

LET US HEAL OUR DILLI

Eyewitness Report from North East Delhi
Date of visit: February 27, 2020

Team: Farah Naqvi, Sarojini N, Navsharan Singh, Naveen Chander

Areas/Mohallas visited:
Bhajanpura, Chand Bagh, Gokulpuri, Chaman Park, Shiv Vihar,
Main Mustafabad (including Bhagirathi Vihar, Brijpuri)

This visit was intended to give us a sense of what this man-made tragedy has meant inside affected mohallas, and what survivors need most urgently; so that we can put our collective might behind pressure on the government and administration, and also mobilize civil society and citizens across all divides, to reach out and help heal our beloved city.

MAIN OBSERVATIONS

- We witnessed a human tragedy of enormous proportions, and feel the reports coming out have not done justice to the extent of the violence and its cost in terms of the emotional, psychological, and economic damage to survivors in Delhi. According to reports the death toll is currently up to 42. And those who have lived through this targeted hate, have lost their sense of security, peace and well-being. It will take years to rebuild these neighbourhoods.
- The targeting of Muslims in North east Delhi reminded one distinctly of the targeting of Sikhs in Delhi in 1984 and of Muslims in Gujarat 2002. The death toll is far less, but the targeting is truly frightening - where one shop is burnt, but the two adjacent shops on either side are not. Roadside mazars are burnt, masjids in the interiors are burnt.
- Our taxi driver, a 66 year old Sikh, was deeply pained at what he saw. He said the sight of these burnt buildings, motorbikes, cars and tyres really hurt him because it reminded him of 1984. He was proud of the fact that Gurudwaras across Delhi have opened their arms for all victims. We were also proud.



Burnt Mazar on Main Wazirabad Road: Feb 27, 2020

- People – men and women - we met had tears and anger in their eyes. They have been rendered helpless, homeless and with no means of livelihood. Fear is everywhere – as we spoke to a group of young men on the road that divides Khajuri Khas and Chand Bagh, elderly residents came out and pleaded with us to move to safer inner lanes, because just 48 hours ago they had been at the receiving end of bullets fired from Bhajanpura, across the main road.
- Men gathered around us, desperate for someone to bear witness. They showed us videos they had taken of the attack. One man in Mustafabad, trembling with emotion and colour rising on his face, kept telling us again and again of how they burnt his mosque and repeated many times, how safe ‘we’ have kept the temples in our neighbourhoods. Come and see them, he kept repeating.
- The targeted damage to property and means of livelihood for people who live on the edge of survival is truly vile. *Theles* burnt, small shops burnt, autorickshaws burnt, e-rickshaws burnt, a scrap market burnt. These are means of livelihood for some of India’s poorest people.



Chand Bagh: Feb 27, 2020

- The targeting is clearly and unambiguously focussed on Muslims. Hindus have also been hit and suffered damage. In Brijpuri, there was a damage to the houses. Shops and banquet halls were burnt. In Gokulpuri we saw burnt autorickshaws belonging to Hindus.
- In one case that we encountered, the attack on Hindu properties was by right-wing mobs themselves. An autorickshaw owner/driver, on the main road outside Gokulpuri flailed helplessly but angrily at the injustice of what happened to him – two of his autorickshaws which he proudly pointed out say ‘Jai Mata Di’ on the back, were burnt because in one of them he was ferrying Muslim passengers and the mob probably thought he was Muslim too. I am a Hindu! he kept saying. Even as he told us his story, his current passenger load consisted of one Hindu and two Muslim women in hijab. And even as he got out of his auto to tell us his tale, he simultaneously asked his two Muslim women passengers to stay back in the auto because, ‘time theek nahin hai’ (this is not a safe time).
- All shop shutters in these areas are down. Nothing open. There are pockets of men on the streets, who emerge from narrow lanes, and go back when the police comes. One small kirana shop on the Mustafabad main street opened while we were there. It’s owner, a Hindu and his wife both said they were frightened, but said they trusted their Muslim neighbours, but not the police. He called the police number more times than he could count. He tried to show his phone to count his calls. He pointed to the CPRF jawan standing outside his store – and said this is why I have had the courage to open for a short while today.
- We saw many journalists on the main shopping street of Mustafabad. The largest crowd of journalists was near the tri-junction of Shiv Vihar, Mahalaxmi Enclave and Babunagar (Mustafabad) where Hindu-Muslim populations meet, and there has been a lot of damage to Hindu shops and properties.

Government & Police

- Across the board, among Muslims and Hindus, there is enormous fury at the Delhi Police for just not being there when they were needed. People simply do not understand why? We heard repeatedly of frantic calls to the 100 line that went unanswered, for 48-72 hours.
- Everywhere we heard accounts of the police facilitating mobs. In one place as a police platoon arrived in police jeeps, we saw people run in the opposite direction. It is a force to be feared. There is zero trust.
- We also heard anger at the AAP government for not being there, on the ground to stand with victims and vulnerable communities.



AAP office in Mustafabad: Shutters down: Feb 27, 2020

“Matlab bharosa jeeta aur uske bad gira diya. Ghar ghar vote manga. Samajh lo - ek to white hai, aur ek kala hai. Kale wale ka samajh aata hai ki haan woh kaala hai! Ab white wala, kala kaam kar raha hai.” [verbatim as recorded in Chand Bagh]

- In Mustafabad people were angry and said the central government was busy with the Trump visit instead of ensuring early deployment of army or police, which would have saved lives and protected their properties.
- Even after the attack, no one from the state or central government has reached out to victims. And it has been nearly 4 days now, to the first attack on Sunday (Feb 23). There was NO relief effort. No food, no places for the displaced to stay, no one to call. At Chand Bagh, we were asked if we could arrange food for 200 families of labourers being accommodated in a masjid.

- We saw the RAF arrive in Chand Bagh. We also saw CRPF, BSF and ITBF jawans stationed or patrolling in large numbers in Mustafabad and in Gokulpuri. They told us they had arrived just yesterday evening (Feb 26).
- We witnessed a BSF flag march close to sunset through the narrow lanes of Bhagirathi Vihar, a neighbourhood in Mustafabad, with a loudspeaker asking people to get off the streets and go home, but just behind the marching jawans were sloganeers shouting - Bharat Mata Ki Jai, CAA Zindabad, and NRC Zindabad. No one stopped the sloganeers.

Internal Displacement of India's Poor



Forced displacement from Chand Bagh: Family fleeing to West Bengal: Feb 27, 2020

- We witnessed in several places we visited (Chand Bagh, Mustafabad, Wazirabad Main Road) entire Muslim families, with children, walking rapidly on the road with their modest belongings tied up in bundles. In two families the main bread earners were daily wagers who have lived here in rented accommodation for the past 3-4 years. They were returning to their villages, in Bihar and in Bengal. The family from Bengal was going back to their village in Islampur (Uttar Dinajpur District). They said they were scared and their families back home were frantic that they would be labelled Bangladeshis. One family in Mustafabad was packed and standing on the road – the man told us he was taking his family back to Bareilly and he would return alone later.
- Another family, clearly very poor, with rag-tag bundles on their heads or slung on their arms, women carrying small babies, were moving out of Chand Bagh to a relative's home in the Jama Masjid area of Old Delhi. They felt that was safer.

- In another neighbourhood, thousands of Muslims were forced to flee from Shiv Vihar, which has a mixed population. They are now being accommodated in shelters in the adjacent neighbourhoods of Chaman Park and Mustafabad, which are Muslim majority. We did not go inside Shiv Vihar but were told of both mosques burnt, many homes burnt and dead bodies.
- In each place – Chand Bagh and Shiv Vihar – the figures of the displaced were given in the thousands (3000 – 5,000 rough estimate by people we spoke to).
- We were also shown a photograph of Yusuf, missing from Gali # 14 in new Mustafabad (Chand Bagh area) for the past three days. No one knows where.
- We estimate there has been massive internal displacement – the full extent needs to be urgently determined.

###