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QUESTIONS ABOUT MORADABAD

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"FOR the first time after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, as many as 130 people have died in a single incident, as in Moradabad last Wednesday (August 13)," Mr. G. K. Reddy remarked (*The Hindu*, Aug. 17). Yet, a holocaust of such proportions is to be inquired into, not by a High Court Judge but by the District Judge of Saharanpur, Mr. B. D. Agarwal. The Ahmedabad Riots Inquiry Commission consisted of a Supreme Court Judge and two High Court Judges. In all major cases of communal riots an inquiry was held by a High Court Judge.

Moradabad, which overshadows them all, cries for an independent and impartial inquiry. One conducted by a District Judge from the State is inherently unsatisfactory because grave charges have been levelled against the State's notorious Provincial Armed Constabulary. As Mr. Reddy remarked, "the police in U.P. have lately become such a law unto themselves that even the mighty Central Government was reluctant to take any action against the police officers responsible for the recent shootings at Bhagpat." Its cowardice and opportunism find expression in its decision to have a farcical inquiry.

The cynicism becomes apparent when one considers that the very people who have hurled all manner of charges of foreign inspiration and political conspiracy are the ones to shun an independent and comprehensive probe. Neither such charges nor those against the PAC are unprecedented. But while the former has been a traditional form of escapism and worse, those against the PAC are fully documented. One has only to recall the wild guesses and wilder charges made at the time of the Ahmedabad riots none of which was substantiated in the inquiry.

But in 1972-73 there were a series of outrages inflicted by the PAC on Muslims in UP—in Aligarh on June 5, 1972; Ferozabad and Varanasi on June 16, (for details vide *Opinion*, September 19, 1972); Dadri on September 21 (*Opinion*, Nov. 7); Nonari on November 15 (*Opinion*, Dec. 19); Sajni on December 12; Ranimau on December 29; Durgajot on January 23, 1973, and Gonda on February 14 (*Opinion*, March 27, 1973).

The Hindustan Times' New Delhi correspondent reported on March 15, 1973 that "investigations have revealed that the atrocities on Muslims in most of the recent riots in U.P. were committed not by members belonging to the majority community but the police." A detailed report by Mr. Girish Mathur in *New Wave* (March 4, 1973), a pro-Mrs. Gandhi

journal said, "The disturbances at Ferozabad, Varanasi, Azamgarh and Basti were not really communal riots, they were in the nature of the armed constabulary's crackdown on the Muslims."

The PAC in U.P. is more than 2 lakhs strong. It has hardly 300 Muslims in its ranks. Is it any wonder that the corrosive feelings of "they" and "we" develop within and without the PAC?

In Moradabad it has been more of the same thing—the PAC goes on a rampage and the Government and its touts begin to look for scapegoats. A fortnight after the massacre Mr. Ashwini Sarin reported from Moradabad (*Indian Express*, August 29) that "the truth behind the August 13 bloodshed is coming out in bits and parts." But during the interval many in the press had willingly accepted the police version and spread it without caring to pause and reflect—that on Id-ul-Fitr August 13, 50 to 60,000 Muslims had met at the Idgah to say their Id prayers some of whom were armed with firearms. A pig strayed into the Idgah.

The P.T.I. reported what ensued thereafter in these terms: The crowd accused the police of "deliberately driving the animal towards the congregation to desecrate their special prayers. On strong denial of the charge by the policemen the crowd immediately started brick-batting police personnel. *Someone in the crowd opened fire, killing three PAC personnel and injuring several others.* Police then made lathi-charge and burst tear gas shells. When this proved ineffective they resorted to firing." The violence spread. "The riotous mobs are reported to have attacked a Harijan colony also which had been the scene of a communal clash a week before."

All the three italicised statements have been proved wrong. - The police were berated for neglect, not intentional insult. None from the crowd fired at the police. The violence did not take a communal turn till the night of August 14. The statements were liable to inflame feelings against Muslims. They obviously represented the police version which the P.T.I. correspondent uncritically accepted. Others who ought to have known better contributed their own poisonous mite. The *Hindustan Times*' correspondent, Mr. Deepak Razdan, reported the same day from Moradabad the DIG Bareily Range, Mr. Prakash Singh's statement that the police were accused of "being careless", that the crowd started throwing stones at the police who made a lathi charge and fired tear gas shells. "As the situation did not improve, the DIG said the police opened fire." To this day, "who gave the order for firing, nobody knows" reported Mr. S. Shahabuddin, M.P., after a visit to Moradabad with some others. "We tried to find out, but without success." Secrecy on such a point is as unique as it is significant.

Mr. Razdan's report the next day repeated the sequence of events and, as before, did not accuse anyone in the crowd of firing at the police.

None of those who lapped up the police version cared to notice its inherent implausibilities. People just do not go to prayer with arms, especially when they go, as they do at Idgahs, with children. No wonder that no firearms were recovered from the namazees. As for the communal turn which the conflict took, Mr. S. Sahay's assessment (*The Statesman*,

August 21) is irrefutable: "The Moradabad riots did not start off as communal. After the stampede in the Idgah the mob rushed to the Galshahid police post, about 75 yards away. The mob's ire was directed against the police because the latter had been allegedly implicating Muslims in false cases. There is some truth in this. Our Staff Reporter who visited Moradabad found blank sheets bearing thumb impressions in the debris around the police post that had been attached by the mob. It was pointed out, however, that the U.P. Police has been notorious for using such methods and that police "ZOOLUM" knew no caste or creed distinctions. Of the 81 casualties officially declared till 5.30 p.m. on August 14, only three were Hindus. However, the riots did take a communal turn later with the involvement of the people of the neighbouring areas."

Another testimony to police misbehaviour comes from Mr. H. N. Bahuguna. He told the Trivandrum Press Club on August 21, that while he was walking along the streets of Moradabad two Muslim houses were burnt. The police were stationed only about 20 yards, from the spot. "When I asked the police what they had done to prevent it, they merely said they had informed the fire service," he said.

On the genesis of the conflict he observed, "When the Muslims asked the rifle-carrying policemen why they did not prevent the pigs from entering the areas, the policemen were reported to have replied that they were to look after the people and not the pigs. This enraged the Muslims and someone from the crowd slapped a policeman. Somebody also threw stones. This was how the trouble started but no Hindu homes were affected." The police-Muslim conflict took a communal turn only from the night of August 14, he said the next day in New Delhi.

More detailed accounts have appeared since (Vide *Mainstream*, August 23 by "A Special Correspondent" and Mr. Ashwini Sarin in the *Indian Express*, August 29) and they make the case for an independent inquiry unanswerable. They also explain why it has been denied. The correspondent wrote: "Many reports have appeared in the national press on the disturbances in Moradabad on the day of Id celebration. But almost all them are largely police versions of the incident—versions which have undergone many a change."

The police has repeatedly said that most of the casualties were due to the panicky stampede on the Idgah. That is not true. They were due to the police firing. Hafiz Mohamed Siddiq, the Congress(I) MLA from Moradabad, who was elected with the support of both communities said, "Police par janoon tari tha" (the police had gone beserk).

Mainstream's correspondent added, "President of Moradabad Ward Congress(I) Committee Altaf Hussain and also General Secretary of Moradabad Town Congress(I) Committee Shamsul Islam said they had seen how Hindu traders had denounced the role of the police when the police and the PAC were looting Muslim shops in Mandi Chowk at 4 p.m. on August 13....

"Siddiq said he had himself seen about 150 bodies, a large number being those of children, in the Idgah and Gulshahid areas.

"Were you there when the firing took place?" Siddiq nodded in the

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affirmative. When he saw the police resorting to indiscriminate firing, he tried to implore the officers to call a halt to it. He had in his arms a small child hit by bullets. But his requests were of no avail.

"And then Siddiq disclosed something which has not been mentioned in any national daily. The bodies of the dead were all assembled by the police, thrown into trucks and driven away towards Sambhal....

"Eye-witness accounts, including that of the local Imam Syed Qaari Dr. Kamal Fahim (Bachelor of Unani Medicine and Surgery, Aligarh), who conducted the Id prayers at the Idgah, were very different (from the police version). Dr. Fahim categorically stated that he had himself seen persons in three *safs* (rows in which they stand to offer prayers at such congregations) lying on the ground inside the Idgah. They had been hit by bullets fired within the Idgah. In Dr. Fahim's own words : 'There were 125 of them, dead and injured, some of the latter breathing their last. I implored the DM to send the injured immediately to hospital. But he did not pay any heed'."

Mr. Ashwini Sarin's report is to the same effect : "As the Khutba came to an end, two shell-like objects landed on the congregation. While the eye-witnesses described them as grenades, the police said they were tear-gas shells. There was confusion all round.

The Imam took to the mike and said : '*Main Shahar Imam bol rahan hun. Aap log iman rakhe police wale goli mat chalayan*'. But what followed was a nightmare, Dr. Fahim recalled."

There was a communal incident on July 23 between Muslims and Valmiki Harijans. Apparently, a teen-aged Hindu girl, Rajo, had been kidnapped in March, whereupon, the police recovered her the next day and arrested some Muslim youths. On July 23, the girl was to be married. The marriage procession was attacked by some Muslim youths as it passed the Inder Chowk Mosque. They alleged that the music of the procession had disturbed namaz in the Mosque. It seems that one FIR was filed in the police station, on August 11, by some Muslims that some Valmiki Harijans had threatened that they would see how Id was celebrated that year. Mr. Raminder Singh reported in the *Indian Express* (August 19) that the Valmikis of Inder Chowk accused the Muslims of beating them up and later poisoning their pet pigs. "They denied any pigs went near the Idgah, on Id day but it is possible that some unsocial elements amongst the Valmiki may have driven pigs towards the Idgah on August 13."

Neither the attack of July 23 by the Muslims nor their extreme resentment at the presence of a pig on the Id day, least of all the assault on the police do the Muslims any credit. But it is all too clear that they did not fire at the police. Moradabad went up in flames because the police went beserk and fired indiscriminately. At any rate, only an independent judicial enquiry can establish the truth definitely. But all that one finds is a plethora of allegations of foreign inspiration, conspiracy and complicity of RSS of which there is not a title of evidence. It was left to Mrs. Gandhi to put the imprimatur of her approval of all these charges.

At the Congress(I) Working Meeting, on August 28, she said that "foreign forces" were involved in the recent disturbances and "these so-called communal incidence are very different from the communal incidents of the past because the present incidents are politically motivated." She implied, no doubt, motivated by the opposition. She linked up Moradabad with the incidents in Kashmir and Ahmedabad and stated that they formed part of a "conspiracy" designed "to undermine the stability of Government."

This is not the first time that Mrs. Gandhi has levelled such accusations. But one has only to compare the anti-price rise agitation by BJP in Gujarat with Moradabad to realise their absurdity. In Kashmir all that had happened was that on July 26 an army truck had an accident with a tempo on a street in Srinagar. The truck driver was beaten up, his companion called his friends in the army whereupon three truck-loads of army men rushed to the scene armed with iron rods, hockey sticks and some arms (*The Statesman*, July 29 and 30). They smashed taxis and simply went berserk. It was a behaviour wholly uncharacteristic of our Jawans, but is it any wonder that the people were outraged? The fight between the truck driver and the tempo driver could have taken place on any street in any city in the country. The aggravating factor was the misbehaviour of members of a disciplined force—the army men coming to the scene to wreak vengeance in the manner they did. How can Mrs. Gandhi link up the incidents in Kashmir with those in Moradabad and says that the attacks on the police and the army were aimed at undermining the administration. It may be recalled that earlier, on August 18 in the Rajya Sabha, Mrs. Gandhi had urged members not to blame the PAC, though she conceded that there might be a few communal elements inside it. This is not the first time that Mrs. Gandhi had reacted thus.

In 1972 Mr. N. G. Goray, MP, wrote to Mrs. Gandhi about the Ferozabad riots: "The most shameful thing is that all this was freely indulged in by the forces of law and order in collusion with the local goondas." Her reply was that the IGP and the Commissioner "did not find any substance in the allegation that the police in general had run amuck".

Unchecked, the UP riots spread. In Nonari 72 Muslims' houses were burnt down on November 15, in Sajni, on December 12, about 100 Muslims' houses were looted and 43 burnt. Riots followed in Ranimau, Durgajot, Gonda and Basti. In May 1973 there were communal riots in Delhi itself, in Sadar Bazar.

Some of the worst riots in UP took place in 1972 when Mrs. Gandhi held the Home portfolio besides being Prime Minister. Mrs. Gandhi paid little heed to them even as she ignored the Hyderabad riots of 1978 and talked about the riots elsewhere.

Curiously, neither she nor the Jan Sanghis discern the obvious "pattern" between the U.P. riots of 1972-73 and Moradabad—the PAC's role and its condonation by the Government.

When Mrs. Gandhi speaks of "attacks" on the army and on the police, citing Kashmir and Moradabad, she clearly brands the Muslims as the attackers in both places and ignores the wrongs done to them. She has

already initiated the inquiry.

In 1980, one finds that Mrs. Gandhi is in full agreement with the RSS chief, Balasaheb Deoras—the PAC was attacked. It was not in the wrong. The Muslims were the attackers. This is also the clear implication of the remarks of A. B. Vajpayee and L. K. Advani when they met the Prime Minister on August 16—someone was pitting Muslims against the police and the army. We find here the strange spectacle of Mrs. Gandhi being in whole-hearted agreement with the RSS Chief and his faithful disciples. Mr. Vajpayee's line is understandable. Asked if the BJP is more acceptable to the minorities, he replied "it is not a question of being more acceptable to minorities. It is a question of being more acceptable to the majority . . . the majority of Muslims voted for Congress(I)" (*Debonair*, August 1980). That Mr. Vajpayee should nurse his old Jan Sangh vote is understandable. That Mrs. Gandhi should behave the way she has towards the Muslims is by no means surprising. Every fact testifies to a gross outrage in Moradabad and the Prime Minister has not a word of sympathy for the victims but rather politicises the incident by levelling false charges of political conspiracy and of foreign involvement, defends the PAC and attacks its critics.

The roots of Moradabad incidents lie in the local soil—the clash of July 23, the happenings at the Idgah, the Muslims' over-reaction to the presence of a pig, the police firing and all the rest that ensued. What it does expose is the utter futility of Muslims selling their votes to Mrs. Gandhi as their protector. What it exposes also is the futility of Muslims organising themselves into communal parties. It should be evident to them by now that none of the Muslim parties has been of the slightest help. But it is more than possible that if the Muslims were to take a keener part in the affairs of the nation, went out of their political ghettos, shed their inhibitions of the past, they might be able to demand justice more successfully than they have been hitherto. They might also be able to avoid some of the mistakes of over-reaction which have caused them no small harm.

TO TYRANNY

IN DIALOGUE (*Opinion*, 19th August 1980) the Lady says: "No, our instruments will give no trouble. The bureaucracy is subservient. I talk against corruption and threaten action, but shall the ox that treadeth out the corn be muzzled? So I let them graze and they are not unhappy. The police and its armed sections, I follow the same policy with, and they co-operate readily. Think, could a riot like Moradabad have occurred, if they thought I really disapproved? No we understand one another...."

The facts in the article on pages 1 to 6 above substantiate fully the lady's thought in the passage above regarding the police. And why does she want these despicable things to happen? She explains: "My plan

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is simple like all great plans, I would like to think. Create an impression throughout the land (further riots, etc.) that it is ungovernable under the present laws, that I must have far greater powers to cope, then at the right moments, the necessary ordinances from you, and hey, presto, I am as powerful as I was at the height of 1975 to 1977, the Emergency which some disapprove of, and quite a number regard as very desirable."

And why does she want to be so powerful? She explains her position: "I am for full and absolute personal power. I can enjoy power only thus." Briefly, she wants to be vozhd, the sole chief whose word is final on all matters, no institutions, much less individuals, daring to look askance 'Indira locuta, causa finita.'

This is the great purpose, Fellow-citizens, for which she is prepared to set the country on the wrong course, always saying 'what can I do? More powers, give me more powers, and I shall see'. Already, some she is gaining, directly or through her myrmidons, and many of you nod approvingly and say 'unexceptionable.' And so she moves on to complete and absolute tyranny. As the lady of the dialogue says: "All obstacles to that I shall overcome, by guile, force or whatever means are available to me. It may take a year, it may take more, but my persistance will not fail." As things seem to be developing, it will be earlier rather than later. Your freedom will, almost without your becoming aware, be a thing of the past. Saddening is it to see Evil moving so steadily and surely towards Triumph, Saddening to see Evil 'using the lie to such great effect, Saddening to see your indifference or neglect in such circumstances. Little remains for this very old servant of yours but to pray for God's mercy on this land.

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