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The authorities, however, say no distress sale has come to their notice and refuse to interfere. Last year's riots still fresh in their minds, a growing number of Muslims in the Muzaffarnagar-Shamli area of Uttar Pradesh are selling their properties in the villages they have now abandoned to Jat neighbours at rates which locals admit are far below the market rates.

The authorities, however, say no distress sale has come to their notice and refuse to interfere, saying property sales remain a private affair.

The Indian Express found that in one village, Kankra, about 5 km from Kutba Kutbi, which saw eight murders and several riot-related cases, the majority of Muslims had sold their homes to Jats. On September 7 last year, three youths from the village who had gone to attend the Jat mahapanchayat, died after a clash broke out in Pulbaliyan village.

Village kids pass through houses that were abandoned during the Muzaffarnagar riots in Kakra Village. Most of the houses owned by the other community in the village are on sale or have been sold. (Source: Express photo by Oinam Anand) Village kids pass through houses that were abandoned during the Muzaffarnagar riots in Kakra Village. Most of the houses owned by the other community in the village are on sale or have been sold. (Source: Express photo by Oinam Anand)

Fearing retaliation, 250 Muslim families fled their homes in the village and have since been staying at relief camps in nearby Muslim-dominated villages.

Village pradhan Ravinder Singh said in the past six weeks, 150 of the 250 Muslim families have sold their homes to Jat neighbours. "The situation is such that small incidents are taking communal colours — accidents, robberies, you name it. It has been like this for a year, in an area which never knew communal tension. So no matter what we say, the Muslims want to leave our village, and the Jats are not trying too hard to stop them either," Singh said. He said that every day "more Muslims are coming to me with requests to sell their property".

Damaged house of muslims, a year after the riots at village Lisad in Muzaffarnagar district on August 19th 2014. (Source: Express photo by Ravi Kanojia) Damaged house of muslims, a year after the riots at village Lisad in Muzaffarnagar district on August 19th 2014. (Source: Express photo by Ravi Kanojia)

Karan Singh Saini, a former principal of the primary school in the village, bought an approximately 650 square metre plot with a house built in it for Rs 5 lakh, from Mohammad

Shabbir. According to the revised circle rate for the village introduced on August 1 — which is Rs 1,400 per square metre — only the land should have cost him more than Rs 9 lakh. “Under normal circumstances, a house here should have cost me about Rs 15 lakh... but rates have gone down since too many people are eager to sell.

Of course we do not want to exploit people who have been our neighbours for years, but we cannot give more than the rates,” said Saini. Shabbir, 65, who was earlier staying in Shahpur relief camp, has now moved in with his daughter and her husband in Loni, said the property was lying vacant for too long.

“I knew I could not get a better rate than this... the rates are only going down. It’s UP elections in 2016, and after that it will be time for the Lok Sabha elections again... it’s not that I am on bad terms with my neighbours, but who knows what the next government will do? What if they just say the state has already compensated us for the riots, and take over our land?”

Mohammad Dilshad sold his 75 square metre plot facing the main road in the village — considered prime property — at Rs 1.62 lakh. The father of four said he had to sell his home for his children’s future. “It was a four-room house. I had asked Rs 3 lakh for it, but I could barely manage over Rs 1 lakh. If I didn’t sell this, I would not have enough money to feed my children,” he said.

Kiran Pal, who was cleaning the house he had just bought from Dilshad, said these are the prevalent rates. “I have bought the house following all regulations. I needed the house because my children are getting married, we need space for them and their families,” he said.

Vinod Singh has bought a 781 square metre house with six rooms for Rs 7 lakh. In this case too, the plot alone should have cost him over Rs 10 lakh, according to the circle rates. Singh agreed the house should have cost him at least Rs 18-20 lakh in “normal times”.

“Honestly I believe they would have sold it cheaper, but they have also got Rs 20 lakh compensation, Rs 5 lakh each from four brothers so there is no reason really to feel sorry for them. They still come to my house and have tea, it’s just that they don’t want to stay here anymore,” Singh said, referring to Mohammad Ilyas and his family from whom he bought the house.

Ilyas is now building a house in Kairana. “Vinod is a friend, I really believe we got the best deal. Houses are selling at Rs 3-4 lakh, we got a much better deal,” he said. A neighbouring house of 343.75 square metre has been sold for Rs 1.45 lakh, here again the plot alone should have cost Rs 4 lakh, as per the circle rates.

ADM (Finance and Revenue) Ram Kishen Sharma said, “Property sales are a private matter, but we have just revised the circle rates this month. We do not have any complaints of distress sales from any community. If people are going to new areas and selling their old homes, it is their decision.”

Sharma said while earlier circle rates were revised every two years, now it is done annually

according to UP government directions. “The rates have just come into effect from August, so there is no question of exploitation,” Sharma said.

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Distress sale: Muslim homes go cheap in riot-hit Muzaffarnagar
Written by Pritha Chatterjee | Muzaffarnagar | August 28, 2014