

November 3, 2003. Indian Express (India).

Activist Teesta Setalvad gets protection

Mumbai, November 9: THE Mumbai police have given police protection to activist and journalist Teesta Setalvad after a human rights activist working with Setalvad's Citizens for Peace and Justice (CJP) received threats.

The threatening phone calls came after the riots in Viramgam, Gujarat.

"Rais Khan, a full-time coordinator of the CJP, received two threats last week on his mobile phone, details of which have been sent to the director general of police of Gujarat," said a release issued by the CJP.

The first one came on November 4, when Khan was in Viramgam after the violence broke out in the town on November 2.

A male voice demanded that Khan leave Gujarat.

The second call was on November 7.

Before this, Setalvad had been granted protection only in Gujarat.

She was unavailable for comment.

December 28, 2003. The Hindu (India).

Gujarat: Remember this?

Can we afford to bury and forget the terrifying messages that the massacres in Gujarat carry?

THIS is the season when people are supposed to pause, think and introspect about the year gone by. And make resolutions about the coming year — on how not to repeat the mistakes of the past. But for some, introspection is preceded by amnesia. Thus, when there is nothing to remember, there is nothing to regret.

Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi is convinced that anyone who still speaks of the horrifying events of February-March 2002 in Gujarat — "five-star activists and pseudo-secularists" — is "trying to tarnish the State's image". There is not even a hint of acknowledgment, leave alone regret, about the killings during those months that scarred not just Gujarat but India. As far as Modi is concerned, the "people have given them (the pseudo-secularists) a fitting reply by voting the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) back to power and these five-star activists have no right to question the collective wisdom of the people of Gujarat."

Is it "collective wisdom" to endorse amnesia? Can a sound future be built for a state, or a country, on the unhealed gaping wounds of thousands of its citizens? Can we as a country afford to bury and forget the terrifying messages that last year's massacres in Gujarat carry?

To ensure that the memory of the Gujarat carnage is not erased, one more report by the people Modi loves to hate has been released. "Threatened existence: A feminist analysis of the genocide in Gujarat" by the International Initiative for Justice in Gujarat is an important addition to the scores of documents that have recorded the events of early 2002. The significance of the report lies in several factors: one, the group that put together this report visited it nine months after the violence first began. As a result, they had the advantage of looking at the events afresh, at a time when things were supposed to have become normal.

Second, the group consisted of women from six countries including academics and activists. The international panelists were Sunila Abeysekara, Director of Inform, Sri Lanka, Rhonda Copelon, Professor of Law, City University of New York, Anissa Helie of Women Living Under Muslim Law from Algeria/France, Gabriela Mischkowski, historian and co-founder of Medica Mondiale, Germany, and Nira Yuval-Davis, Professor of Gender and Ethnic Studies, University of Greenwich, U.K. From India there was Uma Chakravarti, feminist historian from Delhi University, Vahida Nainar, researcher of international law, Farah Naqvi, independent writer and co-founder of Nirantar and Meera Velayudan, formerly with the Institute for Environmental and Social Concerns, Coimbatore. Together they brought their combined experience of similar situations around the world to bear as they listened to testimonies of the affected women and men in Gujarat.

The report is worth more than a glance because it illustrates how something that the Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani prefers to dismiss as an "aberration" has in fact systematised violence and discrimination so that it has become part of daily existence in Gujarat. Nine months after the violence, the panelists found that the problems for the Muslims, who had already lost almost everything, had not stopped. They look at five different aspects that arise from this situation: "Fear — generated both by threat of violence and actual attacks; displacement and non-rehabilitation; continuing economic violence including an economic boycott of Muslims; long-term impact on Muslim women including the impact on their physical, reproductive and psycho-social health and the long-term impact on children."

On the first point, for instance, they observe that "fear is today the dominant emotion in the lives of the Gujarati Muslims. They tread quietly and try to keep a low profile because even small altercations with members of the majority community can easily become serious."

Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Harrassment of Activists/NGOs working for Justice

The report especially highlights the impact of the sexual violence that was such a dominant motif of the killings of last year. "For women the fear of physical violence is heightened by fear of sexual attacks. Having been subjected to sexual violence themselves, having seen other women from the community being violated, or knowing the extent to which sexual crimes were committed, has engendered a psychological threat perception among all women from the community."

A woman survivor from Anand told the group, "Nobody has asked for forgiveness or shown regret. We cannot say anything. Rapists stop women in the street to humiliate them: 'Didn't we have her, haven't we done this or that to her?' We don't speak about this at home, because then our men will get very agitated."

This combination of denial of justice and the continuing threat has caused women, already traumatised by the events of last year, even greater stress. The unmarried women who were raped do not speak about it. There are reports of many of them being hurriedly married off for fear that otherwise they would be unacceptable. Some married women are prepared to speak about what they saw or went through. But clearly, for every one such recorded case, there must be dozens that will never be acknowledged.

On top of this, women are burdened by suddenly being forced to be the sole breadwinners for their families. They also have to cope with displacement and the problems this throws up such as the difficulties their children face in new schools and in a different environment. And all the time, they have to deal with the open intimidation by perpetrators of past crimes who continue to move around unchecked. The team concluded that "nine months after the pogrom, (we) found overwhelming evidence of new and continuing forms of violence against the Muslim minority. They are unable to resume anything resembling a normal life, unable to ensure basic survival and to make free choices in the pursuit of happiness and well being for themselves and their families. The future holds dread".

But this is something Narendra Modi refuses to accept. All such reports are defaming his state, he blazes. On completion of one year in office, he prefers to talk about the wells his government has dug and the heightened attendance in schools. But does this count for anything when thousands of people who lost their families, whose women were gang-raped, whose children were massacred, whose houses were reduced to cinders, still have no hope for justice, for real rehabilitation and a promise of a peaceful future?

No, Mr. Modi and Mr. Advani. India and Gujarat cannot "shine" — "India shining" is the new slogan — as long as the dark stain of the Gujarat carnage remains unacknowledged and unaddressed. Indians who care must resolve that even in 2004, they will not allow such shameful events to be forgotten and erased from public memory.

April 13, 2004. Indian Express (India). ANHAD protests Vadodara assault

New Delhi, April 12: ANHAD — Act Now For Harmony And Democracy — a students' organisation, held a protest meeting today to condemn Sunday's attack on its partner group Youth Aman Karwan, by more than 50 VHP "goons".

Shabnam Hashmi, the eminent social activist, along with 28 children who are the members of this organisation were among those who were attacked.

This happened when they reached Vadodara to address a press conference. When the children reached the venue of the press conference they were attacked by the VHP members. The attackers manhandled the children, tore their clothes and smashed the vehicles in which the children were travelling.

Surngna Anand, the mother of one of the victims, Kandla, actively participated in the protest meet and said: "We will not be feared by these hurdles. We will continue with our mission." Dr Sunita Gupta, mother of Swapnil Gupta, a witness in the incident, also participated in the meet and expressed her disappointment over the late arrival of the Gujrat Police on the site. She contended: "The police reached late by almost an hour and a half. Not only this, they were reluctant in arresting the mischief mongers." Advocate Prashant Bhushan criticised the attack in Vadodara and said: "Its high time that we should stand in unity and counter all these communal forces rampant all over before water surpasses our heads."

April 29, 2004. Yahoo (ANI). SC relief for Mallika Sarabhai

New Delhi, Apr 29 (ANI): Giving relief to famous danseuse Mallika Sarabhai, the Supreme Court on Thursday said the Gujarat police could continue its investigation into the alleged human trafficking charge against her but the trial court would not take action on the basis of any report submitted by them.

A Bench comprising Chief Justice V N Khare, Justices S B Sinha and S H Kapadia also issued notice to the Gujarat Government on the Special Leave Petition filed by her challenging a High Court order refusing to quash the FIR lodged against her in the case.

She alleged that the State Government was victimizing her by filing a false case as she had been raising her voice against the riots that took place following the burning of the train at Godhra.

Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Harrassment of Activists/NGOs working for Justice

Narrating the sequence of events leading to the filing of the "false" case against her, Sarabhai stated that pursuant to invitations from abroad, her institute "Darpana Academy" had selected 13 persons for the tour at a cost of Rs 3.3 lakhs each of which Rs 20,000 was a non-refundable training fees.

However, when the tour got cancelled, the Academy refunded Rs 3.1 lakh to each of the participants including the complainant, Manushi Shah. Shah later filed a complaint before the police alleging that the academy was resorting to illegalities. (ANI)

June 12, 2004. Indian Express (India). NGOs protest Fr Prakash's interrogation

Ahmedabad, June 11: NGOs from across the State raised their voice against the interrogation of human rights activist Father Cedric Prakash on the basis of a mysterious e-mail alleging his involvement in anti-social activities.

Several NGOs on Friday opined that the State Government is violating human rights and misusing the police and other Government machinery.

"For the past couple of years, human rights activists, intellectuals NGOs and others have stood up to defend truth, justice and made efforts to work for communal harmony. But, they have been constantly harassed by State authorities," said rights activist Shabnam Hasmi.

Police enquiries and even physical attacks have become the order of the day in the State, said Fr Prakash. "It is blatantly obvious that subject of these attacks are those who dared to stand up against the fascist attitude of Government and tried to protect the life and property of certain sections of the society," he added.

June 13, 2004. Deccan Herald (India). Activists rally behind Father Cedric Prakash of Prashant

The activists feel Father Prakash is being targeted for it was at his organisation that drafted a charter of demands in connection with Godhra and post-Godhra cases.

AHMEDABAD, DHNS: A day after the issue of alleged harassment of Father Cedric Prakash of Prashant — a human rights organisation, by the state police came to light, social and human rights activists on Friday rallied behind him and have planned a major demonstration on June 25 in the city.

For the last few days, Father Prakash is being grilled by the CID Crime Branch, Gandhinagar following an e-mail by Vishal Sharma, having links with right wing organisations, in which he alleged that the Father was defaming Gujarat's name abroad.

At a meeting held at Prashant on Friday, the human rights activists decided that they would not tolerate the injustice. They have also decided to form a delegation and represent the issue to the Central Government.

The activists feel Father Prakash is being targeted for it was at his organisation that met on June 1 and drafted a charter of demands for the UPA Government in connection with Godhra and post-Godhra cases.

While the police has not come out clear on the reasons for the interrogation, Minister of State for Home Amit Shah could not be contacted despite repeated attempts.

Interestingly, one of the reasons why the police has been grilling Father Prakash is his visit to Sabarmati Jail way back in October 2003.

"I have been going to the Sabarmati Jail for the last several years and running medical camps," Father Prakash said adding that they would in no way tolerate such an injustice.

In the meeting that lasted for more than two hours, social and human rights activists observed that action against Father Prakash violated all democratic norms and revealed "fascist character of the state".

"We are shocked at the way human rights continue to be violated and trampled upon by the Gujarat through misuse of the state apparatus like the police, the Charity Commissioner and other bodies. For the last couple of years human right activists, intellectuals, NGOs and others who have stood up to defend truth, justice and/or have made efforts to work for communal harmony and peace and to defend the secular character of the Constitution have been subjected to constant harassment by the State authorities," the activists said in a statement.

In the last few days, several activists have been visited by officers of various government departments to look into various aspects. Sources said they have also been receiving notices from the charity commissioner.

In a latest example of the harassment, police officials have made inquiries on Raees Khan Pathan, a representative of the Citizens For Peace and Justice. He is being interrogated to know his connections with Father Prakash.

The government machinery had dragged noted danseuse Mallika Sarabhai to court on the charges of an illegal immigration racket.

Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Harrassment of Activists/NGOs working for Justice

On April 11, youth under the banner of Aman Youth Karwan led by Shabnam Hashmi were attacked by two VHP activists in Vadodara. And just a day later, Teesta Setalvad of Citizens for Peace and Justice was threatened of dire consequences by accused in the Gulberg Society massacre. This was following the Supreme Court's decision to shift the trial of Best Bakery to Maharashtra.

November 4, 2004. Times of India (India).

Modi questions the credibility of NGOs

VADODARA: Chief Minister Narendra Modi said Best Bakery complainant Zahira Sheikh's claim, that she had been threatened by activists into falsely identifying the Best Bakery accused, had raised serious questions about the credibility of NGOs involved in riot cases.

Speaking at Padra, he said, "I call forth able citizens of this country and various constitutional bodies to study in detail the role of such NGOs."

Meanwhile, the new Leader of Opposition in the Gujarat Assembly, Arjun Modhvadia, said Zahira Sheikh's volte-face should not be an excuse to undermine investigations in the crime. Modhvadia said, "The Gujarat government is responsible to bring to book the culprits irrespective of what Zahira says. We demand there is no laxity in this."

November 5, 2004. Times of India (India). Kingshuk Nag.

No Good Omen for NGOs in Gujarat

AHMEDABAD: Ever since the conclusion of the riots, segments of the establishment in Gujarat has been informally espousing the line that the victims should follow the policy of "forgive and forget."

This in essence meant that they should not insist on prosecution of the aggressors. After seeing the deadly violence, large sections of the minority community in the state tended to agree with this suggestion. "What is to be gained in trying to meddle with aggressive elements in the majority community," was a common refrain heard amongst Muslims post 2002. Also commonplace was the argument that "buying peace is, if not anything else, a damage limitation exercise."

Somewhere down the line, things changed. Although continued peace and de-escalation of tensions was the fervent wish of both the majority and minority communities, the latter and enlightened sections of the former, began to see a ray of hope with riot cases being reopened and investigated afresh.

National institutions including NGOs played a big role in catalysing the change. Now with Zahira Sheikh turning turtle, the clock has been pushed back. Lawyers insist that Zahira's back tracking will not lead to the Best Bakery case falling flat once again, because she is only one of the many witnesses in the case. Analysts say Zahira has become like the boy who cried wolf; nobody knows when she is speaking the truth. If anything, the whole episode has demolished her own credibility, they argue.

All this may be true, but at the sametime, to use the language of Dalal Street, the general sentiments have turned adverse. This will cast its shadow not only over the Best Bakery case, but also a host of other riot cases. It will also put a question mark on NGOs. At the least the question asked will be, what is the use of organisations that cannot keep its flock together? The deep internal rivalry that divides various NGOs will also come to surface.

What is worse is that the old theory of forgive (your aggressors) and forget (about what happened) will rear its head with a bang. Large sections of riot victims may well fall to this line, giving a new lease of life to riot aggressors. Many of the riot aggressors had been feeling a little restive lately because their mentors seemed incapable of providing protection to them, would now feel optimistic and ease their pressure on the latter. In recent weeks, senior cops have also said in private meetings that they were feeling the heat from the ranks following booking of some policemen.

January 9, 2005. New Kerala(IANS/India).

Activists held over Gujarat riots film

Mumbai, Jan 9 : Two social activists have been arrested for distributing VCDs of "Final Solution", a film on the Gujarat communal violence of 2002, in a hotel where Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi was addressing a meeting.

The police said Lynne Henry and Phiroze Mithiborewala were taken into custody Saturday after the organisers of the function attended by Modi accused them of harassing the delegates.

Other social activists have protested against the arrest.

"Lynne and Phiroze were well within their legal rights in giving out free VCDs of this film to delegates entering and exiting the conference where Narendra Modi was holding forth," said a joint statement also signed by Rakesh Sharma, who produced the 140-minute documentary.

"But instead of allowing them this democratic right, the Mumbai police saw it fit to act on a complaint by RSS elements," the statement said, referring to the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, India's most influential Hindu group.

Modi: Architect of Gujarat Genocide. Harrassment of Activists/NGOs working for Justice

The "Final Solution", which has won several awards, looks at the role of the establishment in the riots that led to hundreds of deaths in Gujarat.