

# BHOPAL RIOTS

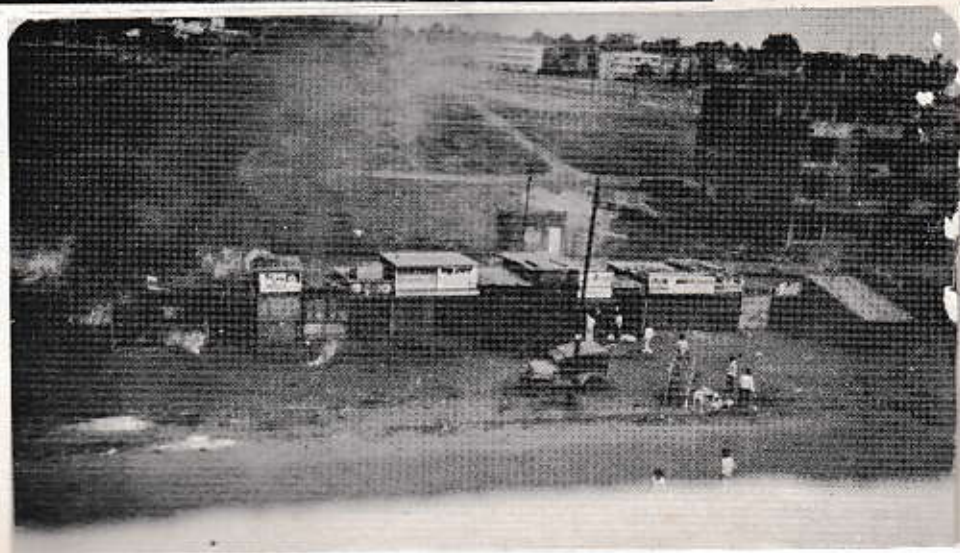
a report



Sanskritik Morcha, Bhopal

People's Union for Democratic Rights, Delhi

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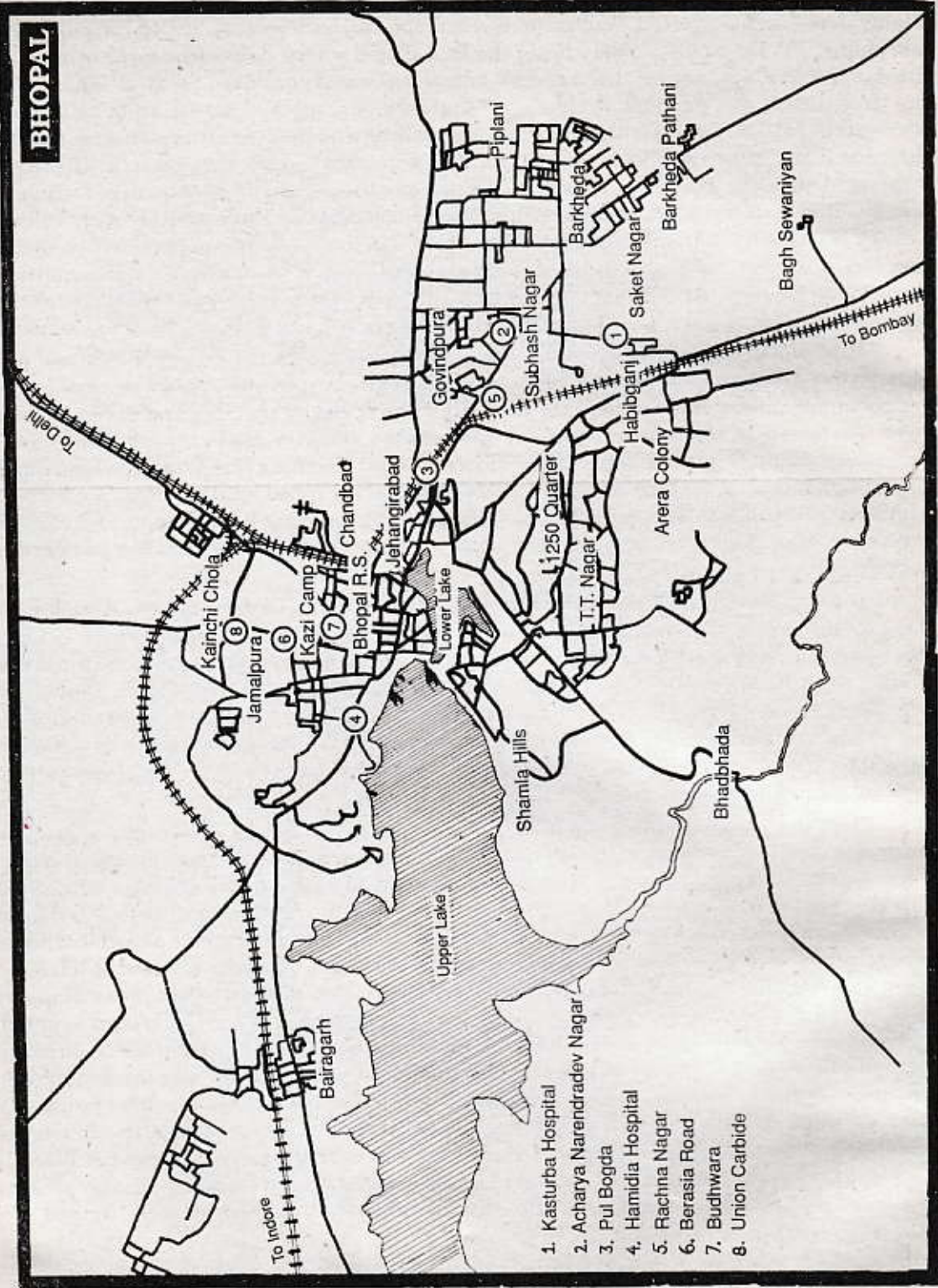
Maharani Laxmibai College is located on the north bank of the lower lake in Budhwara. Highly dense and congested, Budhwara is a muslim majority locality in Old Bhopal. On the morning of 7th December it was among the first places where violence erupted. Almost one third of the 3000 students of this women's college come everyday from far off BHEL area. By the time curfew was imposed at around 10 that morning, most of the students had already reached the college. Some faculty members stayed back and took care to ensure safe return of their students. Those residing in nearby localities were able to reach home soon. Staff escorted other students. The girls from BHEL were shifted to the hostel. The hostel is not inside the college campus. But it is not 'outside' either. In a unique location the hostel, right opposite the college, is on the south bank of the lake. It is located in the Professors colony in New Bhopal. The college operates a boat every hour to transport the girls to and fro. In other words the students do not need to go through the old city. They just have to take a boat ride to reach their hostel. After reaching the girls to the hostel the college informed the BHEL management.

Meanwhile rumours began to circulate in the city about the fate of the college girls. Muslim mobs have attacked the college, molested the girls, raped eighty of them, their breasts are cut off etc. These wild stories gained in detail and speed on that day and in the following days. The scene of the rumoured attack also shifted, as days passed, from Budhwara to Professors colony; from old Bhopal to new Bhopal. On 9th morning *Nav Bharat*, whose Bhopal city edition has a circulation of over 16,000, prominently carried an item "*Kanya Chatravas par dhawa*" (Attack on girls hostel). The same evening in a more lurid fashion *Jan Charcha* carried an item "*Hostel se ladkiyan ijat bachate bhagti rahi*" (Hostel girls flee to save their honour).

For sure the dailies were not reaching the curfew bound parts of the city that day. But these comprise only 45 percent of the area, most of it in the old city. The newspapers did reach other parts, including BHEL area. Their references to the attack on the girls confirmed what by then many had heard by way of rumours. No account of the communal riots in Bhopal, that followed the demolition of Babri Masjid, can recapture the true effect of these news items that day in such an atmosphere. The extensive communal violence that shook the city of over a million people for almost nine days is but a reflection of the frenzy and passions generated by such rumours and news items.

More than a month later when we met the staff of the college their sense of grief and anger was visible. The 25 year old college with both undergraduate and post graduate courses is a reputed college in the region. Its teachers had acted with a sense of responsibility and courage. Yet the fair name of their college was used to ignite further the city that has never witnessed such violence. But then, we also met a senior official of the administration who told us of his chance conversation with a man in police lock up. The man is accused of burning a seven member muslim family to death. His only refrain to the official was "*mujhe ek din ke liye ghor do, mai sau aur musalmano ko jala doonga. Unhonne hamari bahano ki izzat looti hai*". (Let me out for just one day, I will burn another hundred muslims. They have dishonoured our sisters.) There seems to be no way anyone can convince him and his ilk that no such incident took place. What is believed to have happened, very often in a communal riot, becomes the cause of what actually happened. The hazy line between the two colours the immediate perception. And altogether disappears in memory. Fact finding efforts thus get fazed by hardened beliefs as to what constitute facts. In such a context to arrive at a reasonably accurate and objective account of the course of events is difficult. And its usefulness limited. The following report is no exception.

# BHOPAL



1. Kasturba Hospital
2. Acharya Narendradev Nagar
3. Pul Bogda
4. Hamidia Hospital
5. Rachna Nagar
6. Berasia Road
7. Budhwara
8. Union Carbide

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# I.

## The Course of Events

6 December 1992 was to be the day in Madhya Pradesh when the famous music director Rahul Dev Burman was scheduled to receive the Lata Mangeshkar Puruskar. The meeting was cancelled. By afternoon when the domes of Babri Masjid began to fall, the news spread in the state capital Bhopal through cable TV. There was commotion, especially in the muslim majority localities of Old Bhopal. At some places Bajrang Dal activists led the celebration by bursting crackers and distributing sweets. Chief Minister Sunder Lal Patwa called an emergency meeting of the cabinet. It was followed by a meeting of senior officials. Both these meetings discussed measures to maintain law and order. In neither of these meetings measures specially meant for Bhopal were discussed. Indore, Jabalpur and other places figured. Much later a news item planted in the wake of controversy over the role of the suspended Collector of Bhopal, was to refer to an intelligence report that warned of trouble in the city. But no effective measures were initiated in these meetings. And the city witnessed most horrendous violence in the riots that followed the demolition. Altogether 21 places were seriously affected in Madhya Pradesh, in which 161 people were killed. 139 of them in Bhopal.

The city has not witnessed a riot of this nature and extent in its long history of over two and half centuries. In the past there have been tensions. But they were localised and diffused soon. Even in the recent past during the *shilapujan* campaign in 1989 and again during the *rathyatra* in 1990 other places in the state were affected. But not Bhopal. The long history of communal harmony may appear as a ridiculous cliché in advertisements sponsored by the BJP government - "*Visheshkar Bhopal ki lambay samay se chali aa rahi sampradyik sadbhav ki lambi parmpara*" (Bhopal's special tradition of communal har-

mony over long ages). But it is part of a dearly held collective heritage of Bhopalis.

On 7th morning everyone went to their offices, factories, work places, schools and colleges. There indeed was some apprehension in the air. But most people could not foresee what followed. So the day began like any other day. And when the people, men, women and children, left their homes they were not aware that the incidents of violence had already begun. The decision to impose curfew in affected areas was taken at around 10 a.m. Few more hours passed before public got to know about it. Neither the administration nor the institutions had the wherewithal to arrange for the people to return. Meanwhile as violence spread in area after area in the old city, the atmosphere became tense. The circumstances were thus conducive to the rumours that struck the city with a ferocity from which it is still to recover. Imagine yourself to be a parent of a young boy or girl gone to school or college that morning. Almost every fear, every apprehension and every anxiety translates itself into 'news' via a rumour floated by anyone who is interested in floating it. Beginning with eveningers on 7th itself, throughout the period newspapers selectively printed these rumours authenticated as 'news' with devastating consequences. On 7th evening for instance, *Dainik Sandhya Prakash* in its headline reported death toll as eight but made it ten in the story. *Jan Charcha* report not only made it 12 in Bhopal but added that 86 were killed in police firing at Ayodhya. To be sure these two news items credited them to that single most authentic source of all rumours in South Asia: British Broadcasting Corporation ("*Vishesh samvad-data Mark Tully ke anusar...*" According to special correspondent Mark Tully). Ignored in the process were reports filed by their own correspondents and the statement issued by

Ms. Nirmal Buch, Chief Secretary, Madhya Pradesh. Events and their perceptions, rumours and 'news' clouded the course of the communal riots thereafter.

### Initial Phase

The first set of incidents took place around 9 a.m. Almost simultaneously violence erupted in a number of places, mostly in old city. Bands of muslim youth tried to enforce an impromptu bandh call. Shops, vehicles, government property and temples became targets of attack. In Jehangirabad a police constable was killed. Police opened fire to quell the mobs. Curfew was imposed in eight police station areas that cover entire North Bhopal. By late afternoon it was extended to Govindpura, part of which is adjacent to affected old Bhopal. Night curfew was imposed in New Bhopal. But the administration, bogged down completely in the old city, could not enforce curfew in Govindpura or New Bhopal.

Predictably that night sporadic incidents took place in some of the new Bhopal areas also. Colonies in old Bhopal lived amidst rumours, apprehensions and search operations. After 2 a.m. that night senior officials, including the Chief Secretary, took a tour of the colonies. She ordered a search operation in Arif Nagar and sent additional forces to Sheetal Nagar. Elsewhere, the same night, juggis were burnt behind Apsara Talkies; the first of such incidents. On 8th more areas were drawn into the vortex, with similar incidents.

If one were to identify some pattern in this random violence in the first two days, one can note that there were actually very few clashes between mobs of the two communities. Much of the violence was directed against property: vehicles, shops, temples and mosques. It was also confined to the main artery roads and did not spread to residential areas. The exceptions perhaps were some of the colonies on either side of Berasia Road.

## Bhopal: 7-8 December 1992

*Localities that witnessed notable instances of violence in the initial phase.*

Aishbagh Stadium	Kainchi Chola
Arif Nagar	Kazi Camp
Ashok Garden	Kotwali
Bafna Colony	Laxmi Talkies
Bagh Umrao Dullah	Mangalwara
Barkhed	Nishatpura
Berasia Road	Putli Ghar
Budhwara	Rachna Nagar
Ghoda Nakkas	Rajiv Nagar
Hanuman Ganj	Shahjahanabad
Ibrahim Ganj	Sheetal Nagar
Indira Nagar	Sindhi Colony
Jamalpura	Subhash Nagar
Jehangirabad	Sudama Nagar
Jinsi Chowraha	Talaiya
Jumerati	Tila Jamalpura
Kabad Khana	

Instances of private violence against the other community were few. Figures indicate character of the events. In the first two days, of the 24 people dead, seven were killed in private violence. The rest, in police firings. Sources at Hamidia Hospital, which received about 300 patients in the first two days, also confirm this impression.

By the end of 8th evening 24 died, 150 cases of arson registered in 13 places, 350 people including the controversial independent MLA Arif Aqeel were arrested. Although formally the army was called by 7th evening itself, effectively it came into the picture much later. Towards evening the government also woke up to acknowledge to itself the gravity of the situation in its state capital. The Collector and the Superintendent of Police (SP) were transferred. 18 platoons of the army came into operation. All in vain, as we shall see.

The first two days, as it turned out, were not perhaps as striking as the later

phase in terms of extent, scale and brutality of communal violence. But in many ways what happened or what is believed to have happened in this initial phase significantly influenced the course of events. Communal perception of the events became complete. This kind of division, on communal lines, about the course of events is perhaps common to all riots. And in Bhopal it was further confounded by other divisions. BJP versus Congress(I); the Union Minister and former Chief Minister of the state Arjun Singh and his battle with the faction led by Vidya Charan Shukla in his own party; the intense factionalism between the Patwa group and Saklecha group in BJP; factionalism within bureaucracy, often linked with political parties or factions within - all influenced the course of events and their perceptions in addition to the larger hindu muslim divide.

The significance of the first two days lies in that it was largely an offensive by muslim mobs. At least till 8th afternoon. Right from the first set of incidents at Jehangirabad, it was muslims, in the age group of 15-25 who took over the streets. Their anger was directed initially as much against state property as that of hindus. Country made bombs, and rifles were also used in addition to swords and rods. There were of course wild rumours; that sophisticated arms were used; that stacks of arms were piled up in Tajul Masjid etc. The famous mosque is the scene of the Ijtema conference every winter for which thousands of muslims come from all over the world. Some pilgrims who came ahead of the conference this year were staying in the mosque. Immediately they were branded as Pakistani agents out to create trouble. (These early set of pilgrims, we later found out, were from Philippines). Arrival of truck loads of arms from Indore and other parts was also mentioned. On 8th morning *Nav Bharat* in a front page item, "*Barood se bhara tanker Bhopal aaya*" (Tanker loaded with gun powder arrives in Bhopal), gave credence to some of

these rumours. Eventually as it turned out no sophisticated arms were used nor any barood exploded. The doctors at Hamidia who received patients right from 10.30 a.m. on 7th rule out the use of any sophisticated arms. They referred only to pellet injuries, among others. Whatever the rumours, the fact remains that the initial phase was, by and large, an offensive by muslim youth. Most of the elders of the community we met readily acknowledge that they completely failed to control their youth. But they refute any suggestion of organisation or planning behind the offensive. The one controversy that clouds the nature of muslim reaction in this phase relates to Arif Aqeel.

Aqeel originally belonged to Congress(I). But, denied a ticket in the last elections, he contested as an independent MLA from North Bhopal constituency and won. He defeated the local dada and BJP leader Ramesh Sharma popularly known as Ghuttu Bhaiya. Aqeel's speech near Budhwara on 7th morning is said to have incited the muslim youth. It is widely alleged that he distributed arms to the rampaging mobs. There are even some graphic accounts of how he directed them, especially in the afternoon, in and around Jumerati. There are equally graphic accounts of how he attempted to restrain the youth. In Arif Nagar he was supposed to have spread his kurta and pleaded "*mai aman ki bhik mangne aya hun*" (I have come to beg for peace). In Putli Ghar he was supposed to have lain down on the road to prevent a mob attacking a temple. In any case by the evening of the first day he was arrested. He was released on 30th December on a conditional bail that prohibited him from entering Bhopal city limits for a month.

In some respects the role of Arif Aqeel is closely linked with the controversy about the role of Congress(I) in general and Arjun Singh in particular. From about the afternoon itself the party's single point programme became dismissal of Patwa government. Many Congress(I) leaders descended from Delhi,



did a perfunctory tour and promptly demanded the dismissal of the government. None of them played any conspicuous role in establishing peace or providing relief. The exceptions were Digvijay Singh and other local leaders. Reports however suggest that at the mohalla level Congress(I) activists took part in the violence both on the hindu and muslim side, depending on the area (some secularism this!). Some people believe that Arif Aqeel was set up by Arjun Singh to create trouble for the government. Arjun Singh's son, Ajay Singh, it should be noted was among the first to meet Governor Kunwar Mehmood Ali Khan to demand the release of Aqeel. In any case Arjun Singh has enough reasons to create disturbances that would facilitate the dismissal of the government. After BJP came to power, he not only lost much of his clout, but is also faced with criminal charges in the Churhat lottery case.

Arjun Singh is not the only person interested in the dismissal of the Patwa government. In Madhya Pradesh factionalism within BJP is intense. The main target of each faction is more the other faction than the rival party, as is the case with Congress(I) all over. The two main groups are led by Patwa and former Chief Minister Virendra Kumar Saklecha. Babulal Gour, MLA from Govindpura constituency in the city and a cabinet minister is considered close to Patwa. The Saklecha group has been gunning for the Patwa-Gour combine for a long time and the demolition came in handy for them. Some of the dailies which played an inflammatory role were believed to be close to Saklecha. In any case he has gone on record condemning "the indifference of Patwa and his cabinet towards the situation in the riot hit state capital" (*UNI*, Indore, 15 December).

All along the line there is also intense rivalry within civil and police bureaucracy. The initial muslim offensive took place when the Collector of Bhopal was M.A. Khan. (It should be noted that a coincidence like this,

where the Collector, MLA and the Governor were all muslims when the first offensive took place, acquires sinister connotations in the communal propaganda and perceptions.) Khan, all accounts suggest, was an extremely unpopular administrator. As a promotee to the IAS with little experience of district administration, he generates envy among his colleagues in the service. He was earlier considered close to Arjun Singh. Subsequently he became identified with Babulal Gour. He personally supervised some of the most brutal anti-encroachment drives in the city in which Congress(I) voting muslim jhuggi dwellers were the victims. Khan is accused of willfully ignoring his duties in the initial phase and not acting on the intelligence reports submitted to him. But sources close to him maintain that he was made a convenient scapegoat by the BJP government which took advantage of his religion. The charge that he didn't act on the intelligence reports is also denied. The reports, if they did exist, were never shown to him. He, along with the SP, was transferred on 8th evening. Later after President's rule, he along with the SP was suspended, believed to be at the behest of Arjun Singh. Subsequently, in March the Central Administrative Tribunal reinstated both of them. In these factional battles the Chief Secretary's name also figures. She is accused of being close to a faction in BJP. When BJP came to power she was appointed to the coveted post superseding six of her seniors. After President's rule one faction of Congress(I) opposed her transfer, in vain. As one official put it "she used the riots to settle her scores and in turn became a victim of it after the President rule came".

Many observers suspect that the BJP government deliberately allowed the muslim offensive in the initial phase to take place to provide a rationale for the later organised attacks of hindus led by the Bajrang Dal. Till 7th evening and later, adequate force was not pressed into service. Curfew, when it was

extended to New Bhopal and BHEL areas, was imposed in fits and starts. These areas falling under south Bhopal and Govindpura constituencies have elected BJP candidates in the last election. It was in these areas that large scale organised violence took place after the 8th. At the height of the riots, Susheel Chandra Verma, the BJP MP from Bhopal gave a statement naming and blaming the muslim community. Even Patwa, in response to the insensitive and irresponsible statement, was forced to say that "I will have to talk to Mr. Verma about this".

Around 8 p.m. on 8 December the new Collector Pravesh Sharma and the new S.P. Surinder Singh took charge. (Singh was in charge in Bhilai in the last two tumultuous years which saw a major strike, assassination of trade union leader Shankar Guha Niyogi and firing on workers). Three hours later kar sewaks arrived back from Ayodhya.

### The Arrival of Kar Sewaks

The special train bringing back the kar sewaks was delayed at Bina and Vidisha railway stations on the explicit orders of the administration. It reached Bhopal three hours behind schedule around 11.30 in the night. The train was not allowed to stop at Bhopal railway station. Instead it was taken to Habibganj railway station, nearer to BHEL area. The kar sewaks in this train were from Ratlam, Jabalpur and some places in Gujarat. The district administration, with armed escort, put them in state transport buses and sent them off to their respective destinations. So goes the official version.

This version has few takers. Many believe that one bus load was sent to BHEL where the management put them up. (In turn officials say some of them might have pulled the chain between the two stations and sneaked into BHEL.) The fact of the matter is that no attempt was made to immobilise the Bhopal kar sewaks though the city was already in flames. And they did play a crucial role in the

subsequent violence. The official claim that they did not help kar sewaks has little credence. The government provided hospitality to the *kar sewaks* even while maintaining that events in Ayodhya should not be used to create disturbances in Madhya Pradesh. For, state cabinet deputed a minister, Babulal Gour, to receive the *kar sewaks* at the Habibganj railway station. Ironically all dailies in the city that very morning carried the appeal issued by Patwa that "... it is our responsibility to see that incidents that occur outside the state should not aggravate things in the state". Ayodhya, from where the triumphant *kar sewaks* were returning, Patwa should know is in Uttar Pradesh.

### Second Phase

The arrival of the kar sewaks was not the only reason that led to subsequent destruction and death in the city. Bajrang Dal, the police and the media too played their role. By around 8th afternoon itself the initial outburst that is attributed to muslim mobs had abated. From then onwards, gradually and systematically, Bajrang Dal activists took over the streets. The Dal's operational headquarters are located in the old city but it has more organised units in New Bhopal and BHEL area. The focal point of violence shifted here from 9th onwards. At a number of places police apparently actively connived with them. We were told that many of the 4000 curfew passes that were issued to the press actually went into the hands of Bajrang Dal activists. Eye witness accounts suggest that the activists themselves went around in police uniforms. Two particular actions of the administration and police helped the free and unrestricted movement of armed mobs of Bajrang Dal. By 8th in the old city area the army was conducting flag marches. And the police did house to house search for arms. A large pile of arms was seized, according to police sources. But more significantly almost all able bodied muslim men were picked up indiscriminately

## An Anonymous Account

The harassment by police, the possibility of Bajrang Dal coming back to glory, and lack of faith in the effectiveness of democratic institutions to protect citizens haunt the victims in Bhopal. So it is necessary to keep names of the victims anonymous. But pointless to keep their community unidentified. So let us call him Ahmad. A saw mill worker, 30 year old Ahmad has been living in the jhuggis in Vikas Nagar, C Sector, Piplani. Most of the people in these jhuggis are, like him, employed in small enterprises or are self employed. Some are construction labour. About 20 of the 50 families are muslims. Late in the evening on the 9th a group of people came to the jhuggis, raised slogans and went off. That frightened all the muslim families. They all ran for safety. Some, like Ahmed and his family, took shelter in the nearby BHEL quarters under construction. At night the mob attacked the houses, looted and burnt them. They somehow got wind of the hiding place, and attacked it. They dragged them out and assaulted them. From the hints given, Ahmad's wife was raped by more than one attacker. The family did not volunteer any more details than suggestions as to what happened. Nor did we probe further. Ahmad was brutally beaten. His attackers were known to him. Most of them have been neighbours for the last two years after he shifted to Vikas Nagar. Ahmad was left for dead. Bleeding profusely he lay on the road. His old mother, with daughter in law in a state of trauma, grandchildren, and a son left bleeding, pleaded for mercy. She sought help to take them to hospital. But help came only thirteen hours later, next morning, through a passing police van. Ahmad was admitted to hospital. He and his family, miraculously, survived the pain, injury and trauma. It was they who gave us this account. Ahmad is worried about the life that he has to rebuild from scratch. He has probably lost his job and there is no chance of going back to Vikas Nagar jhuggis. His mother is thankful that they managed to survive. *Khuda ka raham.*

by the police. Many of them were illegally detained, beaten up, tortured and were let out only after a week. They returned to their homes or shops to find them destroyed. Further, the decision to impose curfew was taken in area after area after the Bajrang Dal activists had already seized control. Curfew was never imposed at one go. In the midst of this what made the police go berserk was the killing of a young police constable Tomar in a muslim house on 9th morning, near Subhash Nagar. He was allegedly lured into the house by a friend. This was the background in which New Bhopal and BHEL exploded on the 9th.

The morning of 9th however dawned on the city with explosive coverage by the newspapers. All kinds of wild rumours that were in circulation about the 'atrocities' on hindus came home with a stamp of authenticity. *Dainik Bhaskar* reported that rioters en-

tered Hamidia Hospital and beat up the injured patients after identifying them. There is no, absolutely no, basis for this particular melodramatic account ("*Dangayeyon ne manavata ke gala ghonta*" Rioters slaughter all humane values). *Nav Bharat* on its back page carried three separate items titled: "*Yuvatiyaan utha le gaye; Kanya chatravas par dhawa; Samuhik balathkar*" (Young girls abducted; Attack on girls hostel; Gang rape). Apart from the Maharani Laxmi Bai College girls hostel mentioned earlier, an adivasi girls hostel and a working women's hostel were also mentioned in these reports. All these reports were completely baseless. *Nai Duniya*, *Nav Bharat* and *Dainik Bhaskar* reported the events with names and communities of the victims clearly identified. Incidentally their counter parts, Urdu dailies could not bring out their editions till the 20th. At least a whole page was devoted to photo-

graphs. The bias was clear in the choice: a partially burnt shop whose name was clearly visible got prominent coverage. Not very far from this shop, one of the prominent monuments of the city, Jumerati Darwaza was burnt. The dailies did not even refer to the incident. Some of the photographs publicised

were also in bad taste, like that of a half naked corpse of a woman in a nalla, carried by at least two dailies. *Dainik Bhaskar* reported that in old Bhopal a woman was raped and her breasts were cut off. And in the evening *Jan Charcha* quoted Ishwar Singh Chauhan, a lieutenant of Arjun Singh, saying "purane

### Tale of Two Children

Arvind (12) and Tabassum (11) became neighbours during the riots. In the Orthopaedic Surgery Ward of Hamidia Hospital. The ward looks like a railway platform with families, their luggage and permanent state of disorder, in the midst of which the two children are happily keeping company with each other. With Arvind sits his disconcerted mother, Parvati Bai. She and her husband left their village near Lalitpur in search of a decent living. They settled in Bhopal ten years ago. Her husband started a small eating place in Station Bazar, not very far from the Union Carbide Factory. He was one of those who inhaled the toxic gas that fatal night. But he didn't die. Instead he lived with ailments and stomach pain caused by the gas for three years. And finally died in 1987. His brother came and took over the eating place. And was living with Parvati Bai. Recently they shifted to Sahib Colony, Chandbad. On 8th morning, around 11, Arvind went out to play. Parvati Bai having heard of tensions went out a little later to call him back home. She couldn't find him. Nothing much happened in the colony itself. But the police entered the colony chasing a group of slogan shouting youth from the colony across the nala. They opened fire injuring six people (two of them died later). All the injured were taken to Hamidia. Meanwhile after the firing Parvati Bai kept searching for Arvind. Her search ended in the evening. Police came and informed her that he was among the injured admitted to the hospital. She rushed there. The boy had to be given blood. He was operated thrice. Still, some bullet pieces are lodged in his leg. Identifiable on an X-Ray. His leg is in plaster cast. He remained playfully engaged with the girl in the next bed, while his mother narrated this account.

Tabassum's father is a retired textile worker living now in Pushpa Nagar. His four sons are engaged in small business of their own. In Pushpa Nagar, a mixed locality, no incidents took place. But the police came on 8th morning and conducted door to door searches. They entered Tabassum's house, broke the household goods, arrested her father and four brothers and left. But a few minutes later they began firing in the air from the neighbouring house. Nobody knows what was the provocation, if any. One of the bullets entered the house and hit Tabassum. Her mother taking the child and her sister ran out of the house. They took shelter in a drain. Till evening, when a passing military van reached them to Hamidia Hospital. The arrested male members were sent to jail and returned only after the 20th. The girl, her mother and sister remained in the hospital. The bullet that hit Tabassum, penetrating her palm, then entered her thigh bone. Her leg since then is in traction. Her family, like Arvind's, received Rs. 500 as compensation for 'simple injury'. The doctors are not sure whether her leg will become normal. But she looked blissfully unaware of all the anxieties and apprehensions, of her family and doctors.

We do not know what the future holds for these two children, their city and their society. But the sight of the two of them keeping playful company to each other remains the most moving image of the ravaged city.

*Bhopal me 70 hindu streeyone ke stan kaat diye gaye*" (Breasts of 70 hindu women were cut off in Old Bhopal). The evening also put the toll of death in country wide disturbances as 25,000! Official attempts to scotch these rumours were confined to cliches like "*Afwahon par bharosa na karo*" (Do not believe rumours). Chief Secretary Nirmala Buch's standard response in her daily briefings was "we have no information", which is a ridiculous way of denying these wild rumours. In any case there was one source of information: Hamidia hospital. The doctors there could have been mobilised to state facts about mass rape and breast cuttings. Throughout the first few days one of the most inflammatory rumours in circulation was that Laxmi Narayan Mandir had been set on fire. A visual of the temple on Doordarshan could have nipped it in the bud. Instead government let these rumours circulate. Much later a senior official of the administration said, "at least 40 murders in the city should be attributed to 9th morning *Nav Bharat*".

The violence in New Bhopal began on 8th night itself. Subhash Nagar, and the adjoining colonies, Tantiya Tope Nagar and 1250 quarter area witnessed some incidents. The pattern was the same. A mob would come and burn an isolated kiosk or a shop. In the dead of night, despite night curfew, mysterious Maruti cars or jeeps would park themselves and play at full blast, cassette recordings of slogans and mass shouting. At many places residents believed that mobs had arrived. On 9th morning, the first attack on select muslim flats in multi-storeyed apartments took place in Shastri Nagar. The residents of these flats in many cases had moved out to safer places. The flats were broken into, things thrown out and burnt or looted. Unlike in old Bhopal, in New Bhopal in both shops and houses large scale looting took place. After the situation got completely out of control, day curfew was imposed in the three police station areas of New Bhopal also:

Habibganj, T.T. Nagar and Maharana Pratap Nagar. Even then no preventive measures were taken in BHEL areas where the violence shifted to by 9th night.

That night a number of colonies, especially jhuggis, witnessed attacks, stone pelting, and attempted arson all along the eastern side of the railway line. On 10th morning for the first time in 35 years, BHEL closed down its plant. The houses of muslim employees scattered in different parts of the township were selectively attacked. In Piplani, Barkheda Pathani, Hazrat Nizamuddin Colony, Bagh Sewaniyan, Bagh Farhat Afza, muslim majority colonies were attacked. Jhuggis were burnt. On 10th around noon, curfew was imposed in Piplani and Bagh Sewaniyan Police Station areas. But organised destruction and killings went on in the area.

10th evenings proclaimed in banner headlines "500 killed". Next evening *Jan Charcha* carried a front page box with a title "*Bhopal me abhi tak 515 mare*" (515 killed in Bhopal till now) and carried a colony wise list of death toll. The total toll of the listed 13 colonies adds to 437, much less than 515 claimed in the title. But who would bother about arithmetic in such a situation. Independent of this box, the banner headline, that has no relation with the story that followed was: "*Patwa ka jhut sabit. Bhopal me pichli raat balatkar huve.*" (Patwa's lies nailed. Rapes in Bhopal last night.)

As rumours and tensions continued to spread they reached the suburb, Bairagarh. Many of the refugees from old city, mostly hindus, also managed to reach there. The area is considered a BJP stronghold. Other than prohibitory orders under Section 144 no preventive measures were taken. On 11th night select muslim houses were attacked and by next morning arson took place at many places. It was then that finally Bairagarh was also put under curfew, thus bringing the entire city under curfew.

**Bhopal****15 December****Retail Prices**

<i>Commodity</i>	<i>Rs. per kg.</i>
Onions	20
Potatoes	16
Cabbage	12
Brinjals	14
Ordinary Rice	18

The situation in Old Bhopal and later in New Bhopal began improving. Day curfew was lifted for 1-2 hours, where only women were allowed to come out on the streets in old city on 10th. On 11th Friday there was no relaxation anywhere in Bhopal. Friday prayers, the expected judgement on the disputed land in Ayodhya, BJP's action programme against the arrest of its leaders in Delhi - all contributed to an air of fear and apprehension. But otherwise both in Old and New Bhopal the situation gradually and steadily improved as far mob violence is concerned. The only exceptions were some colonies on either side of Berasia Road and Jawahar Chowk. In old city from arson and mob violence on the roads it was now police violence against muslims, on the streets and inside the houses.

But the situation on the east side of the railway line steadily deteriorated. In some of the colonies muslims were dragged out of their houses and burnt alive. On the night of 10th CISF Inspector Nair was killed in a jhuggi in B sector Piplani. In the urban villages on the eastern frontiers attacks led to a mass exodus of muslims. Jhuggis were burnt at a number of places. On 12th an SAF Jawan was killed in Govindpura. From that day the army and CISF gradually took control of the situation although incidents continued. This area, where colonies are not contiguous, made it easy for the rioters who are locals to sporadically come out burn, attack and then retreat. It was only on the 16th that order was

restored. Perhaps the Bajrang Dal mobs felt unsure when they heard news of the dismissal of the Patwa government the night before.

Victims had been moving in hordes to safer places and impromptu refugee camps. Hindus from Old Bhopal, and muslims from New Bhopal took shelter with their relatives. But that was the case with the middle classes. Poor people moved into transit camps. Atalram Sindhi Dharamshala housed hindu refugees while T.T. Nagar stadium housed both hindus and muslims. Police stations, like Kotwali, Taliya and Govindpura sheltered the refugees. After the curfew was somewhat relaxed people moved into what came to be recognised as refugee camps. At the peak there were 31 camps housing about 17,000 victims. The camp sites included religious places (Piplani and Govindpura mosques or Bairagarh and Gufa mandirs); schools and colleges (Subhash Nagar school, PGBT College); public places or grounds (Nagar Nigam Colony and Sports Complex, BHEL). The refugees included both hindus and muslims. In the survey conducted by Self Employed Womens Association (SEWA), eight out of the eleven camps had mixed groups. In that survey 37 percent of the 700 families covered were hindus. On the whole approximately 30-35 percent of the refugees were hindus.

The worst affected were jhuggi dwellers. In many cases they lost all their belongings and were left with no homes to return to. Of the 7684 people surveyed in 18 major camps, by Madhya Pradesh Vigyan Sabha (MPVS), 47 percent were from labouring poor families. For at least a week they stayed in open grounds. In large camps like Nagar Nigam Colony and Shahjahanabad camps, toilet facilities were so meagre that the threat of epidemic loomed large. The situation was saved by the timely and massive intervention by citizen groups. The administration in Bhopal, on its own admission did not provide any relief to the people in the camps. By the

time it recovered from its atrophy, the voluntary organisations were in command of the situation. The administration merely undertook the job of coordinating their efforts.

A part of the relief was provided by religious organisations. On communal lines. Hindu groups concentrated in Atalram Dhar-amshala and Bairagarh camps. Muslim groups focussed on camps in BHEL Area. Some help seems to have come from Bombay ("*Haji Mastan ne bheja hai*") (Haji Mastan has sent help) as people told us in Farhat Afza camp). In the camp at Subhash Nagar some hindu groups distributed material only to hindus

even though the camp was a mixed one. The role of city's leading political parties was not particularly conspicuous. None of the state cabinet ministers or other BJP MLAs took any initiative. Congress(I) organised the largest number of tours with central cabinet ministers, AICC observers, all and sundry leaders with their attendants stomping around. Credit however goes to the Sadbhavana Manch formed by Janata Dal and Left Front associates. BJP came into this picture only after its government was dismissed, on the 15th. Its relief was confined to hindu refugees. In a particularly obnoxious move the party lead-

### Death of a BHEL Worker

Shafiq Mia was a resident of Bhagalpur in Bihar. He got a job at BHEL in 1961 and shifted to Bhopal with his wife. Since then they had been living in the BHEL quarters and had raised a family of two sons and a daughter. Six months ago they shifted to a quarter in C Sector Piplani, which was attacked on 10 December. The attackers included sons of BHEL employees and other residents of the township. Shafiq was killed.

The family had never expected such an attack on their house. Since 7 December groups of youth, school and college students, from the colony, armed with swords and rods were seen moving around. Shafiq went up and questioned them. They said they were protecting the colony against any attack from outside. Three days later they were to become part of the mob that killed Shafiq.

A group of policemen barged into Shafiq's house sometime after 8 p.m. on 10 December. At that time Shafiq's two sons were away, but two boys from his village were staying with him. The policemen ordered everybody to stand in a line against the wall. Then they searched the house. Outside they were heard telling each other that there was nothing inside. According to the family, the policemen were not from the local thana. After the search Shafiq came out and requested the neighbours to help in case of any emergency. But no help was forthcoming when the mob attacked the house an hour later.

The mob approached the house shouting slogans of "Jai Shri Ram". They surrounded the quarter and ordered the family to hand over the valuables. After the jewellery and cash were given, the family was attacked with swords. Shafiq's wife escaped and hid in some bushes nearby. The two boys were badly injured and Shafiq was killed. After this the mob looted and burnt the house. Only when Shafiq's sons came back some time later, were the injured taken to hospital.

Next morning the family shifted to the relief camp at Piplani masjid situated nearby. After the camp was shut down, the family shifted to a relative's quarter in Piplani, where we met them. They have received the compensation for death and Rs. 5,000 for damages from the government. But the BHEL management is yet to take any measures for providing them compensation. Or rehabilitation.

ers encouraged hindus from mixed refugee camps to move to hindu camps.

The efforts by religious organisations or leading political parties pale into insignificance before the work done by voluntary organisations. In scale and sensitivity there is no parallel for the efforts of these groups. Employees unions, mohalla level peace committees, science and education groups, schools and colleges, traders associations, cultural organisations - we were able to list at least 52 organisations or groups which in some form or other helped the victims in the camps. Doctors from Hamidia Hospital and other places constantly visited the camps. Ekta Parishad also helped in rebuilding houses in Indira Nagar and Rajiv Nagar. SEWA, MPVS and Bhopal Gas Pedit Mahila Udyog Sangathan not only actively helped in the relief work but also conducted valuable surveys. Together these three surveys covered 10,000 out of the total 17,000 people. Among others, notable role was played by Gandhi Bhavan and SEWA located in the same place. A number of voluntary groups joined the efforts at Gandhi Bhawan. These organisations began collecting and distributing material to various camps. Initially, cooking of food became a problem since many volunteers themselves could not reach the place due to curfew. In fact one of the employees of SEWA, driver Nasim, was killed in the riots. But just behind the Bhavan there is a colony, Rustam ka Ahata from where people came and helped. They were able to come to the Bhavan, through the fence, without having to venture onto the curfew bound main road. On makeshift *chulhas* in the open, the volunteers cooked food for almost 5,000 people everyday for about ten days and sent it to different camps. By 15th they were able to organise a camp at Gandhi Bhavan itself.

People in majority of the camps began returning to their places around 20th when day curfew was lifted from most of the areas. By the end of the month after the night

curfew was also lifted about 1,000 were left in six camps. Eventually they were all shifted to the camp at Bagh Farhat Afza. It was the only camp running in January end when we visited.

The government initially appointed an administrative enquiry into the riots. Subsequently on 22 December it was replaced by a judicial enquiry under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952. The terms of reference of the Commission include disturbances in Bhopal and Ujjain.

## Death and Destruction

The death toll in communal riots is never a mere number. It acquires an emotive power in a surcharged atmosphere. And after. A figure usually sinks into popular consciousness to become, often, part of communal folklore. In Bhopal this problem is complicated by a variety of contingent factors. Vast majority of the affected people were those living on the margins of the economy. Work place, hut or jhuggi, ration card - every where theirs is a life without a record. Till death bestows it on them in retrospect, in the form of a number. Even the voters list - the *raison d'être* of communal politics - is not reliable. The lists, incomplete, are not free from manipulation. In any case after the last revision of the list, at least 20,000 people were relocated in the anti-encroachment drives of the BJP government. At some places police burnt the corpses on the spot, as the reports suggest. In Putli Ghar they burnt the corpses on the road side. Ibrahim Khan's family in Indira Nagar was not allowed to take the body to the graveyard. Instead police came in the night and took it away. In other places people who went out never returned. The MPVS survey reports 60 people as missing. But that survey was conducted in the refugee camp, in the immediate aftermath. Possibly some of them may have returned later. Cremation grounds and graveyards, that ultimate destination of all human beings, are not



## Victimising a Victim

Shabid Karim is a permanent worker at BHEL who has worked at the plant for the last 25 years as a foreman. Staying at Barkheda previously, he had shifted to C Sector Piplani a few years ago.

On 9 December Shabid was working at the plant when rumours and news about incidents of violence in the BHEL area started pouring in. He left his work in the afternoon and proceeded home. Enroute he saw some burnt vehicles on the road. In the colony he found his family in a state of panic. He immediately contacted Deputy General Manager and Executive Director to provide security. But there was no response. It was only by 5.00 p.m. that he managed to get a vehicle with the help of a senior manager to shift his family to the Civil Maintenance Office. When he was leaving, neighbours asked him not to worry and to stay at home. He stayed in the house and sent the family. A few hours later, with more news of violent incidents in the township, he too went to the Civil Office.

News of attacks on jhuggi clusters and the nearby shops in Indira market kept coming in through the night, as more and more muslim families poured in. The Civil Office soon got converted into an impromptu refugee camp.

Next evening Shabid started back for his house to get out some of the valuables. On approaching his house he saw it was being attacked by a mob of about 400 people. Shabid hid himself by climbing a tree nearby and was a witness to the attack. Household goods were being looted. Furniture was brought into the open and set on fire. After some time CISF jawans reached there. Seeing Shabid hiding, they took him to safety. From the Civil Office Shabid reported the happenings to the Executive Director on phone. He was told that his house was attacked only because he had moved out. Later he lodged a complaint at the Piplani P.S. naming those whom he had recognised. The copy of the FIR given to him however does not include any name.

Meanwhile, large number of families both from the BHEL township and the bastis adjoining it had sought refuge at the Piplani masjid. The families residing at the Civil Office were also shifted there.

Shabid was called to the Estate Office on 21 December for the allotment of a new house. There he saw Prakash Pagade, one of the attackers he had recognised. When Prakash was confronted, he ran shouting that he was being attacked. A strike in the Estate Office resulted and Shabid was arrested under two cases: one under S. 151 and the second under S. 451, 323, 294 and 506. He obtained bail in the former but was sent to jail in the latter case. While in jail he received a suspension notice from the BHEL management. A local Youth Congress leader helped Shabid get bail and he was released on 25 December.

After being jailed, when he returned and was reinstated, what was awaiting Shabid, a technician, hurt him the most. The BHEL management shifted him from production work, after 25 years, to deskwork in Despatch Section.

a useful source either. During the prolonged curfew periods many people disposed off the bodies locally.

And so the death toll in Bhopal riots remains in a permanent state of indeterminacy. Giving scope to rumours. The highest

figures were those mentioned by the media during the peak of the riots. They served their purpose during the period. We don't think now even the dailies would stand by their reports. Muslim organisations put it at 250. There is no basis to treat that as reliable.

Our assessment, is that the official estimate is very near the truth.

Excluding the three policemen and the CISF inspector killed, the official death toll figure is 139. Eleven of them were women. Our enquiries indicate that approximately 70 percent killed were muslims. At least 50 persons were killed in police firings while the rest died in mob violence. The administration was able to identify only 118 out of the 139 bodies. These 21 unidentified bodies may be of those who are reported missing. May be not. The government paid Rs. 24.2 million in the 110 cases for which claims were settled. The payment was Rs. 2.20 lakhs per person.

Religious practices, hindu or muslim, provide a space for mourning rituals at death. Communal riots deny this space for the people. Of the 139 people dead in Bhopal, 54 bodies were recovered long after; ranging from 24 to 72 hours. Even for others curfew made a difference. Families could not complete the required formalities as their religion and custom would have it. And so the living are left, not only with memories of horrible death but also with the guilt of not having been able to complete the rituals. That this denial of ritual space for grief should take place in a tragedy ordained by a conflict over a sacred place is perhaps the most revealing comment on the irreligious nature of communal conflict.

These metaphysics of death acquire menacing material dimension when it comes

to injury. A bullet ridden leg of a twelve year old boy whose father died due to the gas tragedy eight years ago, a broken leg of an auto driver who also lost his auto, broken fingers of a calligrapher in an Urdu printing press, limbs of many handcart pulling self employed - are some of the injuries that we came across. They suffered what their government would term as grievous injury (Rs. 1000) or simple injury (Rs. 500). Altogether the administration identified and distributed compensation on these lines in 109 cases in the former and 18 in the latter. But the meaning of these injuries is different in each case. And in some cases it will take a long time to recognise the way the injury will influence their life hereafter.

Similar is the case with damage and destruction. For the purposes of compensation government has four categories: Movable property (Rs. 2,000), Immovable Property (Rs. 5,000), Kuchha House (Rs. 5,000), and Pucca House (Rs. 15,000). In this way of homogenisation a partially damaged flat in a middle class colony receives at least three times more amount of relief than a completely burnt jhuggi. A damaged TV set would get 10 times more than a *thela* which possibly is the only source of living for a whole family. In our society, where inequities define the existence of people, measurement of damage in purely monetary terms is meaningless. A sensitivity to these inequities alone can recapture the extent and meaning of the loss suffered by the people.

At the bottom rung of the victims are jhuggi dwellers. We have listed at least 25 places where they were completely or partially burnt. Some of them were unauthorised. Most people who were displaced in the anti encroachment drives of recent years have once again become victims in these riots. In fact the destruction of jhuggis became a 'God given' opportunity for those who wanted the place cleared. The victims in Acharya Narendradev Nagar for instance,

### Death Toll

Police	3
Paramilitary	1
Civilians	139
Men	128
Women	11
In Police firing	50*
In Private violence	89*

\* Approximate estimates

## Jhuggis: Burnt or Damaged

*Colonies near or in which jhuggis were burnt or partially damaged during the riots.*

### **North Bhopal**

Basod Basti  
Bafna Colony  
Bagh Umrao Dullah  
Indira Nagar  
Arif Nagar  
Ayub Nagar  
Azad Nagar  
Rajiv Nagar  
Nishatpura

### **BHEL Area**

Acharya Narendradev Nagar  
Apsara Talkies  
Anna Nagar  
Alam Nagar  
Barkheda Pathani  
Barkheda Panchpir  
Kailash Nagar  
Rachna Nagar  
Sudama Nagar  
Subhash Nagar  
Vikas Nagar  
Piplani

### **New Bhopal**

Bhim Nagar  
Ballabh Nagar  
Jail Pahadi  
Sonagiri

**Note:** Approximately 1200 families were rendered homeless in this destruction.

discovered that through what were once their jhuggis the BHEL management is building a boundary wall and laying sewerage lines. The survey by the administration was conducted, in Rachna Nagar, when the victims were yet to return from the refugee camps. In January when we met them they were visiting their burnt places in the day time in a hopeless hope that surveyors would come. And were also facing hostility from the residents of pucca houses opposite who had always views the jhuggi settlement as an eyesore. Even where some compensation was given, it is too meagre. A part of it understandably goes for their immediate consumption needs. In the 1524 families surveyed by the MPVS, as many as 689 reported that their houses were completely burnt. According to SEWA, out of the 701 families they surveyed, 401 had lost everything. And all of them have to start life all over again.

In a city where large majority of the poor people are self employed the destruction of principal means of living has special significance. In practically every locality the destroyed property include thelas, redhis, goats, small kiosks, sewing machines, cycle

pumps - it is impossible to list all of them. Next to jhuggi dwellers, and small self employed people, the largest category of victims are small traders. Shops, we must recall, bore the brunt of violence. In all these cases the compensation, ranging from Rs. 200 to Rs. 4,000, is of no help. Even the promise of arranging 'loans from banks on easy terms' has no meaning as they are left with no security to offer. As per government account 6,606 cases were surveyed of which claims with regard to only 5,803 were accepted. A total of Rs. 20.89 million was distributed as compensation.

The victims of calamities like this become, in official parlance, unitary persons. Their position in the social structure, the meaning of the particular damage suffered by them, and their varying capacities to cope with the aftermath - all get submerged in the unifying legal categories. That this homogenising legal discourse should guide the relief and rehabilitation policy of the government is particularly ironic in Bhopal. For, this is the city whose people have fought India's most bitter tort case to oblige both the government and the Supreme Court to introduce some element of social sensitivity in matters

relating to compensation. In the Union Carbide case.

It was the citizen groups which took care of the day to day realities of society. The survey conducted by MPVS has taken care to note the economic background of the victims in the camps. And the eco-topography of the city. Of the 1524 families covered about 47

percent were from the labouring poor, followed by those in business (34%) and in jobs (19%). In Old Bhopal the labouring poor were predominant among the victims while in New Bhopal it was the business and salaried classes who were more affected. In immediate relief work also the voluntary groups took care to identify the specific needs of the people while

## Revisiting Union Carbide

Bhopal became a familiar name the world over after the gas tragedy. Eight Decembers ago, in 1984 a lethal gas, methyl isocyanate (MIC) escaped from the tank in Union Carbide factory. It killed at least 3,800 people in the immediate aftermath. Subsequently the slow poison killed and disabled more. The victims fought a prolonged legal battle. The amount paid by the multinational corporation as compensation, \$ 470 million, was arrived at in an arbitrary manner by a controversial judgement of the Supreme Court. Subsequently in its final judgement in October 1991, the court directed the government to set up Claims Courts. Death and six categories of disabilities were identified for the purposes of compensation. The judgement asked the government to set up 40 Claims Courts within five months. That is by February 1992. So far only 30 have been set up. About 653,763 compensation claims were filed. The courts are still dealing with the first category, death. In all, the courts cleared only 1,710 claims (0.26 percent). 1,152 of them were rejected. It was while this tortuous process is going on that another tragedy struck the victims, in December 1992.

The gas affected areas or the people witnessed communal violence, death and destruction. Most of the gas victims are now spread out in the city in about 23 colonies. In some of these localities, the presence of Bhopal Gas Pidik Mahila Udyog Sangathan acted as a break on further spread of communal violence. Five lakh people in the city are dependent on the interim monthly remittance (Rs. 200) as gas victim relief. Many of them also go through regular medical treatment. The disturbances and the prolonged curfew affected them badly as they faced both starvation and aggravated ailments. In the large scale destruction in some of the colonies people lost their pass books for regular remittances. Although the government did announce issue of duplicate pass books, the process is once again lost in a bureaucratic maze. The worst affected in this regard are women and children of Gas Widows colony. Meanwhile the scheme for interim relief on which half the city's population is dependent formally came to an end on 31 March. No fresh announcement of extension has yet been made.

In a sense the tragedy of the people is best reflected in the tin sheds of Bagh Farhat Afza. They were constructed as a temporary measure to house the victims of the gas tragedy in 1984. But since the gas destroyed homes and not houses, some of them were able to go back. Six year later the victims of the BJP government's anti encroachment drives took shelter there. Now, two further years later the sheds are housing some of the riot victims who have no place to go back to. Some of them suffered all the three times. Their tale of woe in the aftermath of every tragedy is perhaps the same every time. But there ends the similarity. As a woman from Sudama Nagar put it, "*gas phir bhi behtar thi, usne logon ko alag alag karke to nahi mara*" (the gas was better, it did not divide the people in killing them).

distributing material. SEWA workers told us of efforts to feed the performing bears in the Bhad Bhada camp along with their *madari*! The bears, the sole means of livelihood, were all that he is left with. Sensitivity, zeal and efficiency apart, even the number of people who took active part in relief and rehabilitation work is quite large. From about 8th to 30th December approximately 1,300 volunteers worked hard. Let it be noted for the record that the number of hard core rioters would not be more than a third of this.

The tale concealed by these contrasting figures has more to it than is apparent. For, resistance to communalism is often obscured by communalism. Citizens of both communities coming together and resisting the spread of tensions are many. But it is not these initiatives but individual, even stray, instances of violence that acquire larger than life image in media and reportage in general. A kiosk or a shop burnt in a colony obscures the more strenuous efforts made by the residents of that colony. Over time popular perception, guided and goaded by communal propaganda too gets influenced. Memory, selective and perverse, invests in retrospect, those instances of violence with a significance that they originally never had. And days and nights of love, togetherness and shared concerns disappear into oblivion. Communal violence comes to stay in reportage and in public memory while resistance becomes invisible.

But resistance there was and it was strong and deep rooted. Some of it is the result of more organised efforts. Like the initiatives taken by Sadbhavana Manch, CPI, CPI(M) and Janata Dal in some localities, Sanskritik Morcha, Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Udyog Sangathan and others. Decisive intervention was made by mohalla level committees in many localities. In overwhelmingly

large number of areas violence was confined to main artery roads. Inside the lanes and by-lanes of these localities residents took initiatives, formed some sort of committees, and kept a watch. In fact the new colonies in Govindpura and BHEL areas and some of the old colonies on the Berasia road and adjoining area were the exceptions. Otherwise incidents of violence or physical clashes did not much penetrate the residential localities. In Barkhedi for instance, where otherwise considerable violence took place on the night of seventh itself, a meeting of community elders took place in Jogipura mandir. A few hindu households in the vicinity lived there safely throughout. In Shaskiya Colony, the few muslim families among the government servant quarters wanted to shift out to safer places. But other residents formed youth squads and persuaded them from moving out. The young boys and girls formed a watch group that kept vigil by turns. In Bairagarh, Navyuvak Aman Committee played a similar role. In Pul Bogda the citizens committee took a decision to have at least one member of the other community in each house. And women of both communities lived together in one place. Peace committees came up in Bafna Colony and Station Bazaria also. Residents in Koh-e-Fiza in an unusual move even organised food for the daily wage earners in their locality who were stuck due to curfew. They also held what was perhaps the first silent peace march, in the curfew relaxation hours on 13th itself. The first major city level meeting was held by non-BJP political parties on 19th. Subsequently a number of rallies and marches were held. Such efforts as these, can be treated merely as spontaneous reaction to the outburst of violence. But they also sprung from a deeper framework of social relations that informs the history of Bhopal.

## II.

# Social Framework

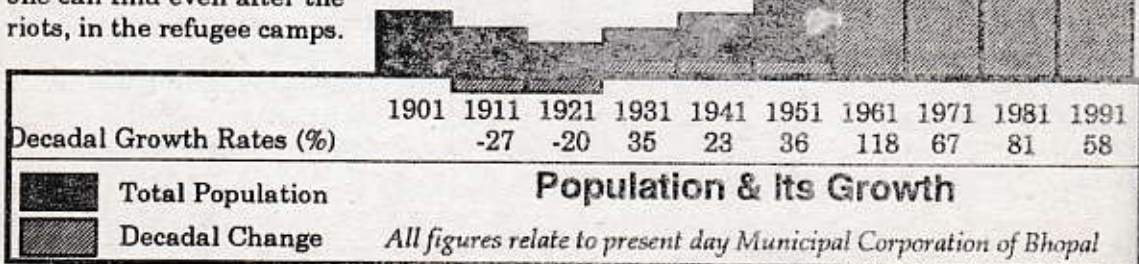
When a place witnesses a riot for the first time in its history, the history of that place is retraced in the light of this communal tension. And the content and course of the ideological propaganda that generates tensions. Such an account of past perhaps is not sufficient to locate the social framework that sustains a tension. And survives a riot. In particular the history of Bhopal including that of its ahistorical people - the migrants who form more than 50 percent of the population - is that of hegemony of democratic consciousness. Till it began to break down in recent years. And that breakdown is facilitated by peculiar patterns in the growth of the city.

Look at the first striking distinction of Bhopal riots: they were not confined to select pockets as is the case in Delhi, Hyderabad, and Ahmedabad. In fact it has been the case in almost all of the 18 (out of the total of 24) metropolitan cities in the country (with population over a million) that witnessed riots in recent years. Here in Bhopal the tensions are spread all over. Bairagarh in the north to Bhad Bhada and Kotra Sultanabad in the south; from the old city north of the lakes to the new shanty labour colonies east of the Bhopal-Itarsi railway line. On the surface it indicates the extent and scale of communal violence. But beneath it lies the social history of a city in which no pockets of precarious demographic balance came to settle. There are no geo-communal ghettos in Bhopal. A feature whose most eloquent reflection one can find even after the riots, in the refugee camps.

For many camps sheltered refugees from both groups.

A close look at colonies which witnessed intense tensions between the two communities also reveal that they are those of settlers, and not of native Bhopalis. The divergence between the two has more than half a century of history behind it in the city. All accounts of the riots and recount of the incidents, given by the natives, are informed by a bitter nostalgia for this past. It is truly secular in that it transcends the hindu-muslim divide. It is these invisible other features and other identities that we should look into to understand the social framework of communalism in Bhopal.

Few cities in India, certainly none in Madhya Pradesh, have seen such sustained growth as Bhopal did. At the turn of the century the city had a population less than a lakh. It was to remain so for five decades. Till refugees, both hindu and muslim, flooded it in the late forties. In 1951 the figure crossed a lakh. In the next decade it increased by 118 percent! Since then the city remains highest in population growth rate in the state. In the last census Bho-



pal's population growth (58 percent) was more than double that of Madhya Pradesh (26.75 percent).

The city under the relentless pressure of population, has gobbled up many areas around it. A colony outside the city limits like Govindpura; a village that became a suburb like Bairagarh; and the vast uninhabited lands in the south on the banks of the river Kalyasot, like Bhad Bhada - have all become part of what is now called Bhopal. This expansion in the area of course has its limits. And could not have kept up with population growth. And so the density grew, in leaps and bounds to over 3700 people per square kilometre. And that in a low density state like Madhya Pradesh whose average is currently 149 people per sq. km. But that is only half the story. The other half belongs not to demography, but to topography.

The pattern of human settlement in Bhopal and the intra-city variations in its density, are influenced by its peculiar topography. The ridges and valleys broken by streams and the two lakes have indented the pattern. It is unsuitable for contiguous development. And thus the mosaic of overcrowded areas separated by uninhabited or uninhabitable areas. They add beauty to the city. But

at the time of widespread tensions, they also add to insecurity. Muslims in this city did not follow any particular pattern in their settlement. The old natives among them of course belong to old city. The refugees who came in the forties or the labourers from UP and Bihar who came in search of a job later did not follow any particular pattern in the choice of locality. If one has to find a grouping in these settlements, it would be more on ethnic lines: Bihari basti, Chattisgarhi jhuggis, Purabia slum or Marathi colony. You would find in them a few hindus among large number of muslims or vice versa. The topography of the city, its linear growth and secular occupational structure have delineated this kind of settlement pattern. They certainly added strength to the 'tradition of communal harmony in Bhopal'. But then when determined communalists indulge in arson and attack the minority, whether hindu or muslim, becomes defenceless. At the larger city level muslims constitute about 30 percent of the population.

Much of the growth in the population was due to immigration. The first wave was during the partition. Bhopal perhaps was the only place in those sectarian years that received both hindu and muslim refugees. Muslims from neighbouring Gwalior state and other parts gravitated to Bhopal state. It was then under a muslim ruler, second largest after Hyderabad. Hindus came because central government felt it a safer place for them. Refugees, mostly from Sindh were settled in Bhopal. Officially about 14,500 displaced persons were allotted facilities in the city. The second major wave was when Bhopal was integrated into Madhya Pradesh and became the state capital. The employees of administration who shifted from Nagpur (capital of Central provinces and Berar) were mostly marathis. The administrative services also attracted people from Uttar Pradesh. A third major impetus was provided by what was then called Heavy Electricals Limited

### People and their Language

Language	1961	1981
Hindi	40.63	55.50
Urdu	33.71	25.20
Sindhi	10.32	6.09
Marathi	6.77	6.75
Punjabi	3.04	1.89
Tamil	1.30	1.08
Malyalam	1.62	0.78
Others	2.61	2.71
Total	100.00	100.00

Note: The category 'Others' does not include the same language groups in both the periods.

## Men and Women

Year	(women per 1000 men)
1961	771
1971	822
1981	870
1991	894

*Note:* Migrant males brought their families to the city only after they got steady jobs. Thus the ratio was lower in the initial decades of expansion.

(HEL). Many of its skilled labour were from south, like Keralites. But the unorganised unskilled labour that the public sector undertaking generated were from various other parts. They came from UP, Bihar, Rajasthan and from Raisen, Sehore, Indore and Chattisgarh within the state. Till the eighties it was the manufacturing sector that was the chief attraction. But the proportion of workers in this sector has declined in the last decade. Its place was taken by construction, trade and other services. The expansion of the city however did not taper off even after its capacity to offer stable jobs petered off. And it continues to grow phenomenally.

Old Bhopal, notionally, was that inside its five main gates. But that entity lost its relevance even before the Nawabi rule ended. Its northern frontiers became Jamalpura and Kazi Camp. The Camp was established when Nawab Sultan Jahan Begum allowed Kazhak refugees of Russian revolution to settle there during the first World War. Later in the fifties Sindhi colony and other colonies joined the northern frontiers. A sort of industrial estate also grew up there. The Union Carbide was to become the most known of the factories here. Over time a number of jhuggis also came up here which became authorised in the early eighties. Within the old city also new colonies of the settlers were established. In the end Old Bhopal became a description that covers many new colonies. From Nishatpura

in the north to Jehangirabad in the south, from Koh-e-Fiza in the west to Barkhedi in the east, Old Bhopal or North Bhopal falls under eight out of the 15 police station areas in the city.

Outside of Old Bhopal, the first development was that of Bairagarh. In 1941 it was just a small village of 250 people. During the second World War military barracks were established there which housed Italian prisoners of war. Later the first batch of Sindhi refugees were settled here. They were allotted land as part of rehabilitation of displaced persons. It grew to be an important suburb of the city, that was eventually merged with it.

In Govindpura Heavy Electricals Limited was set up in 1956. (eighteen years later the company was merged with Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited, BHEL). The 20 sq. km. area of the township covered three villages: Barkheda, Govindpura and Piplani; with six sectors in the former and three each in the latter two. Govindpura Industrial Estate was established in 1960 that housed the ancillaries that today account for 30 percent of BHEL's total production. Another industrial estate on its frontier at Habibganj also came up around the same time. Shanty towns, and jhuggis, authorised or unauthorised dot the entire area now. The housing co-operatives of employees as in Shakti Nagar or colonies belonging to Housing Board as in Saket Nagar came up south of the township. Along with these middle class colonies, the migrants who came since about the mid eighties also settled in the township itself. And jhuggis grew in large number. Most recent settlers are those evicted from New Bhopal areas during the anti encroachment drives of the BJP government. Today what is referred to as BHEL area in common parlance includes all these settlements and fall under Govindpura, Piplani and Bagh Sewaniyan police stations.

New Bhopal, essentially middle class in character, grew with service class. Here



## Workers and Their Work

### Percentage Distribution

	1981	1991
1. Livestock, Forestry, etc.	1.7	1.8
2. Mining and Quarrying	0.2	0.4
3. Manufacture	32.3	20.1
4. Construction	6.3	11.3
5. Trade and Commerce	13.0	20.9
6. Transport, Storage and Communication	9.0	9.1
7. Other Services	37.5	36.4

too the original quarters of government employees generated housing cooperatives and multi storied flats, as in Shastri Nagar and Saraswati Nagar. Bhopal university, the regional engineering college and other educational institutions also joined. Much of the New Bhopal area comprises of middle class settlers. It falls under Maharana Pratap Nagar, Tantiya Tope Nagar and Habibganj police station areas.

This kind of evolution of the city makes a 'history of the city' somewhat irrelevant to it. For, majority are migrants who have no roots there. Nor did their occupational structure provide a sense of identity. The only two stable employers are state administration and BHEL. But then their workforce has been practically stagnating since the last two decades. The large majority are a floatsam of jobbers and job seekers. They are somewhat ahistorical in that they are cut off from their history and remain external to that of the city of their destiny. Yet Bhopal and its history did matter to its ahistorical communities. It governed their political preferences and social relations. Till recently.

In Bhopal it was the nationalist and democratic political awakening that provided the context for the emergence of communalism. Or to use a more relevant phrase *Majhab*

*ke siyasat dukandari* (political trade in religion). Once the identity of communities has emerged and became useful for political purposes, some amount of rewriting of history becomes inevitable. In British administered provinces a colonialist view of past and interpretation of the present emerged that presumed centuries old hostility between the two communities. It influenced the governance. But in some of the Indian States the rulers, for their survival projected a counter view, that of centuries old harmony. These projections of history by the rulers, British or Indian, may not be much use to understand the history of people. But they influenced the course of communalism. And the regional variations in its character.

So, we must first note that Bhopal was never directly administered by the British. It was a princely state. Surrounded by two other Indian states, Indore and Gwalior on one side and British administered Central Provinces and Berar on the other. It was also a small state. In 1941 its population was around 8 lakhs. And its area was little more than double of the present day Bhopal city.

The founder of the dynasty that ruled Bhopal was an Afghan, Dost Mohammad Khan. He also built the capital town in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. The Nawabi period holds a record for women rulers, from 1844 to 1926, for four successive generations. The political awakening that we refer to however belongs to the reign of the last Nawab, Hamidullah Khan (1926-1949).

Hamidullah Khan was a colourful personality. The small size of his state did not prevent him from heading the Chamber of Princes. He maintained good relations not only with the British but also with Gandhi, Nehru, and Jinnah. At one time he was the chosen mediator between Congress and Muslim League. He even tried to erect a third force in the last years of the Raj. At home he ruthlessly suppressed the Praja Mandal movement. But when he had to acquiesce he

patronised a counter to it - Praja Parishad. And then handed over power to both of them, to save his state from being integrated. Bhopal was one of the six princely states that managed to retain its political units a little longer. In the end all this dexterity was of course in vain. The time was up for him and his ilk, as popular sovereignty asserted itself.

The democratic movement during the reign of Nawab Hamidullah Khan had three features: anti-feudal, against the oppression of jagirdars (10 hindu and six muslim jagirdars in all); against the dominance of outsiders, the non-mulkis; and a movement for responsible government. Communal politics were submerged under the hegemony of this democratic consciousness. Its effects lingered on long after the Nawab faded into oblivion.

Arya Samaj and Bhopal Hindu Sabha emerged on the plank of 'injustice to hindu subjects'. They did, intermittently, engage in a campaign on these lines. On the other side Muslim League had its branches in Bhopal and Sehore. But more powerful was Anjuman Aurangzeb, which also received patronage from some of the ministers of the Nawab government. But the influence of these organisations on their respective communities was marginal. Congress in Bhopal, initially, was confined to Khadi Prachar and Harijan Uddhar - the activities permitted by the Nawab. Some of its associates were active outside the state, like Maulana Barkhatulla Bhopali.

In Bhopal, all these three pan-Indian streams came together in the Mulki movement. Both Hamidullah Khan and his mother Nawab Sultan Jehan Begum encouraged outsiders in civil service. Aligarh university was a prime recruiting ground. In some of the agricultural land they also encouraged settlement of cultivators from Punjab. Over time this UP and Punjabi dominance generated a resentment among the local middle class. One of its earliest manifestations was Anjuman-i-Khuddam-i-Watan. Among its

founders was Shakir Ali Khan, the legend around whose personality much of the political history of Bhopal revolves. The Mulki movement attracted into its fold all shades of native Bhopalis, cutting across political and communal divisions. Practically every leader of the first generation Congress, Communist, Jana Sangh and Jamait-e-Islami were products of this movement. It forced the Nawab to grant some concessions to the locals. In many ways the Mulki movement augured the alliance that gained in strength during the merger movement.

The demand for a 'responsible government' took shape in the formation of Bhopal Rajya Praja Mandal in 1938. Its leaders included Saidullah Khan Razmi, Chaturnarain Malviya, Uddavdas Mehta, and Bhairon Prasad Saxena, associates of Congress and Hindu Sabha. Shakir Ali was one of the first organisers of trade union movement in the then burgeoning industrial units in the city. He became very popular during the Mulki movement. And emerged as a charismatic leader in the Praja Mandal.

Hamidullah Khan began playing his cards on all sides during the turbulent months of 1947. In April of that year an 'interim' government was formed. It included select representatives of Congress, Hindu Sabha, Muslim League, and Praja Mandal. But it found no popular acceptance. Meanwhile independence came in August. The agitation in the state became stronger day by day. The Nawab formed a rival Bhopal Praja Parishad. He entered into an agreement with Praja Mandal in April 1948 and handed over power to it, along with his own Praja Parishad. The new government was headed by Pandit Chaturnarain Malviya. The agreement and the new government plunged the agitation into confusion. Apart from those who signed the agreement on behalf of the Praja Mandal, other popular leaders also supported the Nawab (they included Shakir Ali too!). But at the popular level initiative

taken by radical elements gave fillip to the movement. These elements were identified with the journal they published - *Nai Rah*. Many associates of *Nai Rah*, like Balkrishna Gupta and Mohini Devi subsequently joined the Communist movement (Shakir Ali too rejoined them). Massive repression and police firing met the merger movement. In January 1949 Malviya Ministry resigned. Three months later the state became 'Part C' state of Indian Union. In 1956, after the linguistic reorganisation of states, the state was merged into the newly carved out Madhya Pradesh. Bhopal became its capital.

One remarkable feature of this turbulent period was the absence of communal tensions. All accounts of Bhopal's past take pride to point out that even during the partition Bhopal was free from tensions. Partition after all is not just a reality that thereafter informed the history of communal relations. It also serves as a reference point to judge such history. In that sense the pride is well justified. For here was a small princely state ruled by a muslim ruler whose subjects were largely hindus. The disturbances that rocked the country did reach its frontiers, like Gwalior. Muslim communal organisations actively opposed the merger. Yet in the end Bhopal remained free of tensions. It was no accident of history, but was located in the character of the Praja Mandal movement. The minor incident of 1946 perhaps is a good illustration.

By 1946 Muslim League was actively opposing the movement, even disrupting its meetings. And Anjuman Aurangzeb was campaigning for 'laying the foundations of Islamic empire in India', with the help of Afghanistan, to which the lineage of the Nawab was traced. In such a context in April 1946 a band of youth attacked hindu shops and a temple. The Nawab made a decisive intervention and sent his daughter Abida Sultan to hindu areas. But even before the administration made efforts to contain the distur-

bances, Bhopal Rajya Praja Mandal did. Notwithstanding its active opposition to the ruler, Praja Mandal volunteers coordinated with the police. And formed their own squads. Their role is best reflected in the report sent by the British Superintendent of Police to the Political Agent, on the tensions.: "In the afternoon (12 April, 1946) a large mob of Mohammedans armed with spears, swords, and other lethal weapons raided a hindu temple. When the mob tried to enter the sanctum sanctorum, they found a young man blocking their path with outstretched arms. He told them that they would enter the temple only on his dead body. The mob dispersed.... It took us quite some time to find the identity of the young man. His name is Shakir Ali Khan."

It was this self consciously anti communal leadership that came to prevail over the polity and social relations in the city. After the integration Old Bhopal was dominated by the *Nai Rah* group that by now became part of Communist Party. Among the muslims even community leaders came under its influence. The Qazi of the city, Wajidul Husaini, for instance, participated in the programmes of Progressive Writers Association. The other notable influence in the city was that of Congress whose leadership came from the Praja Mandal movement, as did that of the communists. Hindu Mahasabha or Jana Sangh had marginal influence, confined largely to refugees from Sindh. The leadership of progressive forces played a decisive role in diffusing the only other notable tension, in 1959, in Budhwara.

### Emergence of the BJP

The hegemony of the democratic forces reflected at the electoral level. In the old city, Shakir Ali Khan won the elections uninterruptedly for almost 25 years as a CPI candidate. The losing candidate all these years was his former colleague in the anti-Mulki and Praja Mandal movements, Udhavdas Mehta of Hindu Maha Sabha and Bhartiya Jana

Sangh. Outside the old city, Congress won the elections. The only exception was the Bairagarh constituency where Jana Sangh won in 1967 and 1972 elections. The old constituency, which no longer exists in that form, comprised of displaced people from Pakistan and rural areas of what was then Sehore district. Subsequently a large chunk of this constituency was merged with the newly formed Govindpura constituency. In the post emergency elections in 1977, Janata Party won all the three seats in the city. Two of the candidates, including Babulal Gour, were from the Jana Sangh component of the Party. The first notable breakthrough politically and organisationally, for what is now called Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) came in the eighties. And it came ironically in Govindpura, the epicentre of the working class movement in the city.

The trade union movement in Bhopal originated in the early forties when the Nawab set up some factories on the northern outskirts of the city. They include textiles, ginning, sugar and the famous Straw Products factory. Later the establishment of Heavy Electricals (India) Limited led to a formidable trade union activity. Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC) and All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) were the leading

unions. Subsequent to the split in AITUC, Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) emerged strong. They continue to be the main unions. The activities of these unions are marked by two features. First, by and large, they are confined to the permanent employees of BHEL and they comprise 17500 out of an estimated one lakh labour force in the area. Secondly almost all the activities of the unions centered around the economic demands of the workers. They hardly penetrated other areas of their lives. BJP's rise in Govindpura was facilitated by these two limiting features of the trade union movement.

Initially BJP's influence in this area, like elsewhere in the city was confined to refugees. By the eighties, we should recall, the character of the area changed. By now it comprised large settlements of migrants who are employed, somewhat irregularly, in the small industries like those in Govindpura ancillary units. Or are engaged in construction work and myriad other daily wage work. Organisationally however it was the second generation of BHEL employees and other regular workers who provided the base for BJP. Its main activities were centered around civic issues. And religious gatherings and processions became primary means of mass contact and mobilisation for the BJP and its

## ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS

1957-1990

### Changing Choice

Constituency	1957	1962	1967	1972	1977	1980	1985	1990
Bhopal	CPI	CPI	CPI	CPI	*	*	*	*
Bhopal North	*	*	*	*	JP	INC(I)	INC(I)	Ind.
New Bhopal	*	INC	*	*	*	*	*	*
Bairagarh	*	*	BJS	BJS	*	*	*	*
Bhopal South	*	*	*	*	JP	INC(I)	BJP	BJP
Govindpura	*	*	*	*	JP	BJP	BJP	BJP

Note: The 1952 constituencies are not comparable units since Bhopal was a Part C state.

\* These constituencies, as a result of redivision, did not remain in that form.

(CPI - Communist Party of India, INC - Indian National Congress, JP - Janata Party  
BJS - Bharatiya Jana Sangh, BJP - Bharatiya Janata Party, Ind. - Independent)

affiliates. A large contingent of kar sewaks went from BHEL to Ayodhya this December. Thus over time a paradoxical wedge in the political preferences of BHEL employees (and their families) has clearly emerged. They were supporting INTUC or CITU at the work place but were voting for BJP in general elections. In all the elections to the Assembly held since the eighties, Babulal Gour of BJP won in Govindpura constituency.

The influence of BJP in New Bhopal is much more recent. Initially it was based mainly among the Marathi middle class. As the fortunes of Congress declined, BJP gained among other migrants. To counter its influence, jhuggi dwellers were encouraged to settle in New Bhopal areas by the Congress. This dangerous strategy of using jhuggis to tilt the electoral balance, backfired by the eighties. And BJP won, for the first time, in South Bhopal too in the elections held in 1985 and in 1990. One of the first measures of the BJP when it formed the government was to evict these jhuggi dwellers.

The change in Old Bhopal was more complicated. Among the hindus in the old city proper, Jana Sangh was strong among the refugee settlements. The migrant colonies joined them subsequently. They provided the initial base for BJP. It also patronised the petty criminal elements in the thickly populated old city areas. Among the muslims the death of Shakir Ali Khan and Qazi Wajidul Husaini marked the end of an era. CPI as a party suffered during the emergency when it supported Congress. Among the old city muslims, a new leadership, definitely communal in its approach, emerged. But it never rose to have the commanding position that Shakir Ali and his generation of leftists had. The generation gap became sharp among the muslims with youth leaning towards communal forces. That explains the events on the first two days of violence in Old Bhopal. In the last elections both BJP and the official Congress lost to the independent, rebel candidate of the Congress, Arif Aqeel. At the city level,

in the parliament Susheel Chandra Varma of BJP won defeating Swami Agnivesh of Janata Dal and the Congress candidate, cricketer Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi (who from his mother's side is a grandson of Nawab Hamid-ullah Khan).

After BJP came to power in the state in March 1990, Sunder Lal Patwa became Chief Minister, Babulal Gour became a cabinet minister and Bajrang Dal got a boost.

Bajrang Dal in Bhopal, by all accounts, seems to have been more aggressive in its posture than elsewhere. Partly it was due to the fact that BJP was in power. Some members of the Dal were also BJP Corporators. Like the national president of the Dal who is also a BJP MP. The BJP as a political party included in its programme civic and economic issues and corruption in Congress(I). Bajrang Dal is not particularly known to take up such issues. Its main programme appears to be ideological.

The campaign against muslims includes all the familiar elements; they produce more children threatening the demographic balance; they refuse to become part of 'Indian' tradition and culture, they overtly and covertly sympathise with Pakistan, and Islam is intrinsically intolerant of all other religions. Finally, that successive governments at the Centre have appeased the muslim minority. This general line carries an added dimension in Bhopal. It was ruled by muslim Nawabs. The present echoes the past Hindu Sabha campaign about the 'oppression of hindu subjects'. So the elements of the currently prevailing ideological campaign here acquire a historical root. There are no inconvenient discontinuities, like British rule. It is all one long chain from Dost Mohammad Khan to the present government at the Centre. This local flavour certainly adds strength to the moral justification for the aggressive approach adopted by the communal organisations, like the Bajrang Dal.

The campaign of constructing an 'enemy' is matched by the character and

structure of the organisation. In the last three years the Dal set up a number of units at mohalla level. The chiefs are called Senapatis. Core members are tuned to physical culture. Arms, lathis and swords, became part of Dal's programmes and processions. Its character is best reflected in its slogan...'*sashatra kranti ke aur*' (towards armed revolution).

Bajrang Dal's headquarters in Bhopal are located in Jehangirabad, not very far from the office of the state's Director General of Police. Among other places its units are active in Govindpura in BHEL area, T.T. Nagar and Shastri Nagar in New Bhopal and Bairagarh. Significantly its centres of activity were neither work place nor schools and colleges. But, residential areas. Actual organisation was concentrated in middle class and lower middle class colonies. Youth in the age group of 15-30 form the bulk of Bajrang Dal. Most of these youth are unemployed second generation migrants. They include a substantial number of sons of BHEL employees. Others in its fold are unemployed drop-outs from lower middle class. The general impression is that most of them are from what are called backward castes. However one should note that organisations like Bajrang Dal, outside its core, are not strictly speaking membership based organisations. A large section floats in and out of its activities. And its influence has spread across into the unorganised labour force also. In the riots, in Shastri Nagar and Saraswati Nagar in New Bhopal muslim houses were selectively targeted by a highly organised, often small, band of youth. But in BHEL area the Dal led mobs not all of whom may be 'members' of it. The leaders of course were not part of a 'mob', but were highly motivated and experienced organisers. In the old city petty criminals were informally part of the Dal. In fact the nature of violence is an indicator of the Dal character. At many places shops were looted before they were burnt.

Bajrang Dal in particular and BJP *pariwar* in general in Bhopal, like elsewhere in the country, made sacred spaces important symbols around which their activities are woven. On the other side Bhopal has a large number of mosques (over 470 for 3 lakh muslims, going by the MP Wakf Board figures). The hindu forces made a determined bid to capture new spaces and make them sacred. One of the earliest such attempts resulted in tension, in 1982.

In Somwara area, near Peer Darwaza at congested cross roads, hindu forces decided to construct a temple for Durga Mata. Local muslims objected to its location. In the consequent disturbances three people were killed. They however were localised and eventually the temple did come up. The occasion also saw imposition of curfew, possibly for the first time, in the area. Today in popular parlance the temple is referred to as Curfew Devi Mandir. After BJP came to power right opposite the deity, with folded hands, the statue of Udhavdas Mehta, came up.

In the last three years Bajrang Dal erected many chabutaras and street corner deities all over the city. In the main artery roads of old Bhopal the newly erected sacred spaces did become a menacing threat to the muslim community. To its youth they became symbols of their eroding status in their habitat and in society. As at the national level, it is the dispute over such a sacred space and structure in Ayodhya that informs the contemporary repertory of symbols, it seems to have aggravated the competition for structures and spaces, sacred or profane. And so this time religious structures played a major role. According to Hindu Ekta Manch leader Om Mehta (who incidentally is son of Udhavdas Mehta) more than thirty temples were damaged or destroyed during these riots. That perhaps includes some of the street corner deities set up by Bajrang Dal. Muslims point out the destroyed *mazars* for which there is

no record or count. The official toll is 16 temples and 5 mosques, damaged or destroyed. The administration offered to repair or rebuild these structures. The muslim community elders are cooperating. The hindu community leaders have accepted the offer at a formal level. But the work is not being permitted on the field. This has given an impression that political vested interests want to retain them in damaged state. Perhaps till the next elections. Thus Ayodhya, got integrated, in symbolic terms into the local disputed structures, whose history has just begun.

The irony of it all can not be missed. Partition a national issue related to forma-

tion of a nation state did not much affect social relations in the city. But forty five years later a local issue, Ayodhya, got it integrated into the national 'mainstream'. This paradox is unwittingly reflected in the particular audio cassettes played by the marauding Marutis that went around the curfew bound nights. It appears the cassettes were playing the cacophony of communal mobs recorded from the audio track of communal riot scenes in Richard Attenborough's 'Gandhi'. Thus in the end Bhopal too joined the long list of 'communally sensitive' cities. The mob violence this time marks a turning point in its melancholic history.

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### III. State

The most prominent agency of the state that lost its distinctiveness from the communal tendencies prevalent in civil society is the police. A part of it was due to the fact that the ruling party is BJP. That government was dismissed on 15th December. Next day President's Rule, or central rule by proxy, came into effect. Thus during the crucial weeks of riots and their aftermath two different, and rival, parties were in power. This change did not make any difference to the role of police. In their inability to control and contain the police conduct, there is no noticeable difference between BJP and Congress(I). So much for the relevance of differences between political parties, or factions within, that came to dominate the public discourse on Ayodhya.

Police excesses during a crisis are not exceptions due to the exigencies of the situation. They are a heightened reflection of normal repressive behaviour. In particular policemen are known to go berserk when one of them gets killed. In Bhopal three policemen were killed; in Jehangirabad on 7th, in Subhash Nagar on 9th and in Govindpura on 12th. At least the first two instances resulted

in indiscriminate violence by the police, leading to innocents getting killed. Not all instances of police action, however can be, or should be, termed as 'excess'; that would be patently absurd when the force was engaged in pitched battles with mobs.

But what constitutes an excess is the kind of violence that is not permitted by law. And is informed by malafide intentions like communal bias. Throughout the city, cutting across economic and gender lines people complained of police atrocities. By and large the atrocities were directed against muslims. Arson and loot, molestation and murder - charges against police were serious and numerous. We have referred to some specific cases elsewhere in the report (Chapter I and the Annexures). These acts constitute a clear violation of law (See Box: *Law and Its Guardians*). But so far government has not initiated any meaningful action on these cases. Instead it has advanced a specious argument that action will be taken after the judicial enquiry commission submits its report. Commissions appointed under the Commissions of Inquiry Act, 1952 (S. 3) are primarily investigative in nature. Their reports have

## Law and Its Guardians

Offence	Relevant Law	Illustrations
Abetment	S. 107-115 IPC	Passive participation in looting and arson with Bajrang Dal in Jehangirabad
Concealment	S. 119 IPC	Permitting mobs to commit notified offences in Govindpura and Piplani
Illegal Detention	S.56-57,Cr.P.C.	Scores of youth from old city: 8-15 December
Torture	S.330-331,IPC	Beating youth in Shahjahanabad and Jehanagirabad police lock-up: 7-10 December
Murder	S.300-302, IPC	Qadir Malik, Moti Masjid: 9 December

*Note:* The list is not exhaustive.

no judicial sanction. Nor are they a substitute to the due process of law. Supreme Court has categorically stated that proceedings before the Commission 'cannot serve as substitutes for proceedings which should take place before a court of law invested with powers of adjudication as well as awarding punishments or affording reliefs'. (State of Karnataka Vs Union of India, 4 SCC 608, 1977). Thus the reasons advanced by the administration for not taking action against police, are not valid in law.

The government's protective attitude towards policemen, irrespective of party in power, cannot be separated from the rot that has set in in the administration of criminal justice. In our system all prosecutions are conducted in the name of the state, and by the state. Failure, unwillingness or willful tardiness in prosecution have become a common feature in recent times. Take the case of Bajrang Dal in Bhopal. It was engaged in a vicious campaign of 'promoting enmity between religious groups' (S. 153-A); is guilty of 'wantonly giving provocation with intent to cause a riot' (S. 153); structured itself on militaristic lines, collected arms and freely exhibited them in its processions (Ch. VI and Ch. VII; all IPC). Not a single case is registered against it either during the BJP rule or after, for these offences. Instead, the Unlaw-

ful Activities (Prevention) Act 1967 was used after the nation wide ban on the organisation, on 13th December. The Act as originally promulgated does not give scope to ban communal organisations. That was made possible only by an amendment in 1972 which brought under the purview of the Act certain offences covered in Indian Penal Code. These offences in turn were a result of an amendment to the Code, made in 1969 and 1972. They include S. 153-A, IPC mentioned earlier. To put it more blandly somebody commits an offence, persistently and systematically, under S.153-A. He is not prosecuted. But his organisation is banned under the Act which gets sanction from that very section 153-A, that was not applied in the first place. This is a ridiculous farce.

The political implications of the perversions introduced in the due process of law are many. The extent of punishment suggested by the ordinary law of the land (S.153-A) is more stringent than it is for a member of 'Unlawful Association' under the Act. (S. 10). Obtaining bail seems to be easier in the latter case. Frustrated by the ease with which the members of banned organisation were getting bail, a Senior official of the administration termed the Act as 'worthless'. The credibility of not merely the state but law itself is corroded in the process. Look at the way in



which it is mocked at: "I was arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, kept in jail for three days because I refused to seek bail and then let off without any bail bonds. I still belong to RSS. The Home Minister could get me re-arrested any time if he so desires." This was Babulal Gour on his arrest. Being an accused under criminal charges by a prosecuting authority is not the same as being banned by a rival political party. The latter bestows on criminals, political legitimacy and heroism. A heroism indeed fathered by unnatural vices.

The associates of Bajrang Dal whom the administration was able to immobilise were those accused in specific charges of arson, loot and murder. Altogether 1,050 people were arrested in 949 cases of substantial nature. At least 150 of them belong to Bajrang Dal. But no one in Bhopal is sure of the outcome of these cases. Many suspect that they will either be withdrawn or left unpursued if BJP comes back to power. The fear of return of Bajrang Dalis, coupled with the unwillingness to take action against police leave the victims in a state of tension. They do not hope for justice from legal mechanism. Perhaps some of them will be driven to extra legal activities.

Thus the failure of state in Bhopal riots is rooted not merely in the acts of commission and omission by this or that political party. Nor can it be completely explained by failure of one agency or other. The systemic erosion of the judicial system and the illegitimisation of a legitimate force like police have also contributed. To circumvent this problem the state is taking recourse to short term measures: by inviting another superior arm of the state, the army. And para military forces like CISF in Bhopal.

From all accounts of the people the role of army and CISF has been exceptional and free of communal bias. Their intervention had a salutary effect on the law and order situation. At many places victims welcomed

them as saviours. In old city when 32 persons were trapped in a building set on fire, army personnel did a daring rescue job. In an atmosphere ridden with tension insecurity and agony, the arrival of the army provided a source of relief, if not comfort.

But the long range implications of circumventing the illegitimisation of police force by calling in the army should also be kept in mind. It carries in itself the potential of the army too getting drawn into the same debilitating process as the police. For historical reasons the Indian army regiments are structured on ethnic communal divisions. If deployed frequently and persistently army intervention in conflicts of civil society can take an ominous turn. All these years, Indian army, at the national level, has remained aloof from any political role. The value of this particular feature should not be lost. At least on those who are familiar with the post colonial history of our neighbours: Pakistan, Bangladesh and Burma (Myanmar).

The divergences between one arm of the state and the other, the illegitimisation of the police force, and the degeneration of the criminal justice system are not the only factors acting as a limit on the efficacy of state intervention. Even in the best of times it is debatable whether state can provide a lasting solution to communal problems. It is more difficult to expect it in the contemporary political environment where communal biases are eating into the pores of the state, from above and from below. Yet idealised notions of state and expectations on its role continue to appear as a solution, perhaps due to the powerful influence of statist ideology in our polity and society. One can never fight an emerging reality with the help of a lost illusion.

The role of communal propaganda in all this cannot be underestimated. In particular in Bhopal in recent years it made inroads at all levels of state administration, like in civil society. The communalist world view

## Women: *sunl-sunai baat*

Women were the most talked about victims during the disturbances in Bhopal. And least mentioned after the disturbances. The chasm that separates the two informs our account. This kind of gap seems to inform many investigative reports on communal tensions. And it cannot be explained without reference to the ways in which patriarchy permeates our culture.

Patriarchy operates with family as the basic unit. And so does communalism, in many ways. Women of each community become passive supporters of communal ideology and provide a sustaining support base. In some cases they are also active participants in violence. We have referred elsewhere to the case of BJP corporator, Shakuntala Devi. She led the mobs in many localities in BHEL area and is now charged with arson, loot and murder. As supporters of communalism, the gender based experience and identity gets submerged under their religious identity.

But when women suffer communal violence, they suffer as oppressed subjects of patriarchy. Women and their sexuality are man's most valued property. That even the property-less possess. Violence against women of the other community becomes an act of valour and revenge. For, it is seen as a triumph over the 'enemy'. Communal riots thus provide ideological sanction for man's violence against women. Such acts are but a heightened expression of day to day structural violence that is inbuilt into patriarchy. At a number of localities in Bhopal women were subjected to various forms of sexual violence. The repeated stabbing of a 16 year old girl in Chandbad, the burning to death of two women in Piplani, the sword attack on a pregnant woman in Acharya Narendradev Nagar, the woman thrown out of her third floor house who is yet to recover from her trauma, and lying in Hamidia hospital - are some of the instances referred to in this report. They are all characterised by a particular brutality. Altogether 11 women were killed in Bhopal. We understand that post mortem reports confirm rape in three cases. Large number of women suffered sword and pellet injuries. One woman who was admitted to Hamidia hospital with pellet injuries in her uterus died two days later. About 150 women were treated as in-patients in the city's hospitals.

When it comes to attacks on women of one's own community, the same patriarchy is used to invoke the idealised status given to women in scriptures. The code that women and children should be spared is referred to. The violation of women then, becomes an illustration for the caricature of the enemy community built over years. (*'Yahan tak ke bachhon aur auraton ko bhi nahi chhora'*, even women and children were not spared, as the refrain goes.) This violation of the code, coupled with the property consciousness about women's sexuality becomes the source of primordial passions. And fuel the rage against the other community. Here rumours play a decisive role. Wild tales of molestation, stripping, rape, gang rape and breast cutting were in extensive circulation in Bhopal during the crucial week, 7-15 December. Some of the dailies helped the circulation of rumours and stamped them with 'authenticity'.

Rumours however are conditioned by the possibilities of confirmation. Or denial. In case of sexual violence against women rumours are free from such constraints. Fear of social ostracism does not permit women or their families to confirm the rumours. It is this space for ambiguity inbuilt into patriarchy that allows rumours about women go wild. In that sense the role of rumours too is located in the structures of patriarchy. The reports of rape, other than rumours, are quite considerable in Bhopal. But all that a range of people - women workers involved in voluntary work, a women's team, our investigation - are in a position to confirm positively is only one instance; that of a woman raped in Acharya Narendradev Nagar. Perhaps because in this

case there is no possibility of social ostracism for the victim. She was, after the rape, killed.

Pregnant women delivered babies, prematurely in some cases, in traumatic circumstances. In Ibrahim Ganj a woman gave birth to a child, her eighth, on the first floor just when the ground floor was set on fire. She delivered the baby, took it and ran for safety. She received proper medical attention after she managed to reach Gandhi Bhawan camp five days later. In that camp three women delivered babies while three more deliveries took place in Arif Nagar camp. MPVS survey refers to deliveries in the camps at Narela Shankari School, Bairagarh and Chandbad. Doctors who visited the camps noted diarrhoea, high blood pressure, palpitation, sleeplessness, uterus infection, excessive bleeding and menstrual tensions, and post traumatic disorders among women. None of this suffering, it must be noted, falls into the category of 'injury' as defined by the government.

Rehabilitation policy of the government is also not sensitive to the specific needs of women. Women everywhere complained that the survey teams that came to assess, comprising only male officials, never talked to women. Illiterate and unfamiliar with the procedures, women could not manage to get what is due to them as a right. Immediately after the riots the Prime Minister announced that jobs would be given to one member of the family of the dead. In Bhopal after the killings, in many cases, women became the sole earning members. Look at what they received as part of this policy. 118 bodies, thus families, were identified of the 139 killed. According to the administration in these families, many headed by women, only 21 persons are in 'employable age'. And of them only eight have 'required educational qualifications'. In the end the most oppressed end up as the most deprived in the communal riots.

promotes a self image among the followers and a particular image of the 'enemy'. Both based on religious identity. Doubtless, elements of these images are taken from contemporary reality, albeit out of context and are projected back into history. Thus even recent migrants to the city come to believe that they are the heirs of 'oppressed hindu subjects' of muslim rule. The evocative power of this kind of propaganda is also backed by suitable organisational structures, like Bajrang Dal.

The growth of communalism however, is rooted in the political and moral degeneration of the city. This is not a result merely of a collapse of values; once prevalent, now disappeared. It is an inevitable outcome of an economic and social process. And the pace of it. The city has grown more than ten times in a span of four decades. On its margins proliferate a permanent, yet transitory, strata of poor, unemployed, underemployed and the unemployable. They are also rootless, in search of a stable job. And perhaps also of a history. They are organically linked to the social structure that marginalises them. Sooner or later the laws of motion that govern this kind of social order are bound to enter into a conflict with the rule of law that governs it. Even the agencies of the state are too far drawn into this conflict to be able to play the role that is their bounden duty. And thus the city came to provide the alchemy that transforms a propaganda into a conflict. Hence any attempt to resist what appears to be an inexorable process must transcend the influence of statist or communal ideologies.

In that sense the initiatives taken at the popular level, by individuals and groups represent a hope. Admittedly their strength at present is very limited. But then as the saying goes a ten thousand mile journey begins from where we are standing.

# Annexures

## 1. OLD BHOPAL

Violence in Old Bhopal, or, to be more precise, in North Bhopal had no clear cut pattern. It was diffused and dispersed. Most colonies have witnessed events, in some form or the other. A distinction can perhaps be made between Nawabi Bhopal and the colonies, new and old on the northern frontiers of it. In the former it was largely violence against property on main artery roads. The confrontation here was mostly between mobs and police. But in colonies on either side of Bera-sia Road, the residential areas were affected. And mobs from both communities were involved.

As already noted in the first day's events in old Bhopal large number of hindu shops and a few temples were attacked. But the mobs retreated by next evening. From about 9th onwards lanes and by-lanes too were affected, but this time by large scale police violence. In every one of these thickly populated localities police conducted door to door search operations. And they did seize arms from many places. In effect these search operations became an offensive against muslims. In conjunction with the rampage by Bajrang Dal activists who were obviously permitted to do so, police violence became part of 'hindu retaliation'. (The exceptions were when army was also present). Practically in every house all available men folk were picked up by the police. They raided the houses, destroyed household goods and misbehaved with women. Numerous accounts suggest that police also indulged in plain looting. Some of the household implements were also recorded as part of the 'seized arms'. A large number of youth were arrested to 'prevent the commission of cognisable of-

fence' (S. 151, Cr.P.C.). In some cases they include 'offences against public tranquility' (S. 141-160, IPC). But for every single person so produced before a magistrate, there were at least five more whose detention was illegal. The total official figure of the arrested was 3,650. Arrested by the police or having left on their own due to fear, men disappeared from their homes for almost a week. This increased the fear and vulnerability of women and children. Insecure without their men, fearful of attacks from hindus or police, and deprived of milk, food and even water in some localities, the women spent nerve wrecking days and nights. The men taken to police stations meanwhile also had a harrowing time. The lockups were not meant to accommodate so many people in the first place. They were denied food and water. Many of them were severely beaten up. In Shahjahanabad we came across a youth whose finger nails were plucked with pliers by the police. The most notorious thanas in this regard were Shahjahanabad and Jehangirabad.

Outside on the main streets things were under control. Cool and organised. Most shops downed their shutters by 7th morning itself. With army flag marches the following day the streets by and large were deserted. Then began systematic arson, loot and plunder. Youth led by Bajrang Dal activists selectively targeted muslims shops, while police watched indulgently. Near Lily Talkies, for instance, in a row of fifteen shops, six select muslim shops were looted and burnt. When the owners returned (mostly on Saturday, the 12th, after day curfew was relaxed for four hours at a stretch for men also) they found their shops gutted. The owner of a video shop found his entire shop charred. But there was no trace of any burnt cassettes. In Kotwali thana on 7th morning some hindus from Budhwara took shelter. Just opposite

the station in that narrow lane, there exists a lone muslim shop. It appears that police permitted the hindus to go across, burn it, and return to the thana!

Similar was the case on Berasia Road. On 7th December a number of shops were burnt on this road, including a super bazar that burnt for two to three days. The super bazar itself is owned by a hindu but many shops inside the complex that were damaged were owned by muslims also. So was the case with some godowns in Kabad Khana. In the following days, after normalcy was restored, so to say, bands of youth came and burnt shops. Most of the muslim shops burnt here were small iron tools and spare part shops. They all shifted from Bhopal Talkies only a few years ago. Here a double storied building was also gutted. We visited a number of such shops burnt in Kabad Khana, Jinsi, Jehangirabad, Panchsheel, Lily Talkies, Kazi Camp and Jamalpura. This particular form of looting and arson during that period could not have taken place without active connivance of police.

Police also indulged in direct and pointless violence against muslims. On 7th afternoon the Managing Editor of *Nadeem*, who by then had obtained a curfew pass, was dropping his hindu employees to their homes. They were apprehensive since they had to go through muslim majority areas where already violence had erupted. The editor was accosted by the police near Islami Darwaza and was beaten. One Inspector even aimed his pistol at him when the employees in the car came out and saved the situation. Police firing on the first two days was in actual spots where the mobs were on the rampage. But thereafter mostly it was in residential areas. And without any provocation. Near Moti Masjid, for instance, an incident took place on 9th. Police ostensibly in search of arms, went into the house of Abdul Malik. Otherwise a well known figure, Malik did not get unduly perturbed when police asked his two

sons to come with them. A few moments later the family heard gun shots. They ran out to see that both had been shot in the ground opposite the small Kelewali masjid. The younger son Qader (26) died. In a similar fashion Ibrahim Khan was killed in Indira Nagar in his house. And Chunnu Khan in Kazi camp.

While this was going on in most localities of Old Bhopal, the situation in the colonies on its north was somewhat different. In the colonies on either side of Berasia Road it was people who were involved more than the police. In Sindhi Colony around 60 people attacked hindu houses. These youth, we were told, were from Jamalpura. Subsequently it was reportedly youth from Sindhi Colony who were involved in the attack on Arif Nagar. In Putli Ghar hindu shops and houses were attacked on 7th. A clinic was charred. Later police came and started firing indiscriminately. Babu Khan (40) a labourer from Indore on a visit to the city died on the spot. In Indira Nagar on the 7th three persons, Radha Kishan, Dev Anand and Mohan Das were killed around 11 a.m. while they were returning home after closing their shop. Subsequently, the muslim jhuggi colony fell victim to the counter attack. On 8th a grocery shop run by an elderly muslim lady was stoned. She shifted to the house of one Rais Mia. He gave shelter to a number of people in the first few days in Indira Nagar. But on 10th police came and arrested him. A day later his own four shops were looted. In the cluster of jhuggis here, there are about a 100 muslim and 8 hindu families. These people had shifted from Gurbaksh Ki Taliya in the early seventies. Most of them are self employed: cobblers, vegetable vendors, artisans, mechanics. And a few wage earners. The attack here came from a more identifiable source: two double storied buildings from which hindus pelted stones and threw glass pieces around 10 a.m. on 8th. A few hours later after driving the jhuggi dwellers to

panic, the jhuggi cluster was set on fire. It remained burning for about three days. Among those dead in the arson was a quilt maker who was wrapped in cotton and was set on fire. The imam of a small masjid Munna Mia was also killed. Not very far from Indira Nagar jhuggis there is a basti, a cluster of 80 jhuggis. The majority are the scheduled caste hindus, basods. Here on 9th night the attackers came and the whole jhuggi colony was burnt, completely.

In none of these colonies the attackers were from the same colony. In Old Bhopal, unlike, for instance in BHEL area, neighbours were not named by the victims. However, going by the reports and allegations, it appears that youth from an affected colony were involved in the counter attack on the other community, but in a neighbouring colony. Their involvement is generally known. After their return it is unlikely that social relations within their own areas would remain the same. Thus under currents of tension and mistrust have entered between long standing neighbours, in some of the areas in Old Bhopal. Perhaps this is the most damaging outcome of the riots in Bhopal this time.

In many ways what is happening to the history of Bhopal is reflected in the burning of Jumerati Darwaza. And the perceptions of it. It was built, along with other such gates, during the reign of Dost Mohammad Khan. Most of the old monuments of the Nawabi era fell into disrepair since the late forties. In 1956 government notified them as 'protected monuments' under law. Relentless pressure of population, ever expanding vehicular traffic, road widening, if not beautification - all contributed to the decline of old historical monuments, as in other cities. This loss is treated as part of the logic of modernization. But in recent years it has begun to acquire communal connotations. The two earlier major city improvement programmes, in early seventies and early eighties were treated as city improvement programmes.

But BJP *pariwar* in its ideological campaign in recent years also treated old monuments as symbols of muslim rule. Many measures initiated by Ministry of Urban Housing and Welfare (headed by Babulal Gour) came to be seen in this light. Muslims too invested in these monuments in retrospect, a community pride.

The Jumerati Darwaza is one of the 'protected monuments' of the city. Located deep inside the old city, it is one of the few surviving relics of the old times. It appears however somewhat lost in the serpentine rows of houses and shops in and around it. Jumerati Bazar was the scene of offensive by muslim youth on 7th morning. Not very far from it Sindhi shops were specially targeted for burning. Subsequently hindu mobs, with the connivance of police were involved in the attack on the Jumerati Gate. Adjacent to it was the house of Dr. Qayyum Javed. It was an old type three storied house. It was burnt. It was from this house that the mobs seem to have managed to burn the upper portions of the Darwaza also. Some muslim elders point out that the attack on Sindhi shops got a lot of coverage in the media. There were even telling photographs. But there hardly was any mention of the burning of the historic Darwaza. The burning of an old monument of history is indeed sad. But sadder still is that it is now being treated as the symbol, not of Bhopal's history but that of a community. By both the communities. No further comments are necessary on the changing perception of history of the city. And its direction.

### 1.1 Bagh Umrao Dullah

Bagh Umrao Dullah was originally one of the jagirdari areas. The land was given to the tillers after the abolition of jagirdaris. Most of them were hindus. Gradually, the second generation began selling off the land whose value has now gone up due to urban housing demand. Houses and shops came up on about 15 acres of land. On 10 acres how-

ever cultivation still continues. People who came here either as owners or as tenants are recent settlers in the city. It is perhaps for this reason that no social character of basti evolved. Nor is there any regular interaction between communities. Presently the area houses about 500-600 families. It is mixed, both community wise and occupation wise. About 25 percent are hindus. The rest are muslims. The few people employed in regular service here, belong to hindu families. But otherwise they are engaged in trade, small and middle level shops, hotels, auto drivers and vendors. At lower rungs are *hammals*, daily wage earners, bidi makers and maid servants. The locality is predominantly lower middle class both by occupation and by cultural character. There are very few educated among the elders. The structure of the basti is such that lines of hindu houses are followed by those of muslims. At some places the rows face each other. There is no history of a relation between and among these settlers, unlike the old colonies of the city. There is no history of tension between them either. Recently there were some tensions, on Rang Panchami day. But they remained as few skirmishes in the streets.

On 7th morning all males left for their work as usual. It was then that a group of 100-150 people entered the streets, carrying swords, rods, ballams, barchas, etc. Abusing and shouting, they were attempting to drag the hindus out of their houses. Two youth from Chindwara, who are tenants of a house came out hearing the noise. Both of them were badly beaten up by the mob. Some 50 people entered the house of Kamal Shri and Shanti Bai. They ransacked the house and later burnt it to ashes. The women took shelter in the neighbouring muslim house. According to the women the mobs entered the houses, destroyed or looted them. There have been incidents of resistance where muslim youth saved the hindu houses from attackers, standing outside hindu houses and

pleading "*Ye mera dost ka ghar hai, ise chhod do*" (This is my friend's house, spare it). On the whole many families lost jewellery, clothes and cash. A temple was also damaged.

The hindus breathed a sigh of relief only on the next day, when police arrived. But with this started police atrocities on muslims. In Fatima's house they entered and dragged out all the men. Men in other houses ran away. Police entered these houses searched, and not finding the men abused the women. A family comprising of an old man, his blind son and daughter in law are all arrested. This julaha family came to the city about 8-9 years ago. Similar was the account given by a family engaged in bidi making. After the initial police raid, a mob came and attacked the muslim houses. Houses, including that of the patwari were set on fire.

Police took away a number of muslim menfolk. At least two of them are believed to be killed by the police. Others were sent to jail, and were released more than a month later. The peoples account of the attackers is somewhat hazy. The first mob on 7th morning were outsiders. But subsequently the attackers, both hindus and muslims, seem to be from the basti itself. Some of them apparently were wearing some sort of a mask. They know the names of some of them. But did not want to disclose them. The suspicion on the youth from the other community, mistrust, the damaged temple, under current of tension that permeates their lives now - Bagh Umrao Dullah is an exceptional case of breakdown of social relations in old Bhopal.

## 1.2 Rajiv Nagar

After Congress Nagar and Indira Nagar, as one crosses the nala, one enters Rajiv Nagar. A row of one room sheds, each about 320 sq.ft. In all there are 120 sheds, forty of them occupied by muslims. These one room sheds, of Housing Board, were allotted in 1978. But the actual occupation is of more recent origin. People here mostly belong to

different categories of self employed workers including petty traders. Some work in the government.

On 7th when the situation in the city became tense the residents of this shed had a meeting among themselves. 'Pandey Saheb' of the huge building next to the sheds was one of the participants in the meeting. It was from his house that on 8th morning all of a sudden stones were pelted at the sheds. There were about 50 people on the terrace of his building that is strategically located to target the sheds below. They were raising slogans of "Jai Siya Ram". A little after they began pelting stones, police also joined the mob on the terrace. The sheds selected for pelting stones were only those of muslims. The selection was precise. Many of the muslims had no way out as outside in the streets mobs were waiting. When they began running helter skelter, police opened fire on them. Ahmed Hussain (40) an operator in Telephone Exchange died on the spot. The shed next to his was that of Khan, who lost all his property. Engaged in fruit business, all his thelas, some gold and goats were burnt along with the shed. He has now to rebuild life for his family; wife and ten children to look after. Aziz, a driver in the Irrigation department returned home to find both his sheds burnt. Outside in the street, even after a month, the burnt remains of a truck were standing. Its driver Naim Mia who chose a wrong time to visit his sister was murdered and his truck burnt.

In Rajiv Nagar the attackers are almost all from the same locality. The local elder gave them the infrastructural support. Police provided them with cover. In a long row select muslim houses, located randomly were attacked and burnt. It is a case of meticulous planning where the complicity of local residents is beyond doubt.

### 1.3 Bafna Colony

Earlier on this land kachhis used to grow vegetables and flowers. Over time the land changed hands, got divided into smaller plots and houses came up on this. The metamorphosis of a small village into an urban basti was completed only by the Gas tragedy of 1984. Located in the MIC affected areas, the land attracted settlers in the hope of getting compensation.

Today Bafna colony has more than a thousand population. If you enter it from the Berasia Road (just behind the super bazar that was burnt), first you would come across pucca houses belonging to big traders. Most of the other houses are those of salaried middle and lower middle class. Rest of the colony houses auto drivers, petty traders and vendors. In one corner of the colony of five acres, vegetables are still grown.

On 7th morning a huge crowd, estimated to be around three to four hundred entered the colony and began attacking the hindu houses. The mob came from Kazi camp and Kabad Khana. They were carrying petrol bombs, swords, knives. The rioters entered the houses looted and destroyed the property. There were no men in many houses. Only women. The rioters focus was on property. As one of the victims put it "they were hooligans, pick pockets and vagabonds". Most of the women ran out and took shelter in the nearby muslim houses. A rioter was heard saying "aadmi ho to mat chorna, aurat-bachchon ko mat choona" (spare no man, don't touch women and children). One Sindhi woman told us an incident of rape, but she too only has heard of it. We could not find or substantiate any of the rape charges, although rumours of rape in this colony were strong during the riots. The temple destroyed by the mob still remains in that state.

Muslims in the colony were not willing to talk freely. Those who did, complained that all leaders who visited the area visited



## 2. NEW BHOPAL

only hindus. Nor were they paid any compensation. A few muslim houses were also burnt. They were located amidst the hindu houses and thus could have caught fire. Some muslims say that they were set on fire after the colony *kar sewaks* returned from Ayodhya. But hindu elders say that they successfully restrained the youth from any retaliatory measures. Two hindus, echoing perhaps many, told us that muslims themselves set them on fire to get compensation! These conflicting accounts reveal more about the relations than about the incident.

Subsequently an Ekta Committee was formed here. Local residents of Bafna colony along with two more adjoining bastis took initiative. Money was collected, cutting across communities to renovate the damaged temple. Qazi of the area, himself a mason, took initiative for the reconstruction. While everyone was cooperating in the work, it had to be stopped because of the intervention by hindu leaders from outside. The 'muhurat' they claimed was not right for the work.

The events in Bafna Colony took place on 7th morning for about three hours. The rumours about it got into wide and wild circulation throughout the period of tensions. Long after, even now the colony has become a sort of symbol. It is difficult to understand why Bafna Colony events have acquired larger than life images and impressions during and after the riots. Perhaps because it is the only hindu majority area (about 88 percent) where hindus became the victims. That local muslims were not involved is irrelevant to the communal campaign. Fears and apprehensions apart, by and large neither of the communities blame the other in the colony for the events. Yet even together they are not in a position to build their common future. Bafna Colony, and the fate of its inter communal relations will now be determined by forces outside. And their political compulsions.

The area referred to as New Bhopal falls under three police station areas of Maharana Pratap Nagar, Tantiya Tope Nagar and Habibganj. By and large New Bhopal is a relatively prosperous area of the city. The violence here was directed primarily against property. In the initial phase the area south of the two lakes appeared to be normal. Subsequently from about 8th evening and 9th morning onwards stray incidents of burning kiosks and small shops took place on the main roads. These acts of vandalism were perhaps meant to spread an atmosphere of tension. For, there is no clear cut pattern of community-wise ownership in the small establishments burnt. These incidents led to the extension of curfew to day time also. Earlier it was only imposed from 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. However in the night during the curfew hours mysterious Maruti jeeps and cars moved around. Parked at strategic places for brief periods of time, the vehicles played at full blast, audio cassettes of shouting and sloganeering. These movements and sounds created tremendous tension and insecurity in the predominantly middle class localities of New Bhopal.

In a number of such localities muslim flats were selectively attacked in the multi storey apartments. In many cases household goods were looted. This kind of plain brigandage was also more notable in some of the shops on the roads. The middle class victims of residential flats however were not willing to speak. It was with great difficulty that we were able to piece together accounts of the events in Shastri Nagar given below. All accounts suggest that Bajrang Dal activists were involved in the selective attacks on the flats.

Army conducted flag marches on some of the main roads on 10th. With its help police

were able to restore some semblance of order. There was one notable instance of police excess in this area. On 10th, at Jawahar Chowk, they allegedly shot dead, without any provocation, Vivek Parashar.

An account of the tension ridden week in New Bhopal must include an odd tale from its most posh locality: Shamla Hills. On either side of the slope of the hill are located the Chief Minister's bungalow, TV Relay Center, Regional College of Education, and the famous Bharat Bhavan. On top of the hill there are some kothis; perhaps about 20. These palatial bungalows include both hindu and muslim elite. On 8th evening just outside the fence of a muslim house, a cow was found dead. The owner took initiative, called his servants (who happen to be hindus) and put guard around the dead cow. He also mobilised his neighbours, both hindus and muslims. By all accounts the cow had died a natural death. But the residents realised the potential danger it would invite given the tension down below in the city. They also decided that informing the police was not a wise step either. So arrangements were made for its disposal next morning with the help of servants. But at day break when the elder residents reached the place they found the dead cow beheaded. They of course managed to dispose off the carcass without attracting any attention. But the incident remained a mystery that no one wants to probe further.

## 2.1 Shastri Nagar

At the foothill of Shamla hills, on its southern slope is located Shastri Nagar. It is about one and a half kilometres from New Market. A colony of multi storeyed flats, it was one of the first Housing Board colonies constructed in the early 1960s. Today it is surrounded on all sides by multi storeyed housing complexes. Many more are in the process of construction.

The original residents of Shastri Nagar were employed in service sector. But that

generation is today around retiring age. The new generation of youth is in its early twenties. In the last few years they were organised into Bajrang Dal committees. Regular meetings and training classes had become a common sight. Similar committees had been formed in every colony around Shastri Nagar. It was these youth who led the attacks in Shastri Nagar on 9 December.

When we visited Shastri Nagar, a saffron flag was hanging from a mast at the entrance of the colony. Incidentally it was 26 January, the day the administration had taken all measures to ensure that muslims in the city would not put up black flags. We were told that a Bajrang Dal banner too had been put up beside the flag, which was removed after the ban on the organisation. Elsewhere in the colony we saw a hoarding. It read '*sashastra kranti ke aur - Bajrang Dal*'.

There are 15-20 families of muslims living in Shastri Nagar. With news of rioting starting on 7 December, many muslims left their houses to seek shelter in areas of the old city. Around 1 p.m. on 9 December a mob entered Shastri Nagar from a colony adjoining it on the north. Many people from Shastri Nagar too joined the mob. Its first target was a quarter on the ground floor in which was located a daily provision shop. Shutters of the shop were broken and goods looted. Many local children also joined in the looting. After this the shop was set on fire. The mob then proceeded to a one room house on the ground floor belonging to a muslim. The family had never expected an attack. The house had a tin shed in front where the family ran a small *parchun* shop. When the mob came to the house, the family scaled the back wall of the house and were provided shelter by a hindu family. The mob broke into the house, looted whatever it could, took all belongings and wares from the shop and set them on fire outside the house. Household goods of another family were similarly brought out on the road and burnt. Two other houses were

looted. One house on the ground floor was looted and one room was burnt. Many of the muslim houses were spared from being burnt since the neighbours feared that the fire would spread to other quarters adjoining it. Altogether we saw one shop and five houses which had been attacked.

Next to the colony on the opposite side of the road is situated a police chowki. We were told that police were present at the chowki throughout the time when the rioters moved freely through the colony. In fact local hindu families who helped the muslims were later arrested by the police under S. 151. Rumours too helped the rioters, especially one about large number of muslims collecting at a masjid nearby and planning an attack on the colony. This provided passive consent to the looting and burning that followed in Shastri Nagar.

### 3. BHEL AREA

BHEL Area is the common, if confusing, description for the vast expanse of east Bhopal that houses more than a third of its population. The company's township proper is now indistinguishably lost in the maze of colonies that grew inside it and on all sides of its outer flanks. Electorally it falls under Govindpura constituency, a BJP stronghold. A segment of Old Bhopal, north east of the railway line, falls under Govindpura police station limits. (Hence the extension of curfew, unenforced though, to Govindpura on 7th itself). Govindpura, along with Bagh Sewaniyan and Piplani police station areas are what we refer to as BHEL area.

The earliest incidents of violence took place here on the night of 8th, in the clusters around Subhash Nagar and Sudama Nagar. By next evening the entire area was engulfed. Jhuggis inside the township, like Acharya Narendradev Nagar, middle class colonies like Shakti Nagar, urban villages

like Barkheda Pathani and Panchpir, and the employees quarters - practically every area and every kind of area was affected. The ethnic distinctions, that otherwise mark the character of the area, were lost as religious identity came to the fore. Thus we find that both victims and aggressors include Bundelkhandis, Chattisgarhis, Purabias, Punjabis, Biharis, Marathis, Tamilians, besides the natives living here for generations. Intense violence rocked the area for four uninterrupted days and nights. It was only from about 12th when army and CISF made their presence felt, that the situation began to improve. Three more days passed however before a semblance of order was restored. First major relaxation in day curfew was on the 17th. At least 60 people were killed. About 450 people, men, women and children, suffered serious injuries. Kasturba Hospital, run by the BHEL, treated or operated 150 serious cases. At one stage the injured had to be taken to other hospitals, in the curfew bound days, to Hamidia hospital in old city and J.P. hospital in New Bhopal. An estimated 600 families were rendered homeless in this devastation.

The overall direction of the violence was dictated by Bajrang Dal. The most common name that figures in a number of accounts of the victims, is that of Shakuntala Devi. A BJP member of the Municipal Corporation, Shakuntala Devi returned from Ayodhya on 8th night along with other *kar sewaks*. Hers is the only case of its kind. Nowhere else in the city did the victims name any well known leader of the BJP as having directly participated in the violence. The allegations against them were concerning their role behind the scene. Bajrang Dal senapatis at the mohalla level, are accused of participating in the orgy of violence. Take Barkheda Pathani. Here the Dal has been active during the last two years. The Shankarji mandir in the area has been the centre of RSS shakha activities for many years. In the Bajrang

market nearby the Dal has a strong hold. This area witnessed horrible violence. Dousing muslims with kerosene and burning them alive for instance, was reported from Barkheda Pathani. The Dal's aggressive conduct created a tense atmosphere, terrorising muslims in the area. In the nearby Bihari Basti about 60, out of 500 families are muslims. When the Dal began going around, in small bands, all the muslims families shifted to one large pucca house. The house belongs to a person who owns four grocery shops in the Bajrang market. All through the night of 8th and 9th, women of the locality told us, the gathered muslims on the terrace kept shouting slogans, partly to counter the Dal organised slogans in the temple nearby and partly to shore up their own spirits. A day later police came, forced all of them to part with money, wrist watches and other valuables. All the men were arrested and sent to jail, from where they returned after twenty days. Meanwhile women moved to refugee camps. That was when the Dal led mobs came and burnt their houses.

In general the connivance of police with Bajrang Dal seems to be far more open in the BHEL area than in other parts of the city. In Kailash Nagar about 15 of the 150 jhuggis were those of muslims. The attack there took place at around 10 in the morning. Our informant is a local leader of a sort. He was not in the city when the riots broke out. When he returned he found all the muslim jhuggis burnt. He tracked his family in a refugee camp. His one year old grandson was among those injured in the attack. He learnt from the family the names of the people who attacked the basti. So after the curfew was relaxed he lodged a complaint with the police giving names. They included names of associates of Bajrang Dal, a Tamilian and a Marathi dalit, both sons of BHEL employees and of some youth from local trader families. The police did not register the names in the FIR. Instead they informed the accused. Now our

informant feels threatened. His family and neighbours feel that they cannot go back to the area. And they all blame him for it. At the time of our visit they were still staying in Farhat Afza camp.

The role of Bajrang Dal and the police connivance should not, however, be overstated. Not all sets of mobs are associated with the Dal. To categorise every aggressor or group of aggressors as associates of BJP, or acting in collusion with police, would be incorrect. More importantly it tends to underestimate the extent of breakdown in social relations in the BHEL area and the depths of its dehumanisation. For, neighbours were actively involved here, unlike in Old Bhopal.

Saket Nagar is a middle class Housing Board colony. Most residents here are serving or retired employees of BHEL. Ten percent of the 1,600 houses are those of muslims. They were attacked on 10th night. Our account is based on the interview, in a hospital, with a student of Hamidia College whose father works in BHEL. The student and his family heard the sounds of approaching mob around 10.30 in the night. One brother ran out by scaling the back wall. The rest of the family hid in the bathroom. The mob broke open the door and set the house on fire. And then waited outside for the family to get flushed out by the fire and smoke. The family came out. It included this student, his younger brother, sister, mother, cousin and uncle. He and his mother were seriously injured. The uncle died on the spot. At least six persons in the 25 strong mob are from Saket Nagar itself and are known to the family. This kind of neighbour participation, in middle class colonies and factory quarters, in jhuggis and villages alike was the most striking feature of riots in BHEL area. A sense of disbelief marks the narration of the victims here. They simply cannot visualise life in the neighbourhood hereafter.

The violence in BHEL area was also particularly brutal and barbaric. In Chand-

bad, a sixteen year old girl was dragged out of her house. The attackers pushed aside the pleading mother and repeatedly stabbed the girl. Her body was one of the five from the area that greeted Madhavrao Scindia when he visited the Hamidia Hospital on 11th. Others include two men who were burnt alive in Barkheda Pathani. In Piplani a house was attacked on 10th evening. The mob broke open the door and entered the house. They tried to pull the clothes off the two women inside. The half naked women, out of modesty and in an attempt to defend themselves embraced each other. Unable to separate them, the mob poured kerosene and burnt them. The photograph of the gory incident that we saw shows two charred bodies fused together.

It is very difficult to fathom the depths of sickness and inhumanity that marks some of the incidents in BHEL area. We refrain from an attempt to 'understand and explain'.

### 3.1 The Township

The township owned and managed by the Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) should be distinguished from the colonies, jhuggis and urban villages that fall under it. At least at the juridical level. The purview of BHEL is confined to the plant, administrative complex, Kasturba Hospital, other infrastructural services and about 12,000 residential quarters. The employees recognised as BHEL's are about 17,500. In addition there are 2,000 more, working as contract labour. There are thousands of others whose employment is due to BHEL, but are not part of its workforce. They live, though, within the township. This nominal and juridical distinction, as we shall see, plays a role in the dubious explanations offered by the management.

There are approximately 1,050 muslims in the BHEL workforce. Most of them work on the technical side. And many live in the quarters. The attacks on them took place

between 9-12 December. At least 133 houses were partially or completely destroyed. In other houses large scale looting and destruction took place. Three serving and one retired employee were killed. In addition eight of those killed are family members of the employees.

The incidents in the area that began on 8th evening spread to large parts of the township by next morning. Despite repeated efforts by many people including some union leaders, the management did not take any preventive measures. It appears that the management went along with the local BJP government. As a central public sector undertaking the company has enough strength to resist the pressures from the local government. Obviously other considerations prevailed. The connivance of BHEL management in many ways helped the violent mobs in the area.

First, an act of omission. In 1984 after the assassination of Indira Gandhi there was some apprehension of trouble in the air. Management called a meeting of all workers. At all levels peace efforts and preventive measures were initiated. A stern warning was issued that if any employee, or their ward was found involved in any acts of violence, they would face summary dismissal. The management, at that time, played a positive role. This time from about 7th many employees and their representatives appealed for similar measures. There was ample scope and space for such an initiative. For, the plant was working in the first three days. It was closed down, for the first time in its history, only on 10th morning. The refusal by the management must be seen along with its role regarding the *kar sewaks* returning from Ayodhya. As noted earlier there is some truth in the widely held belief that the management, provided hospitality for the returning *kar sewaks* on 8th night. Now, going by the scores of them arrested from this area and charged with arson, murder and loot, even

the management and administration admit that they aggravated a surcharged atmosphere.

The management also did not deploy the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF). Initially the management insisted, with reference to *kar sewaks* and deployment of CISF, that 'BHEL was not affected'. The juridical BHEL township, thus, became a shield for inaction even while most of the township was on fire. Further, management took a position that 'industrial property' was not under attack, meaning the plant. But the CISF Act 1968 explicitly includes in its duties protection of employees and their quarters. [S. 10 (d) and (e)]. The Act also enables the deployment of the force in general duties [S. 15], like controlling a riotous situation in an industrial township. Eventually that is what happened. CISF was deployed. Perhaps by then the management realised, like many in Bhopal and Delhi, the BJP governments days were numbered. The significance of CISF in Bhopal during that week lies in that the local police completely lost their legitimacy. It was CISF which provided relief for thousands of victims. We have already referred to the long term implications of the emerging divergences between one arm of the state and the other. But to deny their significance in the immediate situation would be absurd.

The deployment of CISF, along with army, controlled the situation. Meanwhile from 9th itself victims began moving into refugee camps. At least 9,000 out of the total 17,000 refugees in the city are from BHEL area. And 10 out of the 31 camps were located here. The muslim employees of the BHEL initially took shelter in the Civil Office. Subsequently BHEL Sports Complex housed large number of refugees from all over the area. Others include Natraj Cinema, Govindpura and Piplani masjids. The Piplani masjid housed about 1,000 at the peak. It also included those hindu families who ran out of fear of reprisals. (*"Aap hairan honge hamari masjid me*

*hindu aurat bhi thahre the"*, You will be surprised to know that hindu women also were given refuge in our mosque, the maulvi of Piplani masjid told us). The mobs surrounded the mosque many times and raised slogans. Subsequently CISF and army provided security to all refugee camps.

The management has announced Rs.10,000 as compensation to all the employees whose houses were destroyed. But the compensation policy has no provision for other kinds of destruction and injuries. The families of the three employees killed are promised job to the wards. After normalcy was restored the employees have applied for reallocation of their quarters. Muslims are congregating in some blocks or sectors while there is counter movement by the hindus also. By January end about 80 muslim and 119 hindu employee requests were acceded to by the management. The interaction at social levels between the two communities has completely collapsed. Quarters can be changed. But it still does not eliminate the space and necessity for interaction between them, at the floor level, in the plant. Assembly line production mechanisms are not known to make religious distinctions. For the present a sullen silence marks the relationship, between the two. After working together in the country's premier public sector undertaking, and struggling together in its unions, for almost a quarter century.

### 3.2 Rachna Nagar

On the East along the railway line is situated a cluster of jhuggis comprising over 400 dwellings. These belong to migrants who came here five years ago from urban and rural areas of Bilaspur, Seohore and Bhopal districts. The populations of hindus and muslims are intermixed, though muslims are more concentrated towards the southern end. The residents work as vegetable vendors or as daily wage earners.

Within the basti is situated a par-

tially constructed mosque. The construction was in progress till August 1992, when police stopped it. The mosque when we visited consists of four walls, but no roof.

During its five year existence, the jhuggi cluster was sought to be demolished by the residents of the adjacent colony of pucca houses. One such organised attempt with the help of bulldozers was aborted by the administration a few years back.

Curfew was declared in Rachna Nagar area on 7 December, after most people had left for work. They reached home amidst announcements of curfew and shoot-at-sight orders through loudspeakers. The basti residents were thus confined to their jhuggis. In the evening some miscreants scaled the walls of an adjoining church and hurled petrol bombs and stones at the jhuggis. The resulting fire was soon put out.

Next day around 10 a.m. a group of 15-20 policemen broke into a few jhuggis and pulled out the menfolk. They were beaten with canes and rifle butts and were then dragged away. When Salim was being thus dragged, his wife Shamin obstructed the policemen. She too was beaten but she refused to let go of her husband demanding that if innocents were to be arrested then all the residents of the basti should be arrested. Her exceptional courage saved Salim from further beating which was meted out to the other four people. They were taken to Govindpura P.S., charged under S. 151 and sent to jail. And were released on 26 December.

On 9 December a police party approached the basti and fired one round in that direction. This appeared to be a signal since a large mob of around 500 people along with the policemen surrounded the basti within a few minutes, hurling petrol bombs at the jhuggis. A few residents tried to approach the rioters, one of whom was hit by a bullet while others sustained pellet injuries. The mob, according to the victims, was directed by the owner of the tallest house in the adjoining

colony of pucca houses, which was also the scene of much jubilation after the demolition of Babri masjid. The house belongs to a metropolitan councillor. With their houses ablaze, the residents fled from the basti, crawling through drains till they reached the level crossing half a kilometre away. One of the residents, Mohammad Siddiqui ran back to his house to set free the goat tied in his burning house. But he was surrounded by the mob, hit with iron rods, doused with petrol and set on fire. The rest of the residents reached Jhinsi Chauraha where muslim families helped them get shelter in a school. In all 92 jhuggis were burnt of which four belonged to hindus.

The city magistrate came to the basti with a fire brigade few hours after the attack. Two residents who were hiding nearby came out and told the magistrate that they did not recognise any of the rioters. A survey was conducted and the residents were provided relief of Rs. 500-1500 when they came back to the basti on 26 December. Food and relief at the camp was provided entirely by voluntary organisations as well as by muslim organisations from Delhi and Bombay.

Back at the basti, people are facing continuous harassment. The residents of the adjoining colony regularly remove the chain of the municipal handpump. They have been threatened that they would not be allowed to take water from there. Other sources of water are far away and they feel terribly insecure to venture that far. Apart from this direct threats are being made to force them to vacate the land.

At present the basti dwellers reside in some sheds nearby. They have not tried to rebuild their houses or remove the rubble in the hope of getting some compensation by the government. They have not even been provided the wooden logs and bamboo poles which were announced by the administration as part of the relief. From morning till evening the residents wait outside their

ravaged homes in the vain hope that someone will come to assess their loss. One day a police party did come. A van with blankets stopped outside the basti. Residents were asked to stand in a row. Distribution of blankets started with much fanfare. Cameras clicked. Then abruptly policemen got into the van and drove off. In all only six blankets were distributed, before cameras downed their shutters.

### 3.3 Panchpir Nagar

Situated close to Barkheda Pathani in F sector Barkheda, Panchpir Nagar houses around 4000 people. Of these 24 families are muslims. Though the muslims houses are on one end of the colony, there have been no tensions between the communities in the 25 years of their stay here. Some people work at BHEL as contract labour. Most are labourers, petty shopkeepers, vendors, ply tongas etc. Some of the muslim families had shops in the Bajrang Market nearby. Nine of the muslim families had pucca houses.

Bajrang Dal committees were formed in Barkheda Pathani areas in the past few years. Rallies were taken out in that colony but never in Panchpir Nagar. Shiv Sena too was active in Barkheda Pathani. However on 7 December the residents did not apprehend any trouble.

Panchpir Nagar was attacked around midnight on 8 December. Mobs shouting slogans approached the muslim inhabited area. Residents were surrounded, attacked and women were molested. Most of the residents managed to escape to a forest area nearby. They came back in the morning to find their houses burnt or destroyed. None of the neighbours came out to help. The victims also identified some policemen in the attack.

Salim works as a casual labourer in construction work. His wife Shaija made bidis at home. Salim's face was badly cut by a sword. Both then hid in some bushes nearby from where they witnessed an entire family being surrounded and burnt. Later Shaija

took Salim to the Govindpura Sector A thana but the policemen present threatened them. In the morning she managed to reach Salim to J.P. hospital.

Ali is an autodriver. He owned an autorickshaw which was burnt during the attack. With his wife he had hidden in an empty house of a hindu neighbour. In the morning, they along with others who had returned, were taken by the police to Piplani and Natraj relief camps. On 3 January they shifted to Bagh Farhat Afza.

The victims attempts to shift back are foiled by neighbours who shout slogans whenever they visit their destroyed houses. Expecting a survey team of the administration, on 18 January they were going to their houses. The mini-bus in which they were traveling was surrounded by hindu residents shouting slogans. The driver of the bus luckily drove on. And the victims returned to their camp.

### 3.4 Acharya Narendradev Nagar

Close to Subhash Nagar along the boundary of the BHEL township is situated a basti called Acharya Narendradev Nagar. The basti has two sets of residents. One set are migrants from Bihar (mainly from Bhagalpur and Motihari districts) who have come here in the last few years and work as labourers in factories and other establishments. The second set are those whose families have been living in Bhopal for generations and have shifted to this colony over a decade ago from their earlier residences at Shahjahanabad and Jhinsi Chauraha where they were tenants. These people are mainly petty traders operating tea stalls and vegetable shops while some work as hammals, loading and unloading trucks.

Police came to the basti on 7 and 8 December to conduct searches in the houses. Over a hundred young men were arrested. In jail they were refused food and water for long stretches. Attacks on the basti started on 8



December when one row of jhuggis adjoining the cremation grounds was set on fire. Following this the Bihari migrants, possibly more familiar with communal violence, left the basti in search of a refuge.

The large scale mob attack started around 10 a.m. on 9 December, and carried on till the evening. Around 250 jhuggis were attacked of which over a hundred were completely burnt. The rioters came in large numbers, in trucks and some in police jeeps. A noticeable section was in police uniforms and some of them had their faces partially covered with cloth. Many women were molested, stripped and attacked with swords and acid. Shakeela's jhuggi was burnt. When she ran out she was stoned, then caught, stripped and raped. She later died at Kasturba hospital. Another woman who was stripped and raped, we were told, has gone back to her village in Bihar. A 75 year old woman's feet were chopped off and her son was killed before her eyes. Acid was thrown on an eight month pregnant woman who was also attacked with swords.

In the evening around 5 p.m. CISF jawans came to the colony and the mobs retreated. The injured were taken to Kasturba hospital and the rest to a relief camp at a school in Govindpura. Some of the policemen who were part of the mob attack were also present at the relief camp. The victims were relieved when the army moved in on the night of 11 December. The relief camp was closed when the school reopened and some of the inmates moved to a camp at Bagh Farhat Afza into the tin sheds that came up after the 1984 gas tragedy. In these sheds, separated by gunny bag partitions, around 150 riot hit families from Sudama Nagar, Subhash Nagar, Chandbad, Piplani, Bagh Sewaniyan, Barkheda Pathani and Acharya Narendradev Nagar came to stay.

The affected families were provided with Rs. 500 six wooden logs and 15 bamboo poles by way of immediate relief. Later,

compensation was paid after the survey by the administration, but the initial value of relief was deducted from it. Most of the families thus later got amounts lower than Rs. 500. The relief and compensation had been spent on consumption needs in the days when they had no source of income. In addition the logs and poles were stolen, for the families were in the relief camp. One of the inmates of the camp, Abdul Rahim, had his hut close to the township boundary. The logs and poles given to him have been confiscated by the BHEL authorities, lest he again build his house. The BHEL management has started work on the boundary wall and sewer lines. Thereby many of the riot victims will lose the land.


The victims are hopeful that they will be provided land elsewhere. They are looking forward to being provided land at the Farhat Afza camp itself. They find the place better for their security. The source of their hope is that they were assured rights over their land (13 ft by 30 ft) in 1982 by the Jhuggi Jhopri Nirman Samiti. The Samiti was formed during the time when Arjun Singh was the Chief Minister to obtain votes from the jhuggi dwellers. Little do the victims know that the Samiti has long since ceased to exist.

## NOTE

This report is based on the joint efforts of Sanskritik Morcha, Bhopal and People's Union for Democratic Rights, Delhi. The main part of the investigation was undertaken in the third week of January 1993. On 2 April, the Jabalpur bench of the M.P. High Court struck down the dismissal of the Sunderlal Patwa government. The full bench by a majority judgement of two to one quashed the Presidential proclamation of 15 December as "invalid and beyond the scope of Article 356 of the Constitution". (The dissenting judge, Justice K.M. Agarwal incidentally heads the judicial enquiry over Bhopal riots.) On 16 April the Supreme Court granted a stay on the order.

23 April 1993





हम के: ठहरे अजनबी  
कितनी मुलाकातों के बाद  
फिर बनेंगे आशना  
कितनी मुलाकातों के बाद  
कब नज़र में आएगी  
बे-दाग़ सब्जे की बहार  
खून के धब्बे धुलेंगे  
कितनी बरसातों के बाद

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