

good idea if aid agencies and banks give loans on very concessional terms to set up cooperatives, according to charters determined by the widows themselves, to purchase equipment. Thereafter, the Delhi administration or the government can supply them raw material and take the finished products, for which they can be given conversion payments. The goods can be sold in government emporia or through other marketing outlets.

As far as the wide, overwhelming problem of insecurity is concerned,

the answer is both simple and complex. There can be no viable macro solutions to this problem. What it needs is a moral commitment of every single one of us, who have worked with the Manch or otherwise, to take the responsibility of four or five such widows and their families for at least the next half decade. We will have to spend some part of our time per week with them wherever they are in Delhi, and help them whenever they need assistance. This might mean getting them ration cards, arranging for death certificates, helping them to move in,

helping the children with their homework, getting the aged ones kerosene, getting people jobs, liaising with *mohalla* people on their behalf, going to their festivals, inviting them over, advising them on financial matters, laughing with them, crying with them, drinking tea with them, playing with their kids, sharing our lives with them to the point that when they see us coming down the crooked lane they know that there is a friend. Without this, rehabilitation is a word for drawing-room conversation.

The Struggle to Make the Government Fulfil its Promises

—Volunteers Report on Government Relief and Compensation

FOUR of us have been working as individuals in Nanaksar Ashram, Nanak Pyau, Rakabganj and Farash Bazar camps among the riot victims. We felt the need to concentrate on getting the promised compensation money paid to the victims because we found that many claims had not been met. This was because many victims are illiterate and had no experience of governmental procedures. Some of them had paid numerous trips to administration offices but had returned disappointed.

The procedures for getting compensation are complicated and cumbersome. For instance, a death certificate is demanded of surviving relatives. To get a death certificate, one has to go to three authorities—zonal health officer, the police and the court. The entire process takes about 10 days. For an illiterate widow with small children, this proves to be a stupendous task. We have been accompanying victims on these grounds, and have experienced the callousness of the authorities.

Fortunately, the Nagrik Ekta Manch had got the police reports lodged in bulk by the victims in various camps. Had this not been done by volunteers, the majority of victims would never have got compensation, because they were too scared to approach police stations.

Many hutment dwellers who did not have ration cards had no way of proving their bonafides. When we approached the authorities to point out that many people had not received compensation, we were told that all claims had been met and the cases were now closed. No further claims would be entertained. This was when our survey showed that in Farash Bazar, there were 176 unmet claims, out of which 23 were those of widows. In Nanaksar there were 30 unmet claims, out of which eight were those of widows. In Rakabganj there were 63 unmet claims, out of which 7 were those of widows. After much pleading, the authorities agreed to reconsider these claims, provided we first submitted separate typed applications on behalf of each person.

Thus, the approach of the administration is inhuman and multiplies paperwork. Some officers demand bribes. For instance, Misra of Shahdara had repeatedly demanded bribes. We complained to the relief commissioner who promised to have him transferred. Yet, till date he continues to work in the same area. The riot victims are treated with extreme discourtesy when they approach the administration. They are looked upon with suspicion as if they are thieves or beggars. For instance, Thakur Singh from Rakabganj camp told us that when he went to the relief commissioner's office at Tis Hazari, he was accused of having himself broken his own house so as to be able to claim compensation. A quarrel ensued and the officer handed Thakur Singh over to police custody. Another woman from this camp felt so frustrated by the behaviour of the authorities that she tore up her claim receipt, since she had lost hope of getting justice.

When our survey revealed such facts despite the huge claims the Government was making every day in the papers, we began to monitor the process. A delegation of riot victims met the president on December 31, and a demonstration was taken out. Some of the demonstrators were summarily thrown out from the relief camp as a punishment for having dared protest publicly. The attitude of the authorities remained callous

and uncaring. For example, after four meetings with the SDM, West Delhi, the best we could extract by way of an answer was "We shall think about it." The SDM, Shahdara, visited his office for a total of 10 minutes in the whole of one particular week when we were visiting the office every day. We found that no compensation was being paid to rape victims, not even the amount that is paid for other injuries. One woman who had been severely injured when iron rods were shoved up her vagina during the riots, lay unattended for three days before a hospital agreed to admit her. Although the doctor mentioned the injuries to the vagina in his report, he refused to register a medico-legal case.

We feel that the schemes for rehabilitation of widows need to be closely monitored by volunteers. The director of social welfare told us that in employment centres being set up at Naraina and Okhla, women will receive a stipend of Rs 200 plus Rs 50 per child each month while they are undergoing training in handicrafts. Once trained, they will get a salary of Rs 300 a month. The authorities sent a circular letter to many widows, telling them to join the scheme by a certain date, failing which it would be presumed they were not interested. Since not many turned up, the authorities concluded that widows were not interested in employment. It should be noted that the wage being offered by the Government in these schemes is less than the legal minimum wage.

Recently the Government was compelled to give alternative houses to some of the widows in Delhi who refused to go back to the areas where they previously lived. These houses will have to be paid for in instalments.

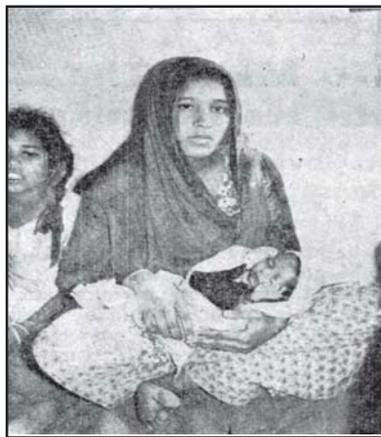
—Names withheld on request.

As of the end of January, all except two of the cases taken up by this group had managed to get compensation.

LALITARAMDAS

Lest We Forget...

Writing and reflecting on the experiences of the traumatic two months spent immersed in the relief camps, working with and through Nagrik Ekta Manch is not an easy task. From time to time in these eight weeks one has tried to put one's thoughts down on paper, but very soon given up. I had not realised the extent to which the role of "camp coordinator", "playing God" as it were over the lives and problems of some three to four thousand battered human beings, had



A widow with her newborn child

taken a toll of one's physical and mental resources.

The fact that all their names ended in Kaur or Singh stopped making sense after a while. The fact that they had been shorn of hair and beard no longer shocked. One learned to cope coldly, almost brutally, with the organisation of distribution—be it of clothes, soap, food, or turbans. Even the words and gestures of comfort to the widows, to the raped women, the children left fatherless, the men humiliated, became mechanical after the first few days. The only tears came after the fifth frustrating trip to the SDM's office at the Shahdara courts when bureaucratic shrugs greeted our questions about

compensation claims, death certificates, verification, when the subjective satisfaction of sector officers became the sole criterion for determining whether a widow got Rs 10,000 for the death of her husband, or 1,000 for a house totally gutted, or 2,000 for multiple rape and internal injuries. My tears were not tears of sorrow or shared grief, but of anger and helplessness at the inaction and apathy of the petty officials, the hypocrisy of the politicians and the barely concealed hostility of the non Sikh intelligentsia—especially those of the majority community.

Amongst all the negative and despairing aspects of the recent events, one factor which has stood out and sustained a hope in the future is the involvement of so many young people, their collective and growing stand against communalism, as a result of intensive exposure to facts which they had seen painstakingly recorded, filed in FIRs and affidavits and had finally reflected upon together.

If we are to build a movement against communalism, against a corrupt and hypocritical polity, it will have to emerge from new sources, from young people and from the yet untapped potential of women. Some of our efforts must therefore be directed to mobilising and motivating these groups into sustained activity.

Rajinder, age 16 years, son of a construction labourer in Maharashtra, who is studying in the tenth class at Springdales school, was visiting a Sikh friend at Kalkaji on November 1, 1984. He recalls: "I remember that day, everybody in the house was trembling with fear. About nine of us went up on the roof and all we could see were thick clouds of smoke from burning houses and cars. We could