

March 2, 2002. New York Times(AP).

India Muslims: Police Abandoned Us

AHMADABAD, India (AP) -- A day after 7,000 Hindus rampaged through her neighborhood, Noorjahan Shaikh recalled how police slapped her mother and called her names when she pleaded with them for protection.

What's worse, she said, police stood by and watched as the mob hurled homemade bombs at shops and beat the Muslim residents with sticks.

"We pray to God to help us because we know the police won't," said the 16-year-old, one of about a dozen Muslims who sheltered nervously Saturday under the awning of a small hardware store.

"All of this really hurts," she said, looking down at trembling hands painted with brown henna flowers.

As the violence subsided in Ahmadabad, the commercial capital of Gujarat, and spread to the villages, Muslims and Hindus were left stunned by three days of religious rioting that claimed more than 400 lives in the western Indian state.

Many blamed the state and national police -- whose bosses belong to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Hindu-nationalist party -- and said the federal government waited too long to send the army.

"Instead of protecting us, they were supporting the mob," said Rafi Ahmad, a state insurance officer who is Noorjahan's neighbor. "The police were just telling us that they were helpless."

This week's sectarian violence is the worst since 1992-93, when 2,800 people were killed nationwide. That upheaval was provoked by the razing of a 16th century mosque by Hindu activists in the northern town of Ayodhya.

Tension between India's minority Muslims and majority Hindus has been building for weeks as the World Hindu Council insisted that it would begin construction of a temple on the Muslim holy site by March 15. The Hindu group believes it is the birthplace of the god Rama.

Hundreds of Hindu nationalists were returning from Ayodhya Wednesday when their train stopped in Godhra, a town south of Ahmadabad. A scuffle broke out on the platform and Muslims set fire to the train. Fifty-eight people were killed, including 14 children and many Hindu activists.

This set off the retaliatory rampage that has gripped the state, with horror stories of Muslim families cornered and burned alive by Hindus.

Warily wandering the littered streets, Hindus blamed the Muslims, who, in turn, blamed the police and government.

"I can give you a gentleman's promise that Muslims did not want this," said Iqbal G. Shaikh, Noorjahan's uncle. "And I tell you in the name of God that Hindus did not want this. It's the RSS, the VHP."

Shaikh was referring to the two powerful Hindu nationalist groups behind the Ayodhya temple plans, whose leaders demanded retribution for the train deaths: the World Hindu Council, known by its Hindi-language initials VHP, and the Association of National Volunteers, or RSS.

Ahmad also blamed police and Narendra Modi, the state's top elected official and a member of Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist party.

"We don't blame the Hindus," Ahmad said as he and Shaikh stumbled through the rubble of demolished homes in their neighborhood. "It's the police and it's Modi, who turned a blind eye."

Modi called such statements "propaganda by our opponents."

"Police are taking strict action to control the situation," he told reporters Saturday.

Modi was criticized for not containing the violence early and for praising Gujaratis for their "restraint."

Modi said his police were outnumbered and suggested that some Muslims -- such as a former member of Parliament who was burned alive with 38 members of his family and neighbors -- brought the violence on themselves.

Other police officials insist they did the best they could.

"We are only 100 police here," said K.K. Mysorewala, a police inspector in Naroda Patia a town south of Ahmadabad where 66 Muslims were burned alive in a shantytown Friday morning.

"First they were beaten and then burned alive," Mysorewala said Saturday. "Three more died today."

Police patrolled indifferently past the blackened body of an elderly man, frozen in terror and pain on a bed outside his brightly painted brick house. Pigs sniffed at a charred skull across the street from a mosque that had been burned to the ground.

“We tried to save as many as we could,” Mysorewala said.

March 3, 2002. Washington Post. Rajiv Chandrasekaran.

Trapped in House of Fire: Wave of Religious Reprisals Ensnares Indian State

SARDARPURA, India, March 2 – Carrying wooden sticks and plastic jugs of kerosene, the mob of 500 Hindus made no secret of its intentions as it swarmed into this tiny farming town late Friday night. “Kill the Muslims,” they chanted. “Kill the Muslims.”

Trying to flee but surrounded on all sides by the Hindu crowd, most of the town’s Muslims holed up in the one place they believed was safe: a one-room house with thick concrete walls and metal-barred windows at the end of their neighborhood.

But the throng soon followed them there and encircled the house, seeking revenge for a Muslim attack on Hindu train passengers earlier in the week. “Get rid of the Muslims,” some of the Hindus said, according to a Hindu man who witnessed the attack.

Panicked and crying, those inside the house begged for their lives. “We said, ‘Please forgive us. Please let us go,’ ” said Ruksanabano Ibrahim, 20, who was packed inside with a dozen family members. “We kept saying, ‘We are not your enemies. What have we done to you?’”

Then, just as it did moments earlier with shops, cars and other homes in the neighborhood, the mob doused cloth-wrapped sticks with kerosene, ignited them and hurled them through the windows. The terrorized occupants, who were locked inside the house, tried in vain to smother the flames with wool shawls and douse them with bottles of drinking water.

When police officers arrived a half-hour later and broke down the door, 29 people were dead. Most of the 15 others in the house were seriously burned.

The gruesome attack was the latest in a wave of retaliatory killings by Hindus that have plunged India’s western Gujarat state into anarchy since Muslims firebombed the train on Wednesday, killing 58 Hindu nationalists who had been rallying to build a temple at the site of a destroyed mosque. Subsequent clashes have claimed more than 350 lives in the most severe religious strife in India in almost a decade.

Although police imposed a curfew in 37 towns and army troops sent to the state received orders to shoot rioters on sight, the unrest continued today. In Ahmadabad, which was the scene of brutal slayings and arson attacks on Thursday and Friday, Hindu gangs set fire to shops in several Muslim neighborhoods. In the town of Vadodra, police said seven Muslims working in a bakery were burned alive by a Hindu mob.

Police said more than 120 people were killed Friday in Ahmadabad, Sardarpura and another village in eastern Gujarat.

Despite fears among some government officials that the fighting would spread to other states, most of the violence has been confined to Gujarat, which has a long history of Hindu-Muslim clashes. Police said they have killed 47 rioters in the state and arrested 1,200 people, including several dozen who allegedly participated in the train attack.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee delivered a nationally televised address calling for peace. He said the attacks were “a blot on the country’s face.”

About 12 percent of India’s 1 billion people are Muslims, while 82 percent are Hindu. Although India is an officially secular nation, religious tension between Hindus and Muslims has existed for centuries.

In 1947, when India gained its independence and was partitioned to create the Muslim nation of Pakistan, hundreds of thousands of people were killed as they tried to move between the countries. And in 1993, in the last major round of religious fighting, more than 800 people died in sectarian riots in Bombay.

While the police and military have increased their presence in large cities, the revenge attacks appear to be spreading to rural areas like Sardarpura, where security forces are stretched thin.

Local police officials expressed concern at their ability to stem a wave of vigilante attacks across the state’s farming villages, many of which have small Muslim enclaves but lack full-time police protection.

In Sardarpura, which has the largest Muslim population in a 30-mile radius, the violence began on Friday afternoon, when several hundred irate Hindus arrived from Jhantral, a nearby village. Claiming that two Jhantral residents were killed aboard the train on Wednesday, the mob used pickaxes to demolish a light blue mosque on the road into Sardarpura, located about 40 miles north of Ahmadabad.

Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. The Genocide

Forced to disperse from the mosque by police, the Hindus later regrouped and returned to the village around 9 p.m., police officials said. Once again, the police pushed them back by firing tear gas canisters, the officials said.

But then, the 14-man police contingent left the town to patrol neighboring villages. As soon as they departed, the mob returned – with devastating consequences.

"We couldn't just stay here," said B.K. Purohit, a police sub-inspector. "We had to patrol other areas."

After an emergency call from the town, the officers headed back, but said they were stopped a few miles away by roadblocks.

Muslims who used to live here, as well as those in other parts of the state contend security forces have been slow to respond. In some cases, they said, police and soldiers simply stood by as women and children were killed with sticks and swords.

"The police were nowhere to be seen when we were attacked," said Fatima Bibi, 48, who hid with nine relatives in the home of a Hindu family. "They should have been protecting us."

As the mob closed in on the Muslim neighborhood, the residents attempted to defend themselves by throwing stones and brandishing knives, said Sanju, a Hindu mechanic who witnessed the confrontation. But the Muslims quickly found themselves outnumbered and were forced to retreat, he said.

Although some Muslims managed either to run away from the village or to hide in the homes of Hindu families, most made their way down a rutted dirt path, past burning cars and huts, to the concrete house.

"We thought it would be the safest place because the walls are so thick," Ibrahim said from her hospital bed today in a nearby city.

But it also was the most crowded. By the time Ibrahim arrived with her relatives, the small house already was stuffed with people. So when the mob began throwing flaming sticks through the open windows, setting the bed and other furniture alight, there was no place to retreat, she said.

"Those who could not move into the corners, they were sucked into the flames," she said. As new pieces of blazing material were tossed into the house and flames danced up the walls, Ibrahim and a few others kept moving around the room, tripping on the bodies of people who had collapsed.

"We were filled with fear," she said. "We were crying, begging them to let us go."

Ibrahim, who has a large bandage over her right eye, said she lost 10 relatives in the blaze, including her aunt, who owned the house.

Police officers said they removed the 29 badly burned bodies from the house this morning. By this afternoon, the village was largely abandoned except for police officers and cows wandering the streets, which fleeing residents had been too panicked to take.

Those Muslims who were not taken to the hospital ran off to other villages, where they planned to move in with relatives. Hindus joined the exodus out of fear that Muslim gangs might attempt to exact revenge.

Hindus in the area neither praised nor repudiated the attack. A group of middle-aged Hindu men loitering outside the town said they were particularly upset by rumors that some of the women and children aboard the train had been raped.

"They should be punished because they have done awful things to our people," one man said.

Police officials said they have found no evidence that any of the passengers were raped. The train was returning from the northern town of Ayodhya, where hard-line Hindus want to build a temple to the god Ram on the site of a 16th-century mosque that was razed by Hindus in 1992. A Hindu group said it plans to start construction of the temple on March 15.

Hindu and Muslim residents said they could not recall another incident of religious violence in the town, even when the Ayodhya mosque was torn down and riots engulfed Bombay. "Relations were always very good," said Nasir Mohammed, a Muslim driver. "Sometimes, we would even go into the homes of Hindus."

But he and Ibrahim said they can no longer imagine returning to Sardarpura. Mohammed said he plans to continue living with relatives in a smaller village 35 miles away. Ibrahim said she has no idea where she will go after she leaves the hospital, but she said it likely will not be to a village where Muslims are in the minority.

Analysts said those sentiments suggest that even if government forces quell the violence, the lingering polarization could set back India's efforts to foster a multi-religious society.

"In one night, the Hindus ended years of harmony," Ibrahim said. "Why in the world would anyone want to go back?"

Special correspondent Rama Lakshmi contributed to this report.

March 4, 2002. Washington Post. Rajiv Chandrasekaran In Wake of Attacks, Indian City's Hindus, Muslims Move Apart

AHMADABAD, India, March 3 -- When Aslam Pathan returned to his religiously mixed neighborhood this afternoon to survey the destruction wrought by rampaging Hindus, his first stop was not his one-room house, which had been looted and torched, but the mosque just down the street.

In 1992, when religious riots last engulfed this city of 5 million in western India, the mosque, with its green walls and spacious prayer area, was spared. But last week, as Hindu mobs sought revenge for a Muslim attack on Hindu train passengers in a city east of here, the mosque was not so lucky.

Ten Korans were set alight, pulled out of the metal boxes in which they were stored. An adjoining religious school was demolished. And the walls around the compound were darkened with soot, suggesting that arsonists tried to burn down the entire concrete structure.

As he walked through the darkened building and surveyed the pile of ash that used to be copies of the Koran, Pathan, a large man with a thick black beard, began to sob. "How could they do this to us?" he asked.

With the mosque unfit for prayer, his house gutted and stick-wielding Hindu mobs still prowling the dirt streets of his neighborhood, Pathan said he had no plans to return home, as he did after the 1992 riots. He said that he and his family felt much safer in a nearby all-Muslim neighborhood, where they are squeezed into a school compound with 300 other families forced from their homes.

As four days of sectarian fighting in Gujarat state began to ebb today with legions of soldiers and police officers patrolling the streets, Muslims and Hindus began to confront the aftermath of India's worst religious violence in almost a decade.

The clashes, which have claimed 499 lives, began Wednesday night, when a Muslim mob torched a train carrying Hindus who had been rallying to build a temple at the site of a destroyed mosque in northern India. Rampaging throngs of Hindus quickly retaliated by killing Muslims and burning thousands of their homes, businesses and vehicles.

But even after the dead are mourned and burned-out homes rebuilt, neighborhoods like Pathan's may never be the same. Muslims and Hindus alike said they have become too fearful to live next to each other and would prefer to reside in religiously homogeneous enclaves.

"Now either they can live here or we can live here," said Sand Kumar, a Hindu who was moving his family's possessions out of a predominantly Muslim area in central Ahmadabad. "We both can no longer live here. The divisions are too deep."

Hindu and Muslim leaders said they expected the strife to lead to a redrawing of demographic maps in Ahmadabad, Gujarat's capital, and other places in the state. Although India, a predominantly Hindu but officially secular nation, has a long history of sectarian tension and divisions, these leaders said the intensity of last week's fighting would translate into new religious segregation.

Muslim leaders said they were shocked by the scale of the revenge attacks, particularly the assiduous effort to flush out Muslims from Hindu areas.

"Right now in Ahmadabad, you will not find any Muslims living in a non-Muslim community," said Shakeel Ahmed, a doctor who is a trustee of Gujarat's Islamic Relief Committee, a private aid organization.

In Pathan's neighborhood, where Muslims and Hindus used to visit the same shops, go to the same schools and mingle on the street, the young Hindu men patrolling the street said they did not plan to allow Muslims to move back. "We will butcher them to death if they return," said Dinesh Tharkur, a mechanic. "I'll make meat out of them."

Aside from Pathan's brief visit to the mosque, Muslims stayed away from the neighborhood today. Others said they were too afraid to return, even to fish out a few charred possessions.

Streets chockablock with Muslim homes were eerily quiet, the silence broken only by goats ambling by in search of garbage to eat. Other parts of the city, which was overwhelmed by fighting on Thursday and Friday, were similarly calm, largely because of a curfew enforced by soldiers and police. Roads were devoid of vehicles and most shops remained closed.

Anwar Ansari, who lives in an all-Muslim neighborhood of 50,000 people, accused government officials of abetting efforts to keep Muslims out of Hindu areas by doing little to prevent the revenge attacks. "They want us to live separately," said Ahmed of the Islamic Relief Committee. "They want to enforce a system of religious apartheid here."

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But senior government officials said they eventually hope to reintegrate divided communities through a series of confidence-building measures, including hosting meetings between religious leaders. The country's powerful home minister, L.K. Advani, who visited Ahmadabad today, said the government "must remove any feeling of insecurity in the hearts of the common man." Advani also said he was confident that "the situation has been tapering down."

The state's health minister, Ashok Bhatt, said isolating Muslims would increase poverty and lead to more children studying in religious schools, leading to a radicalization of the Muslim community. "We're interested in seeing these two communities come together, not move apart," he said.

Muslim leaders said that could happen only if hard-line Hindus did not succeed in building a temple to the god Ram on the site of a 16th century mosque that was razed by Hindus in 1992 in the northern Indian town of Ayodhya. The destruction of the mosque sparked riots across India in which 2,000 people died.

"Hindus and Muslims have gotten along for years, but if they forcibly build a temple there, it will be the beginning of a process where the communities will be unable to live with each other," Ahmed said.

Although the all-Muslim neighborhood near Pathan's house suffered comparatively little damage in the rioting -- about 50 homes were burned but residents were not forced to leave -- Ahmed said he did not think religious enclaves would be good for Muslims. "In the short term, we may have more safety, but there's no way a minority community can live in complete segregation," he said. "We need to go to school with Hindus. We need to work with Hindus. We want to be a part of India."

But Pathan said the idea of moving back into his old neighborhood was too painful to contemplate. Although Hindus contend that "outside elements" were responsible for the attack on Muslims in the area, Pathan said he recognized several of the assailants as his erstwhile neighbors.

"How can we live next to the people who did this to us?" he said. "We forgave them in 1992. But now it is no longer possible. We don't trust them anymore."

Special correspondent Rama Lakshmi contributed to this report.

March 21, 2002. New York Times. Somini Sengupta.

After Riots, Some Muslims Fear for Their Future in India

AHMEDABAD, India, March 20 — The mobs set fire to the lobby of the Signor Hotel but left the Opel car dealership next door untouched. Just below the charred shell of the Neeltop Hotel, a sweet shop is doing a brisk business. Under bright white lights, dinner is served at Vaibhav restaurant. But the Topaz next door is incinerated and another once-popular restaurant upstairs is black with soot.

A drive through this city reveals the design of the mobs that went on a violent rampage here three weeks ago. Hindu-owned businesses have been spared. Muslim-owned businesses have been burned, and their blackened hulks dot the landscape. Their smashed windows stare out like so many gouged-out eyes.

The violence began when a Muslim mob set fire to a train carrying hard-line Hindus. The fire, near a station 95 miles north of here, killed 58 Hindus on board. The next day Hindu mobs took to the streets here with pistols, knives and cans of kerosene. By the end, more than 600 people had been killed across the state, most of them in this city.

More than 60,000 were displaced from their homes into makeshift relief camps. The vast majority of them are Muslims.

Among the hardest-hit Muslim establishments here are those that served some of the city's most observant Hindus. Owned by a small, prosperous Muslim community called the Chelias, they were a string of what are called "pure vegetarian" restaurants, establishments that cater to the most particular of Hindu vegetarians.

The Chelias took pains not to stick out in the Hindu-majority parts of the city. No posters of Mecca and Medina hung on their walls. They employed Hindu cooks. The names of their restaurants contained no trace of Islamic identity. One was called Tulsi, the Hindi word for the holy basil used in Hindu ceremonies. Another was called Annapurna, after a Hindu goddess.

"We have to live here, we have to die here," explained Ismail Heera, a Cheliya Muslim who owns the Signor Hotel and has a share in several vegetarian restaurants in town. "This was just to mix with the rest of the people."

The urge to fit in turned out not to be enough. According to the state hotel federation, police reports have been filed on behalf of 72 hotels and restaurants that were destroyed, all but one of them Muslim-owned. Statewide, a total of 147 Muslim-owned properties have been destroyed to date. Others have yet to file papers with the police, a federation official said. By Mr. Heera's count, about 35 of the properties were owned by residents of his village in the Mehsana district just northwest of here, which is home to the Chelias.

Exactly how their hotels and restaurants were identified as Muslim-owned businesses remains a mystery. Many of their patrons said they realized only after seeing the charred remains that their owners were Muslim. Mr. Heera

and his fellow Muslim merchants suspect the leaders of the rioters had done research on their targets some time ago.

If the Cheliya Muslims were singled out at the top of the economic ladder, their compatriots lower down also have not been spared. Auto-rickshaw drivers dare not leave the borders of the city's Muslim enclaves. The same is true of scrap recyclers and vegetable vendors.

Auto mechanics, factory workers, and mattress stuffers all languish in relief camps across the city, chased from their homes in Hindu-majority areas. Women who made their living doing sewing in their homes say they have no idea when they will be able to work next.

The mobs did more than kill and loot, said the Rev. James Dabhi, a Jesuit priest who has been active in the relief camps. "They have been able to demolish the livelihood of these people," he said.

In recent days, fliers have circulated advising Hindus not to patronize Muslim-owned establishments or work at them. "It will be impossible for them to live in any corner of this nation," read one pamphlet, signed only by "a true Hindu patriot."

Violence has continued to simmer throughout the state. Two people were killed in police shootings here today. Four were gunned down in nearby villages on Tuesday.

In the Muslim parts of the city, where Muslim-owned businesses still stand, commerce has ground to a halt. Iqbal Tadha's place, the Royal Hotel, is empty. Some of his Hindu workers have stayed on, but some are too afraid to venture into the area.

During the riots, Mr. Tadha said, he hid the last of his guests, all Hindus, until they could be safely ferried to the train station.

In the Hindu areas of town, the most striking reminders of mayhem are the empty shells of the Cheliya hotels and restaurants. The steps leading to the Hotel Chicago — named after its owner, who makes his home in the windy city — are a carpet of broken glass.

On the first morning of riots, a large mob set fire to the sign of the Signor Hotel, recalled Ajit Biswas, 19, a hotel employee. Then several dozen young men came up the stairs with the tilak — a red dot — smeared on their foreheads, alcohol on their breath, knives and hammers in their hands. They spared the workers cowering in the kitchen only after the elevator man convinced their leader they were all Hindus.

The rioters ripped air conditioning units from the rooms and made off with mattresses and pillows. They emptied the cash register in the restaurant and also polished off the soda and ice cream.

The hotel, which took up the top two floors of a building, was destroyed. The rest of the building, from a law office to a car dealer, remained practically unscathed.

Mr. Biswas was one of five of the hotel's 70-odd workers who were still coming to work. He said he did not plan to continue for long. It was not that he had anything against his boss. "He looks after us like we're his sons," he said. He was just scared.

"They may set fire here again," he said. "As soon as we get paid, we'll leave."

Yesterday afternoon, Mr. Heera sat sipping tea with friends in the courtyard of his apartment building here and vowed to carry on. Yes, the Signor would reopen, he said. Nothing like this would ever happen again, he hoped.

"We can't just run away," he said. "We feel hurt. But we have to face it."

But Mr. Heera admitted he has started to consider alternative, safer locations. The losses at the Signor alone, he estimated, would add up to \$500,000.

March 24, 2002. Washington Post. Neelesh Misra (AP). India's Human Right Chief Critical

NEW DELHI, India — India's human rights chief slammed government officials Sunday for their handling of the nation's worst religious riots in a decade, saying that a western state was "far from normal" three weeks after clashes between Hindus and Muslims.

The assessment by former Supreme Court Chief Justice J.S. Verma came as more violence was reported in the western state of Gujarat. Three people were stabbed and one died of her wounds in Ahmadabad, the state's largest city, Press Trust of India reported. No other details were available.

About 725 people — mostly Muslims, India's largest minority group — have been killed since late February, when an attack by a Muslim mob on a train carrying Hindu nationalists touched off long-smoldering religious tensions. Most of the deaths occurred in the days after the train attack as Hindus hunted down Muslims in retaliation. Violence has continued sporadically.

"Three weeks or more is a long enough time for complete normalcy ... I did not see that anywhere," Verma told a news conference after returning from Gujarat.

His commission is appointed by the government to investigate incidents of human rights violations across the country. Though it does not have the power to prosecute, its reports often force officials to take action.

A Muslim mob set a passenger train on fire in the town of Godhra on Feb. 27, killing 60 people. Reprisals began immediately.

"When Godhra happened, did or did you not anticipate an escalation?" Verma said, referring to Gujarat's state government, run by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's party.

Meanwhile, in the northern hill resort of Simla, Vajpayee reiterated his regret over the rioting.

"What happened in Gujarat was unfortunate ... that people got burnt alive and then people got angry and there was extreme injustice," Vajpayee told a public meeting.

March 24, 2002. New York Times. Somini Sengupta. Riots Shake Friendships and Faiths in India

AHMEDABAD, India, March 22 — On the day that a scooter-riding mob set fire to Akbar Divecha's apartment building in an affluent, largely Hindu neighborhood here, it was his friend, Sanjay Shah, who drove across town and ferried him to safety.

Mr. Divecha, a retired judge with the Gujarat State court, is a Muslim, though by his own admission only nominally. He describes himself as an ardent secularist.

Mr. Shah, a chartered accountant, is a Hindu. He is also a state-level functionary of the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Hindu nationalist group that controls this state and has been widely accused of doing little during the last month as Hindu mobs set ablaze Muslim homes, businesses and Muslims themselves. Nearly 650 people, mostly Muslims, have died.

Mr. Divecha, 66, calls it "a holocaust." Mr. Shah, 52, at whose home the two met for lunch, says a terrible thing happened. But he adds, "Frankly, the provocation was great."

By this he means that the violence began only after a Muslim mob burned a train full of Hindu militants at a station in Godhra, 95 miles north of here; 58 Hindus, including children, were killed — or, in Mr. Shah's word, lynched.

The riots here have done more than lay bare the simmering hostility between members of the Hindu majority and their Muslim neighbors. They have also left secular Indians fearing for the future.

In the collegial conversation between these two old friends lay the kernel of the debate roiling India.

As Mr. Divecha sat in his friend's living room and listened quietly, Mr. Shah credited Hindu nationalists for uniting Hindus.

But later, in private, Mr. Divecha bemoaned what to him looked like a shrinking space for secularism. For the first time in his life, he faced the prospect of having to move to a Muslim enclave. He fears the riots will divide his hometown into "watertight containers" of Hindu and Muslim neighborhoods.

Mr. Divecha describes himself as a Muslim "only by name, not by deed." Beaming, he said he had visited more Hindu temples than Muslim shrines. He is a vegetarian by choice. (His friend, Mr. Shah, is a meat-eater.)

Mr. Divecha does not read Arabic well enough to read the Koran, and he rarely fasts during Ramadan. Never had he and his wife, Maleka, thought of living anywhere but an integrated area. The mob that attacked the Divechas' apartment building, an island of 12 Muslim families in a Hindu and Jain area, singled that lifelong commitment.

"Left to me, I would prefer to live in a cosmopolitan, mixed neighborhood," Mr. Divecha said. "But all depends on Mrs. Divecha. She's too scared to go back."

Mrs. Divecha, 58, pursed her lips. "What we saw, we won't be able to forget," she said. "It's unsafe. We have no police protection. Nothing." The Divechas are currently taking shelter in a government bungalow.

The cry was much the same at the Shah Alam relief camp, a grief-filled tent city in the walled courtyard of a Muslim shrine here. The refugees here had lived in a Muslim pocket in a largely Hindu area. Their homes have been destroyed. Their heads are filled with awful memories: a husband shot and killed by police, a son set upon by a mob.

Godhran Zadaphia, the Gujarat home minister, said he believed that most displaced residents would eventually move back home. But residents have already pressed the government for land to build a new settlement in a Muslim part of town.

The Divechas wonder aloud where they might feel at home. Should they move to a Muslim enclave, they asked. Would they be accepted?

"They wouldn't harm me, they would look down on me," Mr. Divecha offered. "They wouldn't accept me as a Muslim person partly as a result of my outlook and partly as a result of my way of life."

Mr. Shah insisted that Mr. Divecha was not like most Muslims. "With rabid communal Muslims, this man cannot live," he said.

Mr. Shah, who befriended Mr. Divecha 20 years ago, fretted about his friend's safety and wondered how Mr. Divecha, having invested his nest egg on his apartment, could afford to buy another.

Yet, when talk turned to the fate of those who set fire to the Divechas' home and killed hundreds of Muslims, the two men diverged sharply.

Of course, Mr. Shah said, the mob that killed Hindus on the train should be treated differently from the mob that went on a vengeful rampage. "If I slap you first and then you slap me, should we be charged the same?" he asked. "Who started this mischief?"

Mr. Divecha disagreed. "Homicide remains homicide," he said, "even if it's by way of retaliation."

Mr. Shah escorted his visitors to the door. As Mr. Divecha stepped outside, he raised his finger to the sky and said: "I'd like to add one thing. I have full faith in humanity."

July 27, 2002. New York Times. Celia W. Dugger. Religious Riots Loom Over Indian Politics

AHMEDABAD, India — Here in the adopted hometown of Mohandas K. Gandhi, the great apostle of nonviolence, Hindu mobs committed acts of unspeakable savagery against Muslims this spring.

Mothers were skewered on swords as their children watched. Young women were stripped and raped in broad daylight, then doused with kerosene and set on fire. A pregnant woman's belly was slit open, her fetus raised skyward on the tip of a sword and then tossed onto one of the fires that blazed across the city.

The violence raged for days and persisted for more than two months, claiming almost 1,000 lives. It was driven by hatred and sparked by a terrible crime: a Muslim mob stoned a train car loaded with activists from the World Hindu Council on Feb. 27, then set it on fire, killing 59 people, mostly women and children.

The carnage that followed here in the western state of Gujarat has become a festering political sore because of widespread allegations that the Bharatiya Janata Party, the Hindu nationalist party that leads India and Gujarat, and the World Hindu Council were complicit in the attacks on Muslims. The party and the council — both part of the same Hindu nationalist family — deny the charges.

But official statistics provided in June by the Police Department, now under new administration, show that the state of Gujarat — the only major one in India governed solely by the Bharatiya Janata Party — failed to take even elementary steps to halt the horrific momentum of violence.

The day after the train attack, for example, police officers here in Ahmedabad did not arrest a single person from among the tens of thousands who rampaged through Muslim enclaves, raping and looting as well as burning alive 124 Muslims.

Police officials and survivors said in interviews that workers and officials of the party and the council were complicit in the attacks and, in some cases, instigated the mobs.

"This was not a riot," one senior police official said angrily. "It was a state-sponsored pogrom."

Party officials who lead the national government, while publicly condemning the attacks, resisted opposition calls for a forceful assertion of the central government's authority to halt the violence as it dragged on for more than two months.

Fathoming what happened here in the first major outbreak of Hindu-Muslim violence in almost a decade is critical for India. The specter of such violence has shadowed the country since its birth.

India, a secular democracy, and Pakistan, an Islamic nation, were hacked apart when they won independence from Britain in 1947. The furies of religious hatred were unleashed, and about a million people died.

The use of religion for political gain is an enduring theme in both India and Pakistan and a wellspring of violence that vexes the subcontinent even today.

Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. The Genocide

Senior national leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party, including Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, have maintained that India's tolerant Hindu ethos has helped guarantee religious freedom for India's billion-strong population, which includes 820 million Hindus and 130 million Muslims.

Until the violence in Gujarat, the party, which has led the national government since 1998, had proudly pointed to the absence of Hindu-Muslim violence during its years in power as evidence of its secular credentials.

But many influential Indians are once again questioning whether the party can be trusted to ensure that Hindus and Muslims live together in peace and to resist the temptation of exploiting religious divisions to reap Hindu votes.

Gujarat, a state of 51 million people, has over the past decade become the country's laboratory for Hindu nationalism. That ideology has long depicted Muslim and Christian Indians as converts to foreign religions who must accept the primacy of Hindu culture. Gandhi's assassin was an extreme adherent of this view — and for decades, the Hindu nationalist movement was a political pariah as a result.

In the recent carnage in Gujarat, most of those killed were Muslims. Among the survivors, 100,000 became refugees in their own country. More than 20,000 homes and businesses were damaged or destroyed, along with 360 Muslim places of worship.

The events have inspired an anguished outpouring from many Indian intellectuals.

"Gujarat disowned Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi long ago," Ashis Nandy, one of India's leading social thinkers wrote in *Seminar*, a monthly magazine that addresses domestic and international problems in India. "The state's political soul has been won over by his killers."

In an interview in June, the state's chief minister, Narendra Modi, offered no consolation to the state's Muslims and expressed satisfaction with his government's performance. His only regret, he said, was that he did not handle the news media better.

"We have 18,600 villages," he said in his office, where a photograph of Gandhi hung on the wall. "Ninety-eight percent of Gujarat was peaceful. Is it not a credit for the administration, the government?"

Mr. Modi was a longtime party organizer and pracharak, or preacher, from the source of the Hindu nationalist movement, the Association of National Volunteers. He was handpicked less than a year ago by the Bharatiya Janata Party's high command to turn around its fading fortunes in the state.

[Mr. Modi dissolved the state assembly on July 19 to bring on elections. In the usual practice, he resigned and was named caretaker chief minister while he led the party's political campaign.]

At the national level, too, hard-liners in the party appear to be on the upswing. Lal Krishna Advani, India's home minister, who represents Gujarat in Parliament, was elevated recently to be India's deputy prime minister and is expected to succeed the aging Mr. Vajpayee as the coalition's standard-bearer.

In the late 1980's, Mr. Advani led a movement to build a Hindu temple in Ayodhya, on the site of a 16th-century mosque said to be the birthplace of the Hindu deity Ram. That movement was critical to the party's rise to power and culminated in the mosque's demolition by Hindu zealots in 1992, igniting the last major spasm of Hindu-Muslim violence, which left more than 1,100 people dead, most of them Muslims.

Mr. Advani said he regretted the mosque's destruction, just as he has decried the violence in Gujarat. Still, he stood by Mr. Modi, and at a recent news conference, said that Mr. Modi's government had generally performed well.

Others disagree. The National Human Rights Commission, headed by a retired chief justice of the Supreme Court, concluded that the state's efforts were "a comprehensive failure."

The commission released a confidential report on June 12 that named officials from the Bharatiya Janata Party who have been accused by survivors and witnesses of instigating the violence. It noted that many politically connected people were yet to be arrested.

"These are grave matters indeed," the commission wrote, "that must not be allowed to be forgiven or forgotten."

An Attack and a Vengeful Mob

The train that pulled into Godhra station at 7:43 a.m. on Feb. 27 was packed with more than 1,500 volunteers of the World Hindu Council, who were returning from Ayodhya, where they had agitated once again for construction of a temple on the site of the demolished mosque.

Roused by religious fervor, hundreds of devotees poured out of the train at Godhra station, which is in the middle of a densely packed Muslim slum. A Muslim vendor was ordered to say "Hail Ram" and refused. The Hindu activists yanked his beard and beat him, said a state police investigator.

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As the train pulled out, an angry Muslim crowd pelted it with stones. No one seems certain why, but the mob's fury focused on coach S6. Stones crashed through the windows. A flaming rag soared inside, landing on a synthetic leather seat that caught fire. Police investigators say that as many as 16 gallons of gasoline were poured onto the floor. Fifty-nine people were killed.

Fury over the atrocity came fast. Within hours, a Muslim driver was pulled from his rickshaw and killed with a cricket bat. Hindu mobs burned down shops in the city and threw stones at a mosque.

The World Hindu Council called a general strike for the following day, Feb. 28, to protest the killings. Senior police officials say the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's endorsement of the strike made violence virtually inevitable.

Mashiha Qureshi, an 11-year-old Muslim girl, and her family fled to the safety of Juhapura, the city's largest Muslim ghetto. The family's house and five businesses were gutted by fire. She is now afraid to live among Hindus.

"Somebody might catch me, kill me, throw me under a train," she said. "There are good people. There are bad people. Some save you, some kill you. But how do you know which is which?"

The chief minister, Mr. Modi, said he gave clear instructions that the police were to deal with any violence firmly.

But in a country where authorities routinely round up suspects to head off Hindu-Muslim violence, the Ahmedabad police did not make a single preventive arrest the day of the train attack, city police officials said.

P. C. Pande, who was city police commissioner at the time, and C. K. Chakravarthi, who heads the state police, refused repeated requests for interviews.

Other senior police officials — sickened by what happened, but unwilling to be quoted by name — contradicted Mr. Modi. One official said the chief minister directed that the police "should not come down harshly on the Hindus tomorrow."

As a result, they said, no clear orders were given.

Two large massacres took place on Feb. 28 in Ahmedabad, a gritty city of 3.5 million people, as the police stood by or, according to some witnesses, aided the mobs.

Thirty-nine people were killed at the Gulbarg Society, a walled compound that was home to Muslim families in the midst of a largely Hindu neighborhood.

The mob started gathering in the morning. By early afternoon, more than 10,000 Hindu men assembled, many armed with stones, iron rods, tridents, swords and homemade bombs, screaming: "Beat them! Burn them! Cut them!"

Muslim women and children in the neighborhood had gathered in the home of Ehsan Jafri, a Muslim and a former member of Parliament from the Congress Party. They believed he could protect them.

Through the day, witnesses said, Mr. Jafri made increasingly frantic calls to the city police commissioner and other powerful people, among them Amarsinh Chaudhary, who was the state Congress Party president and a former chief minister of Gujarat.

Mr. Chaudhary said he, in turn, called the heads of the city and state police forces. The third and last time Mr. Jafri called, he wept, begging: "Kindly help me. They will kill me. My society is burning."

The police arrived in numbers only large enough to take on the mob at about 4 or 5 p.m. — too late to save the women and children, who burned to death with Mr. Jafri, survivors said.

The next day, the smell of roasted flesh still hung heavy in the ruins of the residential complex. K. G. Erda, a senior police inspector, was standing outside, watching as people carried on with their looting.

He said the few officers who had been there the day before had stayed in the traffic intersections, only firing at the mob when it stoned the police. He and other officers had called for reinforcements, he said, but none came. In fact, he said, 10 policemen, including two high-ranking officers, were called away.

"What can two or three policemen do when confronted by 20,000 people?" Mr. Erda asked.

The second massacre of Muslims unfolded in a poor area called Naroda Patia, where 11-year-old Mashiha and her family lived.

Many survivors accuse leaders of Hindu nationalist groups, among them Bipin Panchal, known to many as Bipin Bhai, of leading the mob.

A man in the World Hindu Council's front office confirmed that Mr. Panchal was a council worker. Days after the atrocity, Mr. Panchal said his shop had been damaged by fire and looted. The Muslims had attacked, he claimed, and he had only defended himself.

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"They live here in India and pray for Pakistan," he said contemptuously. "They only deserve one treatment. They should pack their bags and board the train to Pakistan. There should be no Muslims here."

He denied even belonging to the World Hindu Council.

Mr. Panchal has since been charged with being a leader of the mob and is said to have absconded. However, an official at the Naroda police station said the police knew where he was but had been instructed not to arrest him.

On the day these two massacres took place, Feb. 28, no one was arrested for participating in the violence. The next day, 55 people were killed, but only 93 arrests were made.

State officials would later point to the large number of Hindus arrested to prove the police were vigilant. Here in the city the police have arrested more than 3,500 people — but those arrests came belatedly, after the carnage had already gotten out of control.

Asked about the failure to make arrests early on, Mr. Modi, the chief minister, asserted that the police had fired into the mobs to halt the violence.

Yet in the three days after the train attack — when Muslims were overwhelmingly the victims of violence — the police killed more Muslims than Hindus, 22 to 14, in what was ostensibly an effort to stop attacks on Muslims.

An alliance of nonprofit groups, Citizen's Initiative, surveyed almost 2,800 Muslim families. But Mr. Modi dismissed the charges. "Not a single complaint has been registered like this," he insisted. Instead of rooting out those who may have been complicit, Mr. Modi used his authority to penalize officers who enforced the law, senior police officials say. They cite what they describe as punitive transfers of four police superintendents in March.

Mr. Modi called the transfers a "purely administrative decision." But several officials confirmed that Mr. Chakravarthi, who heads the state police, wrote a letter protesting the transfers and commending the men for their handling of the violence.

The transferred police officials told dramatic stories of confronting mobs.

One officer, Himanshu Bhatt, recalled arriving at a Muslim village surrounded by a Hindu mob of 15,000 that was brandishing swords and scythes. Already, 14 Muslims had been killed. Mr. Bhatt immediately gave the order to fire. A deputy headman from a neighboring Hindu village was killed, and the mob ran away.

Mr. Bhatt said he took great pride that all the Muslim inhabitants were home cooking dinner by the next evening.

Rahul Sharma, another officer, described rescuing 400 children, ages 6 to 14, at an Islamic school that was surrounded by a mob of 8,000 armed with swords, pipes and soda bottle bombs.

"We fired tear gas, but the wind was against us and it blew back on us," he said. "So we fired three rounds of musket fire. Four or five were injured. The entire crowd vanished."

"I don't think any other job would have allowed me to save so many lives," he said. "That is a bank balance for a lifetime."

As the violence in Gujarat continued into April, the political and civic outcry across the country rose, as did pressure on the central government. Mr. Modi's role became an issue, with even some of the Bharatiya Janata Party's own allies calling for his dismissal. After a bruising debate in Parliament, the central government finally dispatched a senior retired police officer, K. P. S. Gill, to advise Mr. Modi.

Mr. Gill arrived on May 3 and within days, the city's three top police officials were replaced. K. R. Kaushik, the new police commissioner, said he immediately issued orders for the police to arrest anyone gathering in a mob. By the evening of the next day, May 11, he said, the violence was under control.

Unapologetic, Separate, Hopeful

Today, there is no more apt symbol of the divide between Hindus and Muslims in Ahmedabad than the road separating Juhapura, the Muslim ghetto where so many sought refuge during the carnage, from neighboring Hindu areas.

The Hindu houses back up to barbed wire fences and high brick walls topped with jagged shards of glass. The windows in virtually every house on both sides were shattered in the rock throwing that accompanied the violence.

It is as though the Muslims of Juhapura and the Hindus in adjacent neighborhoods live in separate nations. They refer to the road that divides them as a border. It has the appearance of a war zone that has come under heavy shelling.

But as desolate as the road looks today, it ends on a green field, called Unity Ground, where Hindus and Muslims used to play cricket together.

Days after her husband, the former Muslim parliamentarian, was burned alive by a mob, Zakia Jafri, 65, still clung to the idea of an India where Hindus and Muslims lived in peace. For years, she and her husband resisted their children's entreaties to leave their majority-Hindu neighborhood. Mrs. Jafri, haggard and grief-stricken, vowed to go home to their burned-out apartment and start over.

"That is my husband's memory and dream," she said. "I will not abandon it."

But the lack of remorse among many Hindus has slowed the healing among Muslims. Mrs. Jafri said recently that none of her Hindu neighbors ever came to her to express sorrow that they could not save her husband. She asked, "How can I go back to such a place?"

August 8, 2002. Times of India (India).

Media submits riot tapes to inquiry commission

AHMEDABAD: Representatives of the electronic media submitted visual recordings of the riots before the Justice Nanavati and Justice Shah Commission of inquiry.

The commission had earlier summoned the representatives of the television channels to submit all the recordings that they had, of the riots.

On Thursday, representatives of Doordarshan, Zee TV, Sahara TV, NDTV, Aaj Tak and GSTV submitted cassettes of visual clippings, news scripts and related files.

The Commission has also summoned both the traveling ticket examiners (TTE) who were aboard the ill-fated Sabarmati Express which was attacked at Godhra on February 27, and police sub-inspector on duty at the Godhra railway station on that day.

August 12, 2002. The Hindu (India).

We have no good words for Modi, victims tell Kalam

AHMEDABAD Aug.12. The victims of the Gujarat communal riots poured their hearts out before the President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, who arrived here today on a two-day visit.

"It is the first time someone heard us so patiently," said 18-year-old Shahzahan Banu, who had been running from pillar to post to seek medical assistance for severe burn marks on her face she got during the riots. She, like 14-year old Zaved Sheikh, who has been orphaned in the riots, did not know what Dr. Kalam communicated in English to the Ahmedabad Collector, but are hoping that the opportunity they got to talk to the President directly would not in vain.

At Naroda-Patiya, where some 90 persons were burnt alive during the riots, and at the relief camps at Haj House and widows' home in Juhapura visited by the President, there were only brickbats for the Narendra Modi administration.

"I wish I had some good words for him," said Dr. Shakeel Ahmad, administrator of the Islami Relief Committee, pointing at Mr. Modi who was standing next to Dr. Kalam, "but regrettably I have none nor any special feeling for him." Because the Government not only did not do anything to prevent the mass killings during the riots, but it was also lethargic in taking necessary steps for relief and rehabilitation in the post-riot days, he said.

Dr. Kalam, who began his visit by paying homage to Mahatma Gandhi at his Sabarmati Ashram immediately after his arrival here this evening, later went to Naroda-Patiya before talking to the riot victims at Haj House and widows' camp, the two sites from where the media was barred by the State administration.

In the narrow lanes of Naroda-Patiya, the President, however, was taken only a few yards inside the locality. The local residents shouted that he should go and see for himself the "Jalianwalabagh well" in which the bodies of the burnt victims were allegedly thrown by the hooligans, but he was not allowed to go that far. Dr. Kalam apparently did not realise what the local residents were requesting him in Hindi and turned back to meet the selected few delegations waiting for him in a makeshift tent outside.

December 11, 2003. The Hindu (India).

It was genocide, says report

MUMBAI DEC. 10. The violence in Gujarat has still not ended. This is one of the conclusions of the report, "Threatened Existence: a feminist analysis of the genocide in Gujarat", by the International Initiative for Justice in Gujarat.

Released on the occasion of Human Rights Day by Justice Jahagirdar, retired judge, the 244-page report is the result of a visit by an international panel of jurists, academics, journalists and women's activists to the State nine months after the violence that followed the Godhra tragedy of February 27, 2002.

"This is the first time that we have a book that deals with the specific aspect of violence against women as a result of communal riots," said Mr. Justice Jahagirdar.

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"Violence against women took place on a vast scale in Gujarat. Why is it that the 'Hindutvadis' are indulging in this type of violence, specially after 1993?" he asked.

Mass rape, he said, was a phenomenon associated with war. "But was there a war situation in Gujarat when the riots took place? Is every communal riot being equated with war?"

The report specifically documents the sexual violence in Gujarat, based on testimonies by 180 women from seven districts. But as Vahida Nainar, one of the panelists and a researcher in international law, clarified, "The objective of this report was to go beyond documentation to provide a gender analysis of what happened in Gujarat."

An important aspect of the report, she said, was the fact that the panel had applied international law to the events in Gujarat and concluded that they fall within the accepted definition of genocide and crimes against humanity.

"There is a misconception that it takes a large number of casualties for an event to qualify as genocide. In international jurisprudence, the key element is not the number of victims but the intent of the attackers — to destroy a community on the basis of religion, race or class."

Similarly, for an event to be termed a crime against humanity depended on how widespread and systematic the violence was. In the case of Gujarat, she said, it was both.

Film-maker Mahesh Bhatt and writer Shobha De, who spoke at the release function, emphasised the importance of not forgetting what happened in Gujarat.

"It's almost as if our leaders want to impose amnesia," said Bhatt, and endorsed the conclusion of the report that the violence continued in Gujarat and in some ways "has become more dangerous."

The authors of the report have made several recommendations. They have asked the Indian Government to enact legislation to implement the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide that it has already ratified.