



Letters To Manushi

Trauma Of Thousands

Of all the accounts I have read of Hindu mob violence against the Sikhs, yours was among the finest. You depicted the trauma of hundreds of Sikh men and women with great sensitivity. Congratulations too on your petition to the supreme court. We will follow the case with interest.

Your account reflected some of what my family experienced in the days which followed the assassination. We were visiting the home of one of our parents who is a Sikh. From Thursday evening on, we began receiving calls from friends and relatives who had experienced the violence directly. No Sikh family in Delhi seemed safe. A few of the reports stand out. One close family friend of ours was alone in her home in a middle class neighbourhood in New Delhi. She called in anguish to report that a mob had set fire to the home of one Sikh family across the street and that of another behind her house. Although she had spoken with officers at the police station several times that evening, they had not taken any action. We were unable to reach her house because a rampaging mob had blocked off the streets in our area and in hers. Our own house was spared because the servants from surrounding houses fought back the mob which tried to break into our compound.

However, the homes of family members in Haryana were completely destroyed. Several years earlier. A close relative had created a rural health clinic in Haryana. Although friends had urged him to establish the

clinic in Punjab, he wanted to demonstrate his commitment to secularism. Over the years, the clinic had successfully treated thousands of people from farflung towns and villages. On November 2 evening, a large mob surrounded the clinic and threatened the staff. Because no Sikh doctor was present, the mob went on to the nearby homes of two family members. The fact that they destroyed the houses so fully and so systematically shows that this was no spontaneous outburst of violence. The mob removed all the contents of the houses and doused them with so much kerosene that the flames leapt up the solid stone walls and the roofs caved in. The fixtures they were unable to burn they smashed with *lathis*. Although the police, a few days later, recovered bits and pieces of unusable furniture, they did not make a single arrest.

We visited several neighbourhoods on the outskirts of Delhi when it was safer for us to leave our house. We visited the predominantly Sikh section of Kalyanpuri, across the Yamuna. The houses of Hindu families stood amongst the gutted, charred vestiges of Sikh houses. We arrived at dusk and could dimly discern women and children sitting numbly outside the rubble of their homes. The entire male Sikh population in the block, save for an elderly man, had been wiped out. Although the pogrom had occurred five days earlier, government had provided no relief; we were the first to do so.

The women told us that on the

fatal evening, they and their families were sitting on their doorsteps as usual. Suddenly, a mob burst into the lane, beat back the Hindu residents who attempted to intervene, and surrounded the Sikh houses. The mob quickly pillaged everything—food, clothing, jewellery, watches, radios and lifetime savings. They severed a man's finger to remove his gold ring, and then disembowelled him. They doused other men with kerosene and set them afire. They trapped 14 people in a house and burned it to the ground. The police took no action that night, and turned away some women who approached them for help.

For all Sikhs, rich and poor alike, the memories of violence provoke heartrending questions about the future. For the poorer members of the community, however, the most disturbing question is not one of longterm prospects but of short term survival. Without minimising the danger, humiliation and material loss which middle class Sikhs have suffered, we must realise that the poorer members of the community were the primary victims of the violence. We have fortified our fences and added locks to our doors and windows. At least temporarily, we have begun to feel more secure. But across the Yamuna, the women and children in Kalyanpuri have no refuge from the past or illusions about the future.

A.B., M.K., Delhi

People Want Peace

Congratulations on the article on Sikhs. It is the only article done so much in depth amongst the hordes

that have appeared. I am a Sikh and I do not know how I made myself read the article. As I read each incident, I imagined it happening to me or to my husband. I wonder how the widows will go through life, haunted by memories.

I was also glad about the petition. It is time these politicians stopped using innocent people as pawns. Barring the politicians and self styled *sants* and their followers, all common people want to live in peace.

Gursimran Virdi, Bombay

I have often wanted to write and convey to you that it has been an eye-opener reading your journal. At one time, I did think that you were rather sorrowful and morose. Now I do see changes in the magazine. With the article on the anti Sikh riots in Delhi you have broken another barrier. It is nice to see your approach becoming more cohesive and accumulative.

Kavita Arora, Bombay

When I read the article on the riots, I experienced the terrors of the carnage in Delhi. The events portrayed in Pyarelal's *Purnahuti* and Yashpal's *Jhutha Sach* came before my eyes once more.

Thank you for the labour you undertook and your courage in placing the facts before society.

Jayant Diwan, Bombay
(translated from Hindi)

I was very sad to know about the riots in Delhi and especially how women were ill-treated. It was very painful to read. I did not know that such things are really happening in our country.

Lavina Colaco, Bombay

Manmade Disasters

We were stunned by the Bhopal gas disaster. Some of us went to Bhopal to work with the Zehrili Gas Kand Sangharsh Morcha. The women

of the gas affected colonies were very active in the work of the Morcha. They came in large numbers for the big rally on January 3, the sit in demonstrations at the chief minister's house from January 3 to 12, and the Rail Roko campaign on January 12.

In the course of our investigations, we found that several young women are missing, and said to have been sold. Some women were raped during the chaos that followed the gas leakage. For some reason, the Morcha has not been able to work on these issues.

For instance, three girls of Jayaprakash Nagar are missing. One is a 15 year old Muslim girl. Another 15 year old named Shama was in a tent hospital for treatment. Her mother was staying with her. One day, the mother went home to cook for the rest of the family. When she returned, she found that the tent had been shifted elsewhere. She searched all the hospitals in Bhopal and has now announced a reward of Rs 500 but has been unable to find Shama. Another girl, 17 year old Rehana, was lost in the crowds during the leakage. Her husband, Rashid, is not much concerned and is planning to remarry.

Another case is that of a 13 year old who got separated from her family during the stampede and was subsequently gang raped by 12 men while she was reeling from the effects of the gas.

Her parents have not yet been located but she has been discharged from hospital.

Shashi, Hosbangabad
(translated from Hindi)

How Students Helped

As a resident of the University Hostel for Women, the 25th issue of **Manushi** was of particular interest to me. In the well researched article on the November 1984 riots in Delhi, it was mentioned that the residents of this hostel were subjected to more

stringent rules than usual, consequently, they could not participate in the peace marches or in the relief work. I would like to correct this impression, having myself been actively involved in both. While violence was at its peak, we were not permitted to leave the hostel premises. On the morning of November 4, however, the authorities had to give in to our demands—that we be permitted to leave the hostel at our own risk, as adults, and be allowed to participate in the normalisation work. For four days we went on peace marches cum collection drives with other students and teachers of the university, after which some of us concentrated on relief work.

A few of the residents began working in trans-Yamuna areas like Wazirabad and Seemapuri, while others, including myself, preferred to work with a more organised body like Vidya Jyoti (a Jesuit seminary on Raj Nivas Marg). Since you have asked people involved in relief work to send in their opinions, I shall give a brief resume on the work we did up to the middle of December.

After the first few hectic days of relief work, we started thinking along the lines of a more permanent solution. Rehabilitation was a necessarily slower process, involving a lot of tedious but indispensable paperwork like filling of questionnaires. We then proceeded to contact agencies and industrialists, for jobs for these victims. The People's Fact Finding Committee (earlier named People's Relief Committee) set up by the Janata Party was a major help, being liberal with grants to individuals who wanted to set up small shops and the like. The Catholic Relief Service provided funds for immediate relief. People who needed more than Rs 1,000 to restore their businesses and so on were helped with the paperwork demanded

by the banks.

As for the compensation money given by the government, a number of widows undoubtedly received cheques ranging from Rs 1,000 to Rs 10,000. This was in Jahangirpuri, where victims had come from Nand Nagri and Nangloi as well. However, a number of illiterate women were defrauded—they were made to sign receipts of Rs 10,000 whereas they actually received much less. This happened mainly to women who were illiterate, had no surviving male members in the family, and had never stepped out of their houses to earn a living. Women from the camp who had witnessed a Sikh middleman conniving with policemen for

Azadpur Mandi were burnt to death. Victims of looting unanimously name two persons as the instigators of violence—Mangat Ram, a Congress (I) councillor from the area, and Jai Bhagwan, the police ASO from the Jahangirpuri police *chowki* which comes under the surveillance of Adarsh Nagar Thana. Local criminals who are still scot free have also been named as active participants in the looting and killing.

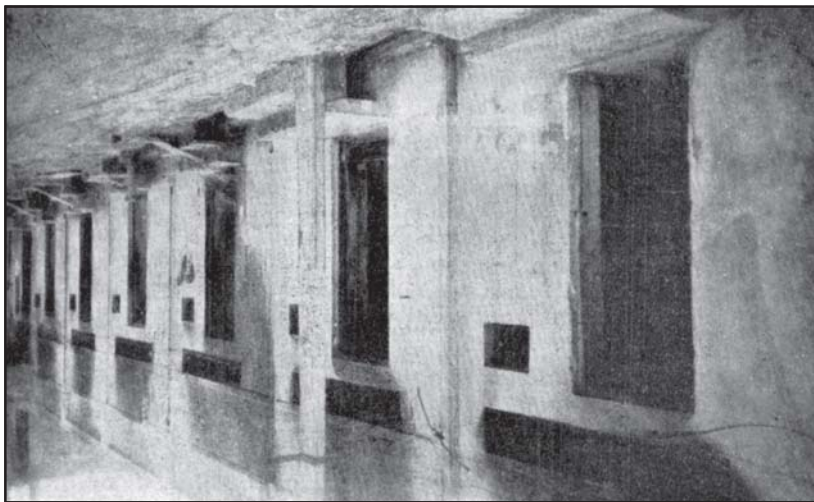
To prevent further holocausts of this nature, I would think more permanent solutions are to be sought than mere blood money given by the government as compensation. Until the citizens of India become more aware of their humanity and their

neither was water. The civil administrators functioned like robots. We were asked to fill up compensation forms for the victims. Some women asked: “What use will Rs 10,000 be for a family of 13?” I had no answer.

At 1.45 p.m., the victims were given a lunch of *chapatis*, *dal* and rice in insufficient quantities. Hot water was not available to make milk powder for the infants. Next day, Miranda House hostel residents sent their morning milk for use at the camp. But when we reached, we found that milk packets had arrived, and, moreover, many families were leaving the camp. We were assured that the milk we had brought would be put to good use. It was—the officers used it for their tea soon after!

The volunteers were set to work making up kits for the departing families to take with them. We found that many families were being forcibly thrown out of the camp. Over the loudspeakers, the authorities announced that people could stay as long as they wanted. But they went from room to room, and intimidated people into leaving the camp. This kind of behind the scenes illegality was rife. For instance, we found army men calmly appropriating blankets that had been provided by the Government for the victims. The army men replaced the new blankets with their own old torn ones. When we tried to protest, we were told that if we did not like the arrangements, we could leave.

While we were packing kits, a pregnant woman who had been manhandled by the ruffians came in to ask us for a shawl. As she stood in the doorway, a civil officer pushed her so that her head banged against the wall. When I protested, he reprimanded me for daring to speak against authority. I reminded him that his wife and children could have been in the position of these victims, to which he replied: “There is a difference. My wife and children are not like these people. These people



The charred homes to which victims were forced to return

monetary gain from such activities told me this. Since they had nothing to gain from spinning tales, there is no reason to doubt the veracity of their statements.

Jahangirpuri has received no attention from the compilers of the PUCL-PUDR report, probably because the number killed was not as large as in not too distant Sultanpuri. However, several residents of Jahangirpuri were killed, particularly in blocks D, E-E, and J Residents of the area who had gone to work in

common nationality, artificial barriers years. It is sufficient to make one despair.

Rita Sinha, Delhi

The Callous Authorities

I am writing to report some experiences of Miranda House students who did relief work in various camps in Delhi. I went to Shakurpur relief camp on November 9, 1984. The scene was intensely depressing. Milk was not available,

are thieves.” I also heard that compensation forms were being sold and bribes demanded to have them forwarded.

Angana Chatterji, Delhi

Authoritarian Family

I read with interest Soma Chatterjee’s review of *Dadima Jagi*. I think the most significant thing to be noted in the serial is the acceptance of authoritarianism within the family—the benevolent matriarchal dictator who knows all the answers! Dissent seems irrelevant in such an atmosphere.

How the searing conflicts between the generations, between the old, authoritarian family ethos and the aggressive modern individualistic ethos can be sanitised like this is just incredible. *Dadima* wins every time—and after a while, it is just not funny. Without taking sides in the conflict, could not the script writer have presented it as it actually is? How is it that not one grandson or daughter-in-law in that large family can fight *Dadima* on a real problem? *Dadima*’s moral superiority is always presented as a foregone conclusion. Yes, I agree with Soma that “the acting is brilliant and the dialogue piquant.”

Vasantha Surya, Madras

Significant Effort

Shahnaz Shaikh’s fight for emancipation is very laudable. Her effort is of great significance for the future of the women’s movement, particularly for women’s fight for a common civil code. I hope women’s organisations will cooperate to win her fight.

A. Bondaiah, Hyderabad

Useful Technique

This refers to Madura Swaminathan’s article “Eight Hours A Day For Fuel Collection” in *Manushi*



Families living in the open after being evicted from relief camps

No. 21. I am sorry to react after such a long time. It seemed to me that she has a misguided opinion about *gobar* gas experimentation. Along with the gas, manure is also produced which is much better than manure made in the traditional manner from cowdung. All the rubbish collected from the fields and waste matter from latrines can be used to make good compost manure. The gas is used for cooking and also provides lighting. The lamps also heat the rooms to some degree.

In the last four to five years, biogas plants, which are a developed form of *gobar* gas plants, have become quite popular. Local materials like cement and sand can be used to make the plant. This model is especially suitable for cold regions. If dung is not available in sufficient quantities, rubbish that is normally burnt can be used instead. This technique is rapidly becoming widespread in Maharashtra. It can go far to solve the problem of fuel.

Vasant Phutane, Aniraoti
(translated from Hindi)

Women’s Weight

I am sending you more details about my writ in the supreme court, to change the discriminatory Christian succession laws in Kerala. It is

interesting to note that as soon as women themselves have thrown their weight behind me in this issue, as seen by the resolutions passed in the various YWCAs, the heads of churches, and the government have had to take note. The law commission has unanimously supported the plea to strike down the discriminatory Act. The heads of churches have also agreed at long last that the laws need change. Now there is no doubt that I shall win the case. The only problem is that vested interests could prolong the matter indefinitely. Hence publicity is welcome.

Mary Roy, Kottayam

Changing Directions

I work in a bank and have just become a subscriber to *Manushi*. I liked the review of *Kanun men mutthi mein*, and enjoyed the analysis given. A small group of us have started a film society here, called Yugantar. We intend to show good films which will help change the direction of people’s thinking, and to follow the films with discussion.

Kalpna Shah, Kolhapur
(translated from Hindi)

Civil Marriage Best

I wonder if any of your legal staff

can help us with a problem we are trying to solve. One of our staff, a Hindu girl, wishes to marry another member of our staff who is a Christian.

We would like to know if you have any information on what kind of marriage service is best in a case like this. The woman is not willing to convert to Christianity and the man does not wish to renounce his religion although it is not the central concern of his life.

We feel a civil marriage service would be best for them but we have heard that Christians are not allowed to have a civil ceremony. Also, we would like to know the regulations concerning civil marriage, any residence requirements and so on. Nobody here seems to be able to advise us and as the problem must for the time being remain very confidential, we are writing to you for advice.

Name withheld

The best way is to have the marriage registered in court with the registrar of marriages. This is also known as a civil marriage. It is to be registered under the Special Marriage Act, 1956. This is the best Act to marry under, whatever the religions of the parties, since it provides the most freedom and protection to women. Even if one goes through a religious ceremony, it is best also to have the marriage registered under this Act in court.

Both parties must go to court and file an application a month in advance, before the magistrate and registrar. No proof of permanent residence is legally required. Only a month's notice is required. The ceremony is a simple one, performed in court or at your residence by the registrar. There is no bar on Christians having a civil marriage. Any citizen of India is entitled to have a civil marriage.

—Manushi

Why this Fear of an Enquiry?

IN December 1984, a petition was filed by Madhu Kishwar, Ruth Vanita and Rakesh Bharadwaj in the supreme court, implicating the Congress (I) leadership and government and police authorities as responsible for having organised riots against the Sikhs in Delhi in November 1984. The petition asked the court to set up an enquiry commission to investigate the origins of the riots. The petition was held up for two months due to minor technical

This kind of unprecedented interference by the executive with the judicial branch shows how threatened the Congress (I) government feels at the idea of any kind of independent enquiry into the riots. It suggests that the Congress (I) involvement was so wide-spread that the party doubts its ability to cover up successfully in case an enquiry is conducted.

Most alarming were the comments of justice Dayal who, on the one hand,



objections. The registrar showed great reluctance to put it up for hearing. Finally, March 25 has been fixed as the date for preliminary hearing.

Another case relating to the riots has been dismissed by government manipulation. The People's Union for Democratic Rights had filed a petition in the Delhi high court, seeking an enquiry into the role of police and politicians in the riots. The petition was admitted on January 11 by justice Rajinder Sachar and S.B. Wad, after a five days hearing. However, the case was suddenly transferred to the court of justices Yogeshwar Dayal and B.N. Kirpal.

On January 22, the government, through the deputy secretary, home ministry, sought to have the petition dismissed on the ground that the court is not entitled to appoint a commission of enquiry. Further, the ministry argued that citizens cannot compel government to hold an enquiry.

said the court could not interfere in political matters and on the other, made highly abusive and defamatory remarks about the PUCL-PUDR investigative report, calling it the product of "wretched journalists" and "professors who have no idea what they are doing." "I have no respect for this report", the learned judge observed when it was read out in court.

The prime minister has repeatedly stated that no judicial probe into the riots will be conducted.

He initially said that a probe would endanger "national security." Later, when people persistently questioned him as to whom he was protecting, he suddenly changed his tune and said that an enquiry would endanger the Sikhs and he wanted to protect them. A strange way to protect the victims—by shielding the guilty!

What this amounts to is that: Those in power are above the law [and cannot be held accountable] for even the most heinous crimes.