



Delhi Violence 2020

Chronology of Events

Working Brief

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Report on violence in Delhi 23/2 – 27/2/2020 and its aftermath

Introduction

In February 2020 Delhi witnessed targeted and organised violence against Muslims. The violence in the north eastern part of New Delhi led to the death of around 53 people, mostly Muslims and more than 200 people were injured. Many mosques were burnt and destroyed, and Muslim houses and shops were looted and burnt. The violence was led by far-right Hindu fundamentalist groups who were identifiable by their trademark saffron clothes, chants, flags, and other markers. The Delhi violence was also marked by Police complicity, and saw blockade of medical help to the injured, targeting of journalists, and sexual assaults across the State of Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. In the aftermath of violence a false narrative of victim blaming was manufactured and was circulated, through right-wing media, and social media including official channels. Victims have been harassed by the police. Many families have not returned to their homes and many others have left the area, leading to demographic change. Hundreds of Muslim youth have been incarcerated. Activists, who had participated in earlier on-going protests in Delhi, have now been falsely implicated in the riots and been arrested and held without trial, often charged under draconian laws ostentatiously meant for controlling terrorism. Journalists who reported on the true nature of the “riots” - in fact a pogrom, are being harassed by the police. In this working report we provide an overview of the relevant media reports on violence and aftermath following the Delhi Riots.

Background and context

Citizenship Amendment Act or CAA, proposed to use, for the very first time in India, religion as an eligibility criterion for citizenship. On 13th December the CAA became law. On 15th December, protesting students of Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi were brutally assaulted by police. The same night, a few women decided to occupy a major road near the university. These sit-in protest became famous as “Shaheen Bagh protests” and become the face of the resistance to CAA. Many Shaheen Bagh-like women led sit-ins have since been launched across India (about 50+ by the end of January).

The state of Delhi elected its legislative assembly on 8th February. The days preceding the vote were marked by highly inflammatory speech by members of BJP, including a call to “shoot traitors”. The anti-CAA protestors were cast as anti-national and therefore traitors. Several incidences of shooting took place [1]. BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party: current ruling party at the center) lost the elections badly (only 8 out of 70 seats). Immediately afterwards a winning member of the legislative assembly from the winning party was shot-at and one of his aids killed [2].

On 23rd February, two new sit-in protests started... “two sit-in demonstrations against the citizenship law at Jaffrabad and Chand Bagh near Maujpur Chowk. The protesters had occupied roads since Saturday evening, nearly two months after a similar protest began in South Delhi’s Shaheen Bagh. While the Jaffrabad protest blocked the Maujpur Road, Kardampuri’s protesters sat by a bridge running parallel to the road. Both areas have large Muslim populations.” [3] In this tense atmosphere, BJP politician Kapil Mishra gave speech calling for “clearing of protesters” [3,4]. After 70 days of peaceful protests, the seeds of violence were sown.

Chronology of violence:

23-24/2 Violence begins at midnight: Shortly after the speech by the BJP politician, a group of CAA supporters clashed with the protesters. Zones occupied by CAA-protesters and those occupied by CAA-supporters became demarcated [4].

Monday 24/2: After a tense but relatively calm night, “violence broke out again on Monday, spilling over into nearby neighbourhoods. In Bhajanpura, a petrol pump was set afire. In the evening, a market in Gokulpuri was set on fire as well. Throughout the day, there was stone-pelting, and shops and homes were vandalised and torched in Maujpur and Jaffrabad. There were also reports of violence from the adjoining Karawal Nagar and Chand Bagh.” [3]. Reports of gun fires came in. Police imposed 144 law which forbids assembly of more than

4 people at one spot. However, large mobs of mostly young men chanting Hindu slogans started confronting the gathered protesters and subsequently stones were thrown from both sides. The mob also vandalized shops and homes. The Hindu mob – identifiable as such because of Hindu symbols and flags as well as its slogans kept growing. People were called in from other areas. They made provocative speeches, claiming themselves as victims and the Muslims as aggressors. Police did little to stop them – on the contrary, some policemen were seen to assist this crowd – throwing teargas shells in the same direction as the crown pelted stones – that is to say towards the largely Muslim protesters [3,5,6,7]. Later that evening the crown started “checking” passing cars and auto-rickshaws, “marking” those who they “recognized” as Hindus. **At the end of the day, 4 people were dead**, including one police officer, and many injured including another police officer and a few journalists.

Tuesday 25/2: Violence continued overnight and the press reported seeing broken and burnt vehicles, burnt shops and vehicles still on fire [8] The targeting was obvious from visuals coming in – including the incidence where a mosque was desecrated and a Hindu flag was planted [9]. It emerged that mosques were also attacked and burnt in Mustafabad were huts of poor working Muslim families were destroyed by masked thugs shouting “Jai Shri Ram” – a Hindu slogan. Hindu neighbours later testified that they were also intimidated [10]. Reports of police harassing victims [11,*]. **End of the day reported 13 dead.**

Wednesday 26/2: Violence continued throughout the night, death-toll increasing by the hour. ambulances denied access to injured, journalists attacked and challenged to prove they are hindus, children attacked, From The Wire: “At the Mustafabad-Brijpuri crossing, a mosque, named locally as Farooquiya masjid, which also functioned as a madrasa for orphans, had been set ablaze by a mob that rampaged through the colony on Tuesday evening. They claimed that many children were injured in the arson, while the maulana died of a bullet injury. Another imam of the masjid has been critically injured and is currently admitted at a government hospital.” Court intervenes to allow passage of ambulances in midnight appeal [12]. Delhi effected area under curfew but tolls rise – unofficial death toll very high but officially 20, press under attack in Delhi [13]. While most victims have died of gun-shot wounds or due to severe beating, 85-year-old Akbari suffocates to death in a burning house, Cops assaulted ICLU lawyers, peace partially restored. **Death toll 27 at the end of the day.**

Thursday 27/2: Despite assurances of safety from the authorities, reports of attack on Muslims by the violent mob continue to emerge in social media. According to mainstream news, peace seems to have been restored but death toll continues to rise. Police beginning to file first information reports (FIRs) but many instances of targeting victims and Muslims in general [14]. **Deaths reported: 36 at the end of the day. No new confirmed report of violence.**

Friday 28/2, Saturday 29/2: Death toll continues to rise. **The count as of Saturday stands at 42**, bringing the total number of dead in CAA/NRC related violence and repression to 69 [15,16]. Total number of dead was about 50: majority, but not all, Muslims [17].

The attack on the press has been documented in a public report by Committee Against Assault on Journalists (CAAJ) [<https://www.caajindia.org/>] To quote verbatim: “...is a dark chapter of horror in the history of Freedom of Press in Delhi that reminded many of the Emergency days. Around 18 cases were reported where journalists were not only stopped from coverage, but identified as Hindu/Muslims, ashamed publicly and beaten up by the rioting mob. Their camera, equipment broken and vehicles burnt up by the mob. Many cases have gone unreported due to horror.” Mainstream media journalists from almost each and every banner recounted their ordeal on social media. Almost each and every media rights organisation condemned the assaults and raised question on the complicity of police forces in not containing the ravaging mob.

Important points:

- 1. Injured denied medical aide [18]**
- 2. Press targeted [19]**
- 3. Children, pregnant women and health-care facilities not spared/targeted [20]**

4. Police neutrality in doubt, torture alleged [21]

5. Independence of judiciary in doubt: [22]

Aftermath:

The violence petered out and soon after the entire country was put under a draconian Covid-19 lockdown. On the pretext of solving cases, the Delhi police have made 800 arrests in this regard, majority of them are poor Muslim youth. Many in the area were unaware of whereabouts of family members and legal redress was not possible due to lock-down. There has been a deliberate attempt to conflate anti-Muslim pogrom in Delhi and the preceding anti-CAA protests: Students and alumni of Jamia Milia University, Safoora Zargar (currently on bail), Shifa-Ur-Rehman, Meeran Haider, Khalid Saifi, Ishrat Jahan were all arrested in February (last two were possibly tortured in jail). Former Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) student-leader, Umar Khalid, has been arrested and charged under UAPA. UAPA: unlawful activities prevention act, with its latest amendment, basically allows indefinite imprisonment without trial. This law, ostensibly meant as an anti-terrorism law, is used to jail journalists, dissenters and human-rights defenders, on the basis of a false narrative of the Delhi violence being orchestrated by Muslims and dissident public figures. A classic example of victim blaming is in the making. Those who suffered and those who stood-by the sufferers are not only denied justice but even made a victim of state directed judicial witch-hunt.

Appendix I

List of Fact Finding reports:

- Delhi Minority Commission, “Report of the DMC fact-finding Committee on North-East Delhi Riots of February 2020”, 27 June 2020, New Delhi.
- Group of Intellectuals and Academicians (GIA), “Delhi Riots 2020: Report from Ground Zero – The Shaheen Bagh Model in North East Delhi: From Dharna to Danga”, New Delhi.
- Human Rights Watch (HRW), “Shoot the Traitors’: Discrimination Against Muslims under India’s New Citizenship Policy”, April 2020, United States of America.
- Youth for Human Rights Documentation (YHRD), “An Account of Fear & Impunity: Preliminary Fact-Finding Report on Communally-Targeted Violence in North-East Delhi, February 2020”, New Delhi.
- Amnesty International India, “India: Six Months Since Delhi Riots, Delhi Police Continue To Enjoy Impunity Despite Evidence Of Human Rights Violations”, 28 August 2020, New Delhi.

Appendix II

Key findings of Preliminary Fact-Finding Report By Youth for Human Rights Documentation

(abridged and copied verbatim)

Violent consequences of communal propaganda - The violence in North-East Delhi is the result of a series of communal propaganda which has instigated attacks on the Muslim community. The role of mainstream media has been critical in manufacturing bigotry and hatred against Muslims.

Organised and targeted violence against Muslims - There is compelling evidence suggesting the intentional and pre-planned targeting of the persons, property and religious places of worship, belonging to the Muslim community residing in the violence-affected areas. Victims have been asked their religion before they were attacked. Testimonials and first-hand evidence points towards Muslim-owned businesses, shops and mosques being looted or burnt down in the violence while adjacent Hindu-owned shops and temples were not touched.

Violent threat to Muslim religious identity - The testimonies of the victims highlight religious and bigoted slurs, abuses, slogans, attacks on the religious symbols and places of worship. Eye-witness accounts have testified to mob chanting “*Jai Shree Ram*” (glory to Lord Ram) and “*Jai Siya Ram*”.

Hate Crimes - The acts of violence committed by the Hindu right wing mob, Delhi Police and even certain sections of the Indian media were clearly motivated by bias and hate towards the Muslim community and thereby constitute as hate crimes under multiple sections of the Indian Penal Code.

Lack of accountability - The fact that this particular attack lasted for more than 4 days in the national capital raises questions of accountability. As per the latest figures published in media reports as on March 5, 2020, 53 people have died and many more have been injured as a direct result of this violence which has also led to the destruction of 122 houses, 322 shops, 301 vehicles and 3 schools. 16 Masjids of the area have been attacked by the mob who even placed a saffron flag on top of one of them.

Impunity of the perpetrators - The perpetrators have carried out their actions with a significant amount of impunity and have continued to enjoy the same. The Fact finding team heard gruesome accounts of many people being shot by firearms, stabbed with knives & swords, body cut into pieces and dumped in a drain and people being burnt alive in the fire. Media reports have carried chilling confessions of self proclaimed ‘rioters’. The community blames the lackadaisical attitude of the criminal justice system and indifference of the Indian society at large for such a situation.

Gendered violence - The Team heard many accounts of rape and sexual violence reported by the community. An eyewitness account of a mob tearing clothes of children and girls and later throwing them in the fire was also shared. Sexual violence has historically remained under reported in incidences of communal and mass violence.

Partisan Role of the Delhi Police - The testimonies point towards the partisan role played by the Police. The allegations include *inter alia* omission in fulfilling their constitutional duties of maintaining law and order, facilitation and collusion with the Hindu right wing mob, active participation in assault, murder and arson and destruction of religious places of worship. The police has also been directly and indirectly threatening the families of those killed in the violence, the injured, eye-witnesses and members of civil society organisations through arbitrary arrests, shielding of actual perpetrators and making worst affected areas inaccessible to media, and civil society stakeholders.

Arbitrary arrests & detentions - As per media reports published on 5 March, the police have claimed to have registered 654 cases related to the violence and 1820 people have been either arrested or detained. While it is difficult to verify this claim, people in the community state that the arbitrary arrests of their people has begun. There is a sense of fear in the community that the cases registered by the police will be used against the ones who have suffered.

Complicity of the Criminal Justice System - The impacted community has expressed shock and angst towards the unprecedented complicity of the criminal justice system specifically that of the police. The news of transfer of a 'good' High Court judge along with slowed down hearing and investigation processes have further contributed to intensifying the feeling of distrust in all systems of justice and grievance redressal mechanisms.

Displacement & further ghettoisation of muslims - Muslims have begun leaving the violence struck localities leading to displacement and potential ghettoisation of violence inflicted community. Many Muslim families have been rendered homeless and have lost all their belongings.

Fear, angst and trauma - The Community has been largely relying on their own kin and acquaintances while being suspicious of any external help owing to their complete disillusionment with their neighbours and Hindu community at large. The Team encountered visible signs of shock, disbelief and trauma in the

victim/survivor community members including incessant crying, blank demeanours and loss of appetite. Children were eyewitnesses to brutal violence and seem to have internalized the violence that they witnessed. The Team has had shocking encounters with children who showed them disturbing videos of the attack and also spoke in great detail about the violence.

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