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Residents wonder why violence flared up on Saturday, two days after rumours about the desecration of a temporary place of worship began to do the rounds. Almost everyone agrees that rumours about the desecration of a makeshift place of worship erected opposite a mosque in East Delhi were the cause of great tension and minor violence on Diwali day. But residents and the authorities are still puzzled about why fierce rioting erupted two days later, as pitched battles were fought in the narrow lanes of Trilokpuri.

Nearly hundred people, both Muslim and Hindu, have been detained for their role in the violence. The police, the Rapid Action Force and the Central Reserve Police Force are patrolling the area. They are equipped with water cannons and riot-control vehicles.

In what some believe could be a repeat of the strategy attempted in western Uttar Pradesh earlier this year, the riots could be an effort to polarise Dalit voters as the possibility of Delhi assembly elections looms.

Muslims constitute about 20% of the reserved assembly constituency, which is dominated by the Valmiki scheduled caste group. Last year, the Bharatiya Janata Party lost the Trilokpuri assembly seat to the Aam Aadmi Party.

Rising tensions

Trilokpuri residents say that tensions have been rising in the area over the past few months, as the Hindu Jagaran Manch has been holding frequent meetings and processions. In addition, Muslims are upset because the authorities have refused them permission to renovate a mosque.

Residents say that rumours started doing the rounds on Wednesday, the day before Diwali, that a Mata ki Chowki had been dishonoured. On Diwali, the tensions increased with a rumour that the Chowki had been attacked. Neither of them was true.

“Only a few minor incidents were reported on Thursday,” said a police official deputed in Trilokpuri. On Friday, the officer said, a large crowd was dispersed as it began to gather at the home of former Bharatiya Janata Party MLA Sunil Kumar Vaidya, which also serves as the party’s office for the area. Minor violence continued on Friday.

But on Saturday, the officer said, “the situation almost went out of control”. The violence was caused by hundreds of people from outside the neighbourhood, residents claimed.

Role of outsiders

“Nearly 400-500 outsiders gathered outside Muslim-dominated pockets,” said Trilokpuri resident Shaur Ahmad. “They started pelting stones and shouting slogans calling Muslims traitors and terrorists. When Muslim youths resisted and blocked their entry, they moved to

other pockets of Muslims' homes. This continued for the whole day.”

Added Amar Visharad, an Aam Aadmi Party activist, “They had gathered from different blocks of Trilokpuri in the morning itself, and they kept moving from one Muslim pocket to another.”

However, Vaidya blamed the police and Muslims for the eruption of communal violence. “Ever since Mata ki Chowki was set up, Muslims started creating trouble,” he alleged. “On the day of Diwali, it was attacked and desecrated. But the police did not arrest anybody. It was because of this that some Hindus had come to meet me in the BJP office with their complaints on Thursday. Nothing would have happened had police taken strict action against Muslims on the day of Diwali or on Friday.”

<http://scroll.in/article/685458/trilokpuri-riots-may-be-an-attempt-to-polarise-dalits-as-delhi-polls-seem-likely/>