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The Genocidal Pogrom in Gujarat: Anatomy of Indian Fascism

A trained saffron militia at work?

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Today, on the second day of our stay in Ahmedabad (Fr Cedric Prakash is Ahmedabad based), we heard more tales of horror in the different relief camps that we visited. Worse, the accounts of the survivors and victims highlight the systematic pattern of behaviour and complicity in the violence.

Violence has not abated but is simply taking place in the more dispersed rural areas where even the media does not reach. Even as we write this update, reports of four persons being burned alive in Santrapur village have come in. Each one of the victims was a Muslim. In regions of north Gujarat, especially, violence continues and terror reins in the countryside.

To their credit, villages on the outskirts of Anand have doggedly resisted the violent threats to their Muslim inhabitants. To pressurise the Hindus from these villages, the local VHP has been sending them a set of bangles every day. But so far the locals have held out. We learn that the day before yesterday a minister from the state cabinet addressed a meeting of the villagers decrying them for not having taken to violence.

In our update yesterday we had stressed that the violence in Gujarat should *not* be referred to as a communal riot but an act of ethnic cleansing, genocide. We saw more evidence of this once again today, as we drove to the outskirts of Ahmedabad, to Vatwa that has given shelter to a total of 6,000 members in relief camps. The main relief camp here is a makeshift pandal where women, children and men eat and sleep. There is a serious problem of sanitation. There is also a problem of insufficient toilets. The administration has *not* responded to the repeated demand for mobile toilets and tents.

We have also pointed out in repeated media interviews and updates that a factor in Gujarat's violence is a trend recorded by Teesta Setalvad (through *Communalism Combat*) in Gujarat over the past two years. The hiring of young men, on high salaries, by the Bajrang Dal for the express purpose of wielding the *talwar and the trishul*. In short, the creation of a trained, private militia.

Every single account that this writer received before arrival in Gujarat, and which has been corroborated by on reaching here are strong pointers to the role played by such an outfit in the present carnage. In every incident in Gujarat over the past few days, the mobs leading the attacks were not the usual riot mobs.

They were mobs of 5-15,000 that collected swiftly and with precision wrecked total destruction of life and property in brief periods and brutal ways. It is not easy to collect such large mobs even in a city like Mumbai, let alone Ahmedabad and scattered villages. Strong indications of

such a militia poses a challenge to Indian civil society and the 'secular' Indian state – how will be cope?

Can we raise a demand for a judicial inquiry into the existence of and the disbanding of such a militia? The training given to this militia is not simply for the perpetration of violence. It is also a mental training in de-humanisation of the 'enemy', through the preaching of ideological hatred that enables men (and women, in some cases) to attack, dismember, de-humanise, kill, burn and then finally enjoy the loot.

On our drive to Vatwa, along the outskirts of the city, evidence of selective destruction of Muslim shops was clear. Kilometre after kilometre, *dhabas*, garages, laundries, bakeries and garages owned by the minority community were burned even as the shops next to them were completely unharmed.

At Vatwa we met displaced persons from Burhani society where 80 homes belonging to Dawoodi Bohras were completely destroyed). Elsewhere the number of homes burnt down were as follows: Bismillahnagar (60), Roshni Park (105), Raunak Park, Bachubai Kua (80) Darbar Khetar (80) Syedwadi (150), Azimpura (100) Tufel Park, Iliaz Park, and Navapura (300).

This entire area was targeted by Hindu neighbours living in nearby societies two days after the Godhra incident of February 27. The attack, all eye-witnesses maintain, was planned with meticulous precision as crowds of no less than 15,000, with saffron bands on heads, *talwars*, *guptis* and *dharis* in hand, arrived on four-six occasions over the next twelve hours to wreck systematic destruction on homes, reducing them to empty shells. The homes in Burhani society belonging to the Dawoodi Bohra community were totally gutted.

When Muslim women went to the *sabzi mandi* today, orders were issued by the local Bajrang Dal activist, Mahesh Patel (indicted for inciting the violence) ordered *sabziwallahs* not to sell any vegetables to Muslims. Stones were pelted at women trying to get a glimpse of what was left of their homes.

In almost all areas, the police has not yet fulfilled its primary duty of registering the First Information Reports (FIRs) related to the violent incidents. Instead, in many cases, they have registered false cases against young men of the minority community who tried to defend themselves.

The frightening aspect of the violence is the deep-rooted terror still in the minds of the survivors. On three occasions over the past three days we have been told of cassettes being played late at night, from the homes of perpetrators of the crime living in nearby societies, sending out the war-cry: '*Looto, kaato, maro, Jai Sri Ram!*' (*Loot, attack, kill, Jai Shri Ram!*).

Provocative speeches, hate speech by both the mainline Gujarati media, the statements of the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi and the surreptitious distribution of provocative pamphlets continue. CM Modi's statement reported in the *Indian Express* this morning is telling: "The violence in Godhra was communal violence, the violence after that was 'secular violence'".

The large circulation Gujarati daily, *Sandesh*, is probably the worst perpetrator of hate speech over past days. Today a report titled, '*Hindu upar khatro-Haj Yatra pachi valta humla ni khaufnaak saajish*' warns Hindus in Gujarat that "Several state govt agencies say that after the Godhra incident, the fear of terrorism looms large all over Gujarat. With the help of international

help, RDX bombs and aeroplane hijacks are likely to be used by these terrorist forces.” Neither the police nor the state is taking any action against this publication.

Schools re-opened in the ‘other’ Ahmedabad and further evidence of ‘normalcy’ was witnessed. When a few of us friends went for dinner to a Gujarati restaurant, I (Teesta Setalvad) was asked to lower my voice and preferably not speak of the only thing that I can speak of at the moment. Hunger is an equaliser and since our long day had meant no food we ate, but ate in a locale that gave us a real taste of virtual reality. A friend on the table summed it up well, ‘*Aaj kal jab log puchte hain, kaise ho to lagta hai ki in dinon mein woh shabdon ka matlab hi nahin raha.*’ (When people ask, ‘How are you?’ these days it seems that these words have no meaning).

A citizen’s initiative in Gujarat has resulted in a pamphlet on the destruction of the culture and heritage of Gujarat. The pamphlet is proposed to be reached to tens of thousands of people, including those living in villages and remote parts. (The pamphlet will be posted on our website (sabrang.com) in the next few days.

Other small and larger peace initiatives have also begun. Two ex-Prime Minister’s, V.P. Singh and I.K. Gujral, are scheduled to arrive in Ahmedabad on Thursday. An all-party delegation of MPs will also visit the city the day after. There are rumours that the state plans to sabotage the visit by taking them to make shift camps where not many problems can be perceived.

RELIEF NEEDED AT MANY CAMPS

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For details of medicine needed contact
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(Courtesy: www.sabrang.com)