



# Patience

Nikhil Roshan<sup>1</sup>

Published online: 14 October 2020  
© O.P. Jindal Global University (JGU) 2020

## Abstract

Hate-fuelled violence reconfigures the social landscape in figurative and literal senses: both the emotive fabric of friendship, neighbourhood, love, and the material landscape of the city's streets, alleys, shopfronts, cars, buses, burial grounds. Hate-violence thus reimagines and re-images the world; restructures it normatively and physically. This photo-essay presents the visual aftermath of the February 2020 communal violence in Delhi. The photographs are situated in a narrative of the author's personal journey to the sites of violence, along with the history of communal tension in the city and its periodic eruption (usually with the sanction of the State) into large-scale pogroms. Word and image combine to give us a visceral sense of the destruction of a lifeworld and of the personal and political negotiations that follow, through which survivors must, somehow, attempt to channel their anger and grief.

**Keywords** Communal Violence · Citizenship · Partition · Emergency · Pogrom · Photography

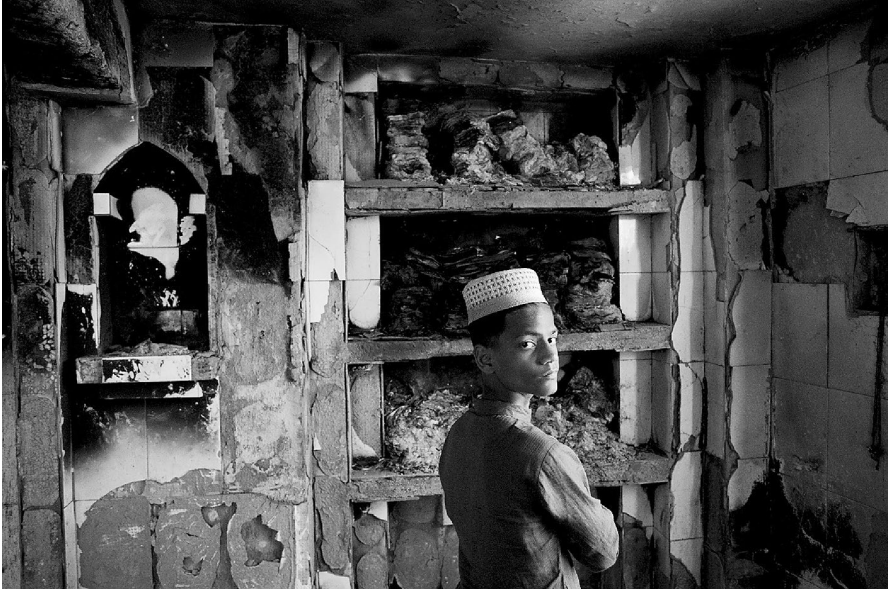
---

Nikhil Roshan—Photographer.

---

✉ Nikhil Roshan  
nik.roshan@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup> New Delhi, India



**Fig. 1** A child surveys the damage done to Mustafabad's Farooqia Mosque where he comes to pray every day

It couldn't be clearer. Things have come full circle with the arrest of student leaders who lent their voices to protests against the unabashedly communal Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA). The allegation? Fomenting riots. If any among us harboured the slightest sense of bewilderment or scepticism about what the silence of the gutted, debris-strewn streets of Northeast Delhi in the final week of February were telling us, these questions ought to be laid to rest: Were both sides culpable? Were there criminal gangs running amok? Was there a free flow of illegal arms in the area? (Fig. 1).

The questions that need to be asked have been hollowed out and made irrelevant by the Delhi Police, under direct control of the Union Home Ministry. As if on autopilot, an all too familiar script is playing itself out now. Under the cover of the pandemic, innocent men and women, some themselves victims of violence, have been disappearing into the interrogation chambers of Delhi Police's Special Cell. It is the hour once again to sacrificially propitiate the beast.

On previous instances when this happened, it was with the help of special security laws like the Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002 (POTA), the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1987 (TADA) and the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act, 1999 (MCOCA). This time, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA)—strengthened by assembling the most draconian bits from these earlier legislations<sup>1</sup>—is the battering ram. Last time, it was young men alleged to be radicalised members of the Students Islamic Movement of India (SIMI) who were targeted. In the crosshairs this time, is the Popular Front of India (PFI). But the cast has now been widened to include dissenting students, journalists, activists and scholars of tribal, Dalit, gender and environmental rights.

Among those accused of “inciting violence” in Northeast Delhi is Safoora Zargar, a student coordinator of Jamia Milia Islamia University's sustained protests against the CAA. She is over three months into her pregnancy, but booked under the UAPA, is unlikely to get bail. Manish Sirohi, an arms dealer found in possession of arms and ammunition while Northeast Delhi burned, was booked and arrested under a First Information Report (FIR) bizarrely bearing the same number as the one Zargar is booked under. But indicted under the Arms Act, 1959, Sirohi was recently granted bail citing the need to decongest prisons and avoid risk to health due to the pandemic. Even Kafkaesque feels an inadequate term to capture the maddening injustice of what is unfolding.

What began as a “riot” on 23 February 2019 quickly turned into a “pogrom”,<sup>2</sup> claiming 53 lives by 26 February 2019, 38 of which were Muslim. Majority of those who have been injured or have fallen victim to arson too are from the minority community. On orders to keep investigations going despite the pandemic, the Delhi Police has arrested hundreds of people, claiming the numbers of those arrested from

<sup>1</sup> Manisha Sethi, 'Delhi Riot Conspiracy Theory: Aim is to Make Every Muslim Guilty' (*Outlook Magazine*, 28 April 2020) <<https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/delhi-riot-conspiracy-theory-aim-is-to-make-every-muslim-guilty/351674>> accessed on 4 June 2020.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the conceptual distinctions between these categories, see: Paul R. Brass, *Forms of Collective Violence: Riots, Pogroms and Genocide in Contemporary India* (Three Essays Collective 2011).

the two communities are almost identical.<sup>3</sup> And yet, hawkish commentators have not missed the opportunity to try and lock our gaze on those “regressive” madrasas and darul ulooms of Northeast Delhi that maintain their orthodox grip on their flock, breeding radicalism, or on the criminal gangs that offer protection. What of the hordes of aimless young men, they ask? Indeed, what of them?

\*\*\*

‘The mosques have never been this full before. This is a time for mourning, for contemplation,’ said Ibrahim Saifi, a young man associated with a local peace-building organisation in Mustafabad, as we stood at the end of a narrow alley, garbage heaped on street corners and an open drain flowing with grey sludge inches away from us. ‘But there is a lot of fear and suspicion in the air,’ he says by way of explaining the reticence of Babu Khan’s relatives in speaking about his two sons who had been killed in February’s targeted violence.

A few paces into the alley, Khan was seated on one of a row of plastic chairs lined-up outside his house, where relatives had gathered for a wake. As he spoke, the distraught father sighed with every sentence. The bodies of his sons Amir and Hashim Ali had been retrieved from the Ganga Vihar drainage canal earlier that morning and transferred to the mortuary at Guru Teg Bahadur Hospital. When he was called in to identify the bodies at Gokulpuri police station, Hindu neighbours told Khan that they had witnessed the murder of his sons by Hindu mobs the previous day. The young men had been intercepted on their way home from a relative’s house, killed, and their bodies dumped in the canal on the evening of 26 February 2019, hours after National Security Advisor Ajit Doval visited the area and assured anxious residents that peace had been restored.

When asked if the neighbours could be convinced to testify, no one at Babu Khan’s gathering had any hope. Some were even annoyed by the question. There seemed a tacit understanding that legal processes were a waste of time and chasing justice may even be an impediment to future peace—reconciliation, without the truth bit. A word I kept hearing was *sabr*—stoic forbearance, patient suffering—which many felt was the only way to make sense of the hand they had been dealt. It reminded me of Noah Yuval Harari’s observation of suffering as the most enduring of themes that characterise the stories we tell ourselves as a species.<sup>4</sup>

But they don’t make the questions go away, nor the helpless rage. The next morning, as Khan and his eldest son Sheruddin stepped out of the mortuary weeping inconsolably, they struggled to understand why their innocent loved ones had to die such a cruel death. Their bodies showed burns and stab wounds. ‘They were harmless, gentle boys... Wouldn’t have hurt a fly,’ Khan sobbed as he tried to hold

<sup>3</sup> Office of the Commissioner of Delhi, ‘Rejoinder regarding ‘Rescripting North-East Delhi riots – and question of justice’ (Twitter, 16 May 2020) <<https://twitter.com/DelhiPolice/status/1261653724885184513?s=20>> accessed on 4 June 2020; Vikas Kumar and Radhika Chitkara, ‘Rescripting North-East Delhi riots – and question of justice’ (*The Hindu*, May 16 2020) <<https://www.thehindu.com/news/cities/Delhi/rescripting-north-east-delhi-riots-and-the-question-of-justice/article31597139.ece>> accessed on 4 June 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Intelligence Squared, ‘Yuval Noah Harari on the myths we need to survive’ (*YouTube*, 23 October 2015) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UTchioiHM0U>> accessed on 4 June 2020.



his phone steady for a TV camera. On the screen was a photograph of 30-year-old Hashim, one of the deceased brothers, at Raj Ghat, standing by Mahatma Gandhi's memorial. 'I wish their killers an equally painful death. May no one even offer them water in their final moments,' Sheruddin spat out as the tears streamed down.

The brothers represented a large cross section of young men in the area. Amir, the youngest, worked as a driver, and Hashim worked as a tailor in a small-scale garment unit with his older brother. In the aftermath of the violence, it was found that many such units had had their machinery stolen or burnt. These modest and precarious livelihoods were built on the dashed hopes of industrial zones springing up in Shahdara. Migrant settlers—many of them Muslim and/or lower caste—came from various parts of Uttar Pradesh (UP) in search of employment.

But these frontiers of a new Delhi also became home to some of the city's older Muslim populations. Following communal flare-ups in the heart of the old city in 1974, Muslim communities from areas like Turkman gate, Ballimaran and Daryaganj were forcibly relocated with the aim of breaking their strength in numbers. Resettlement colonies were chalked out in Trilokpuri, Nand Nagri and Khichripur by planners during the days of iron-fisted Emergency rule.<sup>5</sup> Afraid that their community would be fragmented and sent to various fringes of the city, the poor evictees petitioned Jagmohan Malhotra—then Vice-Chairman of the Delhi Development Authority and Sanjay Gandhi's trusted lieutenant in executing his Delhi "beautification" ambitions—to let them be close to each other and their traditional occupations. Jagmohan's response was typical of the majoritarian Hindi heartland's attitude towards Muslims since Partition. 'Do you think we are mad to destroy one Pakistan to create another Pakistan?' he is recorded as having said.<sup>6</sup> The trauma of being turned out of one's generations-old home or being denied the right to return to it was probably not a new feeling for many of those evictees. The havelis of Shahjahanabad are rife with such stories from the days of the Partition.<sup>7</sup>

That evening, as the funeral procession for the brothers made its way past us to the burial ground in Mustafabad, I stood at the entrance to Noor Masjid and listened to Fahimuddin Abid, a soft-spoken, middle-aged carpenter recount a story of solidarity often heard in times of mass violence. As tensions rose, with news of rioting coming in from all directions, he ferried an elderly Hindu businessman he often worked for from Mustafabad to his home in Shiv Vihar—the area where Muslims experienced the worst targeted violence.

<sup>5</sup> Praveen Swami, 'Delhi's Communal Violence Has Illuminated an India with a Blind Right Eye, Unable to See Abyss Ahead' (*News18*, 28 February 2020) <<https://www.news18.com/news/opinion/delhi-s-communal-violence-has-illuminated-an-india-with-a-blind-right-eye-unable-to-see-the-abyss-ahead-2518395.html>> accessed on 4 June 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Ajoy Bose and John Dayal, "Do you think we're mad... to create another Pakistan?" How Sanjay Gandhi's Emergency drive terrorised Muslims' (*Daily O*, 27 June 2018) <<https://www.dailyo.in/arts/emergency-sanjay-gandhi-muslims-terrorised-in-jama-masjid-and-turkman-gate-rukhsana/story/1/25130.html>> accessed on 4 June 2020; Ajoy Bose and John Dayal, *For Reasons of State: Delhi Under Emergency* (Viking 2016).

<sup>7</sup> Atikh Rashid, 'Did India deal differently with Muslim refugees after Partition?' (*The Indian Express*, 27 February 2020) <<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/partition-hindu-sikh-muslim-refugees-nehru-pm-modi-parliament-caa-6287306/>> accessed on 4 June 2020.

‘We couldn’t find any transport at that tense, late hour. I knew he had trouble with his heart, so I carried him on my back,’ Abid said matter-of-factly. ‘And then I too got back home safe,’ he added as an afterthought as he slipped off his sandals and headed towards the little fountain where others like him were washing their arms and feet in thoughtful silence, preparing for prayer. The muezzin’s call, competing with thunder in the gathering grey sky, resounded through the narrow lanes of Old Mustafabad milling with people.

Most of them had poured in from surrounding areas like Khajoori Khas, Karawal Nagar, Chandbagh, Jyoti Nagar and Shiv Vihar, fleeing the pogrom. That was before the oppressive isolation of the coronavirus lockdown came to India. In the days following the violence, residents were bricking up and barricading with iron gates, lanes already segregated on religious lines, bracing for social distancing of an older variety in the subcontinent.<sup>8</sup>

\*\*\*

Despite the show of force with the deployment of paramilitaries to calm affected areas, there were several accounts of journalists being roughed up and threatened by gangs of Hindutva thugs as they continued looting and burning deserted homes and shops. I realized from preliminary news reports that the AI Hind Hospital in Mustafabad had become a safe haven of sorts and decided to begin photographing there. The bloodied map of Delhi was at the back of my mind as I made my way to Northeast Delhi on the metro. An elderly man was excitedly showing his neighbour a video on his phone, and at Trilokpuri station he abruptly rose and made his way to the door. As he exited, he hollered to his friend, ‘*Jaago Hinduon, jaago!*’—Wake up Hindus, wake up!

Trilokpuri had been one of the worst affected in the 1984 anti-Sikh pogrom unleashed by Indian National Congress ministers, loyalists and thugs to avenge the assassination of Indira Gandhi by followers of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the fire-brand cleric who was by then symbol of a movement for greater autonomy for the state of Punjab.<sup>9</sup> When justice is delayed and ultimately denied to the victims of hate killings, it is easy for old prejudices to grow unchecked. Old traumas seldom die with unsung dirges, and hate speech raises its ugly head time after time. Bhindranwale’s grandstanding and his incitements against Hindus led to a spate of killings in Punjab, and probably helped Congress loyalists and others prime the air for pogroms in Delhi’s already traumatised post-Partition mohallas and camps-turned-unauthorised-colonies.<sup>10</sup> Those spurred into mob hysteria,<sup>11</sup> whether by the Sajjan Kumars

<sup>8</sup> Asaf Ali Lone, ‘Fragmented Identities: (Re)living the “Partition” Today’ (*The Wire*, 31 December 2019) <<https://thewire.in/urban/india-cities-muslims-partition>> accessed on 4 June 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Virginia Van Dyke, ‘The Anti-Sikh Riots of 1984 in Delhi: Politicians, Criminals, and the Discourse of Communalism’ in Paul R Brass (ed), *Riots and Pogroms* (Macmillan 1996).

<sup>10</sup> William K. Stevens, ‘India Events: A New Order of Difficulty’ (*The New York Times*, 12 June 1984) <<https://www.nytimes.com/1984/06/12/world/india-events-a-new-order-of-difficulty.html>> accessed on 4 June 2020.

<sup>11</sup> Veena Das, ‘Anthropological Knowledge and Collective Violence: The Riots in Delhi, November 1984’ [1985] 1 *Anthropology Today* 4.

of 1984 or Kapil Mishras of 2020, make these recurring cycles of bloodletting since 1947 seem immutable.

Within a week of the 2020 violence in Delhi, a news feature had recounted a taxi driver bragging about going out with his friends under the cover of night, shutting out the power in the Muslim lanes of Chandbagh, and going on a rampage. ‘Gun in one hand, sword in the other.’ His aunt apparently marvelled with pride at how much he resembled his father who had gone out with the same swagger in 1984.<sup>12</sup> Political psychologist Ashis Nandy speaks of how ordinary men look for temporary fame and heroism through the act of killing, but live with permanent damage.<sup>13</sup> But clearly, some are left unperturbed by the butchery they participate in.

In a zone of violence where identities decide one’s right to live, it is only natural for me to be conscious of my own heritage. My parents had an inter-faith marriage and when they came to Dehradun the year following the anti-Sikh pogrom, they were largely unfamiliar with the Partition-scarred social landscape of Northern India. Eventually, witnessing the Ramjanmabhoomi mobilisation, they grew acutely conscious of the communal fault lines. Taking care to choose their houses in cosmopolitan localities, they passed on that geographical awareness to their children. My parents did their best to keep our identity irreligiously secular while dealing with the narrow imaginations of school clerks or government servants issuing identity documents.

If the babus found it difficult to make sense of my secular identity, what chance did I have with mobs of roving vigilantes? I had a press card that carried just my own neutral name, and I left all other IDs bearing my parents’ names at home. Will the Hindutva mobs pull down my pants? Will they ask me to recite the *Hanuman Chalisa*? Time was running out. I looked at the map, aware of the mixed mosaic of communities packed into Northeast Delhi, and chose Johri Enclave metro station, just north of more tense ones like Jaffrabad where the violence had begun.

Exiting the anonymous tidiness of the Delhi Metro, I ventured out into the dusty outskirts of Jorhripur, on the border with UP’s badlands. Looking at Gurjar name plaques outside homes, I shuddered thinking of Kapil Baisala (alias Gurjar), the 29-year-old who only weeks ago had shot at the peaceful gathering at Shaheen Bagh, shouting ‘Only Hindus will have any say in this country.’<sup>14</sup> I still shudder when I think of his grotesque dance among the fawning friends who greeted him with garlands and cheers when he was released on bail.

<sup>12</sup> Arunabh Saika, “‘I coloured my sword red’: Meet Delhi rioters who say they killed Muslims’ (*Scroll.in*, 4 March 2020) <<https://scroll.in/article/955044/meet-the-rioters-who-say-they-killed-muslims-in-delhi-violence>> accessed on 4 June 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Aditi Tandon, ‘Ashis Nandy: It’s very difficult to go back to pre-violent days after you’ve once participated, killed’ (*The Tribune*, 8 March 2020) <<https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/features/ashis-nandy-its-very-difficult-to-go-back-to-pre-violent-days-after-youve-once-participated-killed-52702>> accessed on 4 June 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Mukesh Singh Sengar, ‘Shaheen Bagh Shooter Who Shouted “Only Hindus Will Rule” Gets Bail’ (*NDTV*, 7 March 2020) <<https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/shaheen-bagh-shooter-kapil-baisala-who-shouted-only-hindus-will-rule-gets-bail-2191634>> accessed on 4 June 2020.

And yet they ask, evoking the spectre of Islamic radicalisation, what of the hordes of aimless young men? Add “bereft of hope” to that characterisation, and you get a sense of the faces I saw in Mustafabad. Making my way through the Hindu residential localities and marketplaces with my camera packed in my bag, I heaved a sigh of relief that first time I crossed the network of putrid sewage canals into the shabbier Muslim lanes of Mustafabad, which evoked all the neglect and underdevelopment the Sachar Committee Report brought to light nearly 15 years ago.<sup>15</sup> And I knew it wasn’t just me, with the vulnerability of my mixed lineage, who felt safer there. Ananya Bhardwaj of *The Print*, among others, has spoken of the hostility of Hindu vigilantes and their selective targeting of journalists’ cameras.<sup>16</sup>

\*\*\*

Perverse as it may sound, concerns of social justice aside, the thrill of documenting conflict and tragedy while oneself being exposed to danger is something reporters have long acknowledged, even theorised about. In such places and situations, ‘reality is open, and easier to grab,’ as veteran war photographer Luc Delahaye has observed.<sup>17</sup> The shock from the encounter with “the real” that Delahaye refers to, breaks through the sense of alienation from the mundane and safe lives experienced by many of us who come from sheltered, privileged backgrounds.

But the bigger point Delahaye makes about photography being a truly phenomenological practice makes me think of what documentary filmmaker Adam Curtis said a few years ago—that the most radical thing you could do to resist the war in Syria, was to leave the safety of your home, go to Aleppo, and just be there.<sup>18</sup> Curtis was reiterating an old axiom about the virtue of bearing witness, and the moral clear-sightedness that it could bring. It probably still wouldn’t offer a cure for that condition in which you can no longer make sense of what you are looking at. The fog of the information wars today is made up as much of doctored videos shared on right-wing ecosystems,<sup>19</sup> as of outright denial in the face of real documentary evidence of crimes against humanity.<sup>20</sup>

I feel wary of the tired tropes I might deploy to elicit the viewer’s outrage—a child staring back at you blankly, or accusatorily if you are prone towards a sense

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Minority Affairs’ *Government of India* ‘Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community in India: A Report’ (November 2008) <[http://www.minorityaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/sachar\\_comm.pdf](http://www.minorityaffairs.gov.in/sites/default/files/sachar_comm.pdf)> accessed on 4 June 2020.

<sup>16</sup> The Print, ‘In our 400<sup>th</sup> episode: Decluttering Delhi riots with The Print’s team of intrepid young journalists’ (*YouTube*, 26 February 2020) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRoR-aMtUu>> accessed on 4 June 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Blind Shutter, ‘Magnum Photos—The Changing of a Myth’ (*YouTube*, 6 August 2013) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOHmvL5KeXw>> accessed on 4 June 2020.

<sup>18</sup> See generally, Dan Schindel, “‘Documenrary filmmaking has become so rigid’: Adam Curtis on Storytelling Today’ (*Hyperallergic*, 16 March 2017) <<https://hyperallergic.com/365444/documentary-reporting-has-become-so-rigid-adam-curtis-on-storytelling-today/>> accessed on 4 June 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Mohammad Ali, ‘The Rise of a Hindu Vigilante in the Age of WhatsApp and Modi’ (*Wired*, 14 April 2020) <<https://www.wired.com/story/indias-frightening-descent-social-media-terror/>> accessed on 4 June 2020.

<sup>20</sup> Janine di Giovanni, ‘Why Assad and Russia Target the White Helmets’ (*The New York Review of Books*, 16 October 2018) <<https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/10/16/why-assad-and-russia-target-the-white-helmets/>> accessed on 4 June 2020.

of collective guilt or shame; holy books burnt to a crisp to represent the total breakdown of the social contract; childbirth to signify regeneration, and the like. Could I honestly hope to break into the daily stream of partisan visual media and appeal to the viewer at some subconscious level? What can set straight the twisted reality of ex-MLA Jagdish Pradhan laying his hand on the shoulder of the Hindu youth in Shiv Vihar who took a pellet in his back during the violence, elevating him to martyr status? How long will he carry the scar like a badge of honour in his crusade against whatever imagined historic wrong he is avenging? (Fig. 20)

While I make my defence of photography's powers to document injustice, and to stand resolutely against our tendency to forget and bury unpleasant reality, my tribe might be losing the battle. Footage from hundreds of anonymous mobile phones and omniscient surveillance cameras is being gathered and weaponised against the residents of Northeast Delhi as evidence of colluding in the violence. If you were spotted on camera, on the wrong street on one of those chaotic days, it does not matter anymore if you were there to help ferry someone to safety, looking for a loved one, or simply trying to get home yourself.<sup>21</sup>

In her recent book *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*,<sup>22</sup> Ariella Azoulay speaks at length about European museums as symbolic of historic crimes, filled with memorialised objects plundered from colonies, shorn of their contexts, but brought over methodically numbered and catalogued. She makes a belaboured critique of photography, binding it to the beginnings of empire. But she is on target when she 'tries to think about a relationship between the undocumented people and the documented objects,'<sup>23</sup> referring to the unwanted migrants from former colonies and client states knocking on Europe's door today, making a claim to the land, as it were, through those objects in the museums. She goes on to say, 'going to museums and realising your complicity in the act of spectatorship... violence is mediated through documents. This is one of the particularities of empire: documents acquired as sites of legitimacy. We have to unlearn the document. We have to unlearn documentary and unlearn documentation. We have to unlearn the foundations of knowledge.'<sup>24</sup>

I might wish to turn Azoulay's indictment of photographic documentation on its head. But all I have as a historic reservoir is the humanitarian cliché, 'family of man'—the landmark exhibition curated by Edward Steichen in 1955 that celebrated ordinary people from all over the world, and their shared humanity, cutting across nationality, gender, and class.<sup>25</sup> It is a worthy companion to her call to arms against

<sup>21</sup> Vijayta Lalwani, "'Got your azaadi?': Investigation into Delhi violence sparks concerns about bias against Muslims" (*Scroll.in*, 24 May 2020) <<https://scroll.in/article/962567/got-your-azaadi-investigation-into-delhi-violence-sparks-concerns-about-bias-against-muslims>> accessed on 4 June 2020.

<sup>22</sup> Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (Verso 2019).

<sup>23</sup> Hrag Vartanian, 'Connecting Museums, Modern Art, Colonialism, and Violence' (*Hyperallergic*, 11 March 2020) <<https://hyperallergic.com/547296/connecting-museums-modern-art-colonialism-and-violence/>> accessed on 4 June 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Azoulay (n 22) 9.

<sup>25</sup> 'The Family of Man: photography that united the planet—in pictures' (*The Guardian*, 6 November 2015) <<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/gallery/2015/nov/06/the-family-of-man-photography-united-the-planet-edward-steichen>> accessed on 4 June 2020.

documents, and certainly appeals to the anarchic impulse in those of us who question the hold nation-states have over our lives. There is something in Azoulay's entreaty that affirms the beauty in the teeming chaos of India with its porous borders and its unorganised ways, faced as it is today with the regularising zeal of amoral and insecure forces, maladjusted with modernity and selectively deriving from it technologies of control, environmental plunder, and capital accumulation.

When students, religious minorities and migrant workers chant in defiance, '*Hum kaagaz nahin dikhayenge*'—We will not show our documents—it is the distinct echo of that same plea against bureaucratic, documentary regimes I hear. Alas, some of us cannot resist the urge to document these historic moments. Nor can we sit by and watch the dust kicked up by hate-spewing politicians and their marauding mobs, settle without a trace.



**Fig. 2** Charred remains of scriptures at Mustafabad's Farooqia Mosque which was desecrated and set on fire by men in police uniforms. 14 mosques and Sufi shrines were targeted during the three days of violence



**Fig. 3** Burnt out remains of vehicles on Naala Road in Shiv Vihar, the locality of Northeast Delhi which witnessed the worst arson, looting and violence





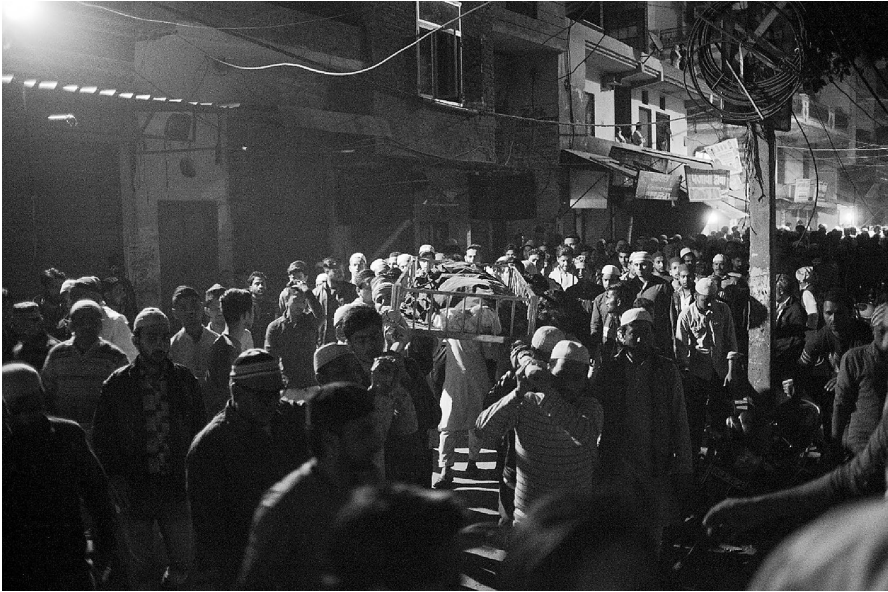
**Fig. 4** Raveena Ali Hassan, a migrant from central Uttar Pradesh, stands in the debris of what remains of her home of several years on Naala Road in Shiv Vihar. A mob looted her home of all precious belongings and then set fire to it by exploding a gas cylinder. Her daughter's sewing machine, which contributed to the family's income was among the things that were stolen



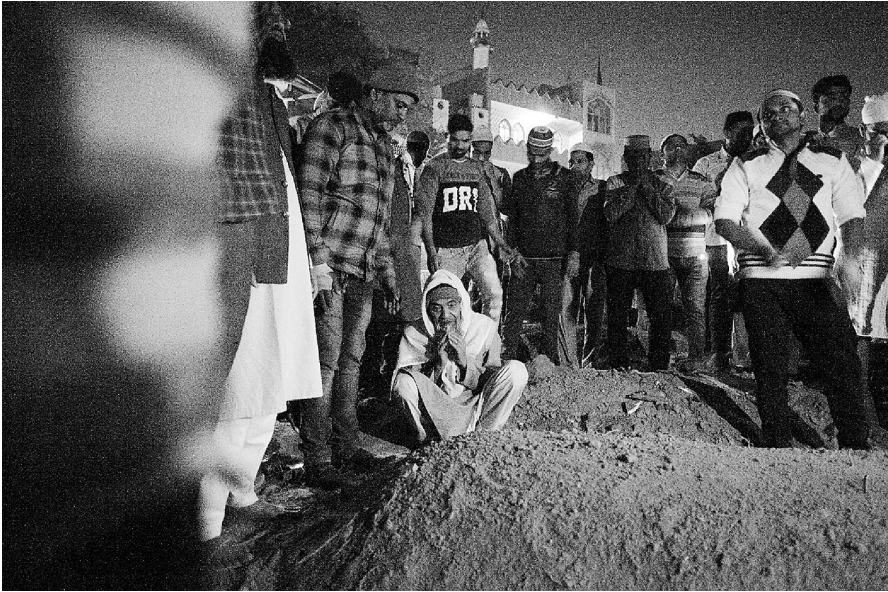
**Fig. 5** Rapid Action Force (RAF) personnel stand guard near charred remains of houses and vehicles on Naala Road in Shiv Vihar. Affected areas in Northeast Delhi fall within the jurisdiction of seven police stations which, as reports point out, received one distress call every minute on February 23 and 24 when the violence was at its worst. Yet, the forces received orders from their higher-ups to move in only by the morning of February 25



**Fig. 6** A sewage canal running parallel to Naala Road in Shiv Vihar. The network of canals revealed bodies of several victims in the days following deadly violence between February 23 and 26



**Fig. 7** A funeral procession for 35-year-old Mudassir Khan, a scrap dealer from Mustafabad. Khan had gone over to Kabir Nagar on work on February 24 and decided to spend the night at a relative's due to escalating violence. He was shot dead while making his way back home the next day



**Fig. 8** 70-year-old Hazi Mohammed Yasir prays at his son Mudassir Khan's grave. It is one of at least 13 new graves to be dug at Mustafabad's cemetery. Saud Raza, the keeper of the cemetery recalls the communal violence following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992 as the only other time when his community experienced similar trauma



**Fig. 9** A bombed out classroom at DRP Convent School in Shiv Vihar. The Delhi Minorities Commission alleges that DRP, and Rajdhani Public School adjacent to it, were taken over by armed mobs to launch attacks of Molotov cocktails from the roof. The school administration reported receiving calls from anonymous numbers threatening not to reopen their gates to students. All property within the school was stolen or vandalized during the days of the violence



**Fig. 10** Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) personnel patrolling streets around DRP Public School in Shiv Vihar on March 12, a day after it was de-sealed. Delhi Police arrested Faisal Farooq, the owner of the school, and sealed the premises for forensic examination for four days. The de-sealing sparked protests by neighbours who suffered losses during the violence



**Fig. 11** A poster on the walls of Mustafabad urging residents to boycott hatemongering television news channels. The last six years has seen a scourge of pliable media outlets towing the ruling dispensation's line, and actively participating in Islamophobic propaganda campaigns





**Fig. 12** Babu Khan breaks down as he recounts his ordeal of losing two sons on February 24 to a television news reporter outside the mortuary at Guru Tej Bahadur Hospital. His sons Amir (30) and Hashim (19) were on their way home when they were stopped by a mob that, as the post mortem reports indicated, stripped them to ascertain their religious identity before shooting, burning and mutilating them, and dumping their bodies in the sewage canal. When the police retrieved their bodies and called Babu Khan to the local station to identify them, Hindu neighbours near the crime scene told him they had witnessed the killing of his sons. But when asked if any of them would agree to testify, Khan was sure they wouldn't



**Fig. 13** Two gutted parking lots in Shiv Vihar with at least 150 completely destroyed vehicles. In tightly packed Northeast Delhi neighbourhoods, spaces come at a premium, and vehicle owners pay hefty rents for safety. Civil society members have pointed that vehicle registration and driver license databases on the web, open to free access, could be used by mobs to specifically target individuals. The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways announced shortly after the disturbing events of late February that it would partially redact names of car owners from open access records. But it maintains that the move has nothing to do with the violence



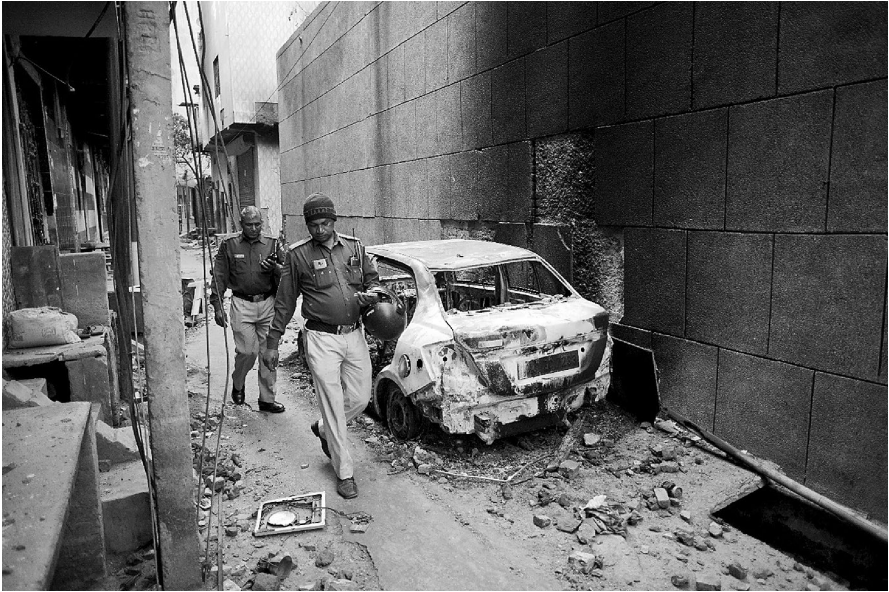
**Fig. 14** Dr Ahtesham Anwar (extreme left) and Dr Ghayarul Hasan (second from left) discuss logistics as a patient is wheeled out of Al-Hind hospital in Mustafabad. The small building became a safe haven for Muslim families during the worst days of the violence, but was overwhelmed by numbers and needs it wasn't equipped to handle. Dr Anwar's appeals for assistance fell on deaf ears for hours before the Delhi Police was directed by a midnight order from the Delhi High Court on February 26 to allow the safe passage of ambulances to ferry the dead and wounded. 'Even in war, ambulances are let through, doctors are allowed to do their work—where has humanity gone?' Anwar asked in an interview with a prominent newspaper



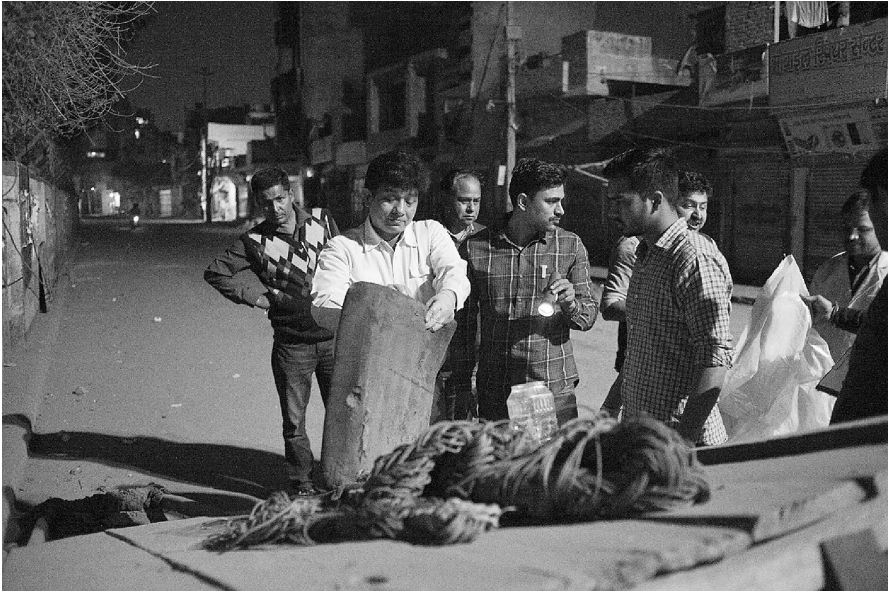
**Fig. 15** Volunteers of Aman Biradri, a civil society organization run by human rights activist Harsh Mander, arrive with food aid at Al-Hind hospital in Mustafabad on February 27. Approximately 1500 Muslim residents fleeing violence and arson in localities such as Shiv Vihar and Chand Bagh found refuge in the hospital, with relatives, and finally, at the Eidgah prayer ground which the Delhi Waqf Board opened and the Delhi government notified officially as a relief camp by March 2



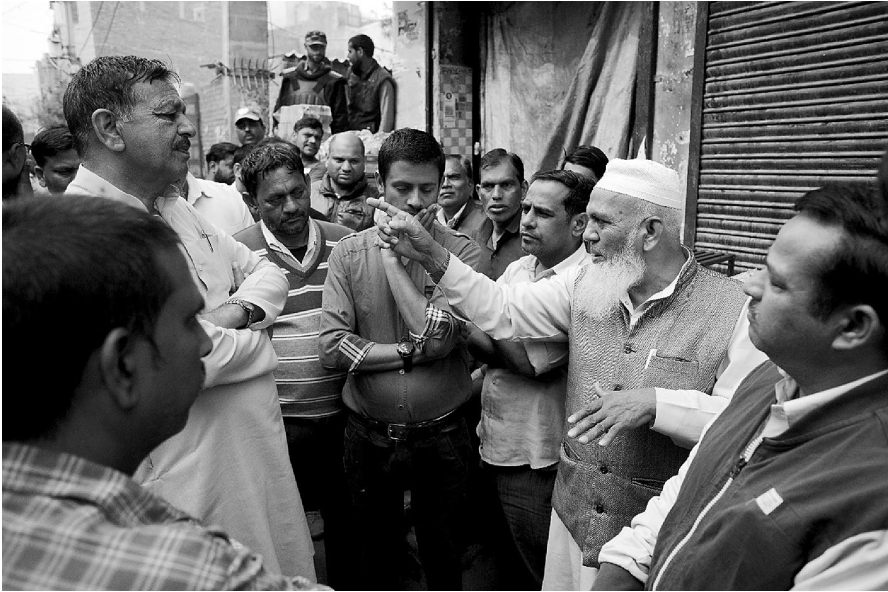
**Fig. 16** Volunteers of a private citizens' initiative distribute relief materials such as dry rations and cooking gas cylinders to the needy in Shiv Vihar. Campaigns to misrepresent and vilify such efforts have been rife on right-wing social media groups. Some Hindu neighbours in the vicinity, emboldened by the consumption of such videos, fuelled rumours that a few Muslim families were grabbing and hoarding aid material



**Fig. 17** Police constables make their way through a torched and looted alley in Shiv Vihar



**Fig. 18** Members of Delhi Police’s Crime Branch unit and the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) collect samples on February 28 from the debris and destruction left behind after the mayhem on Brijpuri main road. In the weeks following the violence, Delhi High Court had to remind the FSL to follow protocol, and match DNA samples collected from family members of those missing to bodies of victims in the morgue awaiting identification

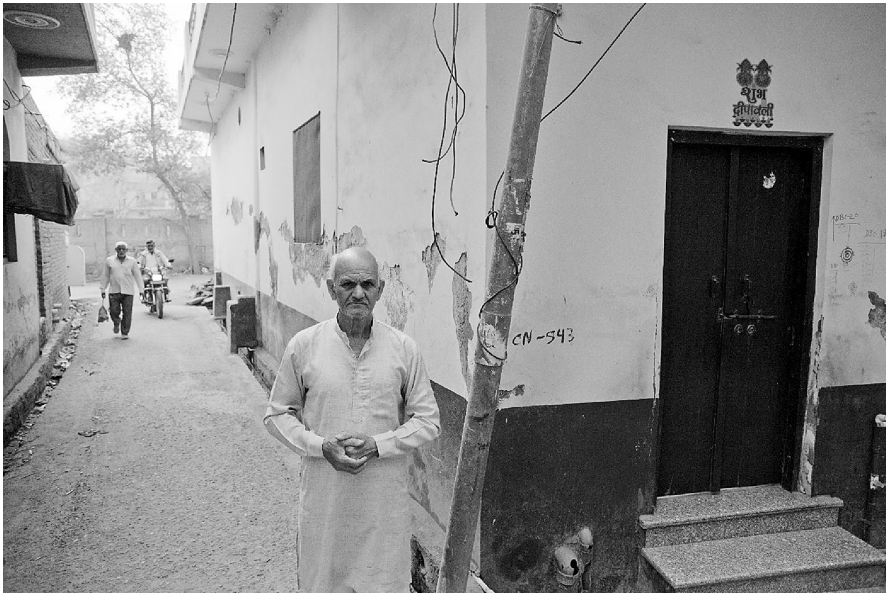


**Fig. 19** A resident of Shiv Vihar reminds Jagdish Pradhan—member of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and erstwhile Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) representing Mustafabad—that theirs is a neighbourhood where Hindus and Muslims have always lived peacefully beside each other. Pradhan was being ferried by his local representatives in Shiv Vihar, selectively meeting Hindu families who had suffered losses in the communal violence that saw a disproportionate targeting of Muslims





**Fig. 20** BJP party workers and sympathisers proudly display a young man's back to reveal a pellet injury he received during the violence of late February. In that moment set up for my camera, Mustafabad's ex-MLA Jagdish Pradhan lay a proud paternal hand on the youth's shoulder. While campaigning during the build up to the elections in Delhi, Pradhan sent out a catchy slogan to his vote-base: '*Bajrang Bali todenge Ali ki naali, Jab hoga shor Bhajpa ki jeet ka gaali, gaali*'—Hanuman will break Ali's shin when cheers of BJP's victory ring though the alleys



**Fig. 21** Premchand, part of Jagdish Pradhan's entourage and a resident of Shiv Vihar, expressed fears about being outnumbered in a largely Muslim area. 'Our little alley has only Hindu homes, and we plan to cordon off both ends of it with iron gates,' he said. A proud member of the Sangh Parivar, he had left his hometown of Meerut in 1987 during communal violence that followed soon after the unlocking of the gates of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. 'We never faced such a situation here in Delhi before,' he remarked



**Fig. 22** Mohammed Azharuddin thought his ordeal was over when he found his brother's body at Guru Teg Bahadur hospital's mortuary, four days after he had gone missing during the peak of the communal violence. Seeing him run from pillar to post to make an affidavit that would get his brother's body released, a Sikh social worker took up his cause and is seen here negotiating with police officers to expedite the release



**Fig. 23** Electric rickshaw driver Mehfouz Umar, a migrant worker from Bihar, was attacked while at work, ferrying passengers through Shiv Vihar. ‘I guess they could see that I am a Muslim from my appearance. They cracked my skull and left me for dead on the street, and burnt my rickshaw—my only source of income,’ Umar said as he got into an ambulance at Al-Hind hospital with his wife



**Fig. 24** When Mumtaz Nizami and his family fled their home in Shiv Vihar, they had to leave behind Julie, their pet. Julie sustained injuries when the house was ransacked by Hindutva mobs, but did not leave. She awaits her owners' return



**Fig. 25** In Mustafabad's burnt out Farooqia Mosque, a visitor scrolls a message on the soot covered wall: 'Sabr, inshallah hisaab hoga'—Patience, god willing there will be justice



**Fig. 26** Evening prayers at Noor Masjid in Mustafabad. Many remarked that they had never seen the mosques in the area so full before



**Fig. 27** Mehsar Jahan, a resident of Shiv Vihar, holds up her new-born grandchild at Al-Hind hospital in Mustafabad. Her daughter-in-law went into labour soon after they were dropped off at the hospital by their Hindu neighbours





**Fig. 28** Horses for hire at weddings, tied up along the banks of a sewage canal near Shiv Vihar in North-east Delhi

**Publisher's Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.