

May 01, 2002. The Milli Gazette. Syed Ubaidur Rahman.

Were sexual crimes in Gujarat planned?

Ahmedabad: Women have been the main target of the rioters in Gujarat. After visiting the state for more than a week and meeting hundreds of people in different camps spread over the four most affected districts of the state including Panchmahal, (under which Godhra comes) Baroda, Anand and Ahmadabad, I have reached the conclusion that women were consciously and specially targeted by the rioters who were being controlled by the VHP and Bajrang Dal criminals besides the members of the RSS and the BJP.

The way the Hindu mobs acted while brutally dishonouring Muslim women will put the Serbs in Bosnia and Kosovo to shame. Wherever there were killings, there were large scale rapes of Muslim women irrespective of age differences. There are incidents when all this was done while their fathers, brothers and husbands were made to witness this brutality after being made captives. And at times all this was done inside the village mosques.

Fatima Bibi Md Yaqub Sheikh whose family lost 19 members including her sisters and brothers says that whatever they did could have been justified, except the way they raped women. She says that when her family tried to flee Naroda Patia, the area where 90 people were burnt alive they all requested the police to save them, but police instead of doing anything for their safety asked them to surrender themselves to the mob.

She says that her sister and her niece both were repeatedly raped by the mob. She adds that her sister offered the rioters twenty thousand rupees that she had with her and asked the rioters to spare her and her daughter. But she says, those were not men, they were devils wearing Khaki shorts, Fatima Sheikh refers to the RSS men who were in the mob. She adds that those devils not only snatched those twenty thousand rupees from her sister but raped her and then burnt her alive. Her niece too was given the same treatment after being raped by men she lost count. And both of them were disgraced there on the road.

Fatima, sobbing inconsolably told me that her sister and niece were not the only ones who were raped by the mob on the road near Naroda Patia. She says there were at least 25 such cases. And all the women were stripped naked before being raped and then were burnt alive. She says that even the very old ones who were not raped were also stripped first before being thrown in the fire.

Jawed, one of the worst victims of the riots, who has been left alone after his father, sister and all other family members were killed by the rioters is another victim. All of eleven years old, he says, 'unhon ne meri mummy, papa, aur baji ko zinda jala diya. Meri masi ke ladke ko jaan se mar diya aur meri masi ki beti aur bahu se badtamizi ki aur phir unko bhi jala diya (they burnt alive my mother, father and sister. They killed my cousin brother and then outraged his wife and sister). Jawed saw all this being done to his closest relatives. This young boy who has been brought to Shah Alam dargah camp in Ahmadabad by some strangers will probably never forget what his innocent eyes saw being done by these beastly people.

Bilqis Yaqub Patel from Randhikpur is one of the worst cases of this horrific crime to whom I met in Godhra relief camp. Five months pregnant this woman of around 20 years was not only beaten up badly and left for dead, she was also raped by three men from her own village. Eight other women, her close relatives including her sister Shamim, Amina Adam, Halima, Munniben Abdul and Madina who were with her too were meted out the same barbarous treatment. Munniben was just all of nine years and Halima was over 45. But for those age difference was nothing.

Shamim, Bilqis's sister who had delivered a baby boy just two days ago while fleeing was not only tortured brutally by those people who had thrown her two-days old baby into the fire but also repeatedly raped. No woman was spared. Everyone was given the same brutal treatment. Bilqis says she and all other women who were killed-Bilqis too was taken as dead when the rapists and killers fled-were lying stark naked when she regained consciousness.

Bilqis who lost her two-years-old child and the one in her womb due to miscarriage refuses to speak. Sharifa Umarjee and her aids who take care of these devastated women in the Godhra camp ask her to tell what happened and it was only after their prodding that the young lady spoke. Sharifa Umarjee told this correspondent that it was only today when they received the news that Bilqis' husband has survived and is in another camp in Dahod district.

But Bilqis is a unique case as she was among the very few women in the whole state who were able to file an FIR against the devils whose name she told me as Govind Nai, Naresh Moria and Jaswant Nai. She has also named all the 23 people who killed all the women and children who were with her.

Others are not so fortunate. Hundreds or probably thousands of women who were raped after every incident of violence and burning around this devilish land have not been able to file FIRs. Don't ask about those who were burnt alive after being raped and mutilated.

Reenu Khanna a social activist in Baroda says that the rioters from Sangh and more particularly from the VHP have used rape to inflict deep psychological wounds in the minds of the whole Muslim community. Khanna who has been working for relief and rehabilitation of the affected people along with her husband says she knows that whichever locality these people attacked they also left horror tales after playing havoc with the women there. When asked about the police registering FIRs against the perpetrators, she says that the police rarely files any charges against the criminals and even if it does it makes the criminal look like a group where no name would be mentioned. She says that rape cases have gone almost unreported and there are very few cases when any FIR has been filed.

Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Targetting of Women

Yasmin Sheikh, only 13-year-old has remained mute ever since she was brought to the Camp in Godhra from her village, Delol near Kalol taluka in Panchmahal district. A young child who had not seen the world at all had a very tragic brush with the marauders. This is the village where 35 men women and children were burnt alive and all the houses were destroyed including the lone double story mosque. All her family members were killed including her mother, father and all other relatives. She was sexually brutalized and then left for dead on the road outside the village. No FIR has been filed in this case.

Similar is the case of Raheemabi who has taken shelter in Rakhyal camp. Her whole family was chased from Ansar Nagar area in Ahmadabad. No one has survived in her whole family and she alone has been left to tell the gory tales of the horrific crime the Sangh goons did with her family. Not only she but her sister, both were sexually targeted by the mob. She says that she recognizes the people who killed her sister and her family, but police is not ready to file FIR.

Examples are scattered all over the state, in all relief camps throughout the state. In every relief camp there are dozens of women and young girls who have been meted out this treatment. And it continues to be done.

YA Charkha asks about the future of these women and girls. He says that the beasts who attacked our localities near Godhra town were well prepared to do what they were assigned to do. He says that he has been told by reliable contacts that the criminals who attacked Muslims were told by their bosses to do as many sexual crimes as they could. And they were told that there would be no police to book them in these charges and no one would ask them anything about what they did.

Muhammad Shamim one of the trustees of the Shah-e-Alam camp says that the large scale sexual crimes against Muslim women were committed to add to psychological frustration of the whole community. He says that it was one of the worst instruments and worst sort of violence perpetrated and planned by the Sangh criminals.

Francis Prakar the principal of the prestigious St Xavier's College in Ahmadabad who has been active in providing relief to the affected people throughout this macabre killing and inhumane assault on women says that he fears reprisal from the affected people if the issue is not addressed properly and justice is not given to them. Justice to the victims and the perpetrators, he adds. He means that criminals should be given fitting reply so that no one could dare to repeat these and victims are compensated properly, though he adds that in these cases no one can compensate them due to the height of mental agony and physical suffering.

May 22, 2002. The Hindu. Vasudha Dhagamwar.

The women in Gujarat's camps I

AROUND THE first week of April, the Chairperson of the National Commission for Women, Poornima Advani, asked me to join her fact-finding committee to Gujarat. Initially, I had some hesitation about joining the committee. But the NCW is a statutory body, and if no NGO had accompanied the fact-finding team we would have been the first to criticise it on that very count. I found that the team consisted of Dr. Advani, Nafeesa Hussain, member, Reba Nayyar, member-secretary, two Supreme Court lawyers, Pinky Anand and Anees Ahmed, one retired Inspector-General of Police, Ramamohan, Pam Rajput, an academic activist, and myself.

The visit was from April 10 to 12. As a fact-finding visit, it was not long enough but some of the members could not have managed to spare more time. We had also decided that the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, was not our direct concern.

Even before I was on the Committee, I had met Elaben Bhat in Delhi. She said that SEWA was busy taking work to women in the camps, as she had done after the earthquake. In Ms. Bhat's experience women always asked for work to keep the family and themselves going. Work brought them money and also took their minds of the horror of their situation. During our visit we met NGOs and women citizens, the latter were mostly Hindus. We visited several camps in Himmat Nagar (Sabarkantha district), Ahmedabad, Godhra and Kalol (Panchmahal district), and Vadodara, mostly Muslim and some Hindu. We also visited the burnt train carriage.

Our strategy was to speak with women to the exclusion of men. The subject of rape was very much on our minds. But while the women said there had been many cases of gang rape and violence they also said that the raped women had also been killed... The sister-in-law of one woman brought her forward in the Godhra camp and said she had been raped. The woman immediately denied it. I have to say that only three women admitted to having been raped.

It is possible that as an official delegation we might not win the trust and confidence of the women... But there is also the social reality. An Indian, a subcontinental or perhaps even an Asian woman who admits to being raped stands the very real chance of being abandoned for the rest of her life. That every woman who had been raped was also killed seemed a little difficult to accept. That is not to say that I believe there were few rapes. One criticism was that the report did not tell exactly what happened to the women. Several visits by NGO groups and print journalists, and by electronic media and do we still need more graphic stories? What about the women who were not anxious to share those experiences?

The women recounted everything else but rape. They mentioned the assaults and the murders and the mayhem. They told us how they had run away and had hidden in the shrubs or jungle or fields — and even in a well — for hours or even days before finding their way to a camp or a relative who brought them there. They said they did not know where their men were when they ran or came to the camp... Some of them still did not know where their

Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Targetting of Women

men were... Altogether, the perennially helpless condition of women, ever dependent on their men, was exacerbated several times over. The men were as helpless as them.

Not only the Muslim but even Hindu women (I was told by team members), spoke about their extreme fear of the State police; especially of the State Reserve Police (SRP). The report remarks that the police credibility was very low. In any riot situation, the SRP is uniformly found playing a devilish role. One has seen Bhils, Santhals and Dalits complaining in other States that the SRP had helped the landowners.

What did the women wish to do after peace was restored? The camps were clearly a short-term option. Many had no homes left to which to return. The women whose men had died or were still missing were even more unsure. Some women expressed a willingness to go back to their homes if they had protection from the Army or the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF).

Notably this answer came from the Kalol camp inmates. Many of the inmates were farmers. They said they had returned with police protection to harvest whatever remained of the crops.

As Kalol is in a tribal district we asked them who the culprits were; one of the men said with black humour, "good caste people, that is why they did such good work".

Although we spoke with women on their own, it cannot be said that the women were speaking their own minds. I got the feeling that with regard to the decision on going back home, the women were following whatever line their men decided.

Farmers and businessmen had a stake in their villages; they would go back. The women from landless agricultural families did not wish it. Landless labourers are often more mobile or less attached to a place, especially if they do not even own their homes. The authorities as well as the activists seem to be taking the camps for granted. No thought seemed to be given to the future.

How long could anyone stay in the camps? The temperature was already 43 degrees. In the next few weeks it would soar to 47 or 48 degrees. There were babies, infants and newborns under the canvas. There were pregnant mothers, the old, and the ailing. Water, sanitation and privacy were in short supply. There was no privacy during waking or sleeping hours, to feed the baby or change one's clothes. The situation was mired in pathos and humiliation.

Even in the camps the women and men did not feel secure. Well away from the Kalol camp we heard some commotion. Immediately a wave of fear ran over the camp. While we had police escorts the camps were defenceless. They needed protection given by the CRPF or the Army.

No one seemed to have asked questions related to rehabilitation. What efforts were being made to make their homes and localities safe? Or to determine, in consultation with them, where the women without men folk or children without parents would go? The problem of widows and orphans cannot be solved except on a case-to-case basis.

But the problem of families needing to return home has to be dealt with, not by peace marches, but by going to the village, slum, suburb and town and making vigorous and sustained efforts in two directions: one, to impress the will of the law with the Army and the CRPF and criminal prosecutions; two, by talking with the communities who have, after all, lived side by side for generations. Peace marches may do good to politicians; they serve no purpose for the people.

On one point everyone was in agreement. The old man from Porbandar had courage beyond our capabilities.

May 23, 2002. The Hindu. Vasudha Dhagamwar. The women in Gujarat's camps II

LIKE EVERYONE else I was struck by the fact that after seven weeks Gujarat was still burning, with no end in sight. Yet, even Parliament has not focussed on the need to restore normality; people were busy scoring points.

Most frightening was the polarisation, the hatred and aggression, even among the NGOs. During a public hearing at the Ahmedabad circuit house on May 11, there was a clear communal divide among the NGOs. They were even positioned on two sides of the conference table. The anger and hostility were also frightening. The pro-Hindu NGOs began with a challenge... What had we to say about the burning of the train on February 27? Had we visited any Hindu camps? A woman from a pro-Muslim NGO hotly contested that anything had happened to Hindus. A colleague of hers seemingly placated her saying, "no, no, they think that Hindus have also suffered". Needless to say that this remark was not designed to pour oil on troubled waters.

The Godhra train burning has truly rocked Gujarat. We were repeatedly asked why we had not spoken up on February 27, why we had ignored the plight of Kashmiri Pandits, even Bangladeshi Hindus or Hindus in Pakistan. This "we" was the Commission as well as the secularists. There was a strong resentment based on the perception that Hindus are denied protection of the law, that their grievances are ignored. The irony is that in New Delhi we have carried the implied but unspoken burden of being a group organised by a BJP-appointed NCW that would naturally be soft on the Government.

Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Targetting of Women

The question about why we had been silent when Hindus were attacked in Kashmir or elsewhere is not new. It has surfaced from time to time. On this point our track record is admittedly poor. It has not given credibility to secular thinkers. To be secular in India is seen by many as being equal to being anti-Hindu. We are losing touch with the ordinary Hindu who does not belong to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad or the Bajrang Dal.

There is one more point. We have been saying and rightly that the train massacre does not justify the carnage, which has now turned into riots. At the same time there are innumerable letters and articles which try to explain why the train carriage was set on fire. Well might a mother-in-law say that her daughter-in-law invited punishment by her behaviour. Another explanation that has surfaced for the quick conflagration is that the travellers were carrying kerosene stoves and canisters for cooking. Well might a mother-in-law say that her daughter-in-law was wearing a nylon sari.

Yet another question being posed now is whether the carnage was planned or unplanned. Is unplanned burning less heinous? What are the permanent anger levels that within minutes a mob can collect, stop a train, and set a carriage on fire? Is that a safe position for a community or a village? What is being done to deal with it?

Yet, people of the eminence of Swami Agnivesh and Nirmala Deshpande were the first to write to The Pioneer to say the train carriage had been burnt because the passengers had misbehaved with a tea vendor and his daughter. This story was further improved: she was kidnapped, and even raped in the few minutes that it took the train to reach the outer signal. Every such explanation leads to a counter-explanation. We must insist that nothing justifies and nothing explains mass murder, mayhem and looting. There is nothing such as a minority or a majority before the criminal law of the land, or before the Constitution.

The report has condemned the police for their role. It is a fact of politics that the police are the bonded servants of the politicians, especially of the Government. We had collected no direct evidence of the Government's complicity but we could perhaps have stated this inference. What we could have said with certainty was that no Government that could not control the riots in 72 days had any business to be in office. After all, the anti-Sikh riots were quelled in four days. To that extent the report is wanting. Our report contains one sentence on the Bhil involvement in the anti-Muslim riots. This is an exceedingly worrying situation. Only Kalpana Kannabiran referred to it in an article in The Hindu of April 24 "Adivasis and genocide". She said that as in these villages, "the Adivasis were to a large extent economically dependent on the Muslims as traders and moneylenders". As she points out, the Hindu baniya also fills these roles. She also concedes that the economic relationship has the "clear potential of being exploitative".

The exploitation is deep and biting. The fertile Tapi Valley lands are almost entirely in the possession of the non-Bhil moneylenders and bigger peasants. The moneylender and trader also take away on mortgage silver jewellery and even brass water jars. From the mountain-dwelling Bhils, the trader and moneylender want minor forest produce. The Bhils work as *saldars* or annual labourers on what used to be their own lands. The anger and resentment of the Bhils are like a dormant volcano.

In one matter, the Muslims are different: they are willing to marry Adivasi girls after converting them to Islam. Santhal women in Dumka had actually given this as the reason for not wanting rights of inheritance. The Bhils may give in because of their economically weak position, but they resent it. I know it after working with Maharashtra Bhils on land issues for three years, when I lived with a Muslim family with a Bhil mother. This factor might have been exploited by the Hindus to make the Bhils join in the looting.

Normally the Adivasis keep well away from us. If they do not, they pay a very heavy price for it. If the story about the Hindus forcing the Bhils to loot is true, we must ask ourselves, what in God's name was the hold the Hindus had over the Bhils? If they could be so driven by other exploiters, it speaks of either a terrible grievance, or a terrible slavery. Possibly, when they got a chance to retaliate against at least one community they took it. Whatever the truth, it has to be brought out in the open and has to be addressed. There is no point in simply insisting that the Bhils were forced to loot and destroy; they are no one's fools.

But over the years we have not been willing to ask questions about the reasons behind any riot or crime by the Adivasis, if it is against a minority. Nellie is a case in point. So is the more recent awful triple murder of the Staines family. One almost prays that they will go on rampage against Hindus so that we will at least ask the much-needed questions, and will have the courage to apply the findings.

The British High Commission and a few others have "found" that the Gujarat carnage was planned four to six months earlier. If this can really be discovered so easily by outsiders, then what in heaven's name were the State and Central intelligence agencies doing? Where do these accusers locate the train disaster? Or the responsibility for it? The malaise in Gujarat is deep, very deep. It needs sensitivity, understanding and courage to cleanse it. Posturing is not going to do it.

**June 3, 2002. Washington Post. Rama Lakshmi.
Rapes Go Unpunished In Indian Mob Attacks. Muslim Women Say Claims Are Ignored**

KALOL, India -- Sultana Feroz Sheikh sat motionless, staring at the mud floor in a dark, windowless room.

Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Targetting of Women

Three months ago, as religious riots engulfed the western Indian state of Gujarat, Sheikh saw her husband and several relatives burned alive. Then, she said, she was brutally raped by three men as her 4-year-old son wailed nearby.

Sheikh wants to see the criminals brought to justice. But Gujarat police are routinely refusing to file charges against individuals accused of rape during the violence in late February and early March, because they say mob violence cannot be broken down into specific crimes.

"It is difficult to determine who in the mob pelted stones, who raped and who killed," said police inspector Ramanbhai Patil. Though the riot on March 1 that claimed the lives of Sheikh's loved ones and resulted in her rape engulfed the entire village of Kalol, she said Patil has arrested only four men in connection with the day's events.

The violence then spread throughout Gujarat, where nearly 1,000 people, most of them Muslims, have been killed in Hindu-Muslim clashes since Feb. 27. That was the day Muslims launched a firebomb attack on a train carrying Hindu activists, killing 60. Countless cases of arson, looting, murder and rape have been jumbled together in what are known as first-information reports, or FIRs. Police have filed "general FIRs," simply blaming riots on Hindu tola, or mobs, and refusing to register individual complaints.

Arrests increased markedly after the Indian government appointed K.P.S. Gill -- known as the "super cop" of Punjab state for his work there in the 1990s -- to assist with law enforcement in Gujarat. Police have arrested about 3,200 suspects in more than 300 cases of attacks against Muslims in Gujarat. The suspects have been charged with murder, rioting and arson. But advocacy groups say arrests for rape are still rare.

"The police FIR said that a Hindu mob attacked a Muslim mob," said Sheikh, who is Muslim. "I am not a 'mob,' I am a woman who was gang-raped by three men. How can I hope for justice, when they don't even register my complaint properly?"

Farah Naqvi, an independent journalist who is part of Citizen's Initiative, a fact-finding team that recorded testimony of sexual violence in Gujarat, called it "a piracy of silence."

"Cases have been filed against the nameless and the faceless," Naqvi said. "When you register them as mobs, it gives you a basis and an excuse for inaction. A single, collective FIR cannot take care of all the individual losses, as the time, loss and place varies. And it is especially true for rape."

There are no reliable estimates of how many women -- Hindu or Muslim -- have been raped in the Gujarat violence. According to the Citizen's Initiative report, however, almost every relief shelter in the state houses people who are victims of or witnesses to rape, molestation or other types of sexual assault.

Part of the difficulty in gauging the problem, said Sejal Dand, an aid worker, is that "many women were raped and then killed or burned."

Dand said fear of the police, who have been widely accused of standing idle as violence peaked, discouraged women and witnesses from reporting crimes for days. When the victims and witnesses finally did file reports, police often asked them to omit the names of influential men, Dand said.

In addition, in India's conservative and inward-looking Muslim minority of 130 million, even talking about rape is a matter of deep shame and stigma.

In the village of Fatehpura, aid workers reported, a Hindu mob dragged 30 young women into full public view, sexually assaulted them and forced them to run naked. Yet the Muslims of Fatehpura refuse to go to the police or even reveal the names of the women, fearing no man would marry them, the aid workers said.

"There is a lot of denial on the issue of rape of Muslim women in Gujarat," Dand said. Even after citizens groups published reports with women's testimonies, many officials were dismissive. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said in Parliament that reports of sexual violence were "exaggerated," and the country's law minister said only two FIRs have been filed for rape in Gujarat so far.

Sheikh hasn't filed one, because the police wouldn't let her, she said.

Her ordeal began on the morning of Feb. 28, a day after the attack on the train, she said, when she heard hundreds of angry Hindus marching toward the Muslim quarters of her home village of Delol, shouting, "We will burn you!" She and her husband grabbed their son and fled to some wheat fields, where they hid with a group of other panic-stricken Muslims. Their homes went up in flames.

The Muslims retreated in a milk van the next morning to the nearest town, Kalol. There, another Hindu mob surrounded them.

"One by one, they pulled out the men from the van and burned them. My husband was burned alive in front of my own eyes as I screamed and pleaded with them," Sheikh said, tears welling in her eyes.

Sheikh said she managed to jump out with her son, then ran toward a nearby river. Eight men wielding swords chased after her.

Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Targetting of Women

"One of them grabbed my hair from behind and pulled me; another snatched my son away," she said. They threw her down and hit her, and three raped her. "They were ruthless," she whispered.

Sheikh ran and hid for days before going to a relief shelter in Kalol. Ten days after the rape, she summoned the courage to go to the police to file a report.

"To my surprise, the police said I cannot file an FIR," Sheikh said. "They said an FIR already existed for that day's events."

Police officials investigating the Kalol violence said they could not register two reports for the same incident. Because a general FIR had already been filed, they said, the most they could do was attach a statement to it.

Patil said Sheikh's case was weak anyway, because she did not undergo a medical examination until more than 10 days after the alleged rape.

Citizen's Initiative recommends that special courts be set up to hear women's cases and that their testimony be treated as the basis for legal action if FIRs are not filed. And the requirement of medical evidence should be dropped, the group says, because so many women hid for days before going to the police.

Trauma counseling, according to the group's report, is the most urgent need.

For a number of emotionally scarred women now languishing in shelters, consisting of tents in the scorching heat, simply returning to their homes could provide the first healing touch. But homecoming is fraught with risks, too.

Bilkees Rasoolbhai Yaqub, 19, was one of many women gang-raped outside the village of Randikpura. She is the single witness to many killings and rapes in Randikpura and has named three men in her police report. Now Yaqub's Hindu neighbors say they will not allow the Muslims to return to the village until she withdraws the names of the accused in her police report.

The villagers say her statements are baseless; the police say Yaqub's story contains inconsistencies and her medical report was negative.

But, asked an anguished Yaqub, "Why would I lie about my rape? Which woman would invite social stigma upon herself?"

July 18, 2002. The Hindu (India). Hasan Suroor.

U.K. groups to highlight crimes against Gujarat women

LONDON JULY 17. A number of South Asian women's groups in Britain have launched a joint campaign to highlight the atrocities committed against women during the recent violence in Gujarat, and press for action against those responsible for it.

The campaign would also focus on the sources of funding of some of the groups which were allegedly behind the violence, call for rehabilitation of the victims and protest the reported closure of relief camps, without giving protection to the inmates to return to their homes.

A spokesperson said there was a move to seek the intervention of the U.N. Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women into allegations of rape and physical assaults. "The extent of sexual violence and brutality witnessed during the carnage in Gujarat has been likened to the horrors of the post-Partition riots in 1947," she said after a meeting in London attended by representatives of more than a dozen organisations which have come together under the umbrella of the South Asia Solidarity Group and Asian Women Unity.

There was resentment over attempts by the State and Central BJP leaders to play down the attacks on women. The Defence Minister, George Fernandes' remarks in Parliament accusing the Opposition of "exaggerating" the incidents came in for strong criticism. "It is shocking to hear this kind of statements from responsible quarters," said Asiya Sareshwala, a housewife making her first public speech.

Organisers claimed that this was the first concerted effort to focus on the plight of women victims of the Gujarat "massacre", and the participation cut across community lines with non-Muslim women outnumbering the Muslims. They also claimed the support of some Labour MPs, one of whom planned to raise the issue in Parliament.

Concern was also expressed over allegations that some right-wing Hindutva organisations were misusing their status as charities to raise funds for the "divisive" activities both in Britain and India. Zubaida Motala, a local community activist, called for a campaign to "name and shame" such organisations. "We want the charity status of these bodies to be reviewed," Amrit Wilson, spokesperson for South Asia Solidarity Group, said.

September 16, 2002. The Nation. Ruth Baldwin. Gujarat's Gendered Violence.

Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Targetting of Women

"I have never known a riot which has used the sexual subjugation of women so widely as an instrument of violence. There are reports everywhere of [the] gang-rape of young girls and women, often in the presence of members of their families, followed by their murder by burning alive."

-Harsh Mander, "Cry, the Beloved Country: Reflections on the Gujarat Massacre."

Women's bodies were central battlegrounds in the worst bout of Hindu-Muslim bloodletting to grip India in over ten years, in the western Indian state of Gujarat beginning on February 27. After an enraged Muslim mob allegedly set a train packed with Hindus on fire in Godhra, killing fifty-eight, a wave of retaliatory violence was unleashed on the minority Muslim population in the region, leaving up to 2,000 dead and 100,000 homeless. Under the indulgent gaze of the state government, and against a backdrop of ransacked houses and desecrated temples, at least 250 women and girls were brutally gang-raped and burned alive.

Shabnam Hashmi, founder of SAHMAT (a coalition of artists and intellectuals who work to strengthen secularism within Indian society), believes that although the pogrom was triggered by Godhra, the attacks were premeditated: "These mobs were trained in rape. Why else would the same pattern of brutality be repeated everywhere? Groups of women were stripped naked and then made to run for miles, before being gang-raped and burned alive. In some cases religious symbols were carved onto their bodies." In the documentary *Evil Stalks the Land*, produced by Hashmi's husband, Gauhar Raza, a young boy stares, unblinking, into the camera. "About 100 to 150 children my age were burned in a house," he recalls. "The tea stall in which we were hiding was set on fire using gas cylinders. My grandmother's limbs were chopped off and my aunt was brutally raped."

Among all the horrifying testimonies of sexual violence to emerge from Gujarat, one story has come to symbolize the collective suffering of the Muslim community. It is told and retold on news stories, in NGO reports, in eyewitness accounts: "I was running [and] I saw a pregnant woman's belly being cut open," states a young boy on Indian television. "The fetus was pulled out and thrown up in the air. As it came down it was collected on the tip of the sword." "[Kausar Bano] was nine months'pregnant," recalls Saira Banu at the Shah Alam camp for refugees. "They cut open her belly, took her fetus with a sword and threw it into a blazing fire. Then they burned her as well." "We were to hear this story many times," wrote the Citizen's Initiative fact-finding team of women, who saw photographic evidence of the burned body of a mother with a charred fetus lying on her stomach. Their April 16 report, *The Survivors Speak*, reflects upon the significance of this crime: "Kausar's story has come to embody the numerous experiences of evil that were felt by the Muslims.S? In all instances where extreme violence is experienced collectively, meta-narratives are constructed. Each victim is part of the narrative; their experience subsumed by the collective experience. Kausar is that collective experience-a meta-narrative of bestiality; a meta-narrative of helpless victimhood." The image of Kausar and her unborn child has assumed a dual meaning, for both Hindu aggressors and Muslim victims: The humiliation of the enemy through violation of the female body, and the assault on the future of the Muslim community through the destruction of the next generation.

Why is gender violence such a consistent feature of the communal riots that spasmodically grip India? In an impassioned May 11 editorial in *The Hindu*, India's national daily, Raka Roy, an associate professor of sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, offered one explanation. Roy asked: "Where does the creation of the inferior other in India begin?" It begins, she argues, with the divisive caste system, which has allowed the principle of inequality to become embedded in Hindu culture. It continues in the belief that "women are not only inferior, but also woman's sexuality has to be patrolled so that it is legitimately accessible to some men and inaccessible to others." If a woman's body belongs not to herself but to her community, then the violation of that body signifies an attack upon the honor (izzat) of the whole community. Hindu nationalists raped and burned minority women to destroy not only their bodies but also the integrity and identity of Muslim society, the inferior Other. Roy also suggests that the terrible legacy of the partition-with "protected and protectable women on one side and unprotected and rapable women on the other side"-still lingers in both the Hindu and Muslim subconscious.

It was the complicity of the state, however, that made it possible for mass rape to occur in Gujarat. A Human Rights Watch report concluded that the Sangh Parivar-the family of Hindu nationalist organizations including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which heads the Gujarat state government-was directly responsible [see Arundhati Roy's essay in this issue of *The Nation*]. According to the report, police told terrified groups of fleeing Muslims: "We have no orders to save you."

The thousands of displaced now live in temporary refugee camps, run almost exclusively by Muslim organizations. Harsh Mander writes: "It is as though the monumental pain, loss, betrayal and injustice suffered by the Muslim people is the concern only of other Muslim people, and the rest of us have no share in the responsibility to assuage, to heal and rebuild." The Citizen's Initiative report argues that the state's colossal failure to implement "international Human Rights norms and instructions and instruments as they relate to violence per se, especially violence against women," may amount to a crime under international law. The report recommends that a special task force, comprising people from outside Gujarat, be set up immediately to investigate the cases of sexual violence, and that counseling and rehabilitation programs be established to help the traumatized survivors. Although the government has proposed "Peace Committees," it remains unclear what form these would take. All this provides little consolation for the Muslim women and their families who must decide where to go when the squalid camps close, which is scheduled to occur before the Assembly elections following the resignation of Narendra Modi, the BJP's Chief Minister of Gujarat. Those who could afford to leave Gujarat have already done so. The rest will return to their villages, to live as second-class citizens in the ruins of their homes among the men who raped their sisters, burned their children and killed their friends.

December 19, 2002. Indian Express (India).

Intl experts spoil Modi's party, say Gujarat worse than Bosnia

New Delhi, December 19: An international women's committee on Thursday condemned the "large-scale" violence against women belonging to minority community during the Gujarat communal violence.

The all-women committee comprising experts from US, UK, France, Germany and Sri Lanka toured violence-affected areas in the state. It stated the carnage had "exposed the myth of Indian democracy".

The committee also asked the Indian Government to allow an international team to inquire into the "large-scale killing and dereliction of state responsibility".

"We have seen lack of national political will to quell violence in Gujarat. Then for nine months we see no redressal mechanisms to ensure justice to victims and law enforcement too failed. The myth of Indian democracy has been exposed," the committee, under the banner 'International Initiative for Justice in Gujarat' said after releasing a report in the Capital.

"Women belonging to the minority community suffered a lot during the communal violence. We met large number of them who were subjected to sexual violence and the survivors also had little access to counselling and rehabilitation," Anissa Helie, a French social worker said.

Nira Yuvali Davis, a professor in University of Greenwich, UK said a few women who "mustered courage" to file complaints found the law enforcement system totally unresponsive to their needs.

Davis, who had run a centre for traumatised women in conflict-torn Bosnia, said the situation was "worse" in Gujarat.

"Sexual violence was being used as a strategy for terrorising women belonging to minority community in the state," said German historian Gabriela Mischkowski.

The committee appealed to the international community to "challenge the charitable and tax exemption status of organisations that support directly or indirectly, the Hindutva agenda".

They also urged the Supreme Court to immediately take up Gujarat violence-related PILs and pressurise the Gujarat Government to implement the recommendations of the NHRC.

Rhonda Copelon, a professor in University of New York, and a Sri Lankan human rights activist were the other members of the body.

The committee toured Godhra, Ahmedabad, Baroda and Panchmahal and talked to various affected people, NGOs and lawyers and held confidential meetings with members of minority community between December 14 and 17.

December 19, 2002. The Hindu (India).

'Muslim women suffered a lot in Gujarat'

NEW DELHI DEC. 19. An international women's committee today condemned the "large-scale" violence against women belonging to the minority community during the recent communal violence in Gujarat and said the carnage had "exposed the myth of Indian democracy".

The all-women committee, comprising experts from the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Germany and Sri Lanka, which toured the violence-affected areas of the State, asked the Government of India to allow an international team to inquire into the "large-scale killing and dereliction of state responsibility".

"We have seen lack of national political will to quell violence in Gujarat.

Then, for nine months, we see no redress mechanisms to ensure justice to victims and law enforcement too failed.

The myth of Indian democracy has been exposed", the committee, under the banner the "International Initiative for Justice in Gujarat", said after releasing a report here.

"Women belonging to the minority community suffered a lot during the communal violence. We met a large number of them who were subjected to sexual violence and the survivors also had little access to counselling and rehabilitation," Anissa Helie, a social worker from France, said.

Nira Yuvali Davis, a professor in the University of Greenwich, U.K., said a few women, who "mustered courage" to file complaints, found the law enforcement system totally unresponsive.

Ms. Davis, who had run a centre for traumatised women in conflict-torn Bosnia, said the situation was "worse" in Gujarat.

"Sexual violence was being used as a strategy for terrorising women belonging to the minority community in the State," said Gabriela Mischkowski, a German historian.

May 13, 2003. Outlook (India).

The Rape of Reason

It has become Everywoman's narrative. The sexual abuse of women has been so public, victims will talk to anyone who'll listen.

The police station was true to every imaginable stereotype: a raunchy, pot-bellied inspector, uniformed henchmen and hapless, pleading villagers waiting in vain for that precious document called the FIR. An ugly circus of intimidation unfolded before our helpless eyes. Fathers who came armed with names of the men who had murdered their sons were turned away. The police told them to omit all individual names if they wanted an FIR quickly. Cases were instead being filed against the nameless and faceless. And how do you even begin to investigate a mob of five thousand people? Arguing with the guardians of the law proved fruitless. Reason was a stranger in this part of Gujarat.

An emotionally exhausted aid-worker turned to us and asked, "Now you try and put yourself in the place of a woman who's suffered physical abuse, who has had a man violate her body again and again. Will she have the courage to walk into a police station and say, 'I have been raped?'"

We looked around. Not a single woman constable in sight. But media presence can create the illusion of security. For minutes later, a small group of women—young girls actually—walked in, huddling together nervously. Among them was Sultani, a waif-like woman of 18, who hid her pain behind a thin muslin dupatta. Her eyes had a vacant stare, numbed by the brutality. She could barely speak. But the women around her did. On March 2, Sultani had clambered onto a tempo along with 40 other villagers to escape the mob. They didn't get far. The tempo was set on fire and as it overturned, Sultani fell behind with her son Faizan. Her clothes were torn off and one by one the men raped her. What she remembers most vividly is the sound of her son crying.

It was a bizarre coincidence, but we remembered that day as well. We had reached the spot just 30 minutes after the tempo (it was a milk-van) went up in flames. Our camera had filmed and broadcast images of the tin cans, the silver handlebars gleaming through the flames, the charred bodies lying strewn across the tall grass. But there was also something else we knew would never make it to the TV screens, especially in those first few days of violence. It was the body of a woman, mouth agape, legs wrenched open, her head thrown back against the thorny bushes. One arm was still flailing the air, probably her last attempt to fight the man or men who had raped her, before killing her.

Sultani, as we discovered at the police station, was still alive only because she fell unconscious and her rapists took her for dead. And here she was, two months later, trying to register an FIR for Rape. No policeman thought it appropriate to escort this young woman into a closed room or even a quiet corner. Her story had to be told in front of a gawking crowd of constables. And when it was over, a brazen policeman declared that a separate FIR for "simply rape" could not be filed.

"Why?", we screamed, anger and exasperation now replacing mere journalistic instincts. "Madam," said deputy inspector Parmar with a smile and an evil glint in his eye, "it's like this. If a shopping centre is burnt down and there are 100 people inside, we can't give individual FIRs to all hundred. For one attack, there can only be one FIR." The police claimed that several complaints had already been recorded in the "tempo incident", another FIR for rape, they said, would be "making a case out of a case". At the most, Sultani's testimony could be a statement attached to the common FIR.

This is how sexual violence is being made invisible across the state. Tomorrow, if Gujarat's history is written by police records and government files, stories like Sultani's and those of hundreds of other women like her, will remain untold and unread. Clubbing rape with complaints of murder is only one part of the problem, the law's insistence on immediate medical evidence is the other. One woman we met had spent 24 days hiding in the forest and had walked over 300 km with her two children before she could reach the safety of a relief camp. Which doctor could she have gone to? Will her story simply fall into a black hole?

Ironically, in camp after camp we found that the traditional shroud of secrecy and shame that normally shadows rape survivors was completely missing. Sexual abuse, this time, had been so public and so widespread, it had taken the form of Everywoman's narrative. Women wanted to talk to anyone who was prepared to listen.

At Godhra's Iqbalpur camp, we sat by the dim light of a gas lamp and heard Bilkees' story. Bilkees is one of only three women who have managed to record a complaint of rape across the entire Panchmahals district, and that too only because of the intervention of Jayanti Ravi, the district collector. When the collector found a battered Bilkees, she had ordered a medical examination, even though the stipulated three days had long passed.

It's been two months now but Bilkees' hand is still in a cast and her back is ridden with bruises. Bilkees was three months pregnant when she was raped and her first born, a three-year old, killed. And that is only one part of her horrific nightmare. Bilkees tells us how she lay flat in the grass, pretending to be dead, while her 45-year old mother, her two sisters, and her sister-in-law were raped and killed. She knows who did it. They were three men from her own village. She has named them in her FIR. But they walk free till today and have sent threats through their henchmen that Bilkees must withdraw her complaint of rape, if she ever wants to come back home.

George Fernandes, are you listening?

(The writer is with NDTV. The views expressed are her own.)

December 13, 2003. Indian Express (India).

Naroda victim saw mob kill pregnant woman

AHMEDABAD, DECEMBER 12 : A chilling tale of the post-Godhra riots, the killing of pregnant Kausar Banu, was told by two women of Naroda-Patiya, to the Godhra commission today. Deposing before retired Justices G.T. Nanavati and K.G. Shah, Zareena Sheikh, a resident of Hussain Nagar slums, claimed she had witnessed the killing of Kausar Banu on February 28, 2002, whose "stomach was slit open, foetus removed, whipped over the tip of the sword and later flung away".

Six of Sheikh's family members were attacked the same day. Sheikh said Kausar and her daughter scaled a wall, dividing their locality and Gopinath Society, and landed in front of a mob. Kausar attempted to escape but fell unconscious after being hit on the head, she said.

Sulekha Banu Sardar Ahmed Chaudhary, a vegetable vendor, also told the commission that she had seen her cousin Kausar being burnt to death. Sulekha said as Kausar was pregnant, she was not able to escape the mob which attacked a small room in the adjoining Gopinath Society where she had — along with several other women — taken shelter during the attack.

"We could hear her screaming," she said. She also alleged that several other young girls and women of the locality were raped. She named one Zubeida, her husband and three children among other people whom she had seen being set ablaze.

December 16, 2003. Times of India (India).

'Women from minority community still traumatised'

MUMBAI: In an unfair world, women have always been the spoils of war. And the post-Godhra carnage in Gujarat, in February-March, 2002, reiterated this with a vengeance.

A testimony of the extent of violence against women, mostly sexual in nature, in Gujarat, comes in the form of a report published by the International Initiative for Justice in Gujarat (IIJG).

The report, titled 'Threatened Existence —A Feminist Analysis Of The Genocide In Gujarat', has been compiled by an international panel comprising feminist jurists, activists, lawyers, writers and academics, based on their interaction with women survivors, activists, doctors, etc.

"The deliberate shaming, especially of girls and young women, by raping them publicly or in front of other family members, including children, speaks of the intentional attempt to subjugate a community by attacking the female body," says the report.

And goes on to cite testimony after chilling testimony of women from the minority community, who were abused, violated, raped, and women who were forced to watch their daughters being abused, violated, raped.

There are testimonies of those who are living only so that they can see their attackers punished.

"I think the most chilling aftermath of the entire carnage comes in the third chapter of the report," says writer Shobhaa De, one of the "chilling first to read the report.

"I got gooseflesh when I read, 'In Gujarat, as in Bosnia or Rwanda earlier, the widespread and furious attacks against women of the minority community were regarded as legitimate not only by male attackers but also by women belonging to the majority community. We heard from testimonies that in some places the rapists were actively supported or even instigated by women of the majority community.' It indicates the complete breaking down of basic humanity."

Documentary filmmaker Rakesh Sharma, Sharma, who has covered much the same ground as the IIJG panelists for his film on the post-Godhra rampage in Gujarat, 'Final Solution' feels that the report will help to remove the misconception of the public that what happened in Gujarat last year was a momentary burst of madness which has now subsided.

"The report will definitely help to put Gujarat back on the agenda, when it comes to public memory," he says.

"We like to live in denial. This will at least jolt us into realising that there has been severe delay, if not complete denial of justice for hundreds of women, who are still living traumatised lives today, forced to cohabit with their violators who never lose a chance to taunt them whenever they swagger past them."

The trauma, for the women, is far from being over. Consider the example of Madina and her family, who hid in a field in Eral village in Gujarat for three days during the carnage. On the third day, the family was spotted by the mobs. Most of the members were pulled out.

The men were killed. Madina's two teenaged daughters were brutally gang-raped and then burnt to death. Only Madina remained unseen in her hiding place, clutching at her seven-year old son. Today, when recounting her trauma, her most desperate refrain is, "Did I do wrong in not coming out when my daughters were being raped? Wouldn't they have killed my son too?"

Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Targetting of Women

"There are hundreds of women who haven't filed charges for fear of stigmatisation or further abuse. Those who have pressed charges, have begun to give up hope of getting justice," says Sharma.

"For instance, Sultana of Delol village, who was gang-raped has filed a complaint, but the police have claimed that the accused are absconding. Yet she pointed out a local paan-seller to me as one of the rapists."

In its final analysis, the IJG report offers recommendations to the international community, the Indian government, the judiciary and civil society in India . It remains to be seen how seriously these recommendations are considered by any of the above sectors.