

India: In Uttar Pradesh, Dalits and Muslims must endure caste hatred, state bloodletting, denial of justice

Sunday 26 November 2017, by [Karwan e Mohabbat](#) (Date first published: 26 November 2017).

Some have given up hope, Karwan e Mohabbat found, but others remain defiant.

Contents

- [Caste oppression](#)
- [Official bloodletting](#)
- [Losing hope](#)

On September 11, Karwan e Mohabbat regrouped in Tilak Vihar, Delhi, where widows of the 1984 Sikh massacre were settled more than three decades ago, and set off to its next destination. We reached Kandla in Uttar Pradesh's Shamli district past midnight. It's a Muslim-majority town, settled by a few thousand people who were displaced by the Muzaffarnagar carnage of 2013 and not allowed to return to their homes.

Kandla made national headlines last year when the local MP, Hukam Singh of the Bharatiya Janata Party, alleged the rise in the town's Muslim population had precipitated an exodus of its Hindu residents. Given this communal stereotyping of a town that gave refuge to internally displaced people, we felt Kandla was a fitting place for the Karwan to spend the night. We were put up in a madrassa.

The next morning, we visited Shabirpur in Saharanpur district, about 150 km from Delhi. In this village, the Dalits had decided to erect a statue of Bhimrao Ambedkar at a Ravidas temple, on land owned by the community. They pooled money, built a tall platform and made preparations to install the statue, ordered in Saharanpur, on Ambedkar's birth anniversary on April 14.

In the meantime, the BJP swept to power in Uttar Pradesh and an ugly rumbling started in Shabirpur's upper caste Rajput enclave. The Rajputs objected to the tall platform and even more to Ambedkar's statue pointing towards the road they too use. "It is our government now," they are reported to have said, and the Dalits needed to be reminded of their place. The Dalits protested that they had legal title to the temple land, and it was for them to decide whose statue they wished to install on it and how. The administration intervened, asking the Dalits to apply for permission, which they then withheld, and the anniversary passed without statue being mounted.

Caste oppression

On May 5, the Rajput villagers celebrated Maharana Pratap Jayanti, the birth anniversary of the 16th century Rajput ruler of Mewar, with unprecedented pomp, taking out a procession with loudspeakers blaring music. The sullen Dalits went to the police station. "If we need permission to

install a statue on our own land, they need permission to play a DJ on a public road,” they complained, referring to the loud music. The police concurred, and ordered the loudspeakers to be disconnected.

The Rajputs took this as an insult. They called their caste kin from many surrounding villages and, riding motor cycles and cars, descended on the Dalit enclave. Shouting insulting slogans, they attacked women and men with daggers and swords, and vandalised homes, setting fire to over 30 of them. The Rajputs prevented fire engines from reaching the burning houses by blocking the approach road with their tractors and cars. The police stood by watching for five hours.

Four months later, we found the Dalits enraged, economically distressed, but proud of their fury and resistance. Most of them are landless, and earlier found work in the fields and brick kilns owned by the upper castes. But they are now unemployed as the Rajputs have declared an economic boycott and banned hiring of the Dalits. The government paid Rs 25,000 to each Dalit household but withheld further grants, claiming it does not have the money. Although a few Rajput attackers have been arrested, the police have charged the Dalits, especially their vocal leaders, with graver crimes and many Dalits are in jail.

The Dalits have been oppressed for centuries, rare moments of resistance by them firmly and cruelly crushed. But the Dalits of Shabirpur we found unbent. They have renounced the Hindu faith and converted en masse to Buddhism. Jai Bhim is their call to battle, with even children wearing Jai Bhim lockets. At our meeting with the villagers, the women were the most vocal in expressing their defiance, not hesitating to speak publicly of assaults on their bodies, crimes that the police continue to ignore.

A few Karwan members went to speak to the Rajputs. They were contemptuous of the Dalits, claiming they had set their own houses on fire for state compensation. Asked if they had injured themselves as well, they did not answer. But there was no remorse.

Official bloodletting

Our second day in Shamli we met the victims of another kind of violence Muslims in western Uttar Pradesh have been suffering since the Adityanath government took office early this year. It is not unusual for front pages of local newspapers to carry sensationalist banner headlines about “dreaded criminals” killed or injured in dramatic shootouts with the police. BBC counts 433 such encounters between March and October this year, an astounding one every 12 hours since Adityanath came to power. It does not ring strange to the media, which uncritically publishes police versions of these encounters, that the slain men are almost always Muslim. It also does not worry them that most men killed or injured in the encounters are either petty criminals or have no criminal records at all; nothing seems amiss even though policemen only ever report receiving light injuries, usually to shoulder or arms, in the shootouts.

The Karwan met a family that has fallen victim to this state violence, but I won’t name them lest they get into trouble with the police. Their son, a young man in his 20s with no criminal record, was taken away by the police along with a friend from his village but their detention was not entered in official records. The two men were taken to sugarcane fields one night and told to run. They were terrified but refused, fearing the police would shoot them in the back. The police then laid them down in a field, and shot them in their ankles, knees and elbows. This, we are told, is the standard practice; most victims of the encounters are not killed but shot in ways that disables them for life.

The next day, the police announced – and the newspapers dutifully reported – that the two young

men were dangerous criminals. When the police had found them, they tried to run away, firing. In self-defence, the police shot them. No one asked how the men could have been shot with such accuracy in their ankles and knees while they were fleeing through fields of tall sugarcane on a dark night.

Their son is now in jail, the family said, and experiences constant, unbearable pain. They are day labourers and have spent their entire savings on medicines for their son. They don't have money left to hire a lawyer. They fear their son may never be able to walk again. More worryingly, he may never be able to prove his innocence.

Cases like this are not unusual in Adityanath's Uttar Pradesh; official bloodletting is common. In the run-up to last Assembly election, the BJP and its ideological parent, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, spread the story that Muslims were responsible for rising crime in western Uttar Pradesh, especially after the Muslims displaced by the Muzaffarnagar carnage moved to towns and villages dominated by their community. A series of reports about Muslim men, all "dreaded criminals", being shot by the police gives public credence to the communal stereotyping of Muslims as the region's main criminals, and projects the BJP government led by the strongman Adityanath as one with the resolve to end the alleged appeasement of Muslims by previous governments and crack down on "criminal elements".

Muslims of western Uttar Pradesh were already fearful of getting lynched. Today, there is even greater fear of being dubbed criminals and shot one dark night.

Losing hope

The Karwan's next place of the pilgrimage was the home of an old man, who lost his son to a mob in 2013, in Khurgaon village, Shamli. The old man, his face lined with suffering, was expecting the Karwan. Yet, when we arrived, he was frightened to speak. We did not press him, only explaining as gently as we could why we had come. After a while he was reassured.

He wept as he spoke of the wounds of a father who does not know who killed his son and despairs of ever getting justice. His son Mohammad Salim, recently married, had gone with a friend to neighbouring Haryana, perhaps to trade in cattle. At the time, the Samajwadi Party was in power in Uttar Pradesh and the Congress in Haryana. News came, not from the police but from his companion that a mob of at least nine men had fallen upon the young man. He was badly injured when they found him. They took him to a private hospital, but Salim could not be saved.

The police did not conduct a postmortem and handed the body to the family for burial. But following public pressure on the state administration, the body was exhumed over a week later and sent for postmortem. "Kabar phad diya," the heartbroken father recalled. They tore open his grave.

He is tormented by the thought that pulling his son's body out of his resting place may trouble him in the afterlife. He had consented to the exhumation only in the hope justice would follow. Yet, he hasn't even been given a copy of the postmortem report. When the Karwan enquired later, we found the police had quietly closed the case, claiming they could not find the killers.

"I just want to know how my son died," the old man wept, adding "Maine sabar kar liya." I have decided to endure. Endure what? The loss of a son to a violent mob, not even knowing why and how it happened. Accepting that justice will never be done. We said we felt broken that he should fall so deep into despair and assured him of help in his fight for justice.

He replied that if anyone could help him to just see his son's postmortem report, he would go to jannat. Heaven for a piece of official paper he should have received as a matter of right.

Karwan e Mohabbat

P.S.

*

<https://scroll.in/article/857879/in-uttar-pradesh-dalits-and-muslims-must-endure-caste-hatred-state-blame-letting-denial-of-justice>

* This is the sixth article in a series on Karwan e Mohabbat, a civil society initiative to reach out to the victims of communal, caste and gender violence across India.

We welcome your comments at letters@scroll.in.