MADHU K1SHWAR

Gangster Rule
—The Massacre Of The Sikhs

THE communal riots that followed Indira Gandhi's tragic death on October 31 were like the sudden eruption of a gigantic volcano. The ferocity of the explosion took by surprise both the victimised community and the community in whose name the ferocious campaign of looting, arson, killing, burning, rape and molestation took place.

Most observers agree that the violence began as random attacks on individual Sikh men who were pounced upon in public places, on public transport and on the streets on October 31. The events of this day may have been passed of as a spontaneous outburst of anger at the assassination of Indira Gandhi by two Sikh members of her security guard. But what happened over the next three days makes it impossible to dismiss those events as spontaneous expressions of outrage.

The series of attacks on Sikh homes, *gurudwaras* and commercial establishments which began on November 1 seems to have been the work of organised hoodlums who collected large mobs for the looting and killing spree. Very broadly speaking, the attacks can be placed in three categories,

(a) Looting and killing in middle and upper middle class localities, such as Lajpat Nagar, Jangpura, Defence Colony, Friends Colony, Maharani Bagh, Patel Nagar, Safdarjung Enclave and Punjabi Bagh. Here, houses, *gurudwaras* and shops were looted and burnt, and a large number of vehicles, including buses, trucks, cars and scooters were set ablaze. Some people were injured and others killed.But, on the whole, relatively fewer lives were lost in middle class colonies.

(b) The systematic slaughter and rape that accompanied looting, arson and burning in the resettlement colonies, slums and villages around the city. Most of the death occurred in areas like Trilokpuri, Kalyanpuri, Mangolpuri, Sultanpuri, Nand Nagri, Palam village, Shakurpur, Gamri. Rows of houses and huts were burnt down and hundreds of men and young boys were beaten, stabbed and burnt to death while many women were abducted and raped. A large number of persons are still reported missing by their families. Houses and *gurudwaras* were looted and burnt down.

(c) Sikh men and boys were attacked in the streets, trains, buses, markets and workplaces, and many of them brutally murdered, some of them burnt alive or thrown out of trains. Others escaped with injuries, more or less serious. This kind of attacking seems to have been done at random -any man who looked visibly Sikh was made a target.

Most of the observations in this article are based on several taperecorded interviews with men and women from some trans-Yamuna colonies, especially Trilokpuri. These were among the worst hit areas in Delhi. Some other observations are based on what I saw happening in our neighbourhood, Lajpat Nagar, and on conversations with our neighbours as well as with friends living in different middle class colonies in the city. The pattern of murder and arson was similar in most parts of Delhi, in as farflung places as Palam village, Mangolpuri, Kalyanpuri, and Bhogal. However, the intensity of violence was far more severe in poorer resettlement colonies than in middle class areas.

Among The Worst Hit

Trilokpuri is one of those resettlement colonies which were brought into existence during the emergency, when Sanjay Gandhi spearheaded slum clearance drives in Delhi. Thousands of families were forcibly evicted from slums and unauthorised colonies in the city. They were transported to areas several miles away from the city proper, and were resettled there. Each evicted family was supposed to be given a small plot measuring 25 square yards, and in some cases also a loan to build a house. Thus were founded these colonies of the city poor who had been evicted from the slums and pavement dwellings where they earlier lived.

Even though, at that time, many people saw the evictions as cruelty inflicted on the city poor, the Congress (I) was able to convert the resettlement colonies into solid support bases and vote banks, because the evicted families slowly began to feel

Next Page »