

The hidden agenda

The real damage done in Ahmedabad was elsewhere. On April 22, when the police withdrew their protection, the opportunity for massacre and rioting arose, an opportunity for scores to be settled. Most of the killing in Ahmedabad took place not in haunts of the well-off medical students and other anti-reservationists, but in working class areas such as Bapunagar and Ambedkar Nagar. On Naroda Road, caste Hindus control the trade in land. As the city expands, they illegally occupy government and private land, and sell it to workers. Dalits and Bhaiyyas from Northern India buy 30 *zopadi* plots of 10 feet by 30 feet for around Rs1,600.

Dalits who live in Ashok mill new *chawl*, a Dalit colony off Naroda Road, and government employees and mill workers claim that these powerful traders in land take advantage of periodic

dya has even constructed illegally a wall around Ambedkar Nagar to prevent people escaping during any fracas.

On April 22 at 3 p.m., large bands of Bhaiyyas from Vidya Nagar attacked the Dalit Colony. Nearly all the menfolk were away since the shift changes in the mills at 3 o'clock. Encircling the colony, the attackers came in from all sides, then swept through the row of houses. There was virtually no resistance. People could not escape, they ran hither and thither, only to be mercilessly beaten. Babiben Channabhi Rathod (45) died trying to save her daughter. Mangal Bhai Becharbhai was speared in the leg. Out of 800 houses, 360 were looted and then burnt clean of whatever belongings remained. A few houses carried notices saying that they belonged to caste Hindus: these were untouched.

The killings in Bapunagar have

disturbances in Ahmedabad to drive them away so that they can sell the same land, now developed, all over again. Vidya Singh Tomer, Congress(I) corporator, "developed" Vidyanagar, which he named after himself; Prem Nagar was sold by Prembhar; Keshubhai Patel of the BJP and former Congress(I) corporator parcelled out Hanuman Nagar; and Narendra Singh Tomar, Congress(I) corporator, also develops land. Ashok Mill new *chawl* was attacked on April 22. Of the 81 houses, 10 were absolutely gutted. The roofs had caved in, the heat was so fierce that even bicycles outside these houses had handlebars, tyres and seats seared; only the metal frames remained. Even furniture, mattresses, blankets and clothing, were all ashes. Ambedkar Nagar is a large Dalit Colony next to Vidya Nagar, built by Vidya Singh Tomar. Vi-

been virtually blacked out in the Ahmedabad press. Bapunagar is a Muslim Colony, mostly of immigrant textile mill workers. Indira Garib Nagar is a section of Bapunagar, with about 4000 houses. It is faced on one side by blocks of flats of caste Hindus, Anand Mangalam; caste Hindu *bastis* on two sides; with a narrow entrance and exit on the fourth side. In the morning of April 22, a Hindu-Muslim meeting was held. A joint peace committee was formed with 10 Muslims and 25 Hindus (only from Anand Mangalam), which was to meet at 7 p.m. that evening.

But by 5 o'clock, a Muslim owned shoe shop was set on fire by the Hindu *basti* dwellers. Arson progressed swiftly, while the Ahmedabad police was still on strike. When they came back on duty at 9 p.m., the joint peace committee met inspector Gohil of Bapunagar police station, who assured them that the police would keep the peace. The night thereafter, three police vans drove to and fro and the people were reassured. However, at four in the morning, there was a sustained attack on the Masjid. The neighbouring houses were set afire. According to Abdul Rehman Shaikh, a police sub-inspector came by jeep to tell them that they "will not step further". "I shall control this", he is reported to have said. Burning and looting continued apace.

Burning rags were now flung from Anand Mangalam and the neighbouring Hans Colony apartment building, which overlooks Indira Garib Nagar. Then the police fired teargas shells into Indira Garib Nagar, and as people tried to find a way out they opened fire. Iqbal Hussain, a press compositor, says that he dragged Syed Ahmed, a bakery worker, into his house - shot through the stomach. He bled to death. In the next house but one, Sher Ali (50) and his father Zaur Ali were shot dead by 6 a.m.; all who could, had fled. Four thousand houses were looted, then burnt down. It is very conservatively estimated that 25 died. Inspectors Chaudhary and S.R. Patel from Bapunagar police station - both caste Hindus - directed the entire operation.

The Hardas Nagar Malek Saheban Dargah has 90 houses inside its compound, with 17 just outside. On the night of April 22, petrol soaked rags were flung in and the compound wall was scaled by the neighbours of this little colony - "people with whom we have shared a cup of tea". All those who lived in the neighbouring houses locked themselves into the *Dargah*. There they stayed while all around them burnt.

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