# Urban Marginalisation, Exclusion and Education

## The Widows' Colony in Delhi

*Yamini Agarwal**

Within cities across the world, communal violence has often led to the formation of neighbourhoods segregated on religious lines. Colonies identified by the religion of its residents are now found in Indian metropolises such as Ahmedabad, Mumbai and New Delhi, occupied mainly by the Muslims who were pushed involuntarily to these spaces after decades of sociopolitical marginalisation and targeted communal violence. Due to their identification with the religious identity of its residents, these colonies faced systematic state neglect and lack of infrastructural development pushing them further towards spatial stigmatisation and social segregation (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012; Mahadevia 2002).[1] Given their specific context, these spaces are identified in both academic literature and policy papers as 'ghettos', pointing in turn to the many stigmas attached to them. These neighbourhoods are part of a city but 'insulated' and 'do not benefit from the same kind of attention from the state as other parts of the city' (Jaffrelot and Thomas 2012: 70). Tellingly, they lack state-run schools, colleges, technical institutions, healthcare amenities and other basic facilities like sanitation and water (Jaffrelot and Thomas 2012: 70).

This chapter examines the many exclusions and marginalities faced by residents of one such neighbourhood in New Delhi called Tilak Vihar. The context of this West Delhi space is distinct from other neighbourhoods that are formed as a result of communal violence. Tilak Vihar is a Sikh neighbourhood of nearly 1,000 families headed by the widows of those men who were killed in the 1984

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anti-Sikh violence in Delhi. It is important to emphasise here that Tilak Vihar is not a self-segregated space. Tilak Vihar was demarcated *by the state* in order to rehabilitate women who lost their husbands in the 1984 violence and were hence displaced. This segregated space then came to be characterised by the gendered identity of the women living here who are widowed – an identity seen as both tragic and deviant and a status that is deeply stigmatised especially in the Indian context.[2] Since then, despite the world-class status that Delhi has gone on to acquire and the marked development of its surrounding neighbourhoods, Tilak Vihar remains a neglected and dilapidated space.

In this chapter, I begin by explaining the context of the 1984 anti-Sikh violence, followed by the journey of the making of Tilak Vihar as it stands today, exploring the characteristics that make it a unique but a deeply stigmatised space in a metropolis. This is followed by the examination of the educational and occupational journeys of the children of the survivors of the violence settled here in order to understand their long-drawn, everyday struggles and the challenges posed specifically by being a part of this neighbourhood. I then look at the role of non-government community organisations here which have taken on a greater role in the absence of the state. The final section reflects on the lack of opportunities available to the residents of Tilak Vihar due to the active gender and class continuum, the missing state and, ironically, even the larger Sikh community's neglect. Thus, while statistically the Sikhs continue to do well in education, families such as those in Tilak Vihar have lagged behind in access to basic development resources.[3]

## The 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots

Despite unfolding around 40 ago, the 1984 anti-Sikh violence continues to be a memory of loss and agony for the Sikhs. This is especially since the state failed to bring the perpetrators to justice (Mander 2010: 59). On 31 October 1984, Indira Gandhi, the then prime minister of India, was shot dead by her two Sikh bodyguards. Unprecedented violence followed, directed at the Sikh community. Events in the state of Punjab and nationally preceding the riots, such as the demand for a separate Sikh state, Operation Blue Star and the rise and fall of Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, were seen as having led up both to the assassination of the prime minister and to the violence directed at the community (for more on Operation Blue Star and Bhindranwale, see Gill and Singhal 1984 and Talbot 2007).

Various reports, commissions and individual accounts have since then detailed the facts of the violence and captured the nature of the killings. While there is

no official death toll, it is estimated that more than 3,000 turbaned Sikh men and boys (identified by their turbans) lost their lives during the three days of violence (PUDR & PUCL 1985; *Report of the Citizens' Commission* 1985). The killings were organised and brutal – there were no 'boundaries of rationality' as Sikh males were 'administered death in a particular, stylized way; they were caught by the crowd, had their skulls cracked before being burnt' (Spencer 2004: 475).

Several middle-class colonies where the Sikhs had settled after the partition of India were targeted. The worst affected areas were the resettlement or *jhuggi-jhompri* colonies across Delhi, home to lower-caste, working-class Sikhs settlements. These included Trilokpuri, Sultanpuri, Shahdara, Nand Nagri and Nangloi (Kothari and Sethi 1985; Rao, Ghose and Pancholi 1985). Gurdwaras and Sikh properties were looted and burnt indiscriminately. A large number of women were also subjected to violence, mainly in the form of sexual assault which went unreported despite their alleged large number (Chakravarti 2005). By 4 November 1984, the army had been called into Delhi to end the carnage. The role of the state and the police in supporting the violence have been made public in the reports of many commissions since then (Thapar 1984: 1895; Ramdas 2005).

While studies have been able to establish the immediate suffering of the survivors – mainly women – little is known about their struggles to reconstruct their lives, especially of those resettled in Tilak Vihar (Chakravarti and Haskar 1987; Das 1990; Harlock 2007). They have since then remained a hidden community both spatially and socially, only occasionally finding space in academia. In that regard, the fact that feminist scholarship on Indian partition and women's voices found ground much later highlights how often their experiences are invalidated (Menon and Bhasin 2000). Yet their voices present subjectivities that are lost in the top-down perspectives on violence, ignoring the constant and unrelentless pursuit of normalcy by survivors. In the case of partition, scholarly focus on the agency of women in its aftermath, on the nature of the state and community and continuing deprivation, gained attention much later but has been able to highlight their long-drawn struggles both within and outside homes. As Robinson notes, 'Narratives of survivors certainly turn again and again to the role played by riots in depressing fortunes, changing around priorities, fracturing aspirations, fostering vulnerability and infusing instability' (2005: 100). In this chapter, I use the narratives of the survivors to unpack the long-term marginalisation and exclusions in education and negotiations they make to reorganise their lives in this unique urban neighbourhood.

## The Study

The study was carried out from September 2013 to June 2014 and, later, in 2016. The first step was an ethnography of Tilak Vihar, which included visits to the colony and interviews with non-governmental organisations (NGO) members and local stakeholders based within and outside the neighbourhood. Following this, in-depth interviews were conducted with seven then-child survivors (six female and one male) of the violence in order to map their life histories, especially after the 1984 violence and the challenges they faced in raising their families.

Five of the seven participants were residents of Tilak Vihar and two resided in better neighbourhoods of Delhi. The latter provide a glimpse of alternate trajectories of their lives after violence in contrast with those who lived in Tilak Vihar. From these accounts of education and occupations of the children of survivors, I show that the neighbourhood plays a key role in access to opportunities for better life chances. The stigma attached to Tilak Vihar, its inhabitants' identities as survivors of 1984 and residents of this neighbourhood, and the complex sociopolitical goals of the larger Sikh community hinder the development of both the neighbourhood and the women-led households here. I employ the theoretical perspectives of social closure and social exclusion to examine the stigmatisation and marginality in terms of opportunities available to the women and their families. Closure theory can unravel the 'power and domination' existent in a larger society that hinges on the ability of certain groups to access social and economic opportunities (Murphy 1988).[4] Within a specific place, closure theory can point to the marginalities and lack of mobility in a particular neighbourhood. Ascribed with the identity of being a resident of a certain space, people living in such neighbourhoods are often denied similar opportunities available to their counterparts in better areas. This has a long-drawn impact on their lives as they are prevented from achieving their full socio-economic potential. The category of social exclusion – earlier understood only in terms of poverty – is useful to examine ways in which residents of these spaces are caught in a vicious cycle of capability deprivation, lack of social and economic opportunities, political isolation, and the like (Kabeer 2000; Sen 2000).

## The Widows' Colony

Tilak Vihar lies about 4 kilometres away from the main market of Tilak Nagar in West Delhi. The colony falls under the jurisdiction of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). Before the 1984 anti-Sikh violence, the then Delhi government built the colony to house its Class IV government employees.[5] It comprises

three-storey buildings of one-BHK (bedroom, hall, kitchen) homes. Around three to four months after the carnage, nearly 1,000 widows were moved to Tilak Vihar with their families as many had lost their homes and livelihoods. The colony was renamed the Tilak Vihar Widows' Rehabilitation Colony and houses were allocated to women whose husbands had been killed.[6] Families whose male members had been injured were allocated housing in a different block in the neighbourhood. This pattern had changed by the time of the fieldwork, with many families having moved homes within the colony itself.

By the time the women and their families were resettled in Tilak Vihar, the larger neighbourhood of Tilak Nagar (of which Tilak Vihar is a part) was already dominated by upper-middle-class (mostly business families) and middle-class Sikhs.[7] Towards the end of 2019, which was my last visit to Tilak Vihar, Tilak Nagar itself was a bustling neighbourhood with markets, upscale malls and a metro station. It was well connected with other parts of the city. Many upper-middle-class Sikh families, politicians and businessmen resided in and around the neighbourhood.

Members of many relief organisations recalled during interviews that the resettlement of the widows in 1985 was carried out by the government under political pressure and as a face-saving exercise since it had failed to contain the violence. In fact, no other Indian government has responded to communal violence by marking a rehabilitation space for survivors. Hence, Muslim survivors of violence in Gujarat and Mumbai were forced to live together in a common space due to the long-standing structural and political discrimination (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012: 1–22). However, after the 1984 violence, it was the then government which segregated the women in Tilak Vihar, leading to the creation of the 'colony of widows'.

Tilak Vihar is unlike ghettoised spaces seen in other urban areas. In urban sociology, 'ghettos' are generally understood as involuntary spaces where people of certain races or ethnicities are pushed to live together. This could be because of many state-sponsored exclusions that force people with an identifiable characteristic (race or religion) to involuntarily share a space (Marcuse 1997). These eventually take shape to become spaces of extreme stigmatisation. The systemic deprivation of development by state or private forces means that ghettos lack infrastructure and facilities otherwise common in cities, and this spatial exclusion results in the further closure of opportunities for people living here, thereby curtailing their chances of social mobility.[8]

However, a space formed in the aftermath of communal violence is a complex one and needs to be unpacked to study the distinct exclusions that it produces.

Some of the characteristics of such neighbourhoods have been identified by Gayer and Jaffrelot, including their involuntary nature and domination by minority populations (2012: 21).[9] These characteristics are what shape post-violence neighbourhoods into ghettos and mark the closure of their residents from socio-economic opportunities. Gayer and Jaffrelot (2012: 21) used these characteristics as analytical tools to examine Juhapura, a Muslim-dominated locality in Ahmedabad, as mentioned earlier. I employ these characteristics to examine Tilak Vihar as follows, even though the neighbourhood holds a significantly different meaning for the Sikh community and the households here are led by women, which produce specific gendered marginalisation as discussed later.

Gayer and Jaffrelot noted that neighbourhoods formed as a direct result of communal violence are defined by the absence of public facilities (2012: 22). In Tilak Vihar, many such facilities are seen to be lacking. There is no proper drainage or sewage system; illegal water and electricity connections are common. The houses are in a dilapidated condition but families have extended their original one-BHK houses to accommodate additional members, albeit without necessary authorisation. Infrastructure is poor – the roads and by-lanes narrow, unclean and ill-maintained. The lack of these facilities and the absence of state interventions in rectifying the issues are keenly felt in the colony even though the overt presence of the state is symbolised by a police station located by the entrance to the neighbourhood. Such spaces do not benefit from state attention in the same way as other parts of the city (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012). Nowhere is this more evident than in Tilak Vihar. Behind Delhi's world-class reputation, the colony has faced neglect by the state while surrounding areas have been intensely developed by the public and private sectors alike.

Post-violence neighbourhoods are also insulated from the rest of the city. In the context of Juhapura, Gayer and Jaffrelot (2012) pointed out that this insulation does not arise from walls being built to divide ghettos, but from the lack of city bus services. Hence, residents rely on private modes of transportation which are expensive. In Tilak Vihar, too, there are no state-run bus services, and one must walk or use other means to get to the main road in order to access any form of transportation. It is important to note here that a ghetto is always located on the margins of a city where their presence is likely to go unnoticed. Tilak Vihar is similarly a hidden colony, locked between other bustling West Delhi neighbourhoods.

The spatial distribution of schools, lack of adequate numbers of educational institutions and prevalence of community-run schools and educational initiatives are a norm here (Gayer and Jaffrelot 2012). At the time of my study, there was

only one private, low-fee, unrecognised school within the colony, compared to a total of 24 schools listed in Tilak Nagar – of which four were private, offering education up to secondary level. Seven senior secondary schools were mentioned – four aided and three unaided. There were also 13 MCD schools in Tilak Nagar – nine of them primary aided schools and three primary unaided schools. One was listed as a nursery school under the jurisdiction of the MCD.[10] In Tilak Vihar, on the contrary, the Sikhs had established a school in 1995 with the aim to cater to the families of survivors and provide them with free, 'private' education. A tuition centre and a playschool were also located within the neighbourhood, run independently by Sikh organisations.

Many identities resonate with such neighbourhoods beyond that of being victims of communal violence. In Juhapura, for example, this is emphasised with reference to the religious identity of its nearly 300,000 residents, leading to it being commonly identified as 'little Pakistan' (Jaffrelot and Thomas 2012: 68). Tilak Vihar was largely known as the 'widows' colony', with the religious identity of widows having taken a backseat to this gendered identity. Another common reference was the 'prostitutes' colony', in reference to the single women here who did not remarry and thus seen as deviant. During the fieldwork, I was asked by one of the participants to leave by early evening for reasons of safety. These had only led to deep spatial stigma for the residents along with other overt and covert discriminations they suffered.

Over the years, Tilak Vihar has also acquired certain characteristics of its own. Many social problems and crimes were regularly reported. Drug usage and domestic abuse were mentioned as common problems, indicating that many families are dysfunctional (Chakravarti and Haskar 1987; Chakravarti 1994; Das 1990). Unemployment was rampant and residents were mainly employed in low-paid, unskilled jobs.[11] Chief occupations among the children of the widows were autorickshaw and bus drivers, small kiosk owners and lower-level government employees. Many widows worked as domestic help in the wealthy homes of Tilak Nagar in order to sustain their growing families. Other widows who were given government jobs after the violence as compensation had retired on pensions.

Some families who had managed to gather some money had left the colony and settled in nearby areas to avoid being identified as residents of Tilak Vihar.[12] In turn, a number of 'outsiders' had moved to the colony – mainly those looking for cheaper accommodation than is available in and around Tilak Nagar. Land prices, which shot up significantly in neighbouring colonies, remained stagnant in Tilak Vihar, indicating the lack of development over the years. Residents blamed the state, arguing that the different political parties viewed them only

as vote banks, and pointed to the promises and subsequent failures of successive central and state governments to better their conditions and deliver adequate infrastructure and employment.

Due to these stigmas and taboos attached to the colony, women had developed a sense of foreboding and believed that living in Tilak Vihar meant a 'future of crisis' (Arif 2016: 117). Many wished to leave but could not due to lack of money. In this sense, there was an awareness that a future had to be negotiated within this space, with all constraints and as a battle against multiple vulnerabilities – but one fought alongside people who shared the same history, collective scars and trauma. It was in Tilak Vihar that the memories of the violence were kept alive while others with better social and economic capital moved on.

## Marginalisation and Exclusion in Education

An important indicator of the long-drawn impact of violence on its survivors is reflected in their education, which suffers due to trauma and loss of home and livelihood. In earlier research, I had shown that school-going survivors of the 1984 anti-Sikh riots suffered a break in their education (Agarwal 2017). As they lost their fathers and were left with mothers who either went to work or were traumatised by the violence, many young Sikh girls were forced to drop out of schools and look after their younger siblings. Others were pushed into early marriages, which was seen as a way to secure their futures. Most were married to non-literate, unemployed men, and instead of having their futures secured, they returned with their husbands to their mothers in Tilak Vihar and continued to fend for their growing families.

Given the specific constraints of the neighbourhood, along with the limited educational opportunities it provides, I present as follows the education and occupational choices of the 17 children of the 5 survivor participants from Tilak Vihar. From interviews with them, I show that Tilak Vihar offered only limited educational options and, consecutively, limited chances of social mobility. A general sense of failure prevailed among children in the neighbourhood, where post-school opportunities were only seen as available in the informal economy and, hence, not worthy of schooling. Drop-outs were common. Gender, the social class of the families and their identity as victims of 1984 intersected with the education of the children of survivors. I contrast these later with the choices and educational journeys of the four children of the two survivors who lived in other neighbourhoods of Delhi.

There was a total of 21 children among the 7 survivors' families – 13 male and 8 female. Five male children were 6–14 years of age (see Table 12.1).

**Table 12.1**  Children of the survivors

| Children | Male | Female | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Currently enrolled** | | | |
| Upper primary | 4 | 0 | 4 |
| Secondary | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| BA* | 1 | 4 | 5 |
| BCom | 2[†] | 0 | 2 |
| **Drop-out** | | | |
| Secondary | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| Total | 13 | 8 | 21 |

*Source*: Collated by the author based on fieldwork.
*Note*: (*a*) *All children who completed senior secondary went on to pursue graduation, though all of them were correspondence students. (*b*) [†]These two also pursued a year-long diploma in tourism and ticketing from a private institute.

In the 15–18 age groups, there were 1 male child and 3 females. Seven males and five females were aged 19 years and above. The oldest among the male children was 24 years old while the youngest was 9. The oldest among female was 27 and the youngest 16. All children had been enrolled in schools, but at the time of the interviews, six were in school and eight had discontinued at different stages of schooling. Seven completed senior secondary and were pursuing graduation via correspondence.

The women survivors in Tilak Vihar were keen to educate their children, recalling times when they were forced to abandon their own schooling. Having lived through, in the words of Anmol Kaur (47), 'the consequences of illiteracy and economic vulnerability', the mothers wanted their children to be able to access continuous and quality education. They reflected on education as enabling and specifically securing their daughters' futures against uncertainty. Parmeet Kaur (46) said:

> I am again searching for a job. I have always lived in uncertainty. My mother regrets forcing me to drop out of school in 1985 to get married. I felt if my daughters could have a good education, they would not have to run from pillar to post struggling to make ends meet like I am doing even now.

Daughters' education was also linked to the idea of status and better marriages. Chaman Kaur (49) added:

> I was uneducated, so I was married to an uneducated man. Look at my life now. I tell her [Chaman Kaur's daughter] about my life, my struggles. I try to encourage her to study, work hard and stand on her own feet. At least she should have a good marriage.

Despite these aspirations, women in Tilak Vihar had limited means which constrained their choice of schools for their own children. As mentioned earlier, there was only one senior secondary government school near the colony that students could walk to. This was the preferred option for survivor families who lived on limited means and one income. Anmol Kaur mentioned that while her daughters studied at this government school, they won scholarships from a Sikh NGO each year: 'It lessened my burden towards their books, stationery and other needs.' Gurpreet Kaur (49) mentioned that access to government schools was easier given the financial constraints on the families. Thanks to the government school, she says: 'I have some hope that my youngest son will be able to complete his education. I know that education from a private school is considered more worthy these days. But for us, this school is the only hope.'[13]

Due to their own lack of education and stable employment, and with husbands who were either unemployed or drug addicts, mothers in Tilak Vihar were in charge of their children's education. As they were either occupied with work or did not have networks to help them plan and choose schools for their children, most women chose the most accessible option in the colony: the nearest government school. Admission here was easier compared to low-fee private or unaided private schools around the area, for which the survivors I interviewed said they had neither the time nor finances. Anmol Kaur said:

> I used to leave for work early in the morning and taking leave was not an option. One day, I just went a little late to work and got my eldest daughter admitted to this government school. I did the same for my second daughter and for the youngest, my older one helped in the process in the same school.

As shown in Table 12.2, 16 out of the 21 children were admitted to the government school in Tilak Vihar from primary level. Five children – all male – were enrolled in unaided co-educational schools from the primary level. Four of the five were the two sons each of Samar Singh (46) and Gurleen Kaur (54), who were not residents of Tilak Vihar. The remaining child (the younger son of Navdeep Kaur, living in Tilak Vihar) was nine years old at the time of the study. He had been admitted to the Sikh-managed unaided school in Tilak Vihar after getting

**Table 12.2**  Schools enrolled into by stage/level

| Schools | Primary (1–5) | | Middle (6–8) | | Secondary (9–10) | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | |
| Government* | 8 | 8 | – | – | – | – | 16 |
| Private† | 5 | 0 | – | – | – | – | 5 |
| Shift from government/private to Sikh-managed (private) | 4 | 0 | 2 | – | 1 | – | 7 |

*Source*: Collated by the author based on fieldwork.
*Note*: (*a*) *Includes children studying or who studied in government schools. (*b*) †Includes children studying or who studied in private schools

a fee waiver. Navdeep Kaur (47) stated that she chose the school only because of fee concession. The establishment of a Sikh-managed private school in Tilak Vihar, purportedly to support local families, opened doors to better educational prospects. Over time, several families shifted their children to the school, which offered fee waivers only to those whose families had suffered in the violence. Seven sons of the participating survivors from Tilak Vihar were subsequently moved to this school. However, the fee waiver did not cover other school expenses (such as stationery and uniforms), for which many relied on additional aid from NGOs working in the neighbourhood. Participants underscored that admission to this school was not easy for them. They had to clear many administrative hurdles to secure admission even though the school had been opened specifically to address the educational needs of those living in Tilak Vihar. Navdeep Kaur said she had to wait four years for her son to be accepted, which he spent studying at an unaided, low-fee school in the colony.

Despite economic vulnerabilities, experience of violence and living in a neighbourhood that offered limited educational choices, most families came up with alternative strategies for their sons' and daughters' schooling. All eight daughters among the interviewed families in Tilak Vihar were admitted to government schools (see Table 12.2). Where resources were available, families preferred to send only boys to private or unaided schools around Tilak Vihar. Navdeep Kaur and Parmeet Kaur sent their daughters to the government school in the colony while their sons attended private schools. The two women reasoned that they did not have the money 'to educate all children in private schools' and, further, that 'the daughter eventually has to marry' (Parmeet Kaur). Navdeep Kaur reasoned that 'sons need the disciplining of a private school while girls can study anywhere':

When we were sending her to school, we did not have the money for a private one. I thought, she is a girl, she can go to a government school. *Ladke padhte kahan hain sarkari school mein*; *ladkiyan toh kahin bhi padh jati hain* [Boys do not study at government school, while girls can study anywhere].

Samar Singh (46) and Gurleen Kaur (54), who lost their parents to the riots, did not live in Tilak Vihar. Unlike the others, they were able to make a substantial socio-economic recovery. Samar Singh was supported by his extended family in setting up a business while Gurleen Kaur finished her education with the help of her older sister and had a government job. Their strategies and aspirations for their children were in contrast to those of the families in Tilak Vihar. Both chose private, English-medium schools for their children from primary level, influenced by their comparatively better finances. Gurleen Kaur said: 'We never considered sending our sons to government schools. There were problems sometimes in meeting all expenditures but education in private schools is good for children's futures.'

Samar Singh had dropped out of school in 1987 due to depression. He reflected during the interview: 'The education which I could not get, I want for my children. The comforts I lost, I want them to have at any cost. I tell them they must study because *mujhe bahot pachtawa hai ki main padh nahi paya* [I regret that I did not].' After dropping out of school, Samar Singh lived in Punjab for nearly a decade and later completed senior secondary through open schooling.

Both parents also planned for their children's educational futures continuously. Samar Singh recalled:

My sons were going to a private school but were bullied there because of their turbans. My son's classmates would untie his turban and tease him for his long hair. He told us he would cut his hair, so we shifted both of them to a Sikh-managed private school, even though it is 10 kilometres away from our home.

This school did not offer them a fee concession, but the parents still chose it to ensure their sons were not bullied and to enable them to learn Punjabi and the history of the Sikh religion, which the school offered.

Limited choices in education and complex negotiations that women in Tilak Vihar have to make for their children's futures were due to their location. Despite aspirations for social mobility, poverty and lack of opportunities in education influenced choices they ended up making for their children. For women in Tilak Vihar, the government school was generally the preferred choice, especially for

the first-born and female children. They were also averse to sending their children to faraway schools which meant extra expenditure. Only after they were offered a fee concession did they take their children out of the government school and admitted them to the Sikh-managed school.

## Supporting Families, Dropping Out of Schools

Hurried marriages after violence did not offer stability and security to female participants in the study (all aged below 18 years at that time). Those who remained in Tilak Vihar and Gurleen Kaur who lived in another neighbourhood pointed to several challenges in their marital lives. Their husbands had taken to drugs or were unemployed. At the time of the fieldwork, the women were the sole earners in their families and also relied on financial support from extended families or NGOs. Chaman Kaur said: 'His illiteracy only added to our woes. We never had a permanent income. And when there is no education, one goes from one job to another. That is what my husband did and the whole family suffered.' Fathers were absent from their children's lives, and it was the mothers who took on the role of the head of the family. In this scenario, irrespective of their aspirations for their children, the survivors did not consider enrolling them in higher education and, as we will see subsequently, pulled them out of school at a vulnerable stage.

Eight children among 17 had discontinued their education at the time of the fieldwork. Of these, one dropped out after class six and the remaining seven after completing secondary education (see Table 12.1). Three had married after completing secondary school or quit to help look after younger siblings. Lack of financial support and their husbands' addiction to drugs led to the four sons discontinuing education and taking on temporary jobs. Chaman Kaur pointed to her inability to pay the school fee:

> I was so embarrassed that I could not pay Rs 400 as my son's fee. My husband did not help. Finally, I stopped sending my older son to school. I told him to do whatever job possible. I was earning ever since the riots happened. I could not support the family all by myself anymore.

Parmeet Kaur, who was widowed soon after her marriage in 1985, said she required additional help to sustain her family. All five of her children had quit school and took low-skilled, low-income jobs to help her.

Lack of education made them vulnerable even in the job market. These children of the survivors were in low-income, contractual jobs and thus at the

bottom of the occupational hierarchy with no benefits of a regular, salaried employment.[14] Three males drove rented cars as cabs and one was a helper at a private office. Mothers said their children had to change jobs once every two years or so since they were on temporary contracts. In most cases, it was the older children who were most vulnerable as they were forced to quit school and take up temporary occupations. Stability of the older siblings enabled the youngest to complete school and even pursue higher education.

However, the nature of vulnerability even in higher education persisted as all those (seven in total) were correspondence students. Their mothers cited lack of money for regular college, which in turn was seen as, in the words of Anmol Kaur, a 'waste of time and resources'. Hence, five (children of Tilak Vihar survivors) worked part-time jobs while continuing their education. The families in Tilak Vihar thus experienced dysfunctionality not only due to the violence of 1984, but also due to their subsequent spatial exclusion to Tilak Vihar and poverty which had left them with a little chance of social and economic recovery. In comparison, the two sons of Gurleen Kaur who lived outside of Tilak Vihar were pursuing technical diplomas through part-time education. Gurleen Kaur was also the sole earning member but had access to networks to ensure her children's future trajectories were better planned.

## Community Organisations: A Way of Life

In the absence of the state, the Sikh community contributed towards providing some services to the families in Tilak Vihar. The role played by Sikh NGOs in this colony is a telling comment on the marginalisation, exclusion and official neglect of the families here. Besides the material relief they provided, these organisations play a key role in keeping the sense of victimhood alive among survivors (Mander 2010). Their many activities – like seeking funds for the welfare of the families living here and dispersing the benefits to them – are built solely around identifying the neighbourhood as widows' colony.

The organisations mentioned here are the Nishkam Sikh Welfare Council (NSWC), the Sikh Forum and the Nagrik Ekta Manch (NEM). These were the sole source of aid and assistance to the survivors in the immediate aftermath of the violence. The formation of the Nishkam Trust began in June 1984, five months before the riots, to help Sikhs from the working classes in Delhi. Established by a group of Sikhs, the trust was in the process of being registered when the violence broke out. The NEM was a spontaneous formation and an umbrella group comprising politicians, bureaucrats, NGO workers, journalists, teachers and students who wanted to assist the survivors immediately after the riots

(D'Monte 1984; Sethi 1985). The Sikh Forum comprised politicians, lawyers and other well-known journalists from the Sikh community who registered the organisation in 1985 to work for the welfare of the survivors.

Soon after the riots, volunteers of all three were actively involved in looking after the welfare of the survivors. Besides welfare of the widows, they collected funds from private sources specifically to ensure education of displaced children and helped to admit them to schools around Tilak Vihar. A former member of the NEM[15] said that volunteers were asked to engage specifically with the traumatised children in relief camps and provide informal tuitions as many had quit schools.

When the women were moved to Tilak Vihar, it was mainly the Nishkam Trust that provided assistance to them. It raised funds from Sikhs across India and the diaspora, as one member recalled.[16] The government had to be pursued to give jobs to the widowed women who had become the heads of their families after the deaths of their husbands. They were eventually offered Class IV government jobs.[17]

All three organisations helped to enrol children in schools – mainly state-run ones close to the colony. Children were also given assistance to continue their education. The Sikh Forum and the Nishkam Trust provided students with uniforms, stationery, books, and so on. This support was given in the form of quarterly or half-quarterly scholarships of INR 50. Students were given scholarships so that they would stay in schools:

> We feared that children would drop out after the violence. Some had already left school to fend for their families. Others were traumatised and not in the condition to study. Those who stayed did so because of this money and continued their education as it lessened the burden on their mothers.[18]

For the education of out-of-school children in Tilak Vihar after 1985, the NEM volunteers started temporary afternoon classes in the colony. In 1992, the Nishkam Trust opened a tuition centre (and a computer institute much later) in the colony to provide education to the children to improve their chances of employability.

However, the efforts of these organisations remained uncoordinated and hence did not make a sustainable long-term educational impact. Despite the Sikh-minority school that was started in the colony, children continued to drop out. The trauma and uncertainty in their families after the deaths of their fathers were never addressed. That this generation of survivors' children went truant and many took to drugs has been mentioned elsewhere (Arif 2016; Mander 2010).

But its educational impact can be gauged from an independent survey carried out by the Sikh Forum in 2010 which revealed telling details about the struggles of the survivors and their children between 1990 and 2000. The survey included nearly 900 children assisted by the Sikh Forum after 1985. It found that most children had dropped out of schools by the early 1990s.[19] Girls were married 'as young as 15–16 years because their mothers were scared for their safety', the survey mentioned. Boys dropped out mainly because of rampant drug abuse in the colony, and the trauma of witnessing the killings of family members. 'The boys used to be alone as their mothers worked immediately after the violence. A number of them became wayward or started abusing drugs. A lot of families lost their boys due to this,' a Sikh Forum member mentioned.

State neglect and lack of coordination between these organisations created space for newer ones to be established. These were guided though by religious and 'victim' identity of the survivors, stigmatising the latter only further. Their formation, however, is a telling comment on the lack of socio-economic mobility within the families 30 years after the violence. In 2006, a few residents from Tilak Vihar formed the All-India Sikh Riot Victim Action Committee (AISRVAC), with its only goal being to persuade the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC), which ran the private school in Tilak Vihar, to admit children from the colony as per its promise of free education when it was established.

Another organisation called Seva '84 was formed in 2012 and headquartered in the United Kingdom, where its funds were mainly raised. Its website stated that its main goal was to 'reduce poverty and improve standards of living in the Widows' Colony' and added that 'poverty has, therefore, not only been inflicted on these widows but also on future generations, and as such the cycle of suffering continues. Many have been left in vulnerable states, leading to suicidal tendencies, prostitution and drug and alcohol addiction.'[20] I met two volunteers from the organisation who conducted health and educational surveys, respectively, in 2014 in the colony. One said that anyone who asked for monetary or medical help during these surveys received aid after 'proper verification of claims'.

References to community identity and, more significantly, to residents' identities as 'survivors of 1984 violence' and 'widows of 1984' were prominent within Seva '84. Donations were actively sought by emphasising the identity of the women as 'widows of 1984'. It also used images of Tilak Vihar and residents' living conditions liberally to raise funds. Seva '84 funded healthcare and education programmes in the colony – two basic urban amenities that families here had only minimal access to. It covered the medical care costs of several families and

financed the education of others. At the same time, it drew heavily on Sikh traditions and sought to 'educate the youth in *gurmat sangeet*,[21] the history of Sikhism and Sikhi, to prevent children from drifting away from their faith'. The organisation strove to keep Sikh identity alive within the community in Tilak Vihar through its many programmes.

Hence, the organisations worked within the boundaries of their hierarchical structures and community practices, without any creative ways to help the families. For instance, they have been regularly funding marriages of young girls, purportedly to help the widows 'settle' their daughters. But no attempt has been made to ensure that girls could instead be given long-term educational or occupational opportunities. The final observation is regarding the state which is missing in various ways from the lives of the survivors. Similar state role, where it has abstained from taking on the responsibility of the survivors, has also been noted in other studies (Mander 2010; Gupta 2011). Whether in the camps, or at the time of relocation of victims, or even in the present day when the new generation grapples with drug abuse, lack of education and unemployment, the state remains missing.

For many of these organisations and for the Sikh community itself, Tilak Vihar represented the violence its residents had suffered and was a space of memory and loss. It also served to bind Sikhs across the world as the remnant of an act of collective violence against the community and a reminder of the need to uphold the Sikh identity. These were the complex motives that guided the organisations' work, which were not necessarily in tune with the welfare of those in Tilak Vihar. The larger idea was to propagate Sikh identity and mobilise the community by keeping the memory of the violence alive. However, it only appeared to deepen the survivors' identities as widows of 1984, which many were trying hard to overcome. The families were caught in a vicious circle in which their collective identity served to stigmatise them in society at large; but, at the same time, their spatial location gave them access to the services of various organisations which they otherwise would not have had. Many of them were hence unwilling participants of the organisations' public activities but joined them nonetheless for different (thought meagre) benefits it got them.

## Conclusions

Nearly four decades after the 1984 anti-Sikh violence, Tilak Vihar remains a hidden neighbourhood surrounded by colonies that have benefitted from the development of Delhi. My attempt in this chapter was to show that an urban, post-conflict neighbourhood like Tilak Vihar – which was created by the state to

rehabilitate survivors – has suffered both state and community neglect, leading to many exclusions that affect survivors to this day. While its neighbouring areas benefitted from developmental policies and, given the focus of this chapter, establishment of schools and other educational institutions, Tilak Vihar was left out of the planning discourse of various governments. Negligible educational provisions have forced the families to depend on community groups. In contrast to the growing prosperity of the neighbourhoods surrounding Tilak Vihar, people here are unable to access similar opportunities.

This chapter emphasises on the need to identify specific vulnerabilities produced by spaces like Tilak Vihar. A simplistic understanding of similar neighbourhoods or those identified as ghettos may not be useful here. While Tilak Vihar has taken on some of the characteristics of colonies formed in the aftermath of communal violence as defined by Gayer and Jaffrelot (2012), it remains a unique space due to its gendered identification and abandonment by the larger Sikh community. Unlike the religious identity of neighbourhoods like Juhapura, Tilak Vihar is primarily defined by the identity of widowhood of women who continue to head the families, which manifests itself in an array of exclusions that the families here suffer. The gross inequalities and neglect experienced by families here have emerged from this gendered identity and kept the colony isolated from development. The women in Tilak Vihar have experienced a double blow in the sense that both justice and the hope of better lives continue to elude them. Ironically, however, this is also a place where the women and their families find a sense of community and relate to each other through a shared, violent past. It binds them together, even though they want to leave for better prospects.

It may be asked why Tilak Vihar has not shared the exponential population growth experienced in similar spaces elsewhere in the country. This is likely again due to the complexities of gender and class (especially in the context of the Sikh community) in this neighbourhood. Though Tilak Vihar holds a symbolic and emotional meaning for the community as a memory of the 1984 violence, Sikhs from better-off classes have refrained from moving here. This is unlike the case of Juhapura, where even upper-middle-class Muslims moved in search of safety after the 2002 riots (Jaffrelot and Thomas 2012: 43–79).

The perception of Tilak Vihar as a minority-dominated, women-led, low-income colony, its stagnant land prices, and the lack of state intervention and infrastructural development contributed to its own unique ghettoisation. The abandonment by the Sikh community, which has become global and made social and political strides across the world, has severely compromised the chances of growth for the colony and its inhabitants. It only currently represents the attack

on the community and the loss and trauma it suffered even though the lives of its residents are caught up in the politics of the space. In this scenario, it is unlikely that things will change for the better.

Uninterrupted, quality education remains a challenge in Tilak Vihar and is dependent on community means, which in turn are guided by religious and political interests. In spaces where the state is absent, non-state actors take over the provision of education. For employment, few options are available, forcing residents to take unskilled, temporary jobs. Hence, these neighbourhoods 'produce young population that is economically fragile and equally deprived of readily marketable skills in the core of the new economy' (Wacquant 2007: 26). In a neoliberal economy where education is key to social mobility, the lack of educational opportunities within such spaces needs further attention.

Nearly four decades after the 1984 riots, it is important to look at the everyday violence that families in Tilak Vihar experience. The daily task of survival is itself challenging and fraught with many negotiations and dependencies on external forces. Yet we must also acknowledge the persistence and resilience of the women who have struggled against hierarchical and forced inequalities to seek a future in this besieged space. Veena Das equates this 'making of the everyday inhabitable' with the 'making of the self', and this needs to be recognised by researchers who wish to understand violence and its impact on survivors (Das 2003: 300).

Spaces like Tilak Vihar keep survivors of communal violence in a vicious circle of opportunity closure and poverty. With the current trend towards greater political conservatism, religious and racial violence and rising urban inequalities, we need to take into account the exclusionary violence suffered by those living in this and similar neighbourhoods. Glossing over urbanisation and infrastructural development means ignoring not only the lives of their inhabitants but also the role of the state in a socially and economically polarising society.

## Notes

1. Gayer and Jaffrelot pointed out that communal violence led to self-segregation among the Muslims, 'reinforced by the socio-economic marginalisation' that the community has suffered (2012: 21).
2. The discrimination and exploitation faced by widowed women in India, including deprivation from inheritance rights, have been written about in detail. For more, see Sarkar and Sarkar (2007).
3. The Sikhs are a relatively more literate religious communities in India, with literacy rate of 75.4 per cent as per the 2011 census.

4. It was Max Weber who drew attention to social closure in his discussion of the concept of class. Weber used the term 'closure' in the context of opportunities and their monopolisation by certain groups who enjoy more opportunities in a society based on their race, language, social origin, religion or education. Raymond Murphy terms the social closure theory of Weber as a theory of 'power and domination' which can be used to explain stratification in society. For more on social closure, see Weber (1978 [1922]) and Murphy (1988).

5. The information is based on interviews with members of Sikh organisations actively involved in relief work in Tilak Vihar.

6. The government took several steps to compensate and rehabilitate the victims, appointing the G. S. Dhillon Committee to carry these out. The panel recommended INR 10,000 for death, INR 1,000 for injury and INR 5,000 for damage to dwellings. Around INT 152 million was given in compensation and 1,932 families were allotted plots in Tilak Vihar and other places in Delhi. Several other commissions were appointed later to investigate the riot (People's Union for Democratic Rights and People's Union for Civil Liberties 1985).

7. The larger neighbourhoods surrounding Tilak Vihar are mainly dominated by Sikhs. It is unclear whether Tilak Vihar was chosen for the Sikh survivors of the 1984 violence on this basis.

8. For more on ghettos as stigmatized neighbourhoods and their systematic isolation from development and opportunities for residents, see Wacquant (2007).

9. Besides Juhapura, there are many similar spaces, such as Mumbra and Byculla in Mumbai, and Citizen Nagar, Madni Nagar, Yes Complex and Faizal Park in Ahmedabad. Also see Jaffrelot (2014).

10. Education Department, Government of NCT of Delhi, www.edudel.nic.in (accessed 20 June 2020).

11. Even when not occurring currently, if violence becomes omnipresent and is experienced through individuals, institutions and the state, so much so that it feels 'normal', it can be referred to as everyday violence. Everyday violence makes uncertainty and risks part of the daily context. For more on everyday violence, see Das (2007).

12. Personal interviews with research participants, 2014.

13. Before liberalisation and the entry of market forces into education in the early 1990s, government and government-aided schools were the preferred option even for the middle classes. A shift of preference was seen after the 1990s towards private unaided schools, which were perceived to be of 'better quality' and provide English-language skills. Preference for these schools

cuts across social classes today and has created a hierarchy of institutions, with parents from the working and lower classes choosing low-fee schools over government institutions. Where parents have to make a choice between schools for sons and daughters, resources are often mobilized to admit sons to private unaided schools and daughters to government schools. See Ramachandran (2004).

14. On the weaker labour-market position of those living in low-income, minority-dominated neighbourhoods, see Pattilli (2010) and Wacquant (2007).

15. Personal interview with a former NEM member at her residence, March 2014.

16. Personal interview with a Nishkam Trust member, January 2014.

17. Personal interview with a Nishkam Trust member, January 2014. It is important to note here that the state employed only women who had been widowed. But there were a large number of families – settled in B Block in the colony – in which men had been grievously injured and forced to leave their occupations. Women in these families were provided temporary employment by the Nishkam Trust, such as sewing jobs, for which they were paid INR 10–40 per day, in 1985. Widows who could not work were given pensions of INR 400 per month at that time by the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC).

18. Personal conversation with a member of the Sikh Forum, June 2014.

19. Private documents of the Sikh Forum, accessed in May 2014.

20. Seva '84, www.seva84.com (accessed 13 June 2014).

21. *Gurmat sangeet* refers to the musical style practised in Sikhism. It incorporates the teachings, principles and sermons given by the Sikh gurus and is meant to communicate the messages of the gurus on the Sikh way of life, culture and religion.

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