



**The Gujarat Pogrom:
An Inquiry into Causes, Consequences, and Aftermath**

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Introduction

India, which claims to be the largest democracy in the world, has gone through horrific acts of atrocities and collective violence against marginalised groups. The secular republic, as it has been proudly claimed by the leaders since its emergence as a republic, was already divided by the bold lines of communal differences, mainly between Hindus and Muslims. Atrocities against Dalits, Adivasis and other religious and ethnic minorities added another layer of stain on the image of the secular republic. Starting from the violence that took place after the partition, countless atrocities have been committed that have put a question mark on this claim. India witnessed the horrors of the Anti-Sikh riots after the assassination of erstwhile PM Indira Gandhi amid the peak of the Khalistan Movement of 1984, the demolition of centuries-old Babri Masjid in 1992, caste-based discrimination often masquerading as violence against the lower castes, as well as Naxal insurgency in West Bengal. However, the worst episode among all the acts of violence was the aftermath of the Godhra Incident (*Godhrakand*), which resulted in one of the largest-scale and most brutal events of atrocities in India.¹ The riots that subsequently took place after the reports of the burning of the Sabarmati Express were spread all across Gujarat, claiming the lives of countless innocent people. The polarised social structure on the lines of communalism made it extremely hard for Hindus and Muslims to trust each other. Instead, it ended up in suspicion between people from both communities who had lived together for centuries.

¹ “Understanding Gujarat Violence – Items,” accessed March 26, 2025, <https://items.ssrc.org/from-our-archives/understanding-gujarat-violence>

Ahmedabad was the worst-affected city in Gujarat during the violence of 2002.^{2 3 4} Many areas, especially those of eastern Ahmedabad, went through bloodshed that no one in Ahmedabad had ever seen before. Ahmedabad had witnessed acts of communal violence prior to 2002, but none of them was as shocking as the aftermath of Godhra.

The Sabarmati Express, which had departed from Ayodhya carrying hundreds of *Karsevaks* (Hindutva Volunteers), took a scheduled halt at Godhra Station around 7 in the morning on 27th February 2002. There are many explanations and possibilities that were later proposed by various journalists, NGOs, human rights organisations, political groups, and commissions sanctioned by the government itself (both national and state). It is still hard to conclude how and why exactly the two coaches carrying *Karsevaks* were burnt. However, one thing that still persists is the fact that around 60 people were burned alive in those coaches. The blame was swiftly pointed towards Muslims in the surrounding areas of Godhra. The Hindus, ‘frustrated’ and terrified by unverified accounts of a Muslim conspiracy behind the burning, quickly reacted. The key factor was the reporting of the burning incident with graphic images of victims shown on their TV screens and newspapers. The media presented various possibilities on how the violence could’ve occurred, but with a clear bias towards the Hindutva cause.⁵ After the success of news manipulating the Hindu readers to join and justify the violence, the anti-Muslim violence emerged. Truly, it is said to be the first genocide of the 21st century, a failure of entire

² Mugdha Yeolekar, “Gujarat 2002 Riots : An Interpretive Analysis” (University of British Columbia, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.14288/1.0093005>.

³ “Understanding Gujarat Violence – Items.”

⁴ Parvis Ghassem-Fachandi, ed., *Pogrom in Gujarat: Hindu Nationalism and Anti-Muslim Violence in India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁵ Saifuddin Ahmed, “The Role of the Media During Communal Riots in India: A Study of the 1984 Sikh Riots and the 2002 Gujarat Riots,” SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, August 22, 2010), <https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=2399847>.

humanity which had recently embraced the new millennium of peace and social justice, leaving behind a couple of world wars and a cold war in the previous century.

Countless incidents of killings, arson, burning children alive, sexual violence against women and even more horrific stories were reported from all across Gujarat. The violence claimed the lives of around 2000 people, based on various sources. There are no official records of crimes against women. Properties that served as the livelihood for many Muslim vendors and businessmen were damaged, burnt and looted by the uncontrolled mob of Hindu participants of the riots. The intensity of the violence and the fear it imposed can be illustrated through the refugee camps that were formed to protect Muslims within their own city.

However, it draws suspicion of the involvement of other powerful social mechanisms that aided such attacks on Muslims. There was a complete lack of law and order in the city of Ahmedabad for a long period of time (a week) that followed the Godhra incident. It was alleged that instead of maintaining order in society and protecting Muslim lives from attacks by the mob of Hindu rioters, police rather ignored or, in some cases, even aided the attackers to unleash violence upon the common Muslim population.⁶ It was concluded by a large group of analysts that the negligence of the erstwhile government of Gujarat, which had the responsibility to maintain law and order through the Gujarat Police, resulted in the casualties of hundreds of common people. Others believe it to be pre-planned by the major stakeholders in the government for personal benefits in the context of the upcoming assembly elections. The theory that widely made sense was that after the Godhra incident, the government deliberately ordered law

⁶ Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat*.

enforcement agencies to refrain from protecting Muslims and not to interfere with the violence committed by the Hindus. The government has been refusing such allegations on the basis that there is no ‘evidence’ of the involvement of the government presentable at the court.^{7 8} Narendra Modi, erstwhile CM of Gujarat, prime accused of being involved or negligent, has blamed the media critical of him for instigating the violence in various interviews that followed the violence throughout the last two decades.

Unbalanced emphasis was given to the Hindu victims of the Godhra incident relative to the aftermath of the incident that claimed many more lives across Gujarat than in Godhra. Arguably, it has been considered a violation of human rights or a human rights crisis by many international bodies.^{9 10} Till today, no concrete action has been taken to prosecute everyone who was involved with the ‘lack of evidence’ as the basis to protect the culprits from such actions. Author Joey Joseph expressed an interesting contradiction to such malign policies by describing the ‘dead bodies of the victims’ serving as the obvious evidence.¹¹ However, long-awaited justice has been denied to the victims.

This thesis is an attempt to understand the origins of violence, the horrors of violence and the injustice that still persists through intimidating victims to give up on the cases filed. There

⁷ “Gujarat 2002: What Justice for the Victims? | Economic and Political Weekly,” February 25, 2012, <https://www.epw.in/journal/2012/08/special-articles/gujarat-2002-what-justice-victims.html>.

⁸ Siddharth Varadarajan, ed., *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy* (New Delhi ; New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2002).

⁹ “Gujarat Violence: Meaning and Implications | Economic and Political Weekly,” May 18, 2002, <https://www.epw.in/journal/2002/20/commentary/gujarat-violencemeaning-and-implications.html>.

¹⁰ Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*.

¹¹ Josy Joseph, *The Silent Coup: A History of India’s Deep State* (Chennai, India: Context, an imprint of Westland Publications Private Limited, 2021).

have been attempts to confine and isolate the violence inside the tiny time frame of a few months in 2002 when the riots took place. However, that narrow understanding has misguided a lot of people who refuse to understand the core and details of the riots. The conditions for such acts of violence were envisaged much before 2002, with the Sangh constantly propagating and delivering their radical ideas to the doorsteps of as many Hindu households as they could. However, whatever happened during that time frame has also been undermined with the apologists either justifying the violence or outrightly declining to believe that it actually happened. There were many attempts to temper, destroy or damage the evidence as well as to manipulate the witnesses. A minister in Modi's cabinet was also shot dead in mysterious circumstances after he was anticipated to expose the discussions that took place, followed by the riots.

For many radical Hindu activists, the violence served as a matter of pride and glory against their enemies, ie Muslims, with hardly any of them being convicted for such acts. It has been claimed that the riots were a turning point in Narendra Modi's political career, which he capitalised on as much as possible. He later became the fifteenth Prime Minister of India in 2014. The sheer injustice faced by Muslims in India still persists.

Despite the abundance of reportage and legal inquiry into the Gujarat riots, much of the existing discourse has either focused narrowly on the immediate triggers or confined the violence to a short temporal frame, neglecting the ideological groundwork and systemic failures that enabled it. This thesis addresses that critical gap by asking: *What led to such mass-scale violence against Muslims alongside the persistent injustice that followed it?* In doing so, it seeks to go

beyond episodic analyses and instead examine the deeper historical, political, and cultural conditions that allowed such brutality to erupt and remain largely unpunished. By tracing the ideological roots of Hindutva, the mobilisation of state and non-state actors, and the erasure of justice in the years since, this work contributes to a more nuanced understanding of state-enabled communal violence in India, and offers insights toward preventing such atrocities in the future.

Chapter One: Causes

As this paper argues, the violence that took place in the aftermath of the Godhra Train Burning was not confined to a narrow time frame but rather the outcome of various other factors that have been largely ignored in the general analysis of the violence. The driving factors behind the inhumane and unspeakable violence unleashed upon Muslim men, women, and children were a product of long-term ideological reshapings that led to specific conditions and circumstances for the violence. All the factors played their role to different degrees. However, it is extremely difficult to distinguish one or two factors and attribute the whole violence to those few causes.

1) Historical Factors

Since the emergence of the Hindutva ideology, the stigmatisation of Muslims as the core opponents of Hindus and Hindu Nationalism has been reforming itself with the contexts of each time period passing by. Before independence, it was mostly related to the demands of separate states on the basis of religion. Later, after the independence, it was alleged that the Congress party had sympathy for the Muslims, followed by the radicalisation due to the Babri Masjid dispute. All these factors in the course of history played their role in forming a radical environment for Hindu Nationalism, suitable for the Sangh and its allies to exploit.

a) Origin of Hindutva

‘Hindu’ derived from the ‘Indus’ river, a term that was not used by its people themselves till the medieval era but was used by Achemendis (The Greeks) and Muslims to denote people living on the opposite side of the Indus (*Sindhu*) river.¹² As a reaction to the Morley-Minto reforms that promised a separate electorate for Muslims, Hindu *Sabhas*, as a response or reaction by Hindus, were formed in prominent states such as Punjab and the United Provinces (currently Uttar Pradesh).

Jaffrelot argues that the idea of *Hindutva* was a modern phenomenon that emerged during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when Shivaji, leader of the Maratha empire, conquered the Gangetic plains in order to restore prominent places important for Hindus. However, many, including Jaffrelot, argue that it was not a religious war. However, Hindu Nationalism or Hindutva emerged as a product of ‘Hindu consciousness’. Thus, Hindutva emerged as an ideology instead of a set of practices. Hindutva brought all these practices under the ambit of a ‘united’ Hindu fold. It has also been argued that the idea was first suggested by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, who, in his novel ‘*Anandmath*’, talked about concepts such as *Bharat Mata* (Mother India) and the glory of the Hindu past and its traditions. Nevertheless, the past of Hindus in India has distorted the imaginations proposed by several historians on the Islamic invasion of the Indian subcontinent. However, Tapan Basu and his co-authors, in their book ‘*Khakhi Shorts and Saffron Flags*’, attempt to debunk the myth that the Islamic Conquest of India was an attack on Hindus or Hinduism.¹³ Providing examples such as the existence of Hindus in Mughal

¹² Christophe Jaffrelot, ed., *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹³ Tapan Basu, ed., *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Right*, Repr., 1. publ. 1993, Tracts for the Times 1 (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993).

administrative-cum-military services, he argues that there was hardly any communal factor that played its role in the course of history and wars.¹⁴ The reason for this discussion of ‘Imaginary History’ as labelled by Kaviraj, is to understand how Hindutva emerged with antagonism against Muslims at its core.¹⁵ However, many argue that (modern) Hindutva emerged through the work of Savarkar’s book.¹⁶ *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* or RSS, inspired by the same ideology for which Modi worked as a *pracharak* for several years, played a major role in organising violent actions against Muslims during the riots.

b) Emergence and Role of RSS

In spite of the contemporary growing tension between Modi’s authoritarian regime and *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS), the latter played a major role in the formative years of Modi’s life before he entered politics. He worked as a *Pracharak* of RSS, which helped him to gain a solid base and network that would eventually help him in his political career.

RSS, inspired by Savarkar’s work, was established by Hedgewar in Nagpur in 1925.¹⁷ The official narrative of RSS about its foundation, based on an official statement that it produced is,

A change was coming over the country. The aftermath of the 1921 movement had come to Doctorji (Hedgewar) as a shock. Indian Muslims had proved themselves Muslims first and Indians only secondarily so that when the Khilafat was given up in Turkey, they withdrew from the allied movement for national independence. The whole atmosphere was charged with Muslim

¹⁴ Basu.

¹⁵ Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Imaginary Institution of India: Politics and Ideas* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010).

¹⁶ Basu, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*.

¹⁷ Basu.

fanaticism. 'Allah ho Akbar' and not 'Bharat mata ki jai' were heard everywhere. Soon there were Muslim riots in Bannu, Kohat, Multan, Nagpur, Kanpur and elsewhere. 'These are not Hindu-Muslim riots,' he would say 'These Muslim riots because in every single case, it is they who start them and go on the offensive.' These riots culminated in the Moplah atrocity, completed with arson, loot, murder, rape and forced conversion. The nation was dazed. And Doctorji wondered: 'Is it Khilafat (restoration of Khalif) Akhilafat (catastrophe for all)? ... ' It became evident that the Hindus were the nation in Bharat and that Hindutva was Rashtriyatva. While wishful thinkers pretended not to see the writing across the national political firmament, the realist in Dr. Hedgewar refused to dream up wishy-washy dreams. The truth was out. Only Hindus would free Hindustan and they alone could save Hindu culture. Only Hindu strength could save the country. There was no escape from the logic of facts. Hindu youth had to be organised on the basis of personal character and absolute love of the motherland. There was no other way. The agony of the great soul expressed itself in the formation of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. With five friends he started the day“-to-day programme of RSS. The great day was the auspicious Vijaya Dashami day of 1925.”¹⁸

Initially, RSS aimed to create a Hindu nation or Hindu Rashtra not through political action but through social and cultural means. Since its emergence, RSS has gone through several upheavals in the latter half of the twentieth century. From the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Godse, a formerly active member of RSS in 1948, to the protests during the emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi in 1977, RSS was banned thrice in India due to the threat it posed to the stability of the country and the secular fabric of the nation. However, RSS, responding to the need of the hour, in 1951, launched the *Jana Sangh*, the political wing of RSS. The same party later emerged as *Bharatiya Janta Party* (BJP) represented by the erstwhile CM of Gujarat and current PM of India, Narendra Modi, since 2001. Under the ambit of ‘*Sangh Parivar*’ created by RSS, many organisations such as *Akhil Bhartiya Vidhyarthi Parishad* or ABVP (1948) and *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* or VHP (1964) took inception into the political discourse of modern India.

¹⁸ C. P. Bhishikar, *Keshav: Sangh Nirmata* (New Delhi: Suruchi Prakashan, 2016., n.d.).

RSS and its ideology were key factors in instigating violence in the riots of 2002. After the burning of Sabarmati Express in Godhra, RSS (including the entire Sangh Parivar) was one of the first organisations at the forefront to respond and accuse Muslims of the casualties and subsequently relate them to ‘terrorists’. There are several allegations of the involvement of RSS in committing atrocities against Muslims during the aftermath of the burning of Sabarmati Express, not only directly but through the use of state apparatus, including law enforcement agencies as well. RSS gained much support through the rise of ‘Hindu assertiveness’ after the riots.

c) Impact of the Partition of India

The partition of the United India into India and Pakistan played a significant role in the emergence of radical Hindu Nationalism in India. The antagonistic relationship between the states of India and Pakistan since their emergence in 1947, due to several issues (including territorial disputes and communal violence), played a significant role in sustaining the narrative in which Muslims in India were portrayed as Anti-Indian solely due to their shared religious beliefs with those in Pakistan. Nonetheless, it was the Hindu nationalist organisations such as RSS and *Hindu Mahasabha* that played a crucial role in the consensus to divide the United India. However, they often blame solely Muslims for the tragedy and charge them with being ‘Anti-National’ or ‘Pro-Pakistani’.¹⁹ Many Muslim ghettos in Gujarat, including one that was allegedly involved in the burning of the Sabarmati Express in Godhra Station, were blatantly labelled as

¹⁹ Asghar Ali Engineer, “Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence,” n.d.

‘Mini-Pakistan’ by the Hindu Nationalists.²⁰ Many instances of violence in Ahmedabad were induced by the scuffles over the cricket matches between India and Pakistan. There were several attempts to associate Muslims in Gujarat with Pakistan and its agencies, such as ISI (Inter Services Intelligence).²¹ The constant questioning of Muslims about their relationship with the state of India often left them burdened with proof of being a nationalist, loyal, patriotic and an ‘ideal’ Indian Muslim, delegitimising their individual agency. Alongside this, the traumas of partition, often connected with the violence against women, were utilised by the Hindu Nationalists to create a sense of vulnerability among Hindus and promote further violence against Muslims as ‘revenge’ in India.²²

d) Previous Communal Riots in Ahmedabad

Prior to the violence of 2002, it would be inaccurate to say that Ahmedabad was not familiar with communal tensions, which often resulted in violence. Some of the well-known instincts that serve as examples were those that took place in 1969 and killed around 1000 people, the majority of whom were Muslims.²³ The series of communal violence continued by 1985, in which the erstwhile CM Madhavsingh Solanki was attempted to be dethroned after anti-reservation protests that transformed into anti-Muslim riots²⁴. BJP gained a stronghold against Solanki due to these riots. Similar to many other cities in North India, in 1992-93,

²⁰ Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat*.

²¹ Ghassem-Fachandi.

²² Angana P. Chatterji, Thomas Blom Hansen, and Christophe Jaffrelot, eds., *Majoritarian State: How Hindu Nationalism Is Changing India*, Oxford Scholarship Online Political Science (London: Hurst & Company, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190078171.001.0001.ma>

²³ Engineer, “Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence.”

²⁴ Christophe Jaffrelot, *Gujarat Under Modi: Laboratory of Today's India*, Oxford Scholarship Online (London: Hurst & Company, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197787502.001.0001>.

Ahmedabad also witnessed brutal violence after the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on December 6, 1992.²⁵ It claimed 134 lives in the city. Another riot also took place in 1999, in which eight people were killed. The essence of the communal tension in Ahmedabad was highlighted by constant ‘gang wars’ between Hindu-dominated and Muslim-dominated groups.²⁶

Hence, the communal violence in Ahmedabad, in which Muslims were often killed and their properties were burnt, was not a new phenomenon for its citizens. These served as a pretext for the 2002 riots. Engineer argues that the Gujarat Riots were not a sudden outcome of solely the Godhra Train burning. Anti-Muslim propaganda spread by the VHP over the previous years played a major role in radicalising the mindset of the general Hindu population in Ahmedabad, which led them to participate in the attacks against Muslims.²⁷

e) **The Babri Masjid Demolition**

On December 6, 1992, the Babri Masjid, a mosque built in 1528 in Ayodhya, was demolished by a large group of militant Hindu Nationalists.^{28 29} They claimed that the mosque was built on a temple dedicated to the Hindu mythological deity ‘Ram’ as his birthplace.³⁰ As a result of this narrative, in 1949, the idols of Ram and *Sita* (his wife) were placed inside the structure on which the mosque stood.³¹ This further accelerated the existing tensions between

²⁵ Engineer, “Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence.”

²⁶ Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

²⁷ Engineer, “Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence.”

²⁸ Chatterji, Hansen, and Jaffrelot, *Majoritarian State*.

²⁹ Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism*, 2007.

³⁰ Jaffrelot.

³¹ Jaffrelot.

Hindus and Muslims all across the country. This superstitious sense of injustice among Hindus helped the BJP to gain a stronghold among all the segments of Hinduism. Lord Ram held a significant importance not only for Caste Hindus but also among all the castes. This helped the BJP to consolidate the support of a large part of the Hindu population, including lower castes and those who lived in the rural parts of the country. As erstwhile BJP supremo L. K. Advani, in 1992, rallied towards Ayodhya from Dwarka as a part of the (*Yatra*) Ayodhya campaign to ‘liberate’ *Ram Janmabhoomi*, appealing tactics such as using bricks with Ram written on them helped them to mobilise more Hindus.³² Eventually, as the Yatra concluded at Ayodhya, a huge crowd of Hindu militants attacked Babri Masjid and destroyed the structure using manual weapons.

Under the ramifications of this incident, Ahmedabad was also not spared from another wave of Communal Violence across the country. The riots that subsequently emerged after the demolition took the lives of 134 people in Ahmedabad.³³ The mobs of Hindu militants attacked and arson Muslim shops and businesses using petrol bombs and other weapons.³⁴ The demolition played the role of a catalyst in the widespread riots and communal tensions in Ahmedabad.

There is a clear pattern between the violence that followed the Babri Masjid demolition and the Gujarat Riots of 2002 in Ahmedabad.³⁵ Firstly, they were threaded by the roles of Hindu Nationalism and Communalism in the violence. The demolition quickly led to the social and political polarisation of Hindus, the intensity of which was revealed in the 2002 riots, with

³² Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*; Engineer, “Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence”; Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism*, 2007.

³³ Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

³⁴ Jaffrelot.

³⁵ Jaffrelot.

thousands of Hindus on the streets to attack Muslims. Both incidents shared a common sense of injustice due to the impunity and ignorance (and sometimes complicity) of the law enforcement agencies, especially the Gujarat Police. All these connections strongly suggest that the Babri Masjid incident normalised the utter hatred against Muslims by Hindus and served as a part of the pretext for the 2002 Gujarat Riots.

f) Emergence of the BJP

The rise of the BJP in the national political arena was a product of both changing circumstances and its strategies to consolidate the majority Hindu population. One of the key factors that led to the rise of the BJP in mainstream politics was the fact that they successfully conflated Hindu nationalism with Indian Nationalism in a convincing manner. This subsequently led to the interpretation of the rival forces of the BJP as ‘Anti-National’.³⁶ Another successful strategy that helped the BJP was to target Congress for the failed outcome of its policies. Emerged by ‘adopting’ Gandhian Secularism and Nehruvian Socialism, the BJP quickly shifted towards the idea of ‘innate’ communalism, rejecting the former.³⁷ They took a stand against the secular values of the nation by labelling it as the ‘pseudo-secularism’ of Congress. In order to rebrand themselves, they branded Congress as the ‘party of Muslims’.³⁸ In order to further exploit the nationalistic sentiments of the people, they criticised the Congress Party’s inability to conduct

³⁶ Chatterji, Hansen, and Jaffrelot, *Majoritarian State*.

³⁷ Engineer, “Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence.”

³⁸ Engineer.

Nuclear Tests in the 1980s and 1990s.³⁹ Besides that, they also put emphasis on economic concepts such as *Swadeshi* or Home Grown products for the progress of the nation.⁴⁰

Moreover, issues such as Babri Masjid demolition, Islamic Terror attacks, ‘Rights’ for Muslim women⁴¹ etc, provided a kick-start for a new era of the BJP to emerge. As Advani replaced Vajpayee as the main leader of the BJP, the BJP took a more militant Hindutva stance.⁴² Just like RSS, claimed as the ‘mother’ of BJP, BJP gained too much traction with each incident of communal violence taking place in India.⁴³ The contribution of RSS and VHP in consolidating the support of the common Hindu people for the BJP through mobilising activists and working at the grass-roots level played a key role in the rapid emergence of the BJP in the last decade of the twentieth century.⁴⁴ Another successful tactic of the BJP was to blur Caste and Class lines among Hindus by asserting the Hindu identity above all others.⁴⁵

Prior to the 2002 riots in Gujarat, the BJP had comfortably made Gujarat their ‘stronghold’ and, as many authors have noted, a ‘laboratory’ of Hindutva, the consequences of which were faced by Muslims.⁴⁶ It would be inaccurate to conclude that the agenda behind spewing hatred against Muslims was solely the BJP’s allegiance to Hindutva. The tactic also paid electoral dividends in return for maintaining the BJP lawmakers in power in Gujarat. The rising

³⁹ Jaffrelot, *Hindu Nationalism*, 2007.

⁴⁰ Jaffrelot.

⁴¹ Engineer, “Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence.”

⁴² Engineer.

⁴³ Engineer; Basu, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*.

⁴⁴ Engineer, “Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence”; Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*; Chatterji, Hansen, and Jaffrelot, *Majoritarian State*.

⁴⁵ Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

⁴⁶ Asghar Ali Engineer, “Communal Riots in Ahmedabad,” n.d.

influence of the BJP overshadowed RSS as the modern face of Hindu Nationalism in India. The growth of the BJP and its subsequent victories in the elections prior to 2002 indeed provided a solid base for the state government and its erstwhile CM, Narendra Modi, to dictate their terms and policies independently without scrutiny or liability.

g) Public Opinion

The new chair of CM vacated for Modi came with many challenges for him to face. Taking oath as the new CM of Gujarat in October 2001, the BJP was losing its voters due to mismanagement and corruption after devastating earthquakes in 2001 in Gujarat. There were many other factors that the BJP feared might harm their political and electoral ambitions. The defeats in the *Panchayat* Elections of 2001 and by-polls of 2002 in Gujarat indicated a possibility of the downfall of the BJP in its own 'stronghold'.⁴⁷ Many initiatives, such as regaining the support of the lower castes and *Adivasis* that they had conceded after the anti-reservation protest of 1985, were taken to realign the social dynamics that helped the BJP earlier.⁴⁸ It was perhaps the last resort of the Modi Government in Gujarat to return to the communal agenda of the Sangh Parivar by engaging in communal polarisation and consolidating the Hindu vote bank, including all sects and castes.

The burning of the Sabarmati Express in Godhra came as a piece of cake (if not pre-planned) for Narendra Modi, as it angered and provoked already polarised Hindus to attack

⁴⁷ Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat*.

⁴⁸ Ghassem-Fachandi.

Muslims for ‘revenge’. Narendra Modi, in light of the upcoming Gujarat Assembly Elections, saw this as an opportunity to extract political and electoral gains from the violence that was about to follow. By engaging in speeches justifying the ‘anger’ of Hindus against Muslims (The ‘Newtonian’ Law of *Swabhavik Pratikirya* (obvious reaction)) and allowing law enforcement agencies under his control to overlook the violence, Modi was seen as a ‘Messiah’ for Hindus.⁴⁹ Many videos of sting operations that later emerged suggested that those involved in violence were rather proud of their involvement, instead of regretting the killings of numerous innocent people.⁵⁰ Despite, the fact that many surveys that were conducted (such as pre-poll surveys conducted by CSDS Lokniti) suggested that Modi Government was largely criticised by the majority of mainstream Hindus after the riots⁵¹, the denial of the prevalent fact that Modi won the next election by a landslide victory is not possible. The ‘silent’ majority that played a key role in the electoral victory expressed their assertion at the polling booths.⁵²

2) Cultural Factors

During the analysis of the violence, the causes are widely looked at through the lens of political affairs, undermining the role that various traditions, cultural norms and collective prejudice play. However, these cultural factors play an equally important role given the fact that

⁴⁹ Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

⁵⁰ Christophe Jaffrelot, “Gujarat 2002: What Justice for the Victims? The Supreme Court, the SIT, the Police and the State Judiciary,” n.d.

⁵¹ Pooja Bakshi, “Communal Riots in Gujarat: Examining State Power and Production of Marginality in the Attempt to Constitute the Past,” n.d.

⁵² Gautam Pingle, “Gujarat Riots | Economic and Political Weekly,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, April 15, 2016, <https://www.epw.in/journal/2016/16/discussion/gujarat-riots.html>.

the Hindus in masses either directly or indirectly participated in the violence or sympathised with those participants, something that cannot be done by people associated with political or ideological organisations alone.

a) Meat Consumption

Besides the fact that many Hindus themselves consume meat, the practice of meat eating is often associated with Muslims in Gujarat. Arguably, most of the members from the upper caste and merchant (Baniya) communities are prohibited from eating meat based on cultural and, to some degree, religious norms.⁵³ ‘Pink Revolution’, a term which was constantly used by Modi and his associates from the Sangh, often signifies the attempt to vilify Muslims.⁵⁴ It refers to beef. Since cows hold significant importance for Hindus, the role of cow and beef consumption has often been exploited by Sangh to ignite anger among the common Hindu population and misappropriate the sensitivity of the ‘pure veg’ majority in Gujarat, which even today consists of more than 60% of the total population in Gujarat (as per the survey conducted by registrar general of India in 2018). The further vilification of Muslims is induced by the association of Muslim identity with ‘violent’ butchers or *Kasai*. Fachandi mentions in his book a fictional story of a ‘conscious’ and talking goat who was slaughtered by a ‘bearded’ man in *Kasaikhana* (a slaughterhouse) in a Gujarati booklet.⁵⁵ Stories like this often provide a higher moral ground for the ‘pure veg’ population based on the primary teaching of Gandhi: *Ahimsa* or non-violence. As we will see, it eventually led to the practice of violence (against Muslims) to uphold the values of

⁵³ Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*; Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat*.

⁵⁴ Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

⁵⁵ Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat*.

'Ahimsa' or non-violence as an integral part of Hindu identity in Gujarat and thorough their diet. Fachandi further explains how his friend Bharat, a Hindu, became dizzy and unconscious at the mere sight of meat and felt like vomiting. The similar Taboo, just like today, also existed, perhaps on a larger scale, prior to 2002. The fact that international fast food franchise giant McDonald's had to open the first of its kind, a separate veg restaurant at Ashram Road in Ahmedabad, reflects the stigma towards meat and, subsequently, towards the 'overconsumers' of meat.⁵⁶ As one of the major cultural factors that led to the violence, 'consumption of meat' was a topic of discussion that influenced a major segment of Hindus in Gujarat, yet it was hardly discussed in the context of the onslaught and violence against Muslims that they followed in 2002. It was rather a punishment for Muslims by 'morally superior' and 'non-violent' Hindus. The idea of 'Pink Revolution', the sarcastic term pointed towards Muslims, did work for the Sangh to spread further hatred against Muslims.⁵⁷ Ironically enough, it was alleged that many Bajrang Dal activists provided meat and alcohol to Dalit and Tribal populations to invite them to participate in the violence.⁵⁸

b) Crime

As we saw in the last segment, the portrayal of Muslims as violent butchers has a far-reaching and long-lasting impact on the image of Muslims designed by the Sangh to further

⁵⁶ Ghassem-Fachandi.

⁵⁷ Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

⁵⁸ Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat*.

extend their agenda of vilifying Muslims.⁵⁹ The areas with Muslim majorities were often referred to as ‘mini Pakistan’ and were always under the watch of law enforcement agencies for ‘potential’ criminal activities originating from there.⁶⁰ The Sangh and BJP outrightly accused the opponent parties of supporting Muslims and their ‘criminal activities’ for the electoral (vote-bank) agenda, further extending the necessity to engage the Muslim identity with criminal activities to sustain their argument. In many instances, including in Godhra, Muslims were often associated with terrorism for allegedly financing and supporting terrorist activities. On many festive occasions, such as Rath Yatra passing through a Muslim neighbourhood, the ‘habitual troublemakers’ were detained under preventive arrest, out of whom most were Muslims.⁶¹ There were several incidents of ‘combing operations’ conducted by law enforcement agencies that resulted in brutal assaults against common Muslim citizens and damage to their properties.⁶² The reaction of Muslims to the attacks by Hindu mobs was often regarded as unprovoked aggression with labels such as ‘beasts’, ‘Satan’, ‘aroused demons’ ‘ghosts’, etc, given to them by newspapers such as *Sandesh*. (GP)

Widespread but unconfirmed stories, such as Muslims inserting sharp objects into certain less sensitive parts of the body of Hindu victims in a crowd created a sense of fear among Hindus in public places too. According to the rumour, it would result in a *concealed wound* that is only noticed after a certain period of time (due to a certain chemical applied on the sharp objects) after the perpetrator leaves the site. The Muslim terrorists, Pakistani agents, gang members, smugglers and common Muslims were put in the single category of ‘trouble-makers’. The constant enforcement of charges, accusations and attempts to associate Muslims with ‘anti-social

⁵⁹ Ghassem-Fachandi.

⁶⁰ Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*.

⁶¹ Chatterji, Hansen, and Jaffrelot, *Majoritarian State*.

⁶² Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*.

elements', did play a decisive role in normalising and, for some people, justifying the brutal violence against Muslim populations in Gujarat. For Hindus, it also called for the necessity of violence to 'control' Muslims, which was visible during the riots. The common statements on the violence, such as "*Aani jaroor hati*" (It(violence) was necessary) and "*Barabar karyu*" ((They(Rioters) did the right thing) reflected the fear and dissatisfaction among Hindus with Muslims and the criminal activities associated with them.

c) Patriarchy and 'Love Jihad'

One of the core driving factors behind the immense hatred for the Muslim men, as observed by the various testimonies of Hindutva sympathisers, was Muslims 'taking' Hindu women to marry and convert them. However, this hatred cannot be attributed only to the sense of protection of Hindu women, but rather to possessiveness or 'control' over the Hindu women and their choices. The hatred for the Muslim men was induced by the narrative of overmasculinity of Muslim men denoted by their alleged preference to produce more children. This was seen as a threat to their own masculinity by the Hindu men who saw themselves failing to 'protect', 'possess' or 'control' their 'own' women, resulting in a sense of inferiority.

d) Political Climate

The rival parties of the BJP, mainly Congress, were often portrayed by the Sangh as anti-Hindu parties. The narrative of alleged ‘minority appeasement’ of Congress in Gujarat left many Hindus dissatisfied with the Congress.⁶³ Sangh has also been misappropriating the history of Congress with allegations that they remained biased towards Muslims even before independence. Congress has often expressed its allegiance to the secular ideology in India. The ‘secularism’ of Congress is regarded as ‘pseudo-secularism’ by the Sangh and its supporters.⁶⁴ Nonetheless, the Congress party has periodically decreased the number of their Muslim representatives in elections over the years.⁶⁵ However, the minority appeasement narrative did help the BJP significantly to mobilise the Hindu population for their support.⁶⁶ Hence, the BJP perceived itself as the defender of the Hindu majority against the alleged threats posed by the Muslims.⁶⁷ As this narrative gained momentum, Congress found itself in a difficult situation to address the interests of minorities without being accused of minority appeasement.⁶⁸ In the Shah Bano case, which discusses the rights of Muslim women in contrast to *Shariah* Law enacted by the Muslim Personal Law Board, the court upheld the rights of Muslim women above ‘religious freedom’ for Muslims. The Congress Government managed to nullify the ruling by enacting the ‘Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act’ in 1986. Widely regarded as a step taken to woo the Muslim vote-bank, the legislation symbolised and validated the BJP’s accusation of Minority appeasement by Congress.⁶⁹ The recent general elections prior to 2002 indicated that the silent majority is not satisfied with Congress anymore. The political climate of Gujarat, just

⁶³ Christophe Jaffrelot, ed., *Hindu Nationalism: A Reader* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2010).

⁶⁴ Jaffrelot; Chatterji, Hansen, and Jaffrelot, *Majoritarian State*.

⁶⁵ Chatterji, Hansen, and Jaffrelot, *Majoritarian State*; Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

⁶⁶ Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

⁶⁷ Jaffrelot.

⁶⁸ Jaffrelot.

⁶⁹ Chatterji, Hansen, and Jaffrelot, *Majoritarian State*.

before the violence erupted, was one of the most effective catalysts for communal polarisation that was ensured by the results of the next elections.

e) Role of Media

The media, specifically the regional media of Gujarat, played a significant role in creating an environment hostile towards minorities. Often portrayed as fundamentalists and disloyal towards India, the anti-minority propaganda of the media played a major role in exploiting the communal sentiments of Hindus in Gujarat.⁷⁰ Newspapers like Sandesh and Gujarat Samachar, notoriously famous for spreading false or fabricated information, also created an environment of hostility and distrust among the common people in Gujarat.⁷¹ The ‘sensational’ news of the Muslim mafia and criminals was presented in a manipulative manner using specific headlines and illustrations to further vilify Muslims.⁷² It shaped the mindset of Hindu readers in such a manner that the suspicion and criticism of Muslims became normalised.⁷³ It was alleged that RSS had managed to infiltrate the media with biased editors behaving like spokespersons of RSS and VHP and a part of the Ayodhya Movement. Many of them attended rallies and events of the Sangh and gave provocative speeches.⁷⁴ However, bias towards a specific set of ideologies was not the only driving factor for the role that media played in Gujarat. Many newspapers, such as Sandesh, observed a drastic increase in circulation and, subsequently, their revenue during times of

⁷⁰ Basu, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*; Engineer, “Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence.”

⁷¹ “Gujarat Violence.”

⁷² Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

⁷³ Engineer, “Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence.”

⁷⁴ Engineer; Basu, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*.

violence, which further incentivised the reporting of provocative news.⁷⁵ For example, the chief editor of Sandesh estimated an increase of 1,50,000 INR in their revenue during the period of violence.⁷⁶ The Stringers (part-time reporters) hired by major media houses lacked expertise in reporting and remained biased towards Hindutva.⁷⁷ The impact of malicious reporting like this was visible during the violence. The key role that the media played in reporting Godhra Train Burning through publishing provocative statements, headlines and illustrations will be discussed in the next segment.

f) Hate Speeches

Gujarat was made a fertile territory to experiment with all kinds of strategies to fulfil the Anti-Muslim agenda of the Hindutva. The occasional provocative and hateful speeches given by leaders from the BJP, VHP, and Bajrang Dal, etc., aided the need to maintain and nurture the Anti-Muslim sentiments of Hindus in Gujarat.⁷⁸ A VHP leader publicly raised a concern that the Muslim population was increasing and that something must be done about it. He added the possibility of Muslims possessing arms. Pamphlets distributed by the Sangh said, *"Today, the minority community is trying to crush the majority community"*. Another one shared by the Bajrang Dal said, *"Fifty years after independence, it appears that Hindus are second [class] citizens of this country. Religious conversions, infiltration terrorism and bomb blasts have surrounded Hindustan"*. Another statement said that *"Jehad is being carried out in order to*

⁷⁵ Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

⁷⁶ Jaffrelot.

⁷⁷ Basu, *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*.

⁷⁸ Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*; Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*.

establish an Islamic state in Hindustan". On September 2001, in a gathering near Law Garden in Ahmedabad, it was commented that," *There are thirty-six ayats of the Quran that should be removed because they perpetrate violence; to make Islam less violent, these thirty-six ayats should be removed*". These attempts to prepare the Sangh and its affiliates for large-scale violence against Muslims were indeed effective.⁷⁹ The news publishers such as Sandesh and Gujarat Samachar also played a key role in circulating hateful speeches and articles. The historical narrative that Muslims defeated Hindus in the past was also used for the systematic 'othering' of Muslims.⁸⁰

3) Situational Circumstances

From the perspective of the Sangh and especially the BJP in Gujarat, the situation they were trapped in during the early 2000s necessitated a major upheaval that could instigate a drastic change in the voters' opinion about the party. Calculatively, the vintage strategy of othering Muslims to polarise Hindus and win the elections was one of the very few resorts (if any) they had. And as usual, that strategy did work. (perhaps much more than enough). In other words, this polarisation, fueled by Narendra Modi's aspiration to strengthen his grip over the Government of Gujarat, served its purpose. In the following paragraphs, that situation and how it was dealt with are explained in detail.

⁷⁹ Rana Ayyub, *Gujarat Files: Anatomy of a Cover Up* (India: Rana Ayub, 2016).

⁸⁰ Engineer, "Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence"; Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

a) Narendra Modi as the new CM

After the poor performance of the BJP in the by-election under the leadership of Keshubhai Patel as the CM, the BJP high command in Delhi found it necessary to make changes in the leadership. Hence, Narendra Modi was selected as the new CM of Gujarat after the resignation of his predecessor, Keshubhai Patel, in 2001.⁸¹ Modi became the first RSS *Pracharak* to represent the BJP as a CM without contesting in any prior elections.⁸² CM Modi's credential as an indirect representative of the Sangh was rooted in history, dating back a couple of decades. Modi worked as an RSS *Pracharak* during the 1980s and 1990s. Amid organisational shortcomings, Modi was exiled in 1995.⁸³ After returning, Modi swiftly reorganised his base to find support to enter the state assembly of Gujarat. He was elected as an MLA in February 2002.⁸⁴ Initially, Modi was seen as an unambitious and humble CM. Modi claimed to be an 'apolitical' CM.⁸⁵ After becoming the CM, in order to concentrate the power in his hands, Modi quickly gained control over the bureaucracy as well as his party.⁸⁶ He took a personal interest in micro-managing party affairs and the nomination of candidates for local and state elections.⁸⁷ Modi affirmed the Hindutva rhetoric of the arrival of the 'Spectre of Islamic Terror' in Gujarat.⁸⁸ Projecting himself as Hanuman, the protector of Ram (the people of Gujarat), Modi assured his image as a 'protector' of Hindus.⁸⁹

⁸¹ Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

⁸² Jaffrelot.

⁸³ Jaffrelot.

⁸⁴ Jaffrelot.

⁸⁵ Jaffrelot.

⁸⁶ Jaffrelot.

⁸⁷ Jaffrelot.

⁸⁸ Chatterji, Hansen, and Jaffrelot, *Majoritarian State*.

⁸⁹ Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

b) The Upcoming Elections

The situation in which the BJP found itself was worrisome for many of its leaders. Narendra Modi, who became the Chief Minister of Gujarat in 2001 for the first time, faced tremendous challenges and opposition from his own party members. This internal conflict was a major concern for the erstwhile BJP leadership. Keshubhai Patel, who was the previous Chief Minister, had become a strong critic of his successor, Narendra Modi. Another major concern for the BJP was the rising tensions between the party itself and the RSS.⁹⁰ Besides this, the BJP was also losing its dominance over the electoral politics in Gujarat. In 2000, the BJP suffered a humiliating defeat in the municipal elections, even within their ‘strongholds’. The number of their seats in rural Gujarat also dropped drastically.⁹¹ These setbacks indicated that the BJP is losing ground in Gujarat. This was further assured by the by-elections in September 2001, in which BJP faced heavy defeats.⁹² The image of the BJP among Gujarati voters was further tarnished by the allegations of corruption and scandals in its government.⁹³ The relief funds and materials allocated for the people who suffered the devastating earthquake of 2001 were also alleged to be misappropriated by the BJP’s government. These undermined the BJP’s image of the “party with a difference”. Amid all these challenges, the last resort for the BJP was the communal polarisation of Hindus.⁹⁴ These circumstances became the chief motivating factor for the BJP to instigate violence in Gujarat.⁹⁵ The next assembly election was also called early after the request of

⁹⁰ Jaffrelot.

⁹¹ Jaffrelot.

⁹² Jaffrelot.

⁹³ Engineer, “Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence.”

⁹⁴ Engineer.

⁹⁵ Ayyub, *Gujarat Files*.

Narendra Modi, who allegedly wanted to capitalise on this polarisation as effectively as possible.

The violence indeed ensured the victory of the BJP in those elections.

4) The Sabarmati Express Incident

The Sabarmati Express incident in Godhra Railway Station, which allegedly provoked (or was used to provoke) the widespread violence in Gujarat, was surrounded by many controversies. A series of commissions established to look into the matter to figure out how it actually happened came to different conclusions (allegedly due to different political influences), which we shall see in the upcoming chapters. However, there is no doubt that whatever happened in Godhra was the origin of the darkest chapter in the history of secular India that also fueled the political aspirations of many individuals, and, most importantly, Narendra Modi. The various narratives generated by false reports, provocative speeches, misinformation and manipulation of the facts of the incident, as well as details and graphics of the incident, that were generated during the next few days of the burning provoked a collective anger among the already hostile Hindu population.

a) Reporting by the Media

Despite the fact that many authentic reports of the burning were published by some responsible media, the majority of newspapers and electronic media played a major role in instigating violence through questionable information regarding the burning. Newspapers, such as Sandesh and Gujarat Samachar, carefully designed the headlines and stories of the incident, the

purpose of which seemed to be the provocation for general Hindu readers.⁹⁶ Besides that, they also reported fake news of a couple of Hindu minor girls being abducted and killed by Muslims.⁹⁷ Based on biased and unreliable sources of information stating ‘Hindu girls going missing,’ *Sandesh* and *Gujarat Samachar* carefully designed false reports in order to provoke the sentiments of Hindus in the worst manner possible. However, none of these ‘news’ items were confirmed by the authorities. The director of *Sandesh* refused to mention corrections in the following publications, stating that ‘it was against their policy’.⁹⁸ Later, the organisations such as PUCL, based in Baroda, in their report on the *Role of Media*, revealed that unconfirmed news of Tribal women being kidnapped and raped by Muslims were also shared as rumours among the tribal groups to incentivise them to participate in violence.⁹⁹ Electronic media channels, such as J TV, repeatedly showed graphic images of the incident, including the burnt bodies of the victims.¹⁰⁰ The movie ‘Gadar’, which reminds of the horrors of post-partition violence in Punjab, was untimely broadcast during this sensitive period in Gujarat. The media, primarily electronic, also worked as a medium to deliver the call for violence by the Sangh to ordinary Hindu viewers. For example, the call to retaliate and ‘create history’ and ‘avenge blood with blood’ by VHP and other organisations were constantly broadcasted by electronic media such as J TV.¹⁰¹ After the riots, several reports and analyses of this fake news and their role in instigating the violence were published by various Human Rights Organisations. However, almost no media platform or publisher faced any consequences. Instead, the newspaper *Sandesh* was praised by Narendra Modi for its reporting.

⁹⁶ Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*.

⁹⁷ Ahmed, “The Role of the Media During Communal Riots in India.”

⁹⁸ Yeolekar, “Gujarat 2002 Riots.”

⁹⁹ Ahmed, “The Role of the Media During Communal Riots in India.”

¹⁰⁰ Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

¹⁰¹ Jaffrelot.

b) The Meeting called by Narendra Modi

As the news of the Sabarmati Express incident on 27th February was spread across Gujarat, it was alleged that Narendra Modi called an immediate meeting of state officials, police officers and a minister named Haren Pandya to instruct them to “Let Hindus vent their anger”.¹⁰² These allegations are supported by an ex-IPS officer, Sanjiv Bhatt, who claimed to have attended the meeting, played a key role in the investigations that took place after the riots.¹⁰³ Moreover, there were rumours of Narendra Modi ordering the police to wait for 24 hours before taking action. When the victims asked the police personnel for help and to protect them, the police, based on allegations, stated that they had orders ‘not to save them’ and let violence go on for twenty-four hours. This will be discussed further in the upcoming chapter. Sanjiv Bhatt asserted these claims in an affidavit to the Supreme Court. The government refuted the claim that Sanjiv Bhatt attended the meeting at all.¹⁰⁴ However, his driver also claimed to have dropped him at the location where the meeting took place.¹⁰⁵ It is also believed that since Haren Pandya, the minister who attended the meeting, was going to testify about the claim that Modi asked not to interfere with the ‘Hindu Backlash’, he was assassinated in Ahmedabad, possibly to prevent him from exposing those who were involved. It is suggested that DGP K. Chakravarthy, Commissioner of Police P.C. Pande, Home Secretary Ashok Narayan, Secretary to the Home Department K. Nityanand, and officers from the CM’s office: P.K. Mishra, Anil Mukhim and A.K. Sharma

¹⁰² Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*.

¹⁰³ Varadarajan.

¹⁰⁴ Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

¹⁰⁵ Jaffrelot.

attended the meeting. A series of inquiries, including SIT, revolved around what was discussed in the alleged meeting and who attended it. It will also be discussed later.

Chapter Two: Consequences

As discussed earlier, the aftermath of the Godhra Incident was one of the most tragic and horrifying periods in the history of modern secular India. For many, it was hard to believe the extent to which hatred can incentivise a human being to burn people alive, kill children, cut the breasts of women, rip off bellies and sexually assault women repeatedly in the name of religion and identity. The madness that was driven by years of hate-infusing propaganda by the Sangh was utterly shocking not only in India but also in the whole world. The claim of ‘Shining India’, a tagline used by Vajpayee to demonstrate the emergence of India in the global economy, was tarnished when the world witnessed the reality of communal polarisation in India. The more disturbing issue was the justifications given by the mainstream Hindu population to normalise the victimisation of Muslims. People who lived together for centuries turned against each other. The hatred for Muslims was no longer hidden in conversations inside the four walls of a Hindu household. Years of suppressed distrust and insecurities suddenly exploded into violence. The fact that Hindus and Muslims were in the same neighbourhood or workplace did not matter when the Hindus set out on the killing spree in the quest for a sense of safety from ‘violent and overmasculine’ Muslims that they had craved for decades. Of course, there were many exceptional cases in which Hindus defended Muslims and vice versa, highlighting examples of the potential trust and unity between Hindus and Muslims. However, it could not overshadow the horrors of violence that the Muslims in Gujarat went through.

Around 151 towns and 993 villages, all across Gujarat, were affected by the violence.¹⁰⁶

Nearly sixteen out of the 24 districts of Gujarat were affected by the violence between 28th February to 2nd March 2002.¹⁰⁷ There are different estimates of the casualties of the violence based on various investigations conducted by NGOs, Human Rights Organisations and the government. While the official death toll was 1169, a significant number of reports indicated the number to be around 2000.¹⁰⁸ Some estimates by NGOs claimed the number of casualties to be more than 2500.¹⁰⁹

In this chapter, we shall discuss the various incidents that reflect the overall situation of Gujarat during the period of violence in detail.

a) The Bilkis Bano Incident

The violence and sexual assault against Bilkis Bano, who lived in Limkheda village of Dahod district on 3rd March, was extremely shocking and disturbing for many observers of the violence. She was gang raped by the people she knew from her own neighbourhood. She was five months pregnant. Besides that, fourteen members of her family were killed, including her

¹⁰⁶ Jaffrelot, "Gujarat 2002: What Justice for the Victims? The Supreme Court, the SIT, the Police and the State Judiciary."

¹⁰⁷ Yeolekar, "Gujarat 2002 Riots."

¹⁰⁸ Jaffrelot, "Gujarat 2002: What Justice for the Victims? The Supreme Court, the SIT, the Police and the State Judiciary"; Yeolekar, "Gujarat 2002 Riots"; Ahmed, "The Role of the Media During Communal Riots in India."

¹⁰⁹ Jaffrelot, "Gujarat 2002: What Justice for the Victims? The Supreme Court, the SIT, the Police and the State Judiciary."

three-year-old daughter, who was killed in front of her.¹¹⁰ The court proceedings to seek justice that followed this incident drew the eyes of many people. More about the court proceedings and her quest for justice will be discussed later. This incident signified the brutal forms of violence that the Muslim women had to face from Hindutva militants.

A report suggested that around 250 women and girls were raped before being burnt to death.¹¹¹ ‘The Survivor Speak’ found compelling evidence that suggested extreme forms of sexual violence against Muslim women.¹¹² This was supported by several testimonies presented by the rape victims with details of gang rapes, mass rapes, stripping and insertion of objects inside the bodies.¹¹³

However, it should be noted that the root of sexual violence against Muslim women was more profound than one might assume. It was seen as a symbol of dominance and masculinity. Under the propaganda by the Sangh, Hindu men felt humiliated by meat-eating, overmasculine, rough-and-tough (as mentioned by Fachandi) Muslim men. The idea that is now called ‘Love Jihad’ added more fuel to the frustration that the Hindu men already had. The narrative of Muslim men indulging in violent crimes compared to ‘weak’ Gujarati Hindu men who hesitate from having even a sight of meat (As described by Fachandi), made it more compelling for Hindu men to prove their masculinity. Various fake news and false interpretations, that often resulted in humiliating imaginations of Hindu men, starting from crime against Hindu women in modern

¹¹⁰ Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*; Yeolekar, “Gujarat 2002 Riots.”

¹¹¹ Genocide Watch, “THE 2002 GUJARAT GENOCIDAL MASSACRES,” genocidewatch, August 2, 2023, <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/the-2002-gujarat-genocidal-massacres>.

¹¹² Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*.

¹¹³ Varadarajan.

society to the Muslim invaders raiding habitats in India centuries ago and taking Hindu women back with them, seemed to be unbearable for Hindu men. Amid all this, the violence that emerged provided an opportunity for them to prove their masculinity. There were many observations that indicated that the violence against women was not only driven by lust but had more to do with the psychological trauma and imaginative insecurity of Hindu men from Muslim men. Hence, violence against Muslim women seemed to be specifically emphasised by the alleged organisers of the violence. The age-old tradition of using and commodifying women's bodies as a tool of dominance and superiority still persisted. It can be neatly concluded that the violence had its roots in patriarchy.

b) Best Bakery Case

Another incident was reported on 1st March when a mob of Hindu militants attacked Best Bakery, a shop situated in Vadodara's Hanuman Tekri area, which was a lower-middle class neighbourhood with a Hindu majority.¹¹⁴ Out of 24 people who were attacked, around 14 people were killed, out of which 12 were Muslims while two were suggestively Hindus working there.¹¹⁵ All of them were thrown into the fire. The court case about the incident based on a complaint lodged by Zahira Sheikh, daughter of the owner Habibulla Abdul Rauf (who had passed away earlier due to natural causes), turned out to be extremely biased. This suggests the impunity that the Hindu Militants had, which motivated them to engage in violence without hesitation.

¹¹⁴ Varadarajan.

¹¹⁵ Jaffrelot, "Gujarat 2002: What Justice for the Victims? The Supreme Court, the SIT, the Police and the State Judiciary."

However, this incident also attracted national traction as the court proceedings continued.

Regardless of the relative magnitude of the violence, the case served as an illustration of the hardship and harassment that Muslims faced to get justice. More about the court proceedings that followed will be discussed in the next segment.

c) Naroda Patiya Incident

Arguably, the most brutal incident of mob violence against Muslims took place in a suburban slum city on the outskirts of Ahmedabad.¹¹⁶ It consisted of around 12,000 to 15,000 residents, out of whom around 1000 were Muslim daily wage labourers.¹¹⁷ On 28th February, amid the declaration of Bharat Bandh by VHP, the Muslim families from Naroda Patiya were attacked and burnt alive.¹¹⁸ Countless women were raped before being burnt alive. Some observations suggested that the incident was meticulously planned, considering the scale and brutality of the violence.¹¹⁹ Some witnesses argued that, when asked for help by the police standing at a side of the slum, they refused to help and pushed them towards the mob with guns pointed towards them.¹²⁰ The police standing there told the helpless victims that they didn't have 'orders' to save them and it should go on for the next 24 hours, added the witnesses.¹²¹ The erstwhile Commissioner of Police and the DGP in Gandhinagar were constantly being called. However, no action or assistance was provided.¹²² Kausar Bano, a victim of the violence who was

¹¹⁶ Engineer, "Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence."

¹¹⁷ Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*.

¹¹⁸ Varadarajan.

¹¹⁹ Engineer, "Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence."

¹²⁰ Engineer.

¹²¹ Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*.

¹²² Varadarajan.

pregnant, was burnt alive after being raped. Her womb was ripped off, and the fetus inside was burnt alive before her.¹²³

d) Gulburg Society Incident

The violence that took place in Gulburg Society, a Muslim-populated enclave surrounded by a Hindu-populated area of Chamanpura, was one of the most brutal and perhaps the most illustrative incidents of the violence that took place in the city of Ahmedabad. Ehsaan Jafri, a former member of the parliament (MP) representing Congress, was one of the most prominent Muslim politicians based in Ahmedabad and a strong critic of Narendra Modi, as reflected during his campaign in recent by-elections.¹²⁴ Around a thousand Muslims, after the declaration of ‘Bandh’ (strike) by VHP on 28th February, gathered at Ehsan Jafri’s residence in Gulburg Society to seek refuge from the potential attacks by surrounding Hindus.¹²⁵ The influence and capabilities of Ehsan Jafri as a political figure were enough for them to believe that they’d be protected from any attack by Hindus. However, in a few hours, a large mob of Hindus surrounded his residence. Amid the threats of attacks, Jafri contacted and approached several individuals to rescue himself, his family members and the people who had sought refuge with him.¹²⁶ The erstwhile commissioner of Police P. C. Panday, reached his residence and apparently assured Police reinforcement to protect the people surrounded by the mob. However, no help reached contrary to

¹²³ Engineer, “Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence.”

¹²⁴ Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*; Yeolekar, “Gujarat 2002 Riots”; Engineer, “Gujarat Riots in the Light of the History of Communal Violence.”

¹²⁵ Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat*; Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

¹²⁶ Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*; Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*; Engineer, “Communal Riots in Ahmedabad.”

the assurance given by P. C. Pandey.¹²⁷ Jafri approached several leaders, including Narendra Modi, Sonia Gandhi (who was believed to have called Vajpayee) and others. It was alleged that Modi also promised to send help.

After a few hours, the crowd entered the premises of the residence. Jafri was brutally attacked, his body stripped and paraded naked after being dragged out.¹²⁸ His limbs were allegedly chopped off by the mob, and a fork-like sharp object was inserted in his body to drag him to the fire.¹²⁹ He was thrown into the fire. Based on official figures, around 39 people in Gulberg Society were killed.¹³⁰ However, some projections estimate it to be more than 60. Women were also raped before killing them and burning their mutilated bodies. The violence went on for around 6 to 7 hours. Some eyewitnesses claim the number of people in the Hindu mob to be between 10,000 and 25,000.¹³¹

The police, during the investigation, claimed that Jafri had fired bullets into the mob with his gun, which provoked the violence.¹³² The claim, however, is refuted by some of the most credible sources.¹³³ More of the investigation, legal procedures and verdicts would be discussed later.

¹²⁷ Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*; Yeolekar, "Gujarat 2002 Riots"; Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat*.

¹²⁸ Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat*; Yeolekar, "Gujarat 2002 Riots"; Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*.

¹²⁹ Yeolekar, "Gujarat 2002 Riots"; Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat*; Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*.

¹³⁰ Yeolekar, "Gujarat 2002 Riots"; Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*; Jaffrelot, "Gujarat 2002: What Justice for the Victims? The Supreme Court, the SIT, the Police and the State Judiciary"; Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*.

¹³¹ Ayyub, *Gujarat Files*.

¹³² Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*.

¹³³ Varadarajan.

It is astonishing to see that newly introduced mobile phones with SMS and MMS were widely used for the coordination of the attacks. Mobile phones also substituted the need for slow and lengthy written communication that could be used as evidence to prosecute the culprits/coordinators who allegedly instructed the police and the mobs on calls (Verbal Communication).¹³⁴ However, on the other side of the coin, the recordings of the calls provided substantial evidence against those who were involved later in the courts. It is alleged that the list of shops, homes and properties owned by Muslims was provided to the Hindutva militants by the authorities, as a result of which the majority of the properties that were looted and set on fire belonged to Muslims. Even a Muslim being a partner in business or having a share of the property with a Hindu businessperson was enough for the mobs to attack and cause destruction. Some of the most prominent members of the Sangh, including some Ministers, allegedly gave orders from the Police Control Rooms (PCR) to facilitate attacks against Muslims instead of protecting them. On the field, the mobs were led by several infamous faces of the Sangh who were in constant touch with their bosses ('commanders').

It is argued that the violence was not spontaneous but was systematically planned. Taking several considerations into account, this argument has a sustainable base.^{135 136} Various sources have expressed their concern about the availability of inflammable materials such as Kerosene, Petrol, Diesel and Gas in such a huge quantity. These were distributed to the mobs in a systematic

¹³⁴ Ayyub, *Gujarat Files*.

¹³⁵ Yeolekar, "Gujarat 2002 Riots."

¹³⁶ Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat*.

manner to burn the properties and bodies of the victims.¹³⁷ Several eyewitnesses claimed that the mob was attacking in an organised manner. In addition, the idea of an ‘institutionalised riot system’ is largely attributed to these attacks.¹³⁸ The hate speeches given by several VHP leaders were constantly broadcast by some news channels.

¹³⁷ Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*.

¹³⁸ Yeolekar, “Gujarat 2002 Riots.”

Chapter Three: The Aftermath

The aftermath of the violence for years to follow has been a humiliating period of injustice for the victims. However, the Gujarat Government tried to cover up its role in the violence, they could not hide certain sections of the Sangh Parivar and its leaders from glorifying the ‘revenge’ of Hindus. Although the Government distanced itself from any statement related to the glorification of violence, its officials and stakeholders neatly intermingled between downplaying and covering up the violence. The death of 58 karsevaks in the Sabarmati Express was still used as a tool to downplay what followed it as a mere ‘reaction’. This, coupled with a series of attempts to cover up, resulted in an everlasting injustice for the people who were affected, which persists even today. The interplay between glorification, downplay, and cover-ups, followed by some epitomes of dysfunctional and failed legal procedures for the victims, will be discussed in this section.

1) Glorification

In a sting operation conducted by Ashish Khaitan for *Tehelka.com*, Babu Bajrangi, a prominent member of Bajrang Dal was captured having to admit that he felt like *Maharana Pratap* (A Hindu Rajput King who fought against Muslim Mughals and a revered ‘inspiration’ for Hindutva Militancy) after killing Muslims, burning shops and admittedly killing a pregnant woman.¹³⁹ The sense of pride that Babu Bajrangi expressed in the sting operation was common

¹³⁹ *Final Solution*, n.d., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6yY8DFSnfw&t=7363s>.

among many Hindus who participated actively or passively in the violence. A sense of relief after restoring the 'Hindu Pride' was cherished by the parts of the Hindu majority that sympathised with the cause for years to come. The joy among Hindu participants and their supporters was visible through the provocative and humiliating slogans targeting Muslims on the walls in the streets of Ahmedabad city. The perpetrators of violence and the government were celebrated as the saviours of Hindus. However, the persistent stigmatisation of Muslims was still there, reflected by conversations that discussed how Narendra Modi has kept Muslims under 'control' under his tenure as the Chief Minister, and (indirectly) after being the Prime Minister as well. The riots were also justified by the Sangh Parivar, which portrayed itself as the only ideological group that could take revenge like this, to sustain and shield the 'Hindu Pride'. For years to come, after violence and even today, infusing the fear of 'revenge' by the Muslims, among the Hindu Majority, which leads them to vote for the BJP, is practised during each assembly election campaign. Many VHP leaders, such as Pravin Togadiya, publicly celebrated the violence in front of thousands of people cheering with the slogan of '*Jay Shree Ram*'. Rakesh Sharma, in his documentary: *The Final Solution*, documented multiple speeches including one in which Togadiya used the spread of violence as analogous to the tail of *Hanuman*, saying that Hanumanji with his burning tail, (based on the legend of *Ramayana* in which Hanuman burnt *Ravan's Lanka*) traveled multiple affected places in Gujarat such as Halol and Ahmedabad burning the 'enemies'.¹⁴⁰ The *Gaurav Yatra*, launched by Narendra Modi after the violence, also had an indication of being a celebration of that violence.

¹⁴⁰ *Final Solution*.

Even after a couple of decades, leaders such as the current Home Minister of India, Amit Shah, who was also allegedly involved in the violence of 2002, portrayed the anti Muslim riots as an example to ‘discourage’ Muslims from attacking Hindus, saying *‘pachi emni himmat j na thai’*. (They(Muslims) did not dare to do something like this (burning of Sabarmati Express) after the riots (teaching a ‘lesson’).¹⁴¹ Contrary to the hollow attempts of the majoritarian state to restore ‘normalcy’, the violence was recalled in almost every subsequent election whenever it was viable to glorify the ‘uprising’ of Hindutva marked by the pogrom.

2) Downplay

The manner in which the atrocities committed by the Sangh were portrayed in Gujarat can be marked by Gujarat Gaurav Yatra, a rally launched by Narendra Modi just after the violence ended for his state assembly electoral campaign. During his speeches as a part of this campaign, he emphasised the 58 victims of the Sabarmati Express Burning, downplaying what followed it. Portraying himself and his government as victims of propaganda by ‘outsider’ Congress and associating this criticism with the common people of Gujarat, the fact that the riots had caused serious human rights violations was quietly ignored. Amid worldwide criticism, he blamed Congress and his other opponents for ‘defaming’ Gujarat and Gujaratis instead of being held accountable for the violence. In Bahuchraji, Mehsana, he diverted the discussion towards the growing Muslim population by using sarcastic slogans such as *“Hum paach, humare pachhes”* (We five (A Muslim man and his four wives), our twenty-five (twenty five children)) as a contrast

¹⁴¹ Maktoob Staff, “PM Modi’s ‘Such a Lesson in 2002...’: Amit Shah Reiterates Defense of Gujarat Muslim Genocide,” Maktoob media, December 16, 2023

to the worldwide attempts to control growing population, for which he also used China's policy as an example. Apart from blaming Congress for the 'victimisation' of Gujaratis in the Gaurav Yatra, he also accused the media that was critical of him of instigating the violence in his subsequent interviews. Other instances of violence, such as the Anti-Sikh Riots of 1984, were put into the lens of comparison by the Sangh to deter the accusations by the Congress and divert attention from the 2002 riots.¹⁴²

However, the topics such as the growing population of Muslims or criminal activities, terror was another tool used by Modi and his government to consolidate and continue infusing fear into the minds of the majority, even after the violence. The attempt to raise terror as an issue and associate that with the riots, the attack on Akshardham Temple in Gandhinagar in 2003, aided the narrative of the Sangh that Muslims were desperately seeking to take revenge for the riots. The attack on Akshardham was attributed to Pakistan and its erstwhile leader, Parvez Musharraf, named as 'Miyan Musharraf' by Modi while addressing the attacks. 'Miyan' is a term often used in Gujarat and many other parts of India to address Muslims. The accusation of the association of Muslims in Gujarat with Pakistanis was once again levelled by the Sangh. The alleged threats given to Modi by national and multinational Islamic terror organisations were highlighted to further portray the image of Narendra Modi as a saviour for the life-threatening 'sacrifices' he had made for the Hindutva cause.¹⁴³

¹⁴² Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*.

¹⁴³ Ghassem-Fachandi, *Pogrom in Gujarat*.

In a statement given to Reuters in a 2013 interview, Modi used puppy (*kutte ka bacha*) as an example to describe the violence of 2002, stating that even if he's in the backseat and a 'puppy' comes under the wheel of car, it's painful, in order to downplay the severity of violence and evaluate worth of the Muslims victims by making them analogous to puppies. One of the tactics that he used was over-emphasising the deaths of 58 karsevaks during his post-violence electoral campaign while avoiding any discussion about the Muslim victims of the aftermath. Any attempt to address the violence and injustice faced by the Muslim victims was repeatedly labelled as an attempt to 'divide people' and 'communalise politics' by the BJP for years to follow.

Bakshi argues that for the victims of the violence, the everlasting humiliation and lack of justice led them to a paradox between remembering and forgetting. While remembering the attacks was important to continue the struggle for justice, the victims, after many years, sought to forget as their coping mechanism.¹⁴⁴ This process of forgetting was aided by the constant pressure from the authorities to retract their testimonies and 'move on'. Surveys, interviews and testimonies mentioned by many authors, such as Rana Ayub, suggested that due to pressure on the victims exerted by the state on judicial matters, the victims consequently become more inclined towards forgetting the riots.¹⁴⁵

3) Cover-up

¹⁴⁴ Pingle, "Gujarat Riots | Economic and Political Weekly."

¹⁴⁵ Ayyub, *Gujarat Files*.

The judicial process that followed the violence was alleged to be extremely biased, unfair and dysfunctional. Starting from the vaguely written FIRs (First Inquiry Reports) lacking important details to the convictions by the Supreme Court, the judicial follow-up of the violence was widely criticised by many NGOs, Human Rights Organisations and the media.¹⁴⁶

In many cases, the courts themselves expressed concerns over the reluctance of the policemen to conduct a proper investigation. Many victims allegedly found it extremely difficult to get the FIR registered by the police.¹⁴⁷ Even NHRC (National Human Rights Commission) noted that the FIRs were wrongly and poorly written, with extraneous factors possibly involved.¹⁴⁸ There were direct accusations of police being politicised by the government, with policemen who complied with the government being promoted while those who did not had to face sanctions and transfers.¹⁴⁹ In the Best Bakery case, the Supreme Court targeted the High Court and noted that the investigating agency helped the accused.¹⁵⁰

Even the Public Prosecutors were alleged to be inappropriately appointed, with many VHP and Bajarang Dal members and sympathisers given the duty to hear the cases. There was not even a single Muslim prosecutor among the appointees.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁶ Varadarajan, *Gujarat, the Making of a Tragedy*.

¹⁴⁷ Varadarajan.

¹⁴⁸ Varadarajan.

¹⁴⁹ Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

¹⁵⁰ Jaffrelot; Jaffrelot, "Gujarat 2002: What Justice for the Victims? The Supreme Court, the SIT, the Police and the State Judiciary."

¹⁵¹ Jaffrelot, "Gujarat 2002: What Justice for the Victims? The Supreme Court, the SIT, the Police and the State Judiciary."

Activists, such as Teesta Setalvad, alleged facing harassment by the authorities during her legal fight.¹⁵² There were accusations of the manipulation of the evidence related to the violence. Several victims and witnesses also alleged harassment and attempts of manipulation by the authorities. VHP and Bajarang Dal attempted to convince the victims to withdraw the complaints.¹⁵³

The Supreme Court appointed a Godhra Riots Investigation Committee after the failure of the judiciary in Gujarat. The Committee recommended the reopening of 1594 cases.¹⁵⁴ Admitting the possibility that complete justice was ‘impossible’, the Supreme Court constituted an SIT (Special Investigation Team) in 2008.¹⁵⁵ The task given to SIT was to investigate major cases such as Naroda Patiya, Gulberg Society, Sabarkantha, etc. The trials for some of the most extreme cases such as Bilkis Bano rape case was transferred outside of Gujarat by the Supreme Court.

Narendra Modi was given a ‘clean chit’ by the Supreme Court against the accusation of a larger conspiracy amid ‘lack of evidence’ in 2012. In the Bilkis Bano case, around thirteen accused were convicted, who were also temporarily released under a ‘remission’ policy by the state government of the BJP in Gujarat in 2022. However, there was a sense of dissatisfaction among many victims from the convictions.¹⁵⁶ Later, many convicts were released on bail or acquitted, for example, Maya Kodnani, a former Minister convicted in the Naroda Patiya case,

¹⁵² “India: A Decade on, Gujarat Justice Incomplete | Human Rights Watch,” February 24, 2012, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2012/02/24/india-decade-gujarat-justice-incomplete>.

¹⁵³ Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

¹⁵⁴ Jaffrelot, “Gujarat 2002: What Justice for the Victims? The Supreme Court, the SIT, the Police and the State Judiciary.”

¹⁵⁵ Jaffrelot; Jaffrelot, *Gujarat under Modi*.

¹⁵⁶ Ayyub, Gujarat Files.

who was acquitted in 2023. Sanjiv Bhatt's claim of Modi asking to let Hindus 'vent out' their anger in the alleged meeting was also rejected by the Supreme Court. He was later *punished* with termination of the job by the state government using various accusations related to his duty and later prosecuted for 'tampering' with the evidence, aided by a custodial murder case in 1990 that he was related to.¹⁵⁷ The 'clean chit' was challenged by Zakia Jafri. However, the Supreme Court upheld its decision.

¹⁵⁷ "Gujarat 2002: What Justice for the Victims? The Supreme Court, the SIT, the Police and the State Judiciary"; "2002 Gujarat Riots: Former IPS Officer Sanjiv Bhatt Sent to Police Remand till July 20," *The Times of India*, July 13, 2022,

Conclusion

The violence that took place in 2002 was not a spontaneous outcome of a specific incident (burning of Sabarmati Express) but a long series of events, as mentioned in historical factors that trace back to the origin of Hindutva ideology. Coupled with cultural factors such as meat consumption, patriarchal tropes such as Love Jihad, crime, various narratives related to Muslims proposed by the media, the situation that emerged in Gujarat delivered a devastating outcome. The political situation in Gujarat and the upcoming elections served as a catalyst, as the bubble of immense hatred, prejudices, and distrust exploded. It is possible that the burning of the Sabarmati Express was well planned, as it helped the BJP and Narendra Modi to restore their control over the government, which, perhaps, otherwise would not have been possible if it had not happened.

It was the poor people, such as migrant workers of Naroda Patiya or people from the rural parts of Gujarat, who had to face the worst consequences of this alleged Hindutva project. This was highlighted by incidents such as Naroda Patiya, Bilkis Bano, Gulberg Society, etc. The distrust among Hindus and Muslims, which was unfurled by the violence, is going to be a barrier for India to pursue its secular goals for decades to come. The horrific abuses faced by the women are a scar on the hollow claim of Gandhi's peaceful and 'safe' Gujarat. The role that technology played and the tactics that were used to coordinate the violence indicate a larger conspiracy of a plan that could not have been manifested just after the burning of the Sabarmati Express.

The manner in which the violence was glorified, justified and downplayed at the same time, makes it evident that there are severe flaws in the claim of the government to deny its role in the violence. This argument was further strengthened by the alleged attempts of the government to divert attention from the violence, as well as to protect the accused during the legal procedure. The injustice that the victims had to face only encourages further violence by the people equipped with impunity and the support provided by the majoritarian state.

Reflections

After a couple of decades, the riots have merely become a part of history. However, the implications of the riots are now more prevalent than it had ever been before, with growing communal polarisation masquerading in the reports of Muslims being attacked from all across the country. There are constant attempts by the majoritarian state to spread misinformation through fake news to shape the mindset of the young generations in their favour. The attempts to vilify Muslims have only increased in multitudes with the spread of information technology. ‘Love Jihad’ is now a trending topic, and many states have made ‘laws’ to prevent it and labelled it as ‘forced conversions’ of Hindu women. False allegations and verbal abuses against Muslims have been normalised. The newly elected Modi government had imposed the ‘beef ban’ on many states to protect the ‘sentiments’ of Hindus. In other words, the experiment that took place in the Hindutva Laboratory of Gujarat is now being tested all across the country. We cannot learn the lesson from the Gujarat Pogrom of 2002, if we fail to acknowledge it as a misdeed at the first place.

Narendra Modi, widely accused of perpetrating the violence, went on to become the fifteenth Prime Minister of India. There is no denial of the fact that, besides his claims of ‘development’ through ‘Gujarat Model’, the fact that he was preferred by the Sangh played a major role in his selection as a Prime Ministerial candidate for the general elections in 2014. There were obvious reasons why the Sangh supported him over anyone else. The problem arises

when the journey of Modi to success, despite severe allegations of genocide, has normalised hatred and violence against Muslims, the results of which are even visible today. Through the example of Modi, vilifying Muslims and dividing communities on the lines of religion and identity, many local and regional leaders have allegedly started following in his footsteps. Communal polarisation and consolidation of the Hindu votes have become the ultimate and indefensible tool for the BJP in the election campaign.

The violence also indicates the failure of the judiciary to protect the fundamental rights of the citizens. Many of the participants of the violence, who had committed serious crimes, are likely to be free due to the constant support of the government. The victims were constantly intimidated to withdraw their testimonies in return for favours, mainly in monetary form. The hopelessness of the victims in their pursuit of justice, lack of legal awareness and constant intimidation of lawyers and activists who tried to help them has led them to give up on the judiciary. It is interesting to see that more than a hundred people from the Muslim community were convicted by the courts in the Godhra Train Burning incident for the massacre of 58 karsevaks. While a relatively smaller number of attackers were convicted for committing atrocities against Muslims, which followed. As of now (2025), many activists, including Teesta Setalvad and Sanjiv Bhatt (IPS), have been facing convictions of 'fabricating' false evidence against the government and have spent a long period of time in prison. While those who were accused of raping women, burning infants alive and causing severe destructions are free under the shield of the government. Many police and other government officers, who complied with the government's alleged attempt to allow violence and protect the accused from convictions, have

ended up in preferred and desired postings in their departments, while those who tried to maintain law and order have been facing consequences.

Whether victims are still expecting justice or not is an open-ended question. However, the courage that victims such as Bilkis Bano and late Zakia Jafri (wife of Ehsan Jafri) have shown in this painful struggle against the entire state machinery trying to intimidate them will serve as an epitome for many women in their fight against injustice.

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” - George Santayana

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