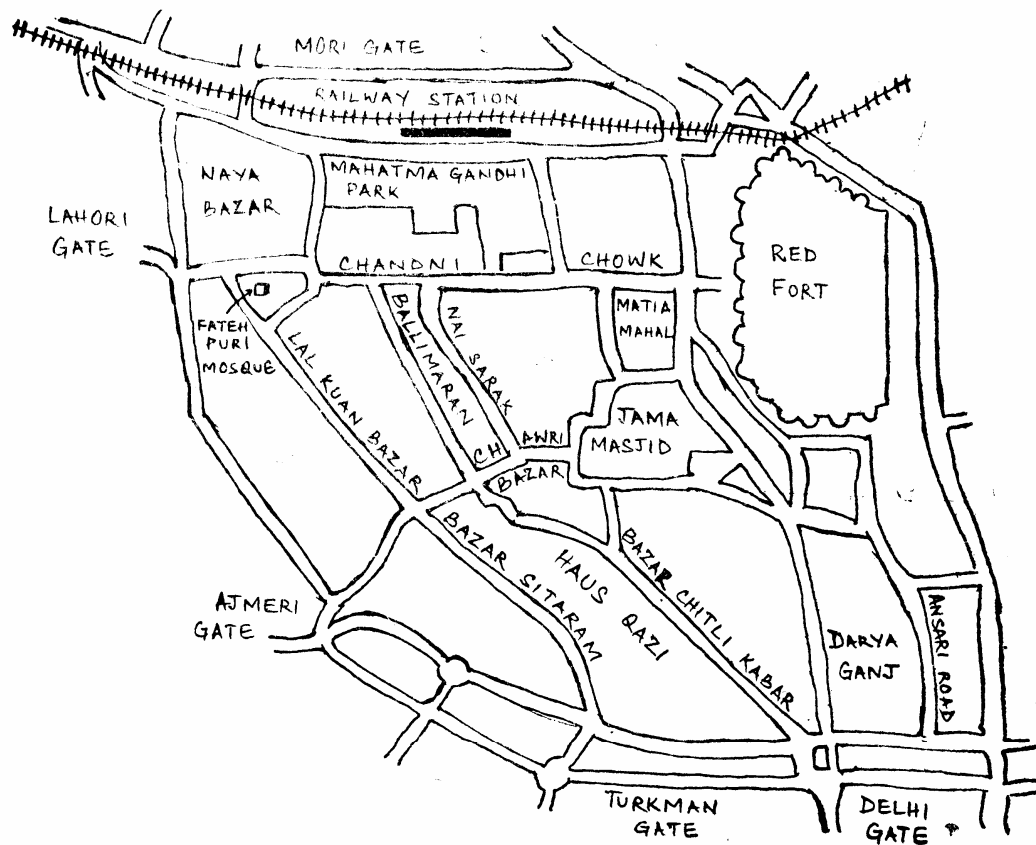


# WALLED CITY RIOTS

A REPORT ON THE POLICE AND  
COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN DELHI 19-24  
MAY, 1987



PEOPLE'S UNION FOR DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS  
DELHI  
JUNE 1987

उजड़े घर को देखकर  
हर माँ के आँसू चीखते  
बन्द करो अब मौत का  
पैगाम मेरे शहर में

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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## **PREFACE**

The communal riots that rocked the walled city of Old Delhi from May 19 to 24, 1987, were set off by a long and vicious spiral of events and trends that had been warping Hindu-Muslim relations for quite some time ; but, in trying to control the riots, the Delhi Administration, the Delhi police and the CRPF (Central Reserve Police Force) betrayed not only utter negligence of duty and responsibility, but an aggressive bias against the Muslim population, which was manifested in widespread terrorisation of Muslims, indiscriminate police firing on Muslims, leading to the killing of innocent people, and harassment of thousands of their community who were trapped inside the curfew-bound lanes of the walled city for days together without any access to the basic amenities-a harassment shared by their Hindu neighbours.

A fact-finding team sponsored by the People's Union for Democratic Rights (PUDR), Delhi, came to the above conclusion after having toured extensively the riot-affected areas, meeting the residents-both Hindu and Muslim-ant." interviewing political leaders, government officials and police personnel. The fact-finding team consisted of Sumanto Bannerjee (journalist), Gautam Navlakha (journalist), G. Lakshmi (research scholar), Kulbir Singh, Nandita Haksar (advocate) and Rita Manchanda (journalist), all from PUDR. They were accompanied and assisted by members of PUCL (Delhi), MANUSHI magazine and the Concerned Group for Minorities, Delhi.

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## I. Introduction

The immediate trigger for the riots was a series of innocuous local incidents, often blown out of all proportion by fast-travelling 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 wide-spread communal riots in Ahmedabad, 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 Banco 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, drug-peddlers, 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 flareup 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 Kausha! 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 Haus Qasi, 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, assault-ing-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 Janambhumi 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. The 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, aisajawab 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 arand mother).

(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 Raise ? 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 Indra-prastha Vishwa Hindu 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 passersby 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 passer—bys 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, Om 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 Mohammad 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 Moham-mad< 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 a Wednesday, the army staged a flag march through the walled city.

Both Wednesday and Thursday (May 20 and 21) were comparatively calm, although tensions 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. Whatever 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 the 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 'namazees' neared the Standard Sweets shop in Churi-walan, 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 Churi-walan who claimed to be an eye-witness, said that it all began when one of the 'namazees' 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 'namaazees became violent when they reached the spot where the Imam of Masjid Hakim 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 by-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 the injured and dead were being brought to hospitals from the riot-affected areas. We interviewed both 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 Kuchanahar Khan, a twisting lane behind the Golcha cinema house on Daryagunj. 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 Shambhu-nath. 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 Kuchanahar 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 appear 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, Bazaar 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 : "Turn 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 Surender in particular, was alleged to have been 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 Kuchachalan. 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 Kuchachalan. The Dalit residents were however all praise for the local police, who they said, were prompt in intervening in stopping further attacks—in marked contrast to what we heard about the police from the Muslims 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 both the Dalit families of Katra Khawaspura, and the Muslims of neighbouring Kucha Nahar Khan and the 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, the 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 Jamun-wali, 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 acting 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 AH, 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 talks with the injured we gathered the impression that they were innocent victims of both the communal frenzy and the 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 personnel—most of them constables, including one Muslim. The nature of their injuries indicated that they might have been hit 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 sweet shop in Churiwallan. While he was working in the shop on Friday, the assailants 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 "Mussailmans 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 Kucha 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. 6 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, Muslims 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, who 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 own 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 even 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 partisanship 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 coldblooded 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 Pahari 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 tussle between para-military forces 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 Dharm College. On Friday, May 22 at about 7 p.m. he was returning home in Suiwallan, next to Cbandni 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. Not only do they not respect the police but they see the police as part of the entire nexus of the underworld.

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 direct and assertive antisocial 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 a crisis, like the outbreak of a communal riot bringing in its trail police harassment, firings, curfew, withdrawal of civic amenities among other things.



## V. 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 the both the 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 'Khoda', to 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)" *Kalikh un par parti hai, jinka muh safed ho"*

The feeling of being let down by the Congress (I) leaders of their own community was quite widespread among the Muslims of the walled city. While some like Zamiruddin Khan, of Kucha Nahar Khan, gave somewhat muffled expression to the feeling, others like Dr. Anjuman 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 Kucah 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 orienta-

tion 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 preplanned. But he would not elaborate on who planned it, beyond saying that it all started because 'Rajivji got embroiled in factional squabbles.'

But Vidyaratua's son, Antil, 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 militance 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 AryaSamaj 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 Hindus 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-finding 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 form 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 the 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 net 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 the Delhi administration and police against the Sikhs 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 jobs 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 formented 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, the 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 Churiwalan 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 Banco 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 the 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 Con-gress-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 reason. They got treated by their local doctors. Some of the deaths 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 o 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 the week 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 Daryagunj 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 intercommunity 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 hand 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.



*The end of every riot is the start of preparation for the next one—not only by stocking up knives, lathis and guns— but by silent acceptance of what is fast becoming part of routine life in our cities and towns. People have learnt to live with riots. Yet, all through, there has also been a continuous struggle against communalism in our country. The present report is a modest contribution to that struggle.*

*PUDR has published a number of booklets and pamphlets related to the issue of communalism. These include a report on the Aligarh riots, studies of repressive legislation enacted in the wake of developments in Punjab, joint reports (with PUCL) on the anti—Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984 and on the R.N. Mishra Enquiry Commission report. We have also conducted meetings, cultural programmes and discussions on this issue, and given legal aid where possible.*

*Though a Delhi based organisation we have investigated and documented attacks on the democratic rights of the people all over the country. We have taken up issues relating to agricultural workers and poor peasants in Andhra and Bihar, workers in Chattishgarh and Modinagar, tribals in Bastar and Adilabad, fishermen in Goa and Madras, slum dwellers in Delhi, gas victims in Bhopal, as well as rights of women and minorities. Apart from nearly 40 reports on such issues, we have fought a large number of cases in the Supreme Court, in relation to the rights of political prisoners, bonded labour, construction workers, fishermen, tribals, and atrocities committed by the police and army.*

*PUDR members are lawyers, journalists, teachers, students and artists. It draws its finances from small donations as well as sale of its literature. It does not accept funds from political parties, government and foreign agencies.*

*PUDR appeals to all democratic sections to help in as many ways as they can especially with donations and the popularisation of its literature.*