

WORLD BARUA ORGANIZATION

London, U.K.

Gujrat Pogrom – A Flagrant Violation of Human Rights and Reflection of Hindu Chauvinism in the Indian Society

The Incident:

Five and half years ago, during the last week of February 2007, the Muslims living across the Indian state of Gujarat witnessed their massacre at the hands of their Hindu compatriots. On 27 February, the stormtroopers of the Hindu right, decked in saffron sashes and armed with swords, tridents, sledgehammers and liquid gas cylinders, launched a pogrom against the local Muslim population. They looted and torched Muslim-owned businesses, assaulted and murdered Muslims, and gang-raped and mutilated Muslim women. By the time the violence spluttered to a halt, about 2,500 Muslims had been killed and about 200,000 driven from their homes.

The Gujrat pogrom, which has been documented through recent interviews of perpetrators of the pogrom, was distinguished not only by its ferocity and sadism (**foetuses were ripped from the bellies of pregnant women, old men bludgeoned to death**) but also by its meticulous advance planning with the full support of government apparatus. The leaders used mobile phones to coordinate the movement of an army of thousands through densely populated areas, targeting Muslim properties with the aid of computerized lists and electoral rolls provided by state agencies.

It has been established by independent reports that the savagery of the anti-Muslim violence was planned, coordinated and implemented with the **complicity of the police and the state government**.

The Gujarat carnage was unprecedented in the history of communal riots in India. Never such communal violence took place with so much active collaboration of the state. There never was so much hate campaign against minorities in the history of Independent India as in Gujarat. There is no let up in the hate propaganda even now. According to a news report of *The Milli Gazette Online*, the propaganda campaign against Muslims is spearheaded by a Hindu nationalist Parvin Togadia, known as prophet of hate.

Generally the guilty of communal violence in India are not punished but the Gujarat Government broke all records in this respect. They closed down all the cases soon after the carnage saying no evidence was available. It was only after the intervention of the Supreme Court that some of the cases were reopened.

The police is generally partial but in Gujarat it acted almost like a Hindutva force. It openly took part in killing and looting. Much of the violence unfolded with the full collaboration of the police. In some cases, police fired at Muslims seeking to flee the

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mobs. When asked to help a group of girls being raped on the roof of a building, police officers demurred, explaining: "They have been given 24 hours to kill you." Subsequent investigations confirmed that police knew in advance of the pogrom and had been instructed not to interfere with it.

The Evidence:

Tehelka Magazine, in its Issue dated 3 November, has published its investigation report "The Truth" on the Gujrat pogrom based on voluntary interviews with the perpetrators of the carnage. Ms. Harinder Baweja, the Editor, writes, "the hopelessly one-sided perpetration of violence on hapless Muslims is one of the biggest ruptures of recent times. A corrosive rupture. A nation's shame." She emphasizes that "we all knew that the State had conspired in the events of 2002. That the rioters – or is assassins the right word? – had political protection." Most of the interviewees have given "horrifying details without batting an eyelid". Suresh Richard, an accused in the Naroda Patiya massacre, confessed to rape. He has narrated details of how he and his fellows killed Muslims hiding in a gutter. Haresh Bhatt, a sitting parliamentarian, has revealed how rocket launchers were assembled in a factory owned by him. *Tehelka Magazine's* editor has stated that frighteningly, all save one of the interviewees said they would like to kill many more."

A study conducted by Indian Social Action Forum has concluded that the genocide in Gujarat is enough to bow the Indian heads in shame. It has negated the slogan 'We the people of India who have proclaimed to be a secular and democratic republic, and profess the right to a life with no communal violence'.

The Statesman, in its report on April 3, 2002 quoted Lt. Gen. AM Sethna (retd), Member of the National Commission for Minorities, after the NCM team's visit to Ahmedabad on March 13-14 as "Calling the situation in Gujarat communal violence or disturbance would be to trivialise the fact. It was a conflagration leading to genocide".

The Hindu, in its report on March 13, 2002 quoted Mr. VP Singh, former Indian Prime Minister as "We talk of terrorism as the basis of religious fundamentalism. How can we face the world when we are practising terrorism in Gujarat?"

The Former Chief of the Indian Navy, L. Ramdas, in an open letter to the then Indian Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, described "the anti-Muslim violence in India as genocide and a pogrom".

Mr. Peter Popham, a Delhi-based reporter for Independent News, wrote on 16 April 2002, "the violence in Gujarat was not a spontaneous eruption of Hindu emotion as a

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reaction to the deaths of 59 Hindu activists on a train in the town of Godhra on 28 February.” He also wrote that “it was meticulously planned by militant neo-fascist groups such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) and Bajrang Dal and Mr Modi, the Chief Minister allowed it to happen. The state police either did nothing or deliberately instigated violence and fired on the Muslim victims.”

Human Rights Watch also confirmed in its reports that “What happened in Gujrat was not a spontaneous uprising, it was a carefully orchestrated attack against Muslims. The attacks were planned in advance and organized with extensive participation of the police and state government officials. Human Rights Watch concluded that “The groups most directly involved in the violence against Muslims include the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council), the Bajrang Dal, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) that heads the Gujrat state government. Collectively, they are known as the sangh parivar, or family of Hindu nationalist organizations.”

Mr. Paul R. Brass, Professor Emeritus of Political Science at the University of Washington has written in his book “The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Cotemporary India that “all available evidence, which is unusually well-documented in the case of Gujrat, indicates beyond a shadow of doubt that the Sangh *parivar* (the umbrella organization of all militant Hindu organizations) was well-prepared and well-rehearsed to carry out the murderous, brutal and sadistic attacks on Muslim men, women and children

Gujrat Genocide and its Aftermath:

Most of the cases filed by victims of the violence have never been investigated. Witnesses have been intimidated. No more than a dozen low-level culprits have been convicted. None of the major conspirators has been brought before the courts.

The situation in Gujarat is far from normal even more than five years after carnage of 2002. The situation, particularly in rural areas is, as Harsh Mandar, former IAS officer and prominent activist for communal harmony in Gujarat put it, “they (i.e. Hindus) hate us and we (i.e. Muslims) fear them. Hindus, particularly, those of Sangh Parivar, hate Muslims and Muslims, particularly those who suffered in 2002 carnage, fear the Hindus.

Muslims in Gujarat live in fear. About 50,000 remain in refugee camps. According to a BBC report, Sabera Biwi, who is a Muslim woman and lives in the heart of Baroda, says “she no longer feels safe”. Most of the refugees are unable to return to their villages. Many of them are rotting in ghettos created after the carnage. They want to return to their villages but are afraid to go back. They are threatened or blackmailed to withdraw the cases. Those who have returned live in fear and total isolation. No one talks to them,

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no one invites them, no one even looks at them. So scorned they find it difficult to live there. All this is due to hate campaign going on by VHP and Bajrang Dal cadres.

Amnesty International reported in 2005 that “lack of progress in bringing the rapists to justice in Gujrat adds insult to victims’ injury” and that “the gross failure of the local police and the Bharariya Janata Party-led Gujrat government to protect Muslims – especially women and girls – and the refusal of the central government to censure the state government in Gujrat is inexcusable”. Coalition Against Genocide – an NGO based in Baltimore adds that “it goes without saying that any legitimization of Mr. Modi (the Chief Minister) and his brand of politics is also inexcusable.

There is no effective intervention by social activists. The NGOs are as much polluted by communal poison. They either hate Muslims or are totally indifferent to their fate.

Lack of Education Facilities:

The genocide of 2002 in Gujarat has adversely affected the education of Muslim girls and boys. Thousands of Muslim families have not been able to return to their original homes. Many do not go to schools because schools are far away or because of fear of new areas and school. This in long term will have adverse impact not only on individuals, but on the community and the country.

More and more self - financed schools are coming up, where the Muslim students, because of high fees can not go and so are forced to go to Government schools where the quality of education is poor, this results in poor performance at higher level and high drop out.

Muslim Trusts are finding it increasingly difficult to get permission to open new education institutes. They are not given Grant in Aid by the Government. Hence to run institutes with community's own resources are very difficult. The situation is of concern because of the discrimination that Muslims face in every walk of life.

In universities there are not enough Muslim teachers. We are convinced there are educated Muslims who are worthy to be University teachers

Economic Exploitation:

This is an accepted fact that majority of Muslims living in the Indian Gujrat are economically backward. They depend on petty business. There are various hurdles in the way of their economic progress.

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It is very difficult for Muslims to get loans from the Banks to start or expand business or for housing. Large areas of Muslims are branded as "negative zones" by Banks and credit cards companies. Any Muslim from these areas is denied loans without any investigation into his/her paying capacity. There are large areas. i.e. Juhapura where two hundred thousand Muslims live, yet there is not a single bank. There are hundred of Petrol Pumps but dealership is not given to Muslims. The last Muslim, according to a report published in *The Milli Gazette Online* on 5 March 2006, to get a dealership license was in 1972.

Internally Displaced People live at far distance from their work places, which cut into their meager income. Few options are available to them and their skills are downgraded. The economic and social ostracism of Muslims further impact their mental and physical well-being resulting in further deterioration of their economic status and self esteem.

Role of Newspapers during the Gujrat Carnage:

According to a survey report conducted by People's Union for Civil Liberties and Shanti Abhiyan, the two Barod-based NGOs, the Gujarati newspaper Sandesh, Baroda has crossed all limits of responsible journalism and was at its inflammatory best. The major characteristic of Sandesh was to feed on the prevalent anti-Muslim prejudices of its Hindu readership and provoke it further by sensationalising, twisting, mangling and distorting news or what passes for it. The average Hindu reader in Baroda felt that he was getting value for money and 'real' reportage. *Sandesh* used headlines to provoke, communalize and terrorise people. Some characteristics of news articles, reports and editorials appearing in the *Sandesh*:

- On 28th Feb 2002 the main headline said: 70 HINDUS BURNT ALIVE IN GODHRA. Another report on the front page says: AVENGE BLOOD WITH BLOOD. This is a quote from a statement issued by a VHP leader. *Sandesh* had simply used his words as a headline.
- On 6th March 2002 the headlines screamed HINDUS BEWARE: HAJ PILGRIMS RETURN WITH A DEADLY CONSPIRACY. In reality hundreds of terrified and anxious Haj pilgrims returned accompanied with heavy police escorts to homes that could have been razed to the ground.

Most reports concerning the post-Godhra violence usually began with a preceding sentence namely that, 'In the continuing spiral of communal rioting that broke out as a reaction to the 'demonic/barbaric etc., Godhra incident.....'. The denunciatory adjectives used liberally to describe the Godhra incident were strikingly absent in reporting the subsequent genocide.

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There were several instances of misreporting. The most horrific acts of violence were repeatedly sensationalized with the use of a few devices. For example, large bold letters were used as headlines particularly when referring to gruesome acts like the burning alive of people. Photographs of burnt, mangled bodies were a common feature on the front page or the last page which usually carried local news.

Sandesh had effectively circumvented the code of conduct that disallowed naming of communities involved in the violent conflagrations. Scattered across the newspaper there were numerous reports where 'mobs of religious fanatics' abducted tribal women and therefore had to face the wrath of the people, or when rumours that 'religious fanatics' were about to attack a temple caused tension in certain areas in Baroda city, which brought 'devotees' out on the street to protect their place of worship.

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