

# Crimes against humanity on Temple R

THE PARTITION OF INDIA UNLEASHED THE most diabolical urges that can beset human beings. It is wrong, however, to believe that the crimes committed against humanity in those days were the work of entire communities. There were on both sides decent people who never approved of targeting innocent people from the other community and those actually involved justified their actions as self-defence.

Two incidents from those fateful days have continued to haunt the people of Mozang living between Safaanwala Chowk and Bhoondpura Chowk on Temple Road. I remember first listening to the stories from my mother when I was a child. She kept going back to them until she passed away on 16 February, 1990, here in a suburb of Sollentuna, Greater Stockholm, where we have settled. The last time I heard them from some native of Mozang was when I met the late Saleem Shahid, a noted Punjabi poet, in London in May 2002 on the occasion of the annual World Punjabi Congress organised by poet Fakhar Zaman.

The first incident took place on 12 August 1947. A big, hefty Sikh came riding a motorcycle down Temple Road. As he approached Chowk Bhoondpura, some local hoodlums prepared to attack him. Then noticing that he carried a gun, they quickly dispersed. Half an hour later, another Sikh, this time an aged, emaciated carpenter, came down the same route riding a dingy, old bicycle. Like most day workers he was carrying his afternoon meal wrapped up in a cloth, called *potli* in Punjabi parlance, which was tied to the handle of

his bike. He seemed to be on his way to work as usual, oblivious of the political upheaval going on at that time. The same roughnecks pounced upon him. One of them stabbed him. He screamed and tried to run away. Seeing a tonga nearby, he tried to climb on to it. The tonga-driver kicked him and he fell to the ground. His assailants now caught up with him and dealt him some more blows. He died screaming for help and mercy.

The second incident concerns the attack on the famous Sikh shrine of Chaveen Badshahi near the Mozang police station on 13 August. My younger brother, Zubair, interviewed on 2 and 25 February, 2000, the man who led the assault — Mujahid Tajdin. This is what he had to say:

"At the time of partition of India, I was living in Mozang. Being inquisitive by nature, I used to visit Hindu temples, Sikh gurdawaras, Christian churches, besides praying five times a day at the mosque. I wanted to know how people belonging to other religions, lived and preached their faiths in their places of worship. I was also a very devout and active member of the Khaksar movement.

"When the call was given to create an Islamic state, to be called Pakistan, many of us were fascinated by the idea. Lahore soon became a battleground between Muslims on one hand and Hindus and Sikhs on the other. The Hindu Rashtriya Swainsevak Sangh exploded bombs in several parts of Lahore, including one in Mozang in early August. We, for our part, mainly used petrol to set fire to Hindu and Sikh properties.

## COMMENT



ISHTIAQ AHMED

*"We were told that Pakistan would be an Islamic state where the nizam (system) ordained by Allah and his Prophet (peace be upon him) would be revived. Once Pakistan came into being, I, like many others, began anxiously to await the revival of the true and just Islamic order. I was particularly hopeful during the period of General Ayub Khan"*

"Soon, Lahore was full of Muslim refugees from East Punjab who told us harrowing tales of brutalities committed against them by Sikhs and Hindus. There prevailed the fear that Muslims might be driven out of Lahore. So we took steps to protect the Muslims of Mozang from an attack.

"On the 26<sup>th</sup> of Ramadan (13 August) we stormed the Sikh temple. I entered the temple with five others by scaling its high wall. We gave a *lalkar* (battle cry), challenging the Sikhs to step out. Nobody responded. It was pitch dark. We broke open the front door and entered the temple. The Sikhs had splashed hot *kaura tel* (mustard oil) on the floor making it slippery and difficult for us to walk on. As one of us struck a matchstick, the oil caught fire.

"I took *qabza* (possession) of the main *takht* (a long bench). There were 25 to 30 of us altogether. We were shouting 'Pakistan Zindabad' (Long Live Pakistan) and challenging the Sikhs. Suddenly, one of them appeared from under the *takht* holding a *talwar* (sword) in his hand. He aimed a blow at me, hitting my hand. I received a deep gash on the wrist but succeeded in snatching the sword from his hand and killed him.

"By now, a number of people had entered the *gurdawara*. The Sikhs came out of their hidings and a hand-to-hand combat went on for some time in the darkness. *Talwars*, *churas* (long knives) and *dandas* (heavy clubs) were used. Then some pistol shots were fired and someone started a fire using petrol. I believe, Malik Maqsood, the *thanedar* (station house officer) had provided the petrol to

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25/07/04

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someone in our group. I was myself unaware of it. There were 20 to 30 Sikh men and women in the temple. All of them perished in the inferno. From our side, we lost Naseer.

"We were told that Pakistan would be an Islamic state where the *nizam* (system) ordained by Allah and his Prophet (peace be upon him) would be revived. Once Pakistan came into being, I, like many others, began anxiously to await the revival of the true and just Islamic order. I was particularly hopeful during the period of General Ayub Khan that things would change. I wrote to him and to the Punjab governor, Nawab Amir Mohammad Khan of Kalabagh, and became very close to them. Later, I pinned my hopes on General Zia-ul-Haq. I also wrote letters to the Shah of Iran and several other Muslim rulers of the world in the hope that they will do something for the glory of Islam and the uplift of Muslims.

"In 1968, I went with a delegation from Pakistan to attend the *urs* (annual religious festival) of Hadrat Nizamuddin Aulia at Delhi. At the border Sikhs welcomed us. They had brought us some fruit. Each of us got two oranges and an apple. In Delhi, a Hindu who used to live in Anarkali, Lahore, recognised me. He was very kind and offered his help and services in case I needed something. Anything."

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