

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 Ensnarers 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.

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."

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."

March 25, 2002. Washington Post. Rama Lakshmi. For the First Time, the Cameras Didn't Blink

NEW DELHI When sectarian violence erupted recently in India's western state of Gujarat, much of this country's outrage and dismay were directed at the news media. Among other perceived excesses, journalists used two forbidden words in their coverage of the Hindu-Muslim violence:

Hindu and Muslim.

In a nation that has been wracked by numerous sectarian clashes since it gained independence in 1947, Indian newspapers traditionally have exercised immense caution and restraint. For years, journalists routinely filed reports of religious clashes that gave no details about the faith of victim or aggressor. Descriptions were often limited to such phrases as "members of one community clashed with another" or "a place of worship belonging to a community was attacked."

The unwritten code was that, in this predominantly Hindu nation with 140 million Muslims, the explicit reporting of a sectarian riot at one site could spark violence at another.

But the violence in Gujarat changed all that. For the first time, India's nascent 24-hour privately owned television channels covered ugly scenes of rioting and mob fury and beamed them into people's homes. It was no longer possible to hide the religious identities of the attackers or the victims. In covering riots that came in retaliation for a Muslim attack on Hindus that killed at least 56 people, the networks loudly -- and accurately -- declared that the mobs were Hindus and the victims were Muslims.

"Communal riots have taken place before, but the words Hindu and Muslim were never uttered by journalists," said Narendra Modi, Gujarat's chief minister, whose resignation is being demanded by opposition parties that accuse his Hindu-nationalist state government of deliberate inaction. "For the first time, such explicit language was used. It was irresponsible and it fueled the fires."

Many Indian journalists said the change was long overdue. As Hinduism has risen again in government and society in the past decade, leading figures in the print and television media see themselves as guardians of India's underlying principle of secularism and say it is past time to rethink their policy of restraint.

The media's dilemma was complicated in Gujarat by what they considered the complicity of the state in the mob violence. The Hindu nationalists in the state government and the police force merely watched as members of Hindu right-wing groups went on a rampage setting hundreds of Muslims' homes and offices afire, often with the Muslims inside.

Television channels showed the city of Ahmadabad in flames, revealed the faces of rioters as they shouted Hindu slogans and even caught the police spectating. Television crews were attacked by angry Hindu mobs who forced journalists to reveal their religious identities and shout Hindu slogans.

"We were reporting in a situation where the line between the mob and the government was completely blurred," said Rajdeep Sardesai, who covered the violence for Star News channel. "I believe showing those images was essential. With TV, there is no place anymore for the rioters to hide."

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, whose Bharatiya Janata Party has close ties with Hindu nationalist groups, said the television channels were exaggerating the incidents of violence and acting irresponsibly by showing scenes of carnage.

And the umbrella group of Hindu radical organizations, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteers Group), recently accused the media of not condemning the attack on the Hindus that sparked the riots as much as they did the Hindus' revenge attacks on Muslims. The group warned that the media "should stop insulting Hindu sentiments."

Faced with the shoot-the-messenger mood all around, reporters and editors have responded by defending themselves in seminars and magazine columns, while also reflecting on some uncomfortable but basic questions about journalism. Some say they believe that the first televised religious violence in post-independence India offered a few lessons in the value of restraint.

"The media tends to overlook its primary responsibility to try to contain the violence from spreading," said Chandan Mitra, editor of the *The Pioneer*, an English-language newspaper. "Violence should not be reported live, as it may provoke copycat riots elsewhere."

April 8, 2002. New York Times (Reuters). India Govt Allies Urge Removal of Gujarat Chief

NEW DELHI (Reuters) - Two key Indian coalition government allies joined the opposition on Monday in demanding the sacking of riot-racked Gujarat state's chief minister who has been accused of turning a blind eye to religious violence.

Opposition groups have been pushing the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, which heads the ruling coalition as well as rules Gujarat, to sack state Chief Minister Narendra Modi after more than 750 people, mostly Muslims, were killed after the burning of 59 Hindus in a train.

"For close to one month, Gujarat has been virtually under the control of mobs," said Shambhu Srivastava, a spokesman for the Samata Party which is represented by, among others, Defense Minister George Fernandes in the federal cabinet.

Trinamool Congress leader Sudip Bandopadhyaya said the state government had "miserably failed" to end the bloodshed. Modi has denied his administration has failed to control the violence.

Police said over the weekend at least five people were killed in more violence in the state.

May 13, 2002. New York Times. Somini Sengupta. Hindu Nationalists Are Enrolling, and Enlisting, India's Poor

MANDOLI, India — Just beyond the bustle of this nation's capital, in a sprawling compound of grassy fields and peepal trees, is a microcosm of some of India's most destitute: children from pockets of poor, indigenous communities scattered far in the hinterlands.

There is the illiterate farmer's son from the hill tribes of Assam in the northeast. There is the teenager with the bright probing eyes from Jharkhand, one of the poorest corners of the country. There is a boy, orphaned since the age of 5, who is housed, fed and schooled here just outside New Delhi, the capital, free of charge.

The nearly 300 boys here at the Sewa Dham school, most of them from what are called the tribal belts of central and northeastern India, hew to a rigorous daily schedule from 5 in the morning until 10 at night. They learn Hindu chants in the ancient language, Sanskrit. They are taught to give up their meat-eating ways and to become vegetarians. They are regaled with tales of brave Hindu warriors and saints and quizzed on the ravages of the Muslim emperor, Babur.

Patriotic to some, frightening to others, this school represents a central project of the increasingly militant and powerful Hindu right in this country. It is substantially bankrolled by Indians in the United States and run by a charity affiliated with the oldest and most prominent of the Hindu nationalist groups, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or the National Voluntary Service, known as the R.S.S.

The Hindu nationalist movement, once banned and reviled for its connections to the man who killed Gandhi, is ascendant once again. Founded in 1925 by men who made no secret of their admiration for German and Italian fascists, the National Voluntary Service is the movement's parent organization.

The Hindu nationalist network's political wing, the Bharatiya Janata Party, leads the coalition government in New Delhi. The prime minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, was once a full-time worker for the voluntary service.

Education is a centerpiece of the Hindu revivalist campaign, which is natural, considering its cause: to build a Hindu nation out of what is officially a secular country with rights accorded to religious minorities.

Its backers praise their efforts as a lift for the society's most downtrodden. But critics describe schools like this one as madrasas of the Hindu right: they pluck the youngest and most impressionable minds and offer a basket of

goods to those who otherwise have nothing. While there is no evidence that these schools prepare young boys to take up arms for a holy war, as some madrasas do in Islamic nations, certainly, schools like this one can train foot soldiers for the Hindu nationalist crusade.

"They really look at their work as groundwork that will pay off in centuries," said Christophe Jaffrelot, a Paris University professor whose book "The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India" (Columbia University Press, 1996) is widely regarded as the authoritative study of these groups.

"The R.S.S. is itself an educational movement," he said. "They want to shape and reshape the mind. That's why they want to attract really young people."

The school is part of a network of social service organizations that cater to indigenous people and "dalits," or those on the lowest rungs of the Hindu caste ladder — the very people organizations like the voluntary service has been losing to Christian missionaries for decades. Across remote villages, it dispatches so-called barefoot doctors armed with first-aid kits and drugs to combat dysentery. It sets up orphanages for the abandoned and hostels for children who must travel long distances to go to school.

Vidya Bharati, an educational charity that is a part of the Hindu nationalist family, now runs 20,000 low-cost private schools serving 2.4 million children across the country. The charity's schools have mushroomed recently, with over 1,000 new schools added every year in the last decade.

Perhaps most notably, with a sympathetic government, Hindu nationalist groups have mounted an ambitious effort to revise the national educational curriculum, replacing history textbooks that it finds unsatisfactory with a canon of its own. Citizens' groups have gone to court to block the introduction of the new curriculum, and the matter now rests with the Indian Supreme Court. Courses in astrology and "Vedic mathematics," ostensibly based on the ancient Hindu Vedic texts, are now taught at the university level.

The Hindu nationalists' larger mission is summed up this way in a required textbook for book 12th grade students at Sewa Dham. "Unfortunately, in the religious land of India, there is no provision for religious or cultural education," it reads in Hindi, the medium of instruction at most of these schools. "That is part of the reason behind the current chaos in the nation. Today, revolutionary changes are being talked about in the Indian educational system. Religion, culture and nationalism are to be given prominence."

The schools are run by committed foot soldiers of the voluntary service who bring to their work nothing short of the missionary's zeal. Indeed, it was to fight the Christian missionaries in the tribal belt that Rajinder Singh Negi, an upper-caste Hindu from the northeastern province of Uttaranchal and an energetic, affable teacher at Sewa Dham, chose his vocation. "Teachers control the mind," he said simply.

Portraits of Hindu heroes hang on the walls of the school complex. There is the 18th-century king, Shivaji, revered for having beat back Muslim rulers in Maharashtra. There is Keshav Baliram Hegdewar, the founder of the voluntary service, his picture frequently garlanded with a string of fresh marigolds. There is a panoply of ancient Hindu saints and scholars credited with a host of scientific achievements.

"Which proves," Mr. Negi, pointed out, "that Indian culture was far more advanced than Western culture."

The Hindu right's version of Indian history is far from conventional. It holds that world civilization emerged from India. Aryans were not foreigners from the West, the view widely held by ancient historians, but India's native people. Muslims were invaders who quashed Hindu traditions.

According to a "cultural knowledge" textbook produced by the group's education wing, Lord Ram, the blue-skinned warrior-king of Hindu lore, lived 886,000 years ago, a conclusion based on "ancient texts and astrology." Ram is described as "the source of inspiration for Indian culture." The Hindu golden era, they believe, dates back to the time of the Indus Valley civilization of the third millennium B.C.

But it is not only the ancient past that concerns them. A quiz written for eighth graders tests their knowledge of the continuing campaign to build a Hindu temple in Ayodhya, the mythical birthplace of Ram, where Hindu militants razed a 16th-century mosque in 1992. Students are grilled on everything from the date on which the temple reconstruction movement began to the names of those killed by the police.

The cultural knowledge textbook also includes a pitch to buy Indian goods and avoid foreign products. Indian soap (Neem brand, for instance) is endorsed; foreign soap (Palmolive) is to be boycotted. The same goes for soda, ice cream, milk powder, jeans, cosmetics, biscuits and more.

In addition to such cultural knowledge, the boys are taught the standard Indian curriculum as well as yoga and exercises. Television is restricted, and on a recent afternoon, having just taken exams, dozens of boys huddled around a television set watching a body-building competition. Judging from the grades posted in the principal's office, Sewa Dham's students do well on state exams.

The principal's office also displays a map labeled "worldwide patronage." There are congratulatory missives from the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of America — the expatriate branch of the World Hindu Council — as well as from the Arya Samaj of Bergen County and the Hindu Society of Ottawa. On one recent day a check for \$2,340 arrived from a Hindu temple in the Catskills. Another \$3,500 came from Australia.

Donations of this size can go a long way here. The Sewa Dham school has an annual budget of 5.4 million rupees, or \$113,000; about half comes from overseas, school officials said. Suresh Joshi, the national coordinator for the education wing of the voluntary service, said that all told, it spent about 50 million rupees, \$1.04 million, a year on its charitable projects, most of it focused on tribal peoples and dalits. The voluntary service is active in 30,000 villages nationwide, Mr. Joshi said.

The group believes that all indigenous people, many of whom practice animism, are really Hindus, whether or not they realize it. Exposure to Hindu culture and history, the group hopes, will persuade those people to return to the fold.

"We believe all the tribals in India, they are originally Hindu only," Mr. Joshi said. "Slowly they will feel like this. Then they will say themselves, 'We are also Hindus.'"

The common Hindi word for the indigenous people "adivasi," or people of the soil, is shunned by the Hindu right, for it suggests that they predate Hindu civilization. The voluntary service prefers to call them "vanvasi," or people of the forest.

Focus on the indigenous people seems to have paid off in at least one corner of Gujarat. There, only a couple of years ago, Hindu nationalists clashed with indigenous people over conversions to Christianity. During the recent Hindu-Muslim violence in that state, some tribal groups went on a rampage against Muslims.

Voluntary service recruiters select the best and brightest to enroll in schools like this one, with the goal that they will return to their communities armed with an education as well as a message.

In one Sewa Dham textbook, a section entitled "Our Goal" reads: "To develop a national educational system that can develop a generation of youth who are full of Hindu pride and patriotism."

Bisoran Wari, an indigenous boy from the hills of Assam, was chosen early. A volunteer from the group persuaded his parents to send him to a school near his home when he was 8. Three years later, after he had shown promise, he was brought here to Sewa Dham. "My parents are farmers, they can only write their names," the boy said.

His version of the group's history is, naturally, rosy. Its founder, Dr. Hegdewar — the students call him "guruji" out of respect — gathered young people together and taught them how to "serve society," Bisoran said. He would like to do that as well, he said.

Now 18, having just taken his state graduation exams, he plans to study politics at a state-run college near his parents' home and, eventually, become a lawyer. "Lawyers work for justice," he explained.

Then, if the voluntary service takes him for its rigorous training program to become one of its full-time workers, he said, he would consider joining.

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.

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.

"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 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.

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.

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.

"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 7, 2002. The Hindu (India). Robert M. Hathaway.
Charity... or terrorism?**

It is probably advisable for the American Government to hold an official inquiry into fund-raising in the U.S. by groups implicated in the Gujarat violence.

TERRORISM COMES in many guises. An armed assault against Parliament House in New Delhi. A suicide bomber detonating high explosives in a crowded bazaar. Political assassination. Angry young men flying commercial aircraft into the World Trade Center. And, yes, hate-consumed mobs butchering innocent women and children.

The people of India need no instruction from foreigners regarding the moral issues raised by this spring's communal violence in Gujarat. Except for an embittered but fortunately minuscule minority, Indians of all religions and beliefs reacted with horror and disgust to the great human tragedy that unfolded in their country earlier this year.

All those who admire Indian culture and accomplishments, who celebrate the extraordinary progress India has achieved in its still brief national existence, understand that the tragedy of Gujarat strikes at the very essence of India's being and promise. The assassination earlier this year of Abdul Gani Lone, who opposed Indian rule in Kashmir but who in his final years had come to the realization that violence and extremism offer Kashmiris no way out in their struggle with New Delhi, represented another blow to the ideals of tolerance and moderation, another triumph for the forces of hatred and sectarian-based violence. In this sense, the tragedies of Gujarat and of Kashmir are inextricably linked.

Kashmir was certainly not the cause of Gujarat. Sadly, the seeds of Godhra and Ahmedabad and Baroda spring from still more ancient soils. But the continued violence in Kashmir makes the hatred recently seen in Gujarat more likely, and in a perverted sense, more "respectable", or at least acceptable. Perhaps, it does not go too far to assert that until the Kashmir sore is at last healed, the poison that produced Gujarat will make other Gujarats increasingly likely.

Some Indians, of course, say that the tragic events in Gujarat are a domestic Indian affair, and that the United States and the rest of the world have no business intruding into a purely internal Indian matter. This is a self-serving falsehood. Important American interests, including the global war against terrorism, can be directly impacted by what the U.S. says — and fails to say — about Gujarat.

At this particular moment in history, the U.S. cannot allow the impression to take hold that Americans somehow value a Muslim life less than the life of a person of another religion. Sadly, there are those in the Islamic world who assert that the present conflict is a war directed not against terrorism, but against Islam. That the U.S. does not care about Muslims. That Washington seeks to hijack the tragedies of 9/11 to carry out long-held plans to repress the Islamic world. These are detestable lies, but many in the Muslim world are prepared to believe them. So leaving aside the moral issue, it is essential that India's friends in the U.S. speak out to condemn the injustice and hatred so prominently displayed in Gujarat, and to lend support to those Indians, of all religious beliefs, who are working to strengthen the forces of secularism, tolerance and multiculturalism.

Some have asked what impact the recent events in Gujarat will have — should have — on the new and healthier relationship that the U.S. is developing with India. No one needs to be reminded of the tortured history of U.S.-India relations over the years, or the difficulty the two nations have had in working collaboratively with one another, even on those issues where our purposes and interests ran along parallel tracks.

Over the past half dozen or so years — and notwithstanding the temporary if traumatic jolt to the relationship administered by India's 1998 nuclear tests and the subsequent imposition of U.S. sanctions — Washington and New Delhi have begun to construct a qualitatively better relationship, so much so that the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, has come to describe the two countries as "natural allies", a phrase increasingly used by Americans as well.

Following the trauma Americans experienced on September 11, India was one of the first countries in the world to step forward with a pledge of unconditional and unambivalent support for the U.S. in its quest to bring to justice those responsible for the terror attacks in New York and Washington. The administration of George W. Bush, already keen to upgrade relations with Delhi, took notice. Prior to the February 27 Godhra attack that touched off the bloodshed in Gujarat, this new and more sanguine relationship between the U.S. and India was widely viewed by Americans as in the national interest. It remains so today; Gujarat has not changed this calculation.

And yet, it is neither possible nor practical simply to pretend that Gujarat did not happen. The violence in Gujarat, and the steps the Indian Government might take in coming months in response to those events, could have a significant impact on American views of India, and hence, on political and public support in the U.S. for a close and collaborative U.S.-India partnership.

Credible reports have recently suggested that substantial sums of money are sent from Indians resident in the U.S., and from American citizens of Indian origin, to groups and organisations in Gujarat and elsewhere in India that are directly linked to the violence in Gujarat. I do not know if these accounts are true. But respected Indian journalists have uncovered disturbing linkages. If these reports prove accurate, then it is possible that such financial transactions violate U.S. anti-terrorism statutes.

Alternatively, issues of fraud may be at issue. Responsible sources report that some U.S. residents make financial contributions to overseas religious groups in the belief that these funds are to be used for religious or humanitarian purposes, when in fact the monies so raised are used to promote religious bigotry.

In either event, it is probably advisable for the American Government to hold an official inquiry into fund-raising in the U.S. by groups implicated in the Gujarat violence, to ensure that U.S. laws are not being violated. Legitimate organisations need not fear such an investigation, which would serve to clear their names and reassure potential donors about the legitimacy of their fund-raising activities.

Nor would such an inquiry be new or unusual. The U.S. has acted in the past to regulate or even to ban fund-raising activities by groups advocating violence and ethnic or religious intolerance in other countries, as well as activities where fraud may be an issue. Since September 11, both the Bush administration and other Governments have shut down a number of groups whose ostensible purposes were to collect funds for Muslim charities, but which actually served to finance terrorist networks.

The Gujarat violence, Lone's assassination, and most recently, the designation of L.K. Advani as Deputy Prime Minister and most likely successor to Mr. Vajpayee have all raised new concerns about India's future among India's friends in the U.S. An official U.S. investigation into Gujarat-related fund-raising, voluntarily facilitated by the Government of India, would go far towards easing those concerns and further strengthening the new partnership between our two peoples.

(The writer is Director, Asia Program, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington D.C.)

August 20, 2002. Yahoo (IANS). Vasantha Arora. Armitage urged to take up Gujarat violence with India

Washington, Aug 20 (IANS) The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom has urged Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage to take up with the Indian government the largely anti-Muslim religious violence in Gujarat.

Armitage, who visits South Asia this week, was also called upon to discuss with President Pervez Musharraf the killings of Christians in Pakistan.

In a letter to Armitage, the Commission, which advises President George Bush and the U.S. Congress, voiced grave concern that none of the senior U.S. officials who visited India recently thought it right to take up the violence in Gujarat that has claimed at least 1,000 lives since February-end.

"Clearly it is important that the U.S. speak out publicly against such religion-based extremist violence, all the more so in view of our country's war on terrorism," said the letter by the Commission's chairperson Felice D. Gaer.

The Commission recently held a Congressional hearing on Gujarat and heard testimony from the families of the victims, non-governmental groups and South Asia experts like Bob Hathaway, who is in charge of the Asia programme in the Woodrow Wilson Centre, a reputed think tank in Washington DC.

Gaer said: "In India we urge you (Armitage) to express publicly the U.S. government's profound concern about the widespread killings of Muslims in Gujarat earlier this year."

Sparked by the killing of 58 people on a train, including many Hindu rightwing activists, Hindu fanatics killed at least 1,000 Muslims. Many were killed in a brutal fashion.

Although some U.S. administration officials have commented in response to questions by reporters about the "horrible violence in Gujarat" and about their expectation that the Indian government would "do the right thing, as far as we know no senior U.S. administration official has expressed concern over the killings or called for accountability for those responsible".

In fact, Secretary of State Colin Powell has said that the violence in Gujarat "did not come up in any of the conversations I had in both India and in Pakistan" during his recent visit to the region.

The Commission has, therefore, asked Armitage to specifically raise the issues of Gujarat and attacks on Christians in Pakistan.

The letter went on to say that although the Indian government has taken some positive steps, the situation in Gujarat remained "highly volatile". It said the National Human Rights Commission of India had detailed evidence of premeditation by members of Hindu extremist groups, complicity by Gujarat government officials and police inaction in the face of orchestrated violence against Muslims.

In Pakistan, Gaer said: "We urge you to similarly speak out publicly against attacks on Christian targets, reportedly by Islamic extremists. Pakistan's government should forcefully combat such violence, punish its perpetrators, and work more effectively to foster an atmosphere of tolerance and respect for the rights of everyone, regardless of religion or belief.

"Unlike in the case of the terrible murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl, the Pakistan government has not demonstrated a similar resolve to find and bring to justice those directly responsible for attacks against Christians."

The letter expressed the hope that Armitage would underline the Commission's conclusion that discriminatory religious legislation in Pakistan (notably, the blasphemy and anti-Ahmadi laws) promoted religious intolerance that in turn encouraged acts of sectarian and religiously motivated violence.

Also, despite the proposed law to reform madrassas, too many Pakistan's Islamic religious schools continue to provide ideological training and motivation to those who go on to fight in Afghanistan and Kashmir, and who take part in violence targeting religious minorities in Pakistan, the letter pointed out.

Saying that there were many interests that the U.S. government must pursue in each of these countries, Gaer felt that Armitage should express grave concern over religious freedom concerns in his dialogue with the governments in South Asia.

"This is important not least because it is the protection of religious freedom and other human rights that has proven often to be the most effective guarantor that other U.S. interests will be advanced," the letter said.

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to give independent recommendations to the executive branch and the Congress.

August 28, 2002. Yahoo(Reuters). Thomas Kutty Abraham.

Gujarat riot-hit Muslims see little hope of justice

KHEDIAD, India (Reuters) - Arjuben Ayub Sindhi lay among a pile of hacked bodies, feigning death for nearly an hour before a police patrol team rescued her from a group of armed slogan-shouting Hindu zealots.

The 20-year-old woman, who now lives in a relief camp along with 250 Muslims who survived India's worst religious bloodshed in February and March, is still traumatised. A deep wound on her shoulder has not healed.

Sindhi says the knowledge that those involved in the March 2 killing of 67 people from her village, including her relatives, hurts her more than the still bandaged aching wound.

"It has been six months and no one has been arrested. Will we ever get justice?" she asks, covering her face with her sari.

Sindhi, who lost six relatives in the riots, is not alone.

Hundreds of Muslims in the riot-hit western state of Gujarat are anguished over the delay in punishing people who went on a killing spree after a suspected Muslim mob set a train afire, burning alive 59 Hindus late in February.

A sense of hopelessness and denial of justice weighs heavily on Muslims in Gujarat, where hundreds still live in relief camps.

Officials say around 1,000 people were killed and hundreds of homes and businesses owned by Muslims gutted during the riots. Non-government groups put the number of dead around 2,500.

While some arrests have been made in some highly publicised cases of mass killing in Ahmedabad, Gujarat's largest city, and over the burning of the train, victims say no visible progress has been made in punishing the guilty in most cases.

An interior ministry official said police had filed more than 4,000 first information reports and arrested hundreds in cases where evidence was available. A first information report is the first step to laying formal charges.

Salimbhai Sindhi, the head of Khediad, a village dotted with lush maize fields, filed several complaints and met officials to get 67 of his villagers certified dead.

"They (authorities) have declared only 11 of them dead, when a total of 67 were killed," he told Reuters.

BURNT BODIES

Authorities have refused to certify the deaths of the other 56 for lack of witnesses or evidence.

"We cannot declare someone dead under the law without some kind of physical evidence or a direct eyewitness account," the interior ministry official said.

The villagers, mostly farmers, were waylaid by a Hindu mob of around 2,000 and burnt alive in their vehicle as they tried to flee another mob that burnt their houses.

"How could we come up with physical evidence when the bodies of the victims were burnt for three days continuously? Nothing was left, not even the bones," the village head said.

"We were on the run to save our lives. Forget about going back to collect evidence," added Shamsuddin Jamu Miya, one of 17 Muslims who escaped.

Survivors of the ambush have named some people but said the accused are still free.

Police officials say every attempt was made to register the complaints of victims and arrest the accused.

"It's not correct to say the accused are roaming free. We have charged 800 people in Panchmahals alone with rioting and murder," Superintendent of Police Narasimha Komar said.

Relief officials and legal experts say lack of witnesses and apprehension among Muslims that fundamentalist Hindu groups could take revenge if they spoke out against the attackers were likely to lead to a majority of the accused being acquitted.

They said Hindus charged with murder, arson and looting had been acquitted in four cases for want of witnesses and evidence.

"In many cases, the eyewitnesses are going back on their testimony. So the trend of acquittal will continue," said Manoj Agarwal, the district collector of Panchmahals.

Non-government groups, providing legal aid to victims, say conviction rates in riot cases would be low as most first information reports name groups as attackers and not individuals.

September 16, 2002. Silicon India.

Fanatic Hindu groups spread tentacles in U.S. universities

NEW DELHI: Hindu hardline groups are active in at least 40 U.S. universities operating under different names and are busy spreading "communal feelings" in the Indian community, says a sociologist from New York.

Aditi Desai, a former lecturer at Delhi University, has studied Hindu-Muslim relations closely. Based in New York, Desai is a consultant for the U.N. and is an active worker on issues relating to civil society, gender and environment.

Desai was in the capital as part of a 13-member "Sadbhavna" (amity) delegation that toured Gujarat after sectarian violence rocked the western state claiming at least 1,000 lives, mainly of Muslims.

"These cells with strong leanings to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Bajrang Dal are teaching young minds to hate. Communal feelings are spreading among the NRI community in the U.S. You can almost feel it in the air," Desai said

"Funds for these organisations are also coming in substantial amounts from all across the world.

"After the Gujarat earthquake last year, Indians in the U.S. regardless of caste and creed contributed generously to support the reconstruction process. But this time finances have not been forthcoming for victims of the communal violence.

"In one city in the U.S. where 1,400 families of Indian origin reside, only \$700 was raised. It shows communal divisions have sprouted in the U.S. too."

The Gujarat violence was blamed mainly on the VHP and Bajrang Dal, both of which are closely linked to the Bharatiya Janata Party, which rules Gujarat. Along with the RSS, India's most influential Hindu group, all these groups are collectively known as the "Sangh Parivar".

On her experiences in Gujarat, Desai said: "What we saw was thousand times worse than what we had imagined. It was total horror and a quantum leap from what communal violence we had seen in the country before.

"The people in the relief camps comprising mainly Muslims are totally helpless and despondent even to protest. Not surprisingly we found no feeling or expression of vengeance or anger on the part of the Muslims.

"Their backs are broken - something the VHP promised to do. I already see the beginning of a Bosnia here.

"What was more alarming was the language of terror - it was a total debasement of humanity. This language could not have been taught in a day. Even the pattern of violence was the same everywhere. Much preparation had gone into it. It could not have been spontaneous.

"Hindus who helped Muslim victims, the administration, the press - everyone was intimidated. And even now, there is no food and livelihood for the people in the relief camps. Not one guilty person has been caught."

Desai added: "But there is a larger task at hand now. India is in a state of siege. People abroad think groups like VHP has the support of 80 percent Hindus in India, whereas its support base it is not more than 20 percent. That has to be exposed."

September 16, 2002. The Nation. Ruth Baldwin.

Gujarat's Gendered Violence.

"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 20, 2002. Silicon India.

American expert compares Gujarat with Nazi Germany

NEW DELHI: When American legal expert Rhonda Copelon heard how Hindu rightwing leaders in Gujarat had demonised Muslims ahead of polls there, she was reminded of Nazi Germany.

"Hindu leaders created fear in the minds of Hindus by telling them a day would come when their sons would not return home as they would be kidnapped and killed by their Muslim neighbours," Copelon told IANS.

"Such fear mongering got them what they wanted -- victory," she said, referring to the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) sweeping election victory in Gujarat this month.

Copelon along with a panel of women activists from the U.S., Sri Lanka, Britain and Germany visited the riot-torn state from December 14 to 17, coinciding with the Gujarat polls and its results.

They went there at the invitation of the International Initiative for Justice, formed by over a dozen Indian women's groups.

"The Hindu leaders literally forced Hindus to look at their Muslim neighbours as demons," she said. "We were stunned to hear of such speeches at a time when Gujarat was limping back to normalcy."

At least 1,000 people had died in sectarian violence from February-May in Gujarat.

"When there are signs of hate propaganda, organised crime and no hope of redress from the state, it signals to be a genocide. After seeing the mass destruction I think what happened in Gujarat was similar to the suffering caused in Nazi Germany," she said.

Copelon, who is a law professor at City University of the New York School of Law, said they were interacting in a huge hall with Muslims women when the Gujarat election results were announced.

"There was a killing silence and terror was writ large on everyone's faces."

She asked a woman sitting next to her what the victory of Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's BJP meant to them, and was told: "They will never let us survive".

Copelon said the importance of the visit was relevant in the context of the post-election scenario.

The panellists, which also included Indian women activists, called for a "genocidal alert" in Gujarat, describing the violence that was perpetrated in the state earlier this year.

Copelon said the international community, organisations and the U.N. bodies should declare a genocidal alert in Gujarat "to put international pressure on India to avoid a repeat" of the anti-Muslim violence that took place in Gujarat.

Copelon, who is also director of the International Women's Human Rights Clinic, said "legitimate investigation and prosecution" should be carried out against police and other officials.

Alleged members of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the BJP, Bajrang Dal and Shiv Sena who participated in the violence should be investigated and prosecuted.

Nira Yuval-Davis, a professor in gender and ethnic studies at the University of Greenwich in London, who was also part of the panel, said: "We were all moved to tears on seeing the extent of damage. The Muslims have a feeling of hopelessness."

Summed up Farah Naqvi, a writer and founder of women's group Nirantar: "We are tired of the legal system. The government should act against perpetrators of the crime, otherwise accept that we are a weak democracy."

March 3, 2003. Newsweek International. Carla Power.

Modi's Moment

On the anniversary of the ethnic violence in Gujarat, the state's militant chief minister is both unrepentant and possibly a harbinger of India's political future

March 3 issue — Drums beat, as supporters of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) push forward to toss marigolds and rose petals at Narendra Modi. When Gujarat's chief minister emerges from the airport in the BJP stronghold of Rajkot, there's a cry and a crush of men in saffron scarves emblazoned with the BJP lotus symbol.

THAT EVENING, SPEAKING at a local IT college, the reception is just as rapturous. "The media say this man is like Hitler," says a local BJP man, introducing Modi to the packed auditorium. "They portrayed him like a devil." And yet, the emcee says, he won the vote. When Modi stands up and starts talking—without notes—in his grave, low voice, the neatly pressed crowd stops fiddling with its mobile phones and starts listening.

Modi is good at entrances. At a Mumbai rally this winter, he emerged from a giant pink hydraulic lotus created for him by a Bollywood set designer. His entry into the national political spotlight has been no less dramatic. In 2001, as a mid-ranking party functionary, he was dispatched from party headquarters in Delhi to steer Gujarat's BJP. Then, a year ago this week, he became the poster boy for India's vicious communal tensions. On Feb. 27, 2002, Muslims set fire to a train in the town of Godhra, killing 58 Hindu pilgrims. In the days that followed, well-organized Hindu crowds retaliated by burning, looting, raping and killing hundreds—some say thousands—of Muslims. Modi's early response (which he later denied) was that Hindu rage was an "equal and opposite reaction" to the train attack.

Newspapers, opposition politicians and human-rights groups charged the Modi government with being complicit in the violence. Even after the riots subsided, Modi's rhetoric did not cool. In his fall campaign for re-election as Gujarat's chief minister, he blatantly played to anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistani sentiments, telling voters that a vote for the opposition Congress Party was a vote for "Mian Musharraf," a phrase that linked the Pakistani leader with defamatory Gujarati slang for Muslim. "He was basically trying to say that all of India's Muslims are hidden Pakistanis—traitors to the nation," says Teesta Setalvad, editor of *Communalism Combat*.

For the BJP, Modi is the perfect 21st-century political specimen: disciplined, media-savvy, silver-tongued and a hard-line Hindu nationalist. "By telling audiences, 'It is only I who can save you from the Muslims,' he speaks in the way that Hindus want to hear," says Jay Dubashi, a former BJP adviser. "He has become an icon for the party." That's particularly true since his fiery Hindu nationalism landed him two thirds of Gujarat's vote, ending a string of BJP election defeats around the country. Party leaders are trying to figure out how to replicate Modi's Gujarat victory in four state elections this month, with three more to come later this year.

There's even talk that Modi could be India's next prime minister. For those keen to preserve India's secularism, painstakingly constructed by leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi, that's a terrifying thought. Pundits and opposition politicians worry that Modi-style intimidation of Muslims, Christians and other minorities is making India feel increasingly like 1930s Germany. Human Rights Watch has accused Modi's police force of being complicit in the 2002 violence. "Who is this Human Rights Watch?" he says, in an interview with *NEWSWEEK* as his eight-seater ministerial plane flies to Rajkot. "Who is behind them? Who funds them?" Besides, he adds, the riot issue is being looked at by a government commission. In the meantime, "the people of Gujarat have already replied, so it's not necessary for me to reply." To his accusers, he quotes Jesus: "Oh, forgive them Lord, they know not what they do."

Love it or loathe it, Modi's Gujarat success has triggered political soul-searching in India. The judiciary's failure to investigate his government for its involvement in the riots, says Justice A. V. Ravani, a former chief justice in Rajasthan, "is Balkanizing the country, and threatening the very basic fabric of this society." The Congress Party—which held secularism as an article of faith for decades and has long tried to convince itself that the BJP's popularity was based—mostly on a protest vote—is being forced to confront the depth of Hindu nationalist sentiment in India. In the wake of Modi's December victory, Nehru's old party—which always made a grand show of praising India's religious heterogeneity—has begun to adopt its own version of Hindu-influenced nationalism. Says Jairam Ramesh, the Congress Party's secretary of the economy: "We have to rescue Hinduism from being hijacked by the BJP."

The form of the religion promoted by the nationalists is more political than doctrinal, and relatively modern in origin. Modi, born 53 years ago to a lower-caste family in the Gujarati town of Vadnagar, left home at 17 to join their petri dish, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). Influenced by 1930s fascists of Germany and Italy, the RSS founders built a disciplined social organization that insisted India be defined as a Hindu country. Like prime minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and his deputy, L. K. Advani, Modi became an RSS apparatchik. In the mid-1980s he joined the RSS's political wing, the BJP, and later worked to broaden the party's appeal to the lower castes and non-Hindu ethnic groups.

RSS and BJP colleagues describe Modi as a classic organization man: driven, hardworking and ambitious. Separated from his wife, he told *India Today* he's committed to ascetic bachelorhood: "When you are on a mission, you don't need a companion." It is this disciplined demeanor, says Ramesh, that distinguishes the younger generation in the BJP—a group of up-and-comers he calls "the Albert Speer generation," after Hitler's brilliant architect—from older politicians. "Vajpayee and Advani still operate in a Nehruvian ethos," he notes. "But [politicians in the younger generation] are technocrats," he says. "Economically, they're liberalizers. And socially, they're bigots."

Across the border in Pakistan, Modi's brand of nakedly muscular Hinduism alarms moderates and stokes Islamist anger. At home in India, it appeals to professionals like his audience at the Rajkot computer college: urban, striving middle-class Hindus. Buoyed economically by India's economic liberalization and software success, they're nonetheless keen to keep traditional values alive. (The same is perhaps even more true for the vast and successful Gujarati diaspora in the West, from which much of the nationalists' financial support comes.) By casting Muslim communities as uncivilized and backward, Modi's rhetoric simultaneously equates Hinduism with progress and strength.

Modi, whose 18-hour workdays start online, and whose Handspring pocket organizer boasts his own picture as a screen image, shares his followers' faith in technology. He also appeals to their resentments. Hindus are angered by what they see as the Congress Party's pandering to Muslims, allowing them privileges like their own family law, based on Sharia. "Modi is bidden by the call of the motherland," says H. V. Pradhan, a tourism officer in

Ahmedabad. "He says, 'In the world of science and technology, why are you going back to the age of the bullock cart?' He asks, 'How long should we be told by uneducated imams what to do?'"

At Ahmedabad's Shah Alam Mosque, mention Modi's name and people talk of violence, not vision. They recall how Modi's police force refused to protect them during last year's riots, telling them they were Hindus first and policemen second. At dusk, the Mughal monument is a tribute to the centuries-old braid of Islamic and Hindu cultures. For proof of how Indianized Islam has become during its 12 centuries in South Asia, one need only look at how incense thickens the air, candles flicker in front of the saint's tomb and a huddle of musicians belt out qawwali, the songs of South Asian Muslim mystics. Yet the faithful at Shah Alam believe Modi is trying to rip them out of the fabric of Gujarati society. "He wants to finish the minority community here," says Nasrin Sheikh, an English-literature student at Gujarat University. Post-riot politics have changed the 20-year-old's life. "Before, I'd go to see movies or roam in the gardens with my Hindu friends," she says. "Now they say, 'You are not my friend, you're my enemy.'" She now hopes to emigrate, worried that she'll have no future as a Muslim in India.

As with many populist politicians, part of Modi's appeal to his constituency lies in his extravagant scorn for India's elites. Though he believes his election was a historical turning point for India, "the winning party isn't acceptable to so-called writers and intellectuals, so they're not writing books about it." Or perhaps they're waiting to see whether Modi's Gujarat success is an aberration or a trend. Anxious for their new golden boy to repeat his winning formula in state elections this month, the BJP is sending him on the stump. His anti—terrorism and anti-Pakistan message looks set to be the central plank for parliamentary elections in 2004.

Yet there's a real question as to whether the Gujarat strategy will have traction in other Indian states. Modi's polarizing strategy worked well in the religiously conservative region with its 512-kilometer border with Pakistan and a history of riots and communal tension. Known as the party's "Hindutva laboratory"—the state where it tests out its radical Hindu program—Gujarat is about 10 percent Muslim, but its Islamic population is evenly spread across the state, which means that parties haven't bothered to court a Muslim voting bloc. On the other hand, Himachal Pradesh, which Modi visited last week on the stump, doesn't have Gujarat's huge Muslim population or its religious tensions. At a press conference in the state capital of Simla, Modi started by sounding his familiar themes of "nationalism and security." A few minutes later, sensing the absence of radicals among the audience, he changed tack. The BJP's main goal, he finally said, was efficient administration.

Even if the BJP has to temper the Gujarat message for other Indian states, there's no denying a rising Hindu sensibility may dominate the country's political future. Italian-born Congress leader Sonia Gandhi recently started a campaign at a Hindu temple, and not long ago, a Congress chief minister made a noisy defense of supporting a ban on cow slaughter—long a BJP issue. But it may be tricky for a party that historically was heavily invested in secularism to beat the BJP at its own game. In the end, the best chance of defeating a demagogue lies in ideas and policies that speak to people's needs. If Congress can't come up with them, they may lose the battle for India's political soul. And then this may truly turn out to be Modi's moment.

July 1, 2003. New York Times. David Rohde. Muslims Recant, and Hindus Are Acquitted in Riot Trial

VADODARA, India, June 30 — It seemed the moment of vindication had finally arrived for Zahira Sheikh.

Last month Ms. Sheikh, a 20-year-old Indian Muslim, took the witness stand in the trial of 21 Hindu neighbors whom her family accused of burning 11 Muslims and 3 Hindu workers alive in their family bakery.

The victims included her older sister, three women, twin 4-year-old girls, two babies and her uncle, who was hacked to death. The killings were among the most gruesome in the anti-Muslim riots last year in Gujarat State, which killed about 1,000 people, a vast majority of whom were Muslims.

In the year since, the young woman with pigtails and a primary school education has emerged as the public face of the victims in this industrial city of 1.5 million in western India.

Vowing not to marry until the perpetrators were punished, Ms. Sheikh tearfully told journalists and human rights investigators how jeering Hindus, enraged by the killing of 59 Hindus in another part of the state, had surrounded the family business, Best Bakery, and set it on fire. She and her mother, brother, grandmother and sister-in-law made it to the roof and survived.

But when her day in court finally came, Ms. Sheikh said none of her neighbors had been involved, according to a lawyer present. She has since disappeared.

"She said, 'These are the people who saved me,'" said Muhammad Hanif Sheikh, a Muslim lawyer who watched the proceedings in dismay. "She helped the accused."

Over the next several days, the relatives who survived with her took the stand and also exonerated the defendants. By the end of the trial, 24 of the 73 witnesses had recanted. On Friday a judge, citing a lack of evidence and shoddy police work, acquitted the 21 defendants and set them free.

The verdict has drawn nationwide attention and has prompted local Muslim leaders and human rights groups to accuse Hindu nationalists of sabotaging efforts to prosecute Hindus involved in the riots. They say Ms. Sheikh and her family were threatened, bribed or both.

Local Muslims said the faith of India's 140 million Muslims in the country's commitment to equal justice was again being tested in Gujarat. The state's Hindu nationalist rulers and the police were accused of standing by as Muslims were killed during the riots. Now they are being accused of generating a climate of fear and skewing the judicial process.

Hindu nationalists, who were overwhelmingly re-elected to office here early this year, denied the charges and said the scale of the attacks on Muslims had been exaggerated. The state's population is more than 80 percent Hindu. They said they had played no role in Ms. Sheikh's case.

Madhu Shrivastav, a Hindu nationalist who, some witnesses said, accompanied Ms. Sheikh to court, said he had never met her.

"I don't know who she is," said Mr. Shrivastav, a burly, bearded man. "I never talked to Zahira."

In a report issued today in New York, Human Rights Watch said that 16 months after the riots, no defendant had been convicted. Muslims are being prosecuted under India's strict antiterrorism laws, the group said, while no Hindus are.

The police are downgrading charges against Hindu defendants, filing false charges to cover up their own role in the violence, deleting the names of the accused and failing to pursue rape cases, Human rights Watch said.

Raghuvir Pandya, the state prosecutor in Ms. Sheikh's case, has been widely criticized for failing to aggressively cross-examine the witnesses who recanted. The lawyer said public prosecutors could not push witnesses too hard.

"If you put some hardness on the witnesses," he said. "they could complain to the government."

Iqbal Ahmed Ansari, a local Muslim businessman who aided Ms. Sheikh's family before she disappeared, called for the intervention of the federal government, which is also controlled by Hindu nationalists from the Bharatiya Janata Party. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee leads the largest nationalist party but is generally seen as more moderate.

Where Ms. Sheikh is and why she changed her story remain a mystery. Indian journalists are hunting for her across India. One theory has it that Mr. Shrivastav has hidden her in Bombay. He called those reports "rubbish." Another involves her getting married and moving to New Delhi.

Hindu neighbors said they remembered Ms. Sheikh as a friendly woman whose father had died of a heart attack a month before the riots.

Piyush Patel, one of the police officials who arrived after the fire, said Ms. Sheikh had been weeping. Her mother, who was more composed, identified nine of their Hindu neighbors as part of the mob. The police did not arrive at the scene until 12 hours after the fire.

"She used to be very angry when she would narrate the story," Mr. Ansari said. "She used to be very emotional."

In the months after the attack, Ms. Sheikh seemed to come into her own, he said. Giving interviews and testifying before various commissions, her girlish face became a symbol of the horror of the riots.

Her family also began to benefit financially, Muslim leaders said. Receiving aid from Muslim charity groups, as well as payments from the state and national governments, they lived in various donated homes.

But the houses Mr. Ansari described all sounded smaller than the living quarters that were part of the spacious three-story family bakery. The charred building lies in ruins today, but it appeared to have been one of the finest homes in a lower-middle-class neighborhood filled with nearly all Hindu families.

Today, looters have torn out every window, door and electrical cable, and a family of pigs has bedded down on the first floor. On the second story, the partly melted legs of a girl's plastic doll lie on the floor.

A half-mile from the scorched bakery, Mahender Jadhav, one of the freed defendants, sat in his house today and hailed the verdict. He said Ms. Sheikh was now finally telling the truth.

"What can I say? These people came from outside," said Mr. Jadhav, 26, who owns a scooter repair shop. "I was at home. I don't know."

July 3, 2003. Los Angeles Times. Editorial. Fairness on Trial in India.

It was bad enough that India's Gujarat state government did nothing to stop last year's riots in which Hindus killed more than 1,000 Muslims. It was worse that state rulers refused to let federal police investigate or to move the trials of those accused in the killings to a state where justice might be done. The result of the first trial stemming from the riots was as predictable as it was despicable: Twenty-one people accused of arson in a bakery fire that burned alive 11 Muslims and three Hindus were acquitted after prosecution witnesses changed their testimony.

Religious confrontations have plagued India for centuries, although the nation prides itself on being a secular state. More than 80% of India's billion people are Hindu; about 12% are Muslim. In February 2002, Muslims in Gujarat set fire to a train carrying Hindus back from Ayodhya, a disputed religious site. Hindus retaliated by massacring Muslims. Police were late to show up and when they finally arrived did little to protect Muslims.

Nor was Narendra Modi, the state's chief minister, any help. He later campaigned for reelection as a promoter of "Hindu-ness" and protector of Hindus against neighboring Pakistan, where Muslims predominate.

The main characteristic of the bakery arson trial was changed testimony. The organization Human Rights Watch said Hindus warned Muslim witnesses that they would be allowed to return to their homes only if they recanted. The judge who delivered the acquittals last week said the police work had been shoddy. Also, prosecutors made little effort to get witnesses to stick to their original identifications and narratives, and they failed to emphasize why witnesses backed down. India's coalition government should move the remaining trials and protect witnesses. The coalition's biggest faction is the Bharatiya Janata Party, which counts Modi as a member and benefits from support from Hindu fundamentalists. Eleven years ago, Hindus tore down a mosque in Ayodhya, which they say is the birthplace of the god Ram. That touched off riots across the country. Activists are still trying to win permission to build a Hindu temple on the site.

Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani said last month in an interview at The Times that the Gujarat riots were an "aberration" and "indefensible." He is a mainstay of the BJP and a favorite of Hindu fundamentalists. Advani should take the lead in pushing for fair trials for those accused of causing last year's riots. He also should keep the Ayodhya controversy from inflaming India again, by telling BJP members to forget building a temple or by insisting that if a temple is built, Muslims be given a new mosque nearby. The BJP also must not use the riots and Ayodhya as lures for Hindu votes when elections are held.

July 12, 2003. Los Angeles Daily News (AP). Prajnan Bhattacharya.

Training camps worrying India's minorities

KANPUR, India -- At her summer camp, 10-year-old Stuti Gupta is learning to use guns, leap through rings of fire and fight with knives and wooden truncheons -- skills India's most powerful Hindu nationalist group tells her she needs to protect her faith. The women's wing of the World Hindu Council is holding training camps in several parts of India, where girls learn martial arts and are "ordained" with metal tridents, the symbol of Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction.

But in a modern nation built on principles of tolerance and equality, such camps don't just deepen Hindus' faith. They create cauldrons of hostility and inject hatred against Muslims and Christian minorities, critics say.

"Such trends are inconsistent with prosperity, development and modernization. They are completely antithetical to the modern project of nation building," said Mushirul Hasan, a Muslim who is a professor of modern Indian history.

"If the government wants to create a modern state, it must call the bluff of the Hindu fundamentalists and show the danger they pose to the country."

Stuti, a fourth-grader, traveled 170 miles from her native Banda to attend the camp in the northern industrial city of Kanpur. Both cities are in Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state.

"This training will prepare me to fight the odds in the society confidently. They are killing Hindus everywhere to reduce us to a minority and this would help me to face that challenge," the girl said.

The World Hindu Council's main target is Muslims, who make up more than 12 percent of the country's 1.02 billion people. Some 84 percent of India's citizens are Hindus, and the Hindu nationalists often warn of what they say are the growing militant ambitions of Muslims.

While the camps for girls are a relatively new phenomenon, the nationalist group has long held camps for boys, who attend them by the thousands.

"The camps are not only organized to impart arms training and physical education, but also to give them an in-depth knowledge of Indian culture and traditions," said Hari Agarwal of the camp in Lucknow, capital of Uttar Pradesh.

But Muslims are alarmed. In a rare move, a Muslim organization in Uttar Pradesh has announced it would distribute 5,000 tridents to Muslims next week to counter what they see as a growing threat.

In the western state of Gujarat, several summer camps are under way for hundreds of young women. Gujarat was the scene of Hindu-Muslim riots last year that claimed over 1,000 lives, most of them Muslims. The riots began after Muslims burned a train car, killing 60 Hindus.

"These camps are being run across the state without any ban from the government," said Atallah Khan, a Gujarati industrialist and organizer of a relief camp for Muslims whose homes were burned in the riots.

"If tomorrow, Muslims start organizing such camps in the name of their religion, and the same with Christians and Buddhists, would the state government permit them to do so?" he asked.

The Gujarat state government, widely accused last year of doing little to stop the anti-Muslim violence, has not taken a stand on the camps.

Kalpana Vyas, a senior Hindu Council leader who is supervising the camps in Gujarat, said they were meant to aid girls in "physical, mental and spiritual development."

"Learning how to use firearms is not illegal and it is not meant to kill anyone without provocation," she said. "Muslims also organize such camps in Pakistan to train people how to handle deadly weapons."

The Hindu Council campaign has been bolstered by the 13-year Islamic insurgency in the disputed Himalayan province of Kashmir. India has long accused Pakistan of supporting the militants, a claim Islamabad denies.

The Hindu Council, an ideological affiliate of India's ruling Baharatiya Janata Party, has used the Kashmir insurgency to push its hard-line brand of Hinduism, traditionally a peace-loving religion.

Minorities throughout India and those who defend the country's secular constitution say training young Hindus how to use weapons is neither patriotic nor religious.

"These camps are being organized to scare the minorities," said Sharif Khan Pathan, secretary of the Citizens Relief Service in Gujarat. "We understand that the state government is a sponsor of such activities, but the (federal government) should ban such training camps, as ultimately it is the Muslims who will suffer."

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.

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)

October 17, 2004. New York Times. Amy Waldman.

Indian Muslims' Hope Is One Good Policewoman

KALOL, India - So indecent was his younger brother's death that Idris Yusuf Ghodawala never imagined the indignity that was to follow.

On March 1, 2002, as Hindu-Muslim riots convulsed the state of Gujarat, a Hindu mob armed with shiny new swords set upon Imran Ghodawala, an 18-year-old Muslim, dragged him into the Rabbani mosque and burned him to death. Idris, hiding on a balcony next door, saw the attack and then the smoke billowing from the mosque.

When Idris Ghodawala went to the police to claim Imran's remains, he said the top local police officer, a Hindu named R. J. Patil, told him there were no remains to claim. Mr. Patil had burned them, knowing full well that Muslims, unlike Hindus, bury their dead.

The sacrilege still makes Mr. Ghodawala, 31, weep.

"We are Muslims, and they burned our body," he said.

Mr. Patil's action appears to have been part of a broader effort to conceal evidence and thwart prosecutions after the riots in Gujarat state, which left at least 1,100 Muslims dead and up to 600 missing. Mr. Ghodawala could name four members of the mob that killed his brother, two of whom he had played cricket with as a child. But he said Mr. Patil refused to let him name names, or even file a complaint. So Mr. Ghodawala's case essentially disappeared, as did thousands of others stemming from the riots.

In a state controlled by Hindu nationalists, the police either refused to register the names of the accused or simply summarily closed cases; prosecutors did not oppose bail for suspects, and judges delivered acquittals in cases where dozens of people died.

Only a small number of Hindus have been convicted for any action in the riots, although the Supreme Court has now intervened to force more than 2,000 cases that had been closed to be re-examined and at least two retried.

What happened in this area was typical except in one respect. Late last year, Neeraja Gotru Rao, a policewoman of uncommon courage, arrived here after being sent by the state police to reinvestigate the cases. Her work led to the arrests of about 30 suspects, including the personal assistant to a state government minister. It also led to the arrest of Mr. Patil on suspicion of destroying evidence by burning the remains of Imran Ghodawala and at least 12 other Muslims.

The fate of these two police officers, whose interpretation of duty so diverged, will test more than whether justice will be done in the riots, which were set off by the immolation on Feb. 27, 2002, of 59 Hindus in a train carriage. It may also determine whether Muslims here can once again believe in the impartiality of the Indian state.

On a recent afternoon, the corpulent Mr. Patil was found not in jail, but sipping tea in his pajamas in the local government hospital. The minister's personal assistant and another well-connected accused person - all three ostensibly under arrest - were with him. Pleading illness, they were seeking bail from the comfort of the hospital.

Ms. Rao, meanwhile, was back in Ahmedabad, having been ordered by the Gujarat state police to wrap up her unfinished work. She is not granting interviews, but victims and their advocates say the order is another effort to thwart prosecutions.

"She was removed because she was doing good work," Mr. Ghodawala said. "And because she said she would try to find out who were the superior officers who gave the orders. Now I don't think anybody will take up this case." The director general of the Gujarat police says Ms. Rao, who is Hindu, was taking too long with her work, and that her investigation was finished.

The rioting lasted for weeks, but was most ferocious in the first few days. Sixty-eight Muslims died in this area, many of them from Delol, a village nearby.

Muslims died in the village and the surrounding fields, where Yaqub Adam, a tailor, saw his father, mother, uncle, cousin, nephew and two other relatives killed.

"Their only work in those days was to find the Muslims, kill them and burn them," Mr. Adam, 40, said.

Eleven more Muslims died next to the Ambika Society housing colony, when the truck in which they were trying to flee ran straight into a Hindu mob.

"Nobody came to save us," said Medina Yaqub Sheikh, who said she saw her husband hacked by a sword, then set on fire. One young woman said she was raped by five men.

More Muslims died at Derol station, and 17 more fleeing rioters at the Goma River. Two small boys were reportedly thrown on a fire, then when they crawled off, thrown on again. In Kalol, where about one-fourth of the 20,000 residents are Muslim, 165 Muslim properties and vehicles were looted and burned. One Muslim man, injured in the police firing, was burned to death in the hospital compound. Imran Ghodawala was burned to death in the mosque.

If each killing had its horrific particularity, the aftermath was strikingly similar. Victims and witnesses went to the local police station, controlled by Mr. Patil, to register complaints and claim their dead.

Survivors said Mr. Patil refused to let them file complaints, saying he would write what needed to be written. In the end, he wrote a single complaint bunching all the killings together and not listing the suspects whom witnesses had named. Survivors of the Ambika Society massacre said he told them that he had burned the remains of their loved ones.

When Mr. Ghodawala sought a certificate proving his brother's death so his family could get compensation from the state, he said the police told him that if he named names his family would get no money.

He would see his brother's killers in town, but was powerless, he said, tears flowing again. "If we chase them we cannot live here, we cannot work here," he said. "We do not have anybody to help."

That changed when Ms. Rao arrived at the end of last year. The state police had dispatched her to investigate the killings and rape at the Ambika Society after pressure from human rights and women's groups and the Supreme Court.

She set up shop in a separate room at the Kalol police station, and victims began coming to see her. They found a woman, about 35, in a police uniform, with short hair, small glasses, a strong build and a soft voice.

She listened with compassion, and spoke with affection. Medina Yaqub Sheikh is illiterate, but as she recounted how her husband died, she knew it mattered that Ms. Rao took notes.

"Earlier when we used to talk to the police they never used to write," Ms. Sheikh said.

As word spread about Ms. Rao, more victims began visiting her. Idris Ghodawala told her of his brother's killing. She visited the scene, photographing the spot, still preserved in the mosque, where his brother had burned.

"She used to encourage us: 'Don't be afraid of anybody,' " Mr. Ghodawala said.

Yaqub Adam told her of his family's deaths. "No one knew about this case because it was never reported," he said. "Because of R. J. Patil, nothing came on the surface."

Ms. Rao worked as late as midnight and avoided talking to witnesses in front of the local police, bringing her own staff to write affidavits.

"She wanted that whatever injustice happened to us, at the end of the day we should get justice," said the young woman who had been gang-raped.

Local Hindus looked on her less favorably. "Neeraja Rao used to call people and they would be sitting all day in her office," huffed Tushat Patel, a town official. "She was very tough."

By the time she was taken off the investigation, 22 Delol men had been arrested. So had at least three of the four men Idris Ghodawala had named in his brother's killing, although they are free on bail.

One of them, Ajay Soni, a lecturer and member of the Association of National Volunteers, India's most powerful Hindu nationalist organization, called the charge fabricated. "This is all political," he said. "The minority cannot rule this country. This will not go any further."

Mr. Patil denied any wrongdoing as well. "All the senior officers knew what was the situation at the time," he said from his hospital bed.

For now, whether he was a renegade or following orders from superiors will remain unanswered since Ms. Rao is no longer here to pursue it.

Not a single Muslim has returned to live in Delol. Instead, they live in a ready-made ghetto, a colony built for them on the edge of Kalol by an Islamic relief organization. The houses are filled with widows and absence.

The young woman who said she was raped said she also lost her father, brother and husband - every male member of her household. She said she is still too fearful to go to town on her own, where her rapists wander free on bail.

She and the other victims want Ms. Rao back. "We had complete confidence in her, and we were getting justice through her," said Ms. Sheikh. "Now we are not sure."

In trusting Ms. Rao, the victims went out on a limb. Now, they say, it has been snapped beneath them.

Idris Ghodawala said he again sees no hope for justice, and he feels more threatened than ever. When he crosses paths with those who were arrested in the killing of his brother, he said, "It is I who try to hide, not them."