
REBUILDING TRUST AND PROMOTING POST-RIOT RECONCILIATION: A STUDY OF NORTHEAST DELHI

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ABSTRACT

The Delhi riots of 2020 were a significant case of intercommunal violence that caused many fatalities, extensive property damage, and unending societal tensions. Due to the scope and severity of the violence as well as the intricate social and political forces that underlay communal tensions in India, this case is especially pertinent, yet the subject of the study. After the riots, fostering peace and reestablishing confidence amongst the impacted populations depends on the process of reconciliation and social cohesion building. The concept of reconciliation and community building after violent riots revolves around the process of healing and reconstructing social bonds in a community that has experienced significant upheaval and conflict. When violent riots occur, they often leave communities fractured, with deep-seated grievances, mistrust, and social divisions. Reconciliation, in this context, refers to the intentional and systematic efforts aimed at restoring a sense of harmony, trust, and cooperation among individuals and groups affected by the violence.

This research study aims to investigate and analyze the situation aftermath of the riot and the feelings and aspirations of people towards rebuilding communities and fostering social cohesion and peace. In post-conflict environments, the task of reconstructing communities is complex, involving multifaceted challenges that extend beyond physical infrastructure. This study, by adopting a comprehensive approach, tried to explore the perceptions of social cohesion and peace among individuals and communities directly impacted by conflict. The study has been conducted with the use of qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and content analysis, to delve into the nuanced experiences and narratives of the people, with the aim to collect the rich and raw data.

Another objective of this study is to provide special attention to explore the role of intergroup dialogue, economic factors, role of media and the influence of cultural and community-specific elements and events. Additionally, it tried to investigate the role of the local as well as government involvement, assessing the contributions of humanitarian aid and assistance in post-

conflict settings. Challenges and obstacles faced by the communities during the rebuilding process are systematically analyzed, with the aim of proposing practical solutions for overcoming these hurdles in the near future.

INTRODUCTION

India has a long history of riots and other forms of violence, with some of these episodes occurring even before the country gained its freedom, which have caused enormous property damage, loss of life, and social, political, and economic destruction.

Following the death of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards in 1984, one of the most horrendous riots in Indian history took place. The riots, which were predominantly directed towards Sikhs, persisted for many days, and claimed hundreds of lives. Lack of responsibility and justice for the victims in the aftermath of the riots contributed to continued hostilities between the affected community and the State. Following the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya by Hindu nationalist organizations, there was another significant riot in India in 1992. Almost 2,000 people lost their lives in the riots, which largely targeted Muslims, and a great deal of property was destroyed. Following the riots, there continued to be hostility between the Muslim and Hindu populations, and those responsible for the violence were not held accountable. The Gujarat genocide of 2002 will always haunt the Indian history and the list goes on.

The Delhi riots of 2020 were a series of communal clashes that unfolded in the northeastern part of the Indian capital, resulting in widespread violence, loss of lives, and significant property damage. The violence erupted primarily in the aftermath of protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC). Tensions escalated in late February 2020, leading to clashes between groups supporting and opposing the CAA. The riots saw incidents of arson, stone-pelting, and targeted attacks on individuals and communities, exacerbating existing fault lines. The police faced criticism for their handling of the situation, with accusations of delayed intervention and bias. The aftermath of the Delhi riots left a community deeply scarred, underscoring the complex challenges surrounding communal harmony, political discourse, and the need for effective conflict resolution strategies in diverse societies. These occurrences have also brought attention to the requirement for efficient strategies to address and prevent intergroup violence, foster peacemaking, and strengthen social cohesion.

It is questionable that despite recurring communal bloodletting during and after the traumatic Partition of the country, there has been no systematic official (or even significant non-official) processes of “truth and reconciliation”, to help perpetrators and survivors of hate violence come together; see and speak to each other; acknowledge their crimes and failings, and their hate and fear; seek and offer forgiveness; and ultimately help bring closure and eventual healing. Given the enormity of contemporary threats posed by a deliberately fostered communal divide and violence to the very survival of secular democracy in India, it is imperative today more than ever that systematic, sustained processes of reconciliation and justice in communal relations in India are established.

Scholars have spent a great deal of time studying the phenomena of riots and intergroup conflict in order to better understand the dynamics and underlying causes of these occurrences as well as preventative and remedial measures. There are numerous studies and volumes of articles that can be found and cited discussing the numerous factors and background of riots and violent conflicts, but the studies on what happen once the riot and the tension has settled down are scarce.

- How do people who once used to live with love and harmony view the newly created environment and how do their perceptions get tinted with constant fear and mental turmoil?
- How has the riot affected their personal and professional life and what initiatives can help in undamaging the harm already been done?
- Does the idea of brotherhood and fraternity change, or do the affected communities still hold the love and aspire to return to status quo?
- Is it even possible to fully reconcile? (Mander, 2007)

Through this study we aim to deeply analyze the situation post-riot and distinct factors and contributors that promote as well as hinder the process of reconciliation.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

"Riots are the explosion of dormant inter-group tensions, aroused by some precipitating event, which mobilizes collective action on the basis of group identification," claims Paul Brass (Brass, 1997, p. 1). These occurrences frequently have significant social, economic, and

political repercussions, including the escalation of socioeconomic injustices and the breakdown of intercommunal trust.

In spite of the fact that India has always been known as the secular nation, which respects all religious communities equally, it is unfeasible to ignore the constant occurrence of turbulences in the society. Neera Chandhoke while talking about Indian ideology of secularism states that “secularism seems to have practically vanished from political scene; whatever remains of the concept is subjected to contemptuous remarks, some ribaldry and rank dismissed” (chandhoke, 2017). She goes on to indicate the immense responsibility that the word “secular” holds. In India according to Chandhoke, secularism shoulders the onerous task of nation building and national integration, bear the weight of construction of uniform civil code, bear responsibility for subversion and rearrangement of hierarchical and exclusionary relationships within religious communities, and even stand in for smooth working of democracy.

Taking from the writings of Jürgen Habermas, Chandhoke goes on to suggest that instead of over stimulating or abandoning the secular, we need to recast the concept in the new mold to accommodate religious practices, affiliation in public sphere, and plurality.

She explains the importance of plural society and how it enhances individual life (chandhoke, 2017).

- Plurality is instrumental. If all rights are guaranteed by international covenants and national constitutions proves incapable of protecting citizens from harm if they belong to a group that is targeted, stigmatized, and is often referred to as “other.” In such a scenario, protecting and promoting the rights of a group to respect and dignity becomes essential precondition for socially derived individual rights.
- Individuals, as constantly stated in social sciences, are social beings who extract sociability through membership of different associations. These associations are important to give a secure feeling of equal belongingness.
- Societies that will allow only one system of belief to flourish are bound to be soulless and bare.

Just like many other conflicts, on 23rd February 2020, while the United States president was having a visit in India, in the heart of the country the national capital, Delhi, there were some communal upheavals emerging. The country for the last two months has been witnessing civil

protests over a new citizenship amendment act that was introduced into the parliament. The act has according to the protestors the potential to cause trouble and stripping off dignity for the population belonging to the minority.

The northeast district of Delhi that stretches over many sub districts and localities witnessed one of the most destructive riots in the recent times which took over more than 50 lives and a boundless amount of loss of private property, specifically the minorities. The incident covered by various news platforms can be partitioned into two compartments, the one calling it a state sponsored pogrom that notably targeted Muslims while the other terming it a clash or a riot between two equal parties that are against and in support of CAA.

But unlike previous fact-finding reports on the February 2020 riots, the ‘Uncertain Justice’ (Justice Madan B. Lokur, 2022) report which is authored by a former judge of the Supreme Court, three high court retired judges and a retired IAS officer relies heavily on legal documents including FIRs, charge sheets, and orders passed by courts.

The report puts into perspective the events triggered by the amendments passed to the citizenship law, the build-up to the violence, its trajectory, and the state’s response as it unfolded. The report stated that the Muslim community was grappling with deep fears of loss of citizenship. Deepening their fears, a campaign of hate against anti-CAA protesters, and more broadly against Muslims, had been a steady feature in political speeches and election campaigning in the months immediately preceding the violence. Additionally, the report states that there was a targeted application of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) by the state. A few weeks into investigating, the police applied the (UAPA), an anti-terror legislation, into one of the FIRs connected with the riots, severely restricting the avenues for the accused to get bail during the trial.

India since its independence has observed various religious clashes between different communities. There is Pandora of research discussing the diverse factors and influences that lead to such riots but while looking through these articles, I noticed **a research gap** where scholars scarcely deliberate about the situation post conflict, which we termed as “reconciliation.”

Reconciliation refers to the restoration of relations between members of different racial, ethnic, or religious groups that have been strained by mass violence or organized campaigns of hate

and distrust. It entails rebuilding mutual dialogue, understanding, social, cultural, and economic interactions, trust, and goodwill to levels equal or surpassing those before the violence or hate campaigns. The aim is to expel or neutralize the hate and suspicion that have permeated social relations (Mander, 2007).

Some Mandatory Components of Authentic Reconciliation:

- **Acknowledgement:** This involves public acceptance of the grave and unjust violence and discrimination that occurred, causing significant suffering to the targeted individuals.
- **Remorse:** A public expression of collective sincere regret for the violence and injustice perpetrated.
- **Reparation:** Providing adequate and timely assistance to survivors, enabling them to achieve sustainable livelihoods, shelters, common resources, habitats, and cultural environments better than those enjoyed before the conflict.
- **Justice:** Encompassing legal justice, equal application and protection of the law, fair and non-partisan processes in handling legal matters, and holding public officials accountable for preventing and controlling communal violence.
- **Restoring Peace:** The goal of reconciliation is to establish a sustainable environment of harmony and amity, founded on justice. This involves freedom from fear and distrust between communities and the strengthening of social, economic, and cultural bonds.
- **Responsibilities for Reconciliation:** The state and the people on both sides of the conflict, along with their respective organizations, bear the responsibilities for organized processes of reconciliation. Human rights and social organizations committed to secular democracy and peace can play a facilitating role with their compatible values and skills.
- **Complexities in Achieving Reconciliation:** While some ordinary individuals in both communities make spontaneous efforts towards reconciliation, the broader failures are evident in the state machinery and formal civil society. State denial, economic boycotts, and subversion of the legal process hinder the comprehensive achievement of justice and reconciliation. However, the resilience of survivors, acts of compassion, and daily resistance by ordinary people illustrate the complex nature of human history, emphasizing both cruelty and

compassion. As Howard Zinn suggests, what we choose to emphasize in this complex history will define our lives.

Reconciliation, in the aftermath of conflict or societal upheaval, is a concept that has not been extensively researched and discussed at least in Indian context. It is typically linked to retributive justice, restorative justice, political and social justice perspectives. The concept of reconciliation can be understood as societal transformation following a period of conflict or unrest as it becomes vital in addressing the deep-rooted animosity and prejudices that have permeated society.

A key component in the practical application of reconciliation work is understanding how the term reconciliation is conceptualized. A definition that permeates academic literature and has been adopted into programmatic language is that reconciliation is managing either individual or collective identities. Daniel Bar-Tal asserts that the lines of division are created, reshaped, or reinforced by violent conflict and are upheld by eight psychological societal beliefs that constitute a conflict ethos. Three of these beliefs— “the justness of one’s own goals, delegitimizing the opponent, and positive self-image”—are direct obstacles to reconciliation and transforming them should be the primary goal of reconciliation.

Some scholars, such as John Paul Lederach and Andrew Rigby, take a more religious and often Christian-based approach, arguing that reconciliation is when the truth about the past, mercy to perpetrators, justice for victims, a mutual need for well-being, and time come together. For Ernesto Verdeja, mutual respect for divided peoples underpins the essence of reconciliation, whereby political, civil societal and individual forces build this respect by disseminating the truth of the past, holding perpetrators accountable, acknowledging victims’ suffering, and upholding the rule of law. Verdeja further argues that through sustained and personal interactions with former enemies...we slowly rehumanize them; we individualize them in ways that are impossible when collective identities trump individuality. Through this process, fraught as it often is with distrust, anger, and fear, respect can develop over time, though it may take years. Forgiveness may not always be possible but mutual respect can serve as the cornerstone of new relations.

Reconciliation is among the most daunting long-term challenges peace builders face. Peacemaking, Herbert Kelman suggests, proceeds in three phases:

- First, “conflict settlement” between political actors marks the end of violent conflict, either through military victory or “negotiated peace agreement.”
- Second, “conflict resolution” builds a pragmatic partnership at both the national and the local levels, fosters working trust, and sets the cooperative stage for reconciliation.
- This final phase, Kelman argues, requires managing individual and collective identities to remove “the negation of the other as a central component of one’s own identity.”

These interconnected phases have developed as fields of study and practice unto themselves, reconciliation perhaps receiving the least inquiry despite its critical role in building inclusive, sustainable peace after mass violence (McKone, 2015).

According to Krishna Kumar, Center for Development Information and Evaluation, U.S. Agency for International Development, the construct of social reconciliation undoubtedly remains controversial. The word reconciliation derives from the Latin expression *conciliatus*, which means “coming together.” Kumar writes, reconciliation implies a process, that of restoring the shattered relationship between two actors. The adjective social simply indicates that the emphasis is on group, and not individual reconciliation. This conceptualization has limited relevance for post conflict situations. First, it is both unrealistic and impolitic to talk about restoring mutual trust in the aftermath of severe, brutal conflict, when memories of the violence perpetuated by the warring groups are still fresh and the social vestiges of destruction still quite visible. Under these conditions, the reconciliation process can at best promote intergroup tolerance, an attitude of live-and-let-live. The process cannot go beyond this. Second, intergroup harmony did not always exist before the conflict; to presume so would be incorrect. It is a process that begins with the adversaries’ acceptance of each other’s right to coexist in war-torn societies. Social reconciliation does not presuppose tolerance; it seeks to promote it. In some circumstances, it may culminate in the beginnings of mutual trust (Kumar, 1999).

The definitions of reconciliation are expansive and tend to cover many overlapping concepts, such as intergroup respect, trust, harmony, social cohesion, coexistence, justice, and peace. These elements positively reinforce one another in a momentum-building process that leads to societal tipping points that in turn trigger broad normative changes in identities and intergroup relationships.

Reconciliation involves acknowledging the pain and injustices experienced during the riots, fostering open communication, and addressing the root causes of the conflict. It goes beyond merely ending hostilities and seeks to establish a foundation for sustainable peace and understanding. The goal is to build a shared vision of the future that transcends the divisions caused by violence. Community building, on the other hand, focuses on the broader process of restoring and strengthening the social fabric of the affected community. It entails creating an inclusive environment where individuals from diverse backgrounds can coexist and collaborate. This involves not only repairing physical infrastructure but also addressing socio-economic disparities, promoting dialogue, and fostering a sense of belonging among community members.

The idea is to empower the community to actively participate in its own recovery, encouraging initiatives that promote unity, resilience, and shared responsibility. Through community building, the aim is to create a more equitable and interconnected society that can withstand future challenges and conflicts.

Why is it necessary?

The necessity of having a proper guideline to mend the broken relationships after any kind of turbulence in the society is essential because such conflictual instances can often leave deep scars on the fabric of the society fracturing the social bonds, creating divisions and mistrust among communities. Through reconciliation, we should aim to heal these wounds by fostering a sense of unity, understanding shared identity, empathy, and collaboration among different communities. These unresolved grievances and animosities if not treated properly can linger and potentially lead to further violence, which eventually has proved to be true in context of Indian society. Restoration of harmony certainly will break this cycle of retaliation and vendettas by addressing the root causes of conflict and promoting peaceful coexistence. Communal conflicts also result in gross violations of human rights, with individuals experiencing physical harm, displacement and loss of property leading to trauma and psychological distress. Reconciliation involves acknowledging and addressing these emotional traumas, providing avenues for healing, supporting mental health recovery, and working towards redressal of justice.

One of the major repercussions of violence is that it strikes economic structures and sources of livelihood, by destroying homes, businesses, and infrastructures. Thus, to revert to the status

quo, it becomes crucial to facilitate rebuilding of these elements, contributing to economic recovery and sustainable development. If reconciliation efforts are neglected, it may erode the perceived legitimacy of government institutions. Communities may feel abandoned or excluded, contributing to a sense of disenfranchisement and alienation.

OBJECTIVES:

- Assess the Current State of Community Relations and comprehensively understand the existing dynamics within the community post-riot and to gauge the level of trust, harmony, and dissonance among diverse groups.
- Explore the primary challenges and obstacles hindering the process of rebuilding trust and harmony in the aftermath of communal riots.
- Examine the several factors that could contribute to fostering reconciliation and community building.
- Role of NGOs and social workers in fostering reconciliation and building back lives.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

1. How do community members perceive the current state of trust and harmony, and what are their aspirations for the future?
2. What contributions do NGOs, social workers, and government organizations make in the process of reconstructing lives, fostering trust, and rebuilding community relationships?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**Rationale of the study:**

The rationale for conducting a post-riot analysis in Northeast Delhi following the 2020 riots stems from the critical need to comprehensively understand the socio-political landscape after four years and the aspirations of the affected communities. The aftermath of such traumatic events holds significant implications for the well-being of individuals and the broader societal fabric. By delving into the intricacies of the present scenario, this study aims to shed light on the evolving dynamics, capturing the sentiments and aspirations of the people directly impacted

by the riots. The role of media, as a powerful influence in shaping public perceptions, also becomes a relevant area, exploring its impact on community relations and trust-building efforts. Additionally, investigating the perceived necessities for community rebuilding provides valuable insights into the areas that require attention for effective rehabilitation and reconciliation. Through a detailed analysis, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the post-riot landscape and inform future initiatives aimed at promoting healing, rebuilding trust, and fostering resilient community relations.

Universe and Sample Size: Northeast Delhi is one of the eleven administrative districts of Delhi, India. The district was established in 1997. It borders the Yamuna River on the west, Ghaziabad District to the north and east, East Delhi to the south, and North Delhi to the west across the Yamuna. Karawal Nagar, Seelampur and Yamuna Vihar are 3 sub-divisions of this district with several other divisions. The major riot affected areas were Jaffrabad, Shiv Vihar, Ashok Nagar, Karawal Nagar, Gokulpuri and Mustafabad, while other areas endure less loss and destruction. For this term paper, 3 major areas were covered namely Shiv Vihar, parts of Yamuna Vihar and Mustafabad. Hence, all the residents of these 3 identified places constitute the universe of the study. The responses were identified initially through personal contact and subsequently snowball sampling. 15 in-depth interviews were conducted; 8 from Shiv Vihar, 3 from Mustafabad and 4 from Yamuna Vihar.

Qualitative Research Design: In addressing the complexities outlined in the rationale, a qualitative research design emerges as particularly advantageous. Qualitative methods provide the depth and nuance necessary to explore the multifaceted aspects of the post-riot scenario in Northeast Delhi. Through techniques such as in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observations, qualitative research allows for a holistic understanding of the lived experiences, perceptions, and aspirations of respondents. This approach is well-suited for capturing the nuances of community dynamics, trust-building processes, and the intricate interplay of factors shaping the current social landscape.

Moreover, qualitative research enables the exploration of the subjective realities of individuals, offering insights into the emotional and psychological dimensions of their experiences. The study's focus on the perceived necessities for community rebuilding necessitates an approach that goes beyond quantitative metrics, allowing for a richer exploration of narratives, discourse, and the contextual nuances that shape people's perspectives.

Additionally, qualitative research is inherently flexible, enabling the researcher to adapt the study design dynamically based on emerging themes and insights. It facilitates an iterative process, where initial findings inform subsequent data collection, refining the research questions and enhancing the overall depth of the study.

Data collection and tool for data collection:

Implementing semi-structured interviews is a fundamental component of this study, involving engaging discussions with community members. The interview schedule is thoughtfully designed with open-ended questions, facilitating the extraction of nuanced and unfiltered information from participants. Each interview session is meticulously recorded, and prior consent from respondents is obtained, ensuring ethical research practices, and respecting the autonomy of the individuals sharing their perspective.

Content Analysis: The researcher analyzed relevant documents, such as official policy reports, community initiatives, and media coverage, to gain a deeper understanding of the historical context and strategies employed.

Thematic Analysis: It is employed as a robust method to distill and interpret the wealth of qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews. The diverse perspectives of key stakeholders, encompassing community members and social workers from various pockets within Northeast Delhi, are systematically examined. This method is particularly suited for identifying recurring themes and patterns inherent in the raw and rich information acquired during the interviews.

The open-ended nature of the interview questions ensures that participants are free to express their perspectives authentically, contributing to a comprehensive dataset. The thematic analysis process involves a systematic exploration of these qualitative responses, seeking to uncover prevalent themes that emerge organically from the narratives of the interviewees. By categorizing and coding the data, this method enables the identification of recurrent patterns, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted post-riot scenario.

DATA ANALYSIS

The primary objective of the study was to assess the post-riot scenario in the designated area and to understand the efforts towards reconciliation and restoration. Additionally, the research

aimed to delve into the aspirations of individuals concerning the restoration of fractured and strained relationships in the future. A crucial component of the study involved identifying the contemporary obstacles that impede the ongoing process of social rebuilding and the re-establishment of harmony. To achieve this, the questionnaire was meticulously structured into three distinct sections: personal inquiries, reflections on life before the riots, and observations on life in the aftermath of the riots, including the reconciliation and restoration efforts.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The major findings can be categorized as following themes drawn out from the interviews:

Deviation of relationships from harmonious to conflicting:

Among the 15 participants, 13, when recounting their experiences before the occurrence of riots, conveyed that the inter-community relationships resembled that of familial bonds. The community members exhibited inclusivity during festive occasions, extending invitations to one another for weddings and other celebratory events. Notably, neighbors played an integral role by offering unwavering support during times of personal challenges and were the immediate responders during emergencies, fostering a sense of brotherhood among them. The post-riot scenario has brought about notable changes in the treatment of individuals in the affected community, markedly diverging from their prior experiences. A discernible shift is evident in the manner they are presently regarded compared to the pre-riot period. Regrettably, there has been a discernible erosion of their sense of belonging to the locality, accompanied by a prevailing atmosphere of apprehension, wherein residents live under constant fear of potential attacks. Even minor conflicts have the potential to escalate into perilous situations, marked by ominous references to replicating the events of the riots. Moreover, the religious card is frequently invoked even in personal matters, exacerbating the strained social fabric. The palpable deterioration in relationships manifests through observable actions and expressions, reflecting a palpable change of heart within the community. Presently, interactions are characterized by a pragmatic adherence to necessity and situational demands, undertaken primarily for the preservation of peace.

Challenges in Economic Sphere: Rebuilding Livelihoods amidst Devastation:

The worsening relationships between communities are also impacting the economic stability of

the region.

The current economic landscape of the area reflects severe damage to the sources of livelihood. While commendable efforts have been initiated to reconstruct lives and properties, the task of establishing self-sufficiency becomes exceptionally challenging when both residences and means of income are entirely obliterated. Of the surveyed 15 individuals, 10 experienced the complete destruction of their houses and shops, with areas like Shiv Vihar and Yamuna Vihar witnessing widespread devastation of the affected community.

Post-riots, economic relationships have borne a substantial brunt. Individuals from specific communities encountered economic boycotts, facing restrictions on obtaining work or employment opportunities. Additionally, a considerable number of people found themselves unemployed after the riots, having been terminated from their respective positions. The economic repercussions of the riots have thus posed formidable obstacles to the community's ability to rebuild and regain financial stability.

Emotional Trauma and Mental Health Support: A Struggle Post-Riots

All participants in the survey shared accounts of the harrowing aftermath of the riots. They recounted instances of fleeing their homes without essentials, enduring injuries, and facing months of displacement before returning to rebuild their residences. The lingering impact on their mental well-being is profound, with many expressing ongoing difficulties in sleeping and heightened sensitivity to even the slightest sounds.

Children, profoundly affected by the trauma, were reluctant to return to the same schools, and convincing them to participate in board exams proved to be a challenging task. The prevailing fear has instilled a deep-seated concern among parents, with many expressing a primary focus on ensuring their children are home before sunset.

One respondent, assaulted by a mob on February 24th, 2020, while returning from the office, highlighted the crucial role played by Hindu neighbors in ensuring their safety. The trauma of living on the streets, enduring camp conditions during winters, and sometimes going without food remains indelible for these survivors. Despite these brutal experiences, there is a noticeable absence of mental health counselling support for the victims, either from governmental or other sources. The pressing need for such psychological assistance is evident, given the enduring

impact of the riots on the emotional well-being of those affected.

NGOs and Social Workers: Catalysts in Rebuilding Lives Post-Riots

In the aftermath of the riots, NGOs emerged as pivotal contributors to the process of rebuilding lives, as local assistance was notably absent. Unfortunately, the government's compensation funds were reported to be neither efficiently distributed nor immune to corruption, exacerbating the challenges faced by the affected individuals. One organization was prominently featured in discussions which went beyond mere infrastructural reconstruction and financial aid. Their comprehensive support extended to providing essential items such as food, grains, utensils, and even facilitating immediate earning opportunities through the provision of cycle rickshaws, autos, and e-rickshaws.

In response to the needs of women seeking to contribute to their households, another NGO initiated a tailoring institute in Shiv Vihar. This institute not only serves as a workplace but also empowers women by imparting valuable skills.

Additionally, another NGO has undertaken initiatives to foster unity between the two communities. Through educational programs, they engage young children in academic and cultural learning, emphasizing diversity and tolerance. This organization extends its outreach to parents as well, organizing activities that bring both communities together for meaningful conversations and mutual understanding. While it has offered counseling to young individuals, it is noteworthy that this support is not provided in a professional capacity. The combined efforts of these NGOs and social workers signify a crucial role in the holistic rebuilding and reconciliation process in the post-riot scenario.

Media's Role: Pre, During, and Post-Riots - Perceptions and Realities

As per the accounts of all interviewees, the media assumes the forefront as the primary promoter of animosity, constructing a negative image of Muslims. Accusations abound regarding the media's alignment with the central government, functioning as a puppet and selectively broadcasting information in line with a particular ideology. The media, according to interviewees, consistently portrays the negative image of the affected community, contributing to heightened animosity. The failure to highlight the actual culprits delivering provocative speeches further exacerbates the issue. Despite Muslims experiencing 91% of the riot damage,

media representation consistently depicts them as terrorists and rioters.

Amid this challenging scenario, social media and individual journalists emerge as beacons of hope. Following the riots, these journalists demonstrated courage and diligence by reporting on the ground without biases. Their unwavering efforts shifted the nation's focus towards the injustices faced by a specific community, countering the simultaneous portrayal of them as rioters. The critical role of social media and independent journalists becomes evident in steering public attention towards a more accurate understanding of the complexities surrounding the riots.

Aspirations for Harmonious Coexistence Post-Riots:

The participants uniformly expressed a fervent desire to restore their lives to the pre-riot era, emphasizing the paramount importance of fostering friendly relations and harmony within their communities for comprehensive development. While some harbored doubts about the feasibility of reverting to previous relationships due to pervasive hatred, there remained a collective hope for the establishment of a peaceful environment.

Several respondents likened the communities to two vital eyes, asserting that the optimal functioning of both is indispensable for a clearer and more comprehensive perspective. Those engaged in entrepreneurial endeavors highlighted the impracticality of sustaining economic boycotts over an extended period, emphasizing the interdependence between the two communities. Instances of camaraderie and tranquility were cited, underscoring a collective willingness to forgive past transgressions and an unwavering commitment to reinstating friendly relations at any cost.

Additionally, a respondent from Shiv Vihar recounted the area's history of maintaining peace and harmony even during the significant riots of 1984, 1992, and 2002. This historical resilience, they argued, suggests that the current challenges will not erode the strong bonds within the community, expressing confidence in a swift return to normalcy.

Significance of education:

A pronounced focus on education and skills development emerged prominently in the targeted areas of Northeast Delhi, as indicated by the interviewees, who constitute migrant populations facing pre-existing developmental challenges even before the occurrence of riots. The residents,

primarily driven by survival instincts, expressed a collective desire for accessible educational resources and skill-building opportunities. Their aspirations center on acquiring knowledge and skills that can elevate their socio-economic status, providing a pathway to enhanced life prospects.

The interviewees emphasized the integral connection between individual development and the broader process of reconciliation, contending that education serves as a catalyst for building confidence and dignity. They underscored the transformative potential of education in fostering economic stability, thereby contributing to an improved societal standing, and facilitating enhanced interpersonal relationships. Moreover, education emerged as a potential bridge between communities, offering a platform to impart the richness of Indian culture and emphasize the country's enduring commitment to secularism.

Beyond economic considerations, interviewees highlighted the role of education in diverting the attention of young minds from divisive sentiments, acting as a deterrent to hatred. They contended that education has the capacity to cultivate a more liberal and secular mindset, fostering tolerance among individuals. Education was identified as a key instrument for societal transformation and reconciliation, resonating with broader aspirations for personal and societal betterment.

SUGGESTIONS

Some of the intervention strategies for reconciliation that needed to be followed are:

Conflict Mediation

Many international reconciliation projects involve creating or strengthening an institutional layer at the community level to be the point of contact when a dispute arises between members of divided communities. Community members may feel more comfortable going to local institutions to resolve disputes for any number of reasons, such as physical accessibility, lower costs, local norms for conflict resolution, or distrust in legal institutions at the regional or national level. The apparent propensity is to keep the dispute local. If a mediation body does not exist or is ineffective or untrustworthy, then at best tension between communities could intensify and at worst people could turn to violence.

Trauma Healing

Traumatic events are common during conflict and can make certain reconciliation issues, such as dealing with the past, especially difficult to overcome, and thus complicate reconciliation efforts. Put differently, without healthy individuals and communities, lingering stress from past violence is likely to impede if not completely undermine reconciliation efforts.

Community Leader Dialogue

Dialogue is an activity which involves “a conversation or exchange of ideas that seeks mutual understanding through the sharing of perspectives.” Dialogue targeted at leaders is needed to analyze separately from that targeted at community members.

Exposure to the Other

Focused activities on introducing people to the personalities, culture, and general lives of people on both sides of the divide are necessary. However, interventions to expose people to various aspects of the lives of the other should be treated as a distinct category precisely because they did not explicitly involve a formal dialogue session or did not focus on creating an economic benefit to communities.

Community Dialogue

The second type of dialogue focused on community members rather than leaders.

Vertical Connections

Although all the interventions operated at the grassroots level, vertical connection strategies suggest that bottom-up approaches must at some point connect with the policies and processes at higher institutional levels for reconciliation to really take hold in a country. Policies in local and national governments undoubtedly affect the process.

Conclusion:

The aftermath of the 2020 Delhi riots reveals a complex web of challenges that necessitate a multifaceted approach for reconciliation and rebuilding. The significance of education emerges as a cornerstone for individual and societal transformation, offering a pathway to economic

stability, enhanced interpersonal relationships, and the cultivation of a tolerant mindset. Mental health support, collaboration between NGOs and the government, media accountability, and community engagement are pivotal elements in the holistic rebuilding process. While the scars of the riots run deep, there is a collective aspiration among the affected communities to restore friendly relations and harmony. This aspiration, rooted in historical resilience, serves as a beacon of hope for a swift return to normalcy.

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