to victory and defeat the humanising culture that is being spread in the name of religion.

The NF PW has always considered the fight against communalism as a primary task of all cultural workers and reiterates its demand for ensuring separation of religion from politics and ban on formation of communal political parties and their participation in elections.

(Source : *New Age*, 14 June 1987)

### **Extracts from Union Minister For Tourism : Mufti Mohammad Syed's Letter to the Prime Minister**

Dear Prime Minister,

The presidential election is over. As a congress worker, who has been extremely worried about the recent development in the country. I feel a sense of pride that our party has demonstrated exemplary unity at this juncture. Every congressman and woman has risen to the occasion to meet a serious challenge. But there is no room for complacency. The question remains : Where do we go from here. . . .

After coming to Delhi, I have been observing more closely than earlier, the events in the rest of the country. The monster of communalism is eating into the vitals of national unity. After my visit to Meerut, I had occasion to apprise you of the horror I witnessed there. If victims of communal carnage lose hope of safety from the administration charged with the duty to protect them, if Congress workers become victims of communal passion, if the government is dilatory and negligent in dealing firmly with communalism, how long will we be able to safeguard national unity ? If the Congress does not uphold the banner of secularism with seriousness and resolute determination, who else will do? What I saw in Meerut has shaken me to the bones. What has saddened me more is the inadequacy of our response. For us in Jammu and Kashmir, secularism has been the most cherished ideal. To see the secular fabric of the country being torn asunder is an unbearable agony for workers like me. In fact, because of our acts of omission and commission in Jammu and Kashmir and other parts of the country, the evil of communalism is gaining strength even in our state.

As a nation and as a party, we are standing at the crossroads of history. The legacy of socialism, secularism, nationalism and democracy bequeathed to us by our great leaders is in peril. We cannot successfully meet the present challenges unless we act with the sagacity and dedication to build a strong and united party which will carry credibility with the people.

**RESOLUTION PASSED IN THE TWO DAYS NATIONAL  
EXECUTIVE IN MEETING OF ALL INDIA QAUMI  
TANZEEM HELD IN NEW DELHI ON 28th &  
29th JUNE 1987**

Qaumi Tanzeem has noted with great satisfaction that the meeting of the standing committee of the National Integration Council headed by Prime Minister, Shri Rajiv Gandhi felt deep concern over the deterioration in the communal situation. Prime Minister rightly pointed out that a multi-pronged approach was needed to deal with the menace.

It suggested a more active role for political parties in promoting national integration, strict adherence to the three language formula and rigorous enforcement of laws to punish communal and disruptive elements.

Qaumi Tanzeem hails the outcome of the meeting and calls for the implementation of those decisions and suggestions which might go a long way in settling the issues so sensitive like communal, sectarian and regional.

Even in the past the council has made concrete suggestions, but unless some serious thoughts are given and within that framework some corrective and remedial measures are adopted, nothing could help the situation improve.

Hence it is necessary that efforts are made on administrative, social, educational and legal fronts to promote national integration and to eradicate communalism.

The Tanzeem endorses the stand taken by the council that all-out effort should be made to implement that 15 Point Programme for the minorities. We also appreciate that it was felt necessary to create job opportunities for the minorities, to which due representation should be given in the services and

the police forces.

The Tanzeem appreciates the concern shown by Prime Minister, who is also the Chairman of N.I.C. who stressed the need of concentrating on communalism along in that meeting and while referring to the role of administration, he called for infusing a national outlook in the regional services. He emphasised that inculcating a national outlook among the services was a very important part of national integration.

The Qaumi Tanzeem feels perturbed over the role of law enforcing agencies and a part of administration specially in the context of Meerut riot and none other than the Home Minister, Shri Buta Singh has admitted that the administration had proved itself unable to cope with the situation.

It is also disturbing to note that communalism is assuming serious proportions and challenging the fundamentals of the Constitution. We support the view-point of Mr. Rajeshwar Rao that no religious leaders should be treated above the constitution and the laws of the land.

The Tanzeem feels that the sense of insecurity has overtaken the Muslim community and they feel quite shaky now and if this continues they will get alienated more and more from all secular parties. In order to create confidence in them there may be short term and long term plans.

There is no doubt about that the tension being built around Ram janambhoomi-Babri Mosque over the period of two years has played its role in Meerut riots. This can not be ignored for a long time and some political solution must be found. This will expose the real game of those political parties who arouse passions but can never sit to find out the lasting solution.

Some structural changes could be effected in P.A.C. and other administrative wings of the Govt. Immediate relief should be provided to those who need help. Large scale arrest and harassment must be stopped and those found innocent should be released forthwith.

Members from both the communities with secular credentials should be brought together and let them march together in disturbed areas, which would help remove mistrust.

Those completely uprooted should be rehabilitated. There should be survey of the extent of loss and a comprehensive



rehabilitation programme should be chalked out. The support of genuine voluntary organisations wedded to secularism must be enlisted and they should be put into action to help create atmosphere congenial to peace and undertaking.

The Tanzeem has noticed that gossips and rumours cause great harm and play with human lives and properties. There should be some permanent arrangement to nip such mischievous game in the bud at the right moment and deterrent punishment should be meted out to those found spreading rumours. We would rather suggest a kind of permanent machinery be set up to deal with this mischief mongering.

Communalism and communal violence are interrelated but not the one and the same thing. Communalism is an ideology and those who propagate it with sustained efforts are the generators and the carriers of the communal germs. They impress upon people and get communal followers but these followers are just the victims; their social condition also propel them in that direction. These people need to be educated to overcome their communal thinking and prejudices. On the other hand, the generators of communal germs should be branded as the enemies of the society and to be given no quarter.

The Tanzeem considers both the communities—Hindus and Muslims ethnically the same and have strong bonds of a historical and geographical past. They have to live together and work collectively for their progress and livelihood in India. Any breach attempted to divide them must be filled—for none is an aggressor and none is outsider. They are all sons and daughters of India.

The Tanzeem suggest that separation of religion from politics must be given substance and political will is required to do away with the forces exploiting religion for narrower ends.

## TEXT OF THE MEMORANDUM SUBMITTED TO THE PRIME MINISTER BY THE MUSLIMS OF MALIANA

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

The morning of 23rd May began in a very tense atmosphere. At 9 a.m. in front of us the wine shop was looted. People were seen running with a bottle or entire crates of bottles on their heads. Those wearing khaki dress were also seen among the plunderers. We thought it to be their internal matters and remained in our houses.

It was time for the noon prayer. Some people were returning after prayer from the mosque in the middle. It was then that the PAC surrounded the Muslims from all sides. The PAC shot two Muslims returning from prayer, who died on the spot. Thereafter the PAC took position on the terraces of our houses and started firing on Muslims. They also clearly gave green signal to some miscreants from among the Hindus. Thereafter began the "operation Muslim Murder". For two hours the PAC and these miscreants continued to strike terror. We, out of fear, collected in the central portion of settlement. When the PAC and the police did not see anyone outside the houses they broke into the houses. And, out of sheer barbarism they killed many old men, women and children and broke their limbs.

When we saw death close to us we, in the last moment, decided to come out on the road going out. The whole PAC force stood with rifles aiming at us. The barbarism and anger

of PAC was still not satisfied. Behind it (i.o. PAC) the miscreants were setting fire to the houses. And we were lurking between life and death in front of the rifles of the PAC. When we told DIG (Moradabad range) Prem Datt Ratudi that some miscreants are setting fire (to our houses) in your presence, he shot back that we have not come here to put out fire but to kill the Muslims. You go back to your houses otherwise there will be worse than Jalianwala Bagh here.

Another officer Navinchandra Joshi, standing at some distance said that if you want to live in Hindustan, live as Hindus. Another Police officer whose name could not be read from his badge from a distance said you people clap a lot on Imran Khan's sixers. R.C. Singh of the UP Police was pushing us again and again that you go back to your houses. R.C. Singh was involved enthusiastically with the PAC. Some people of the local police were sympathetic but were helpless. The PAC and the local police were again and again compelling us to go to our houses but we were insisting that either arrest us or shoot us.

After our non-violent demonstration CRPF came at about 2-30 A.M. After assurance by it we went to those houses which were not burnt. Others are still in the relief camps. The administration sent its help after four days. When the army came in the morning then we felt we can survive. The army helped us a lot. So much so that they gave from their stock to eat, to those who were unable to bear the pain of starvation. Army is helping us even today.

Yours sincerely,  
Ezaz Ali Siddiqui and all the  
Muslims of Maliana (Meerut)

## LIST OF THOSE KILLED BY PAC IN MALIANA FIRING

	Age
1. Mudassar Siddique S/o Aji Liyakat Ali	26
2. Mohammad Ashraf S/o Karim Baksh	40
3. Gulfam S/o Anwar Ahmed	22
4. Tasleem S/o Arif Ahmed	20
5. Rafiq Ahmed S/o Basheer Ahmed	26
6. Nasir Ahmed S/o Vazeer Ahmed	24
7. Kaniz Fatima W/o Md. Yameen	42
8. Mehmood Ahmed S/o Aziz	35
9. Akbari W/o Khairati	50
10. Naseem Bano W/o Mohammad Ahmed	30
11. Mohamed Arif S/o Mohammad Ahmed	15
12. Mohammed Waris S/o Mohammad Ahmed	3
13. Aftab S/o Mohammad Ahmed	3
14. Bablu S/o Ali Hasan	3
15. Tarannum S/o Mohammad Ahmed	12
16. Shahjahan Begum D/o Amar Deen	5-6
17. Mohammad Ali S/o Unknown	70
18. Ibrahim S/o A. Sattar	10-11
19. Yusuf S/o A. Sattar	22
20. Asghari W/o Abdul Sattar	40
21. Yunus S/o Abdul Sattar	15
22. Banu D/o Abdul Sattar	24
23. Nurjahan D/o Hbdul Sattar	10
24. Shabnam D/o Abdul Sattar	3
25. Munni D/o Unknown	22
26. Zaibunnisa D/o Sattar Ahmed	21
27. A. Sattar S/o Md. Ali	—
28. Mahmud Faisl Imam Masjid, Sanjay Colony	60
29. Mohammad Akbari W/o Itwari	65
30. Mage Khan S/o Kabul Khan	40

31.	Bilkis D/o Mage Khan	17
32.	Raeesa D/o Mage Khan	13
33.	Kashmiri W/o Mage Khan	35
34.	Rasheed S/o Md. Shakur	45
35.	Idan W/o Rasheed Ahmed	40
36.	Jumma S/o Unknown	50
37.	Kalu S/o Hussain Baraksha	45
38.	Bashiran S/o Azimuddin	46
39.	Zaitun W/o Chandkhan	
40.	Zinat (divorcee) W/o Navabkhan	
41.	Raziya W/o Sagheer Ahmed	40
42.	Saghir Ahmed S/o Ismail	45
43.	Sakhavst S/o Unknown	
44.	Chimman S/o Unknown	
45.	Anwar S/o Unknown	
46.	Rafique S/o Allahdeen	45
47.	Nafis S/o Rafique	
48.	Khalifa S/o Rafique	
49.	Raiesuddin S/o Rafique	
50.	Munni D/o Rafique	
51.	Husna D/o Rafique	
52.	Three daughters-in-law of above family have also been killed whose names are not known	
53.	Mustaquim S/o Unknown	
54.	Akhtar S/o Unknown	
55.	Saeeda W/o Ismail	
56.	Shakura S/o Allah Mehr	
57.	Iqbal S/o Shakura	
58.	Rehana D/o Abdul	
59.	Mohammad Ismail S/o Hameed	
60.	Nawab S/o Md. Ismail	
61.	Shahzad S/o Md. Ismail	
62.	Naseem D/o Md. Ismail	
63.	Vakeela W/o Name not reable	
64.	Zulfiqar S/o Unknown	
65.	Mubin	} S/o Unknown
66.	Akhtar	
67.	Akbar	
68.	Asghar	



## ACTION PLAN FOR COMMUNAL AMITY

*K.R. Malkani*

When India was tragically partitioned in 1947, it was hoped that the country had seen the last of the Muslim problem. Unfortunately, today that problem is as acute as ever. Only thinking men and saints who view the totality of life can comprehend the problem, and it is only they who can help us resolve this problem amicably, sensibly and finally.

First, we must clearly understand that there is nothing called Indian Muslims—that is, Muslims who happen to be living in India. What we have instead are Muslim Indians—Indians, who happen to be Muslim. Muslim Indians are nearer to Hindu Indians than to Muslims in West Asia. Less than 0.1 per cent of Muslim Indians can honestly trace their ancestry to outside India. Muslim Indians and Hindu Indians are blood brothers.

Over the centuries, many Hindus embraced Islam as a result of force, temptation and casteism. That state power was not the only factor in conversion is proved by the fact that Uttar Pradesh, where Muslims ruled the longest, has a huge Hindu majority whereas East Bengal where they ruled for a much shorter time, has a Hindu minority. However, even after conversion, Muslims retained many of the attitudes and institutions of the old faith, complete with the ideas of right and wrong and high and low, of amulets and pirs in life and of chadars and lamps in death. For Sheikh Nizamuddin Aulia of Delhi, “a command of the Pir is like a command of the Prophet” and a

visit to the Pir's tomb is "spiritually more exhilarating than a pilgrimage to Mecca."

### **Babur's Ban**

Kings fought each other and they even invoked religion. But these were basically power struggles and not religious wars. The rulers slaughtered people but ordinary Hindus and Muslims did not go about killing each other. Hindu-Muslim riots are a phenomenon of the British period.

Many Muslim rulers gave preferential treatment to Muslims. But they also gave special concessions to "Multanis" and Hindu traders in the interests of economy. While the orthodox kazis sided with the ruling elite, the sufi saints criticized both—kings and kazis—for their corruption and hypocrisy.

Babur, the first Mughal ruler, banned cow slaughter and this ban continued until the British took over. Just like old Hindu kings, the Mughals drank only Ganga-jal and Akbar and his successors were not circumcised. Jahangir was half-Hindu and Shah Jahan was three-fourths Hindu by birth. They called themselves Jahangir (Keeper of the World) and Shah Jahan (World Ruler) to the intense irritation of the Caliph and the Turks. Aurangzeb removed the Kalma from coins on the ground that Hindus also touched them, and Akbar made it clear that "India cannot be ruled by Arab rules of a thousand years ago."

Aurangzeb was a violent fanatic. But even he was more of a king than a momin. He snubbed the Caliph in Turkey and neither informed him of his accession to the throne nor asked for his recognition and blessings. Indeed, the Mughal rulers regarded themselves as also Caliphs. Aurangzeb imposed the jiziya on Hindus in the name of Islam but the real reason was that the treasury had been drained because of his wasteful wars. He fought to keep Central Asia attached to Delhi and made the revealing remark that while other Indian princes fought for their respective principalities, he was the only one to think of "All India". Here was the national core of the Mughal empire.

In the Mughal and provincial courts, Dussera and Diwali, Basant and Holi were celebrated as national festivals. While the Hindu saints rejected fanaticism and resisted tyranny, they had

nothing against Islam as such. Tukaram said: "Never forget to take the name of Allah first." Even immigrant Muslims developed an intense love for India. For Amir Khusrau, Delhi was more important than Mecca. Mecca, he said, should go round Delhi in reverence.

The popular impression that Muslims were pro-British, is only a half-truth. Muslims resisted British power more than the Hindus. Tipu Sultan was the only Indian ruler who died fighting the British before the 1857 rising. And Muslims resisted even British culture and the English language much more than the Hindus. For all these reasons, for a long time the British were more anti-Muslim than anti-Hindu. The Muslims took a much more active part in the 1857 uprising than the Hindus. Until then, Hindus and Muslims were recruited to the same army units; after the revolt, they were put in separate regiments. The policy of divide et impera had begun!

After 1857, the British cursed every Muslim rebel as "badmash" (rogue) while the Hindu rebel was only dubbed a "Pandy" (after Mangal Panday). It was only after 1905, when the Hindus began to talk of swaraj, and to practise swadeshi, that the British became decisively anti-Hindu and pro-Muslim—and the Muslim became increasingly pro-British.

That being the historic perspective, it should not be difficult for Hindus and Muslims to resolve their problems amicably and finally on the basis of good sense, good faith and common destiny.

### **True History**

First of all the history of India, written by the British from the imperial angle and mechanically regurgitated by the present authorities should be replaced by one written by Indians from the Indian perspective. Such a history should be people-oriented and not elite-centred. This history should not suppress unpleasant facts; but it should not overlook pleasant facts. Such a true and balanced history of the Indian people will go a long way in improving community relations.

The life, limb, property and honour of all citizens must be safe. District officers must be held fully responsible for law and order. In cases of violence there must be a prompt inquiry.

The findings of such inquiries must be made public, the guilty punished, and the victims compensated.

A feeble Minorities Commission does no good to anybody. We should instead have a human Rights Commission at all levels to deal with complaints of discrimination on the basis of caste, creed or community. Once that is done, Muslims should refrain from mouthing all kind of grievances, real or imaginary. Simultaneously, Hindus should stop eyeing Muslims with suspicion and reproach.

Hindus nurse a grievance over the excesses of invaders who happened to be Muslim. Muslim Indians should look upon these scourges of humanity as invaders, and not as fellow Muslims (Muslims in Sind, Pakistan, have already shown the way by acclaiming Raja Dahir Sen, the last Hindu ruler of Sind, as a great hero, and denouncing Mohammed Bin Qasim as an invader and enslaver). By way of goodwill Muslim Indians should return the more important temples known to have been forcibly converted by tyrannical kings into mosques to Hindus.

Muslim Indians should not try to be more Muslim than even the Mughals. They should heartily celebrate Dussera, Diwali and other Hindu festivals and Hindus should not hesitate to observe Id and Muharram in mixed localities as was the practice until only 50 years ago. If non-Christians can exchange gifts and greetings at Christmas why can't Hindu and Muslim friends do the same for Id and Diwali? Incidentally Tazias are only a Muslim adaptation of Rathyatras and Aurangzeb had actually banned them as "un-Islamic".

Urdu is 75 per cent Hindi. Just as Braj, Avadhi, Bhojpuri, Maithili and Rajasthani are accepted as forms of Hindi, such Urdu works as are not highly Persianised and, therefore, not easily understood should be included in the Hindi curriculum of schools and colleges. This should not, however, affect the position of Urdu in the Persian script.

Polygamy should be banned in India, as it is already banned in Pakistan and several other Muslim countries, to protect Muslim women. In addition, the step would also allay Hindu fears of a disproportionate increase in the Muslim population.

### New Laws

Muslim members of the Constituent Assembly had urged proportional representation in the legislatures to ensure equitable representation of all communities. Muslim leaders still feel strongly about it. And they are right. Outside of Anglo-America most democratic countries have proportional representation and Indian electoral laws should also be reformed accordingly.

Indians—Hindu and Muslim—should help each other wherever possible. For example, Muslim Indians wishing to visit Pakistan and Muslim Pakistanis wishing to visit India, should be given passports and visas without inordinate delay.

Likewise Muslims should try to help Hindus living in Muslim countries. For example, Hindus working in Arab countries are not allowed to build temples. A Hindu dying in these countries cannot be cremated there. Muslim Indians should plead the case of Hindu Indians on these issues. It is possible that Arab countries will take their time to do the needful, but Muslim Indians should champion the cause of their Hindu brothers. Gestures like these generate considerable goodwill at the personal level.

Above all Hindus and Muslims must learn to respect each other's religious leaders. As Gandhiji rightly said: "There is in Hinduism room enough for Jesus, as there is for Mohammed, Zoroaster and Moses." Hindus should not hesitate to respect Mohammed as a great man—even as they admire a Lenin or a Napoleon. And Muslim Indians should not hesitate to adore Rama and Krishna. Let them remember that Muslim Iran prides itself on its pre-Islamic heroes like Rustom and Sohrab; Muslim Egypt glories in pre-Islamic Pharoahs, Rameses and Cleopatra; and Muslim Indonesia has Sri Rama as its main national hero.

If Hindus and Muslims ponder over these matters dispassionately and respond to suggestions positively, the ground could be prepared for a great reconciliation in the sub-continent. That will be a great day for all mankind.

—From *The Statesman*, 30 May 1987

