



## The Carnage: Gujarat 2002

Gujarat Carnage 2002 was the shock, if anyone needed a shock to be reminded of the ever-present danger of communalism in its worst forms in India.

The carnage that began on 1st March 2002 – apparently as a reaction to the Godhra killings (discussed later in some detail) – exploded a few fond myths.

One of them was that if the *Hindutva* forces were in power there would be no communal violence. The *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) had itself often boasted that wherever it is in power no communal riots take place. No one had raised the corollary – that the price of communal peace was power to the BJP – an instance of obvious political blackmail. In March 2002 however, the BJP was in power in Gujarat and at the centre. That did not prevent the occurrence of a systematic, government supported, brutal, inhuman carnage in large parts of the state. It was now clear that power did not temper the murderous hordes fired by *Hindutva*. In fact, Gujarat Carnage showed what the *Hindutva* forces in power could achieve.

It also then became clear that the Gujarat Carnage was not another instance of outbreak of communal violence – partially organised but largely spontaneous that had just spiralled out of control. The planned and systematic – hence cold-blooded - nature of the massacre of the Muslims clearly demonstrated that this was a pogrom threatening to become a holocaust if not checked in time.

Gujarat Carnage 2002 also exposed the so-called secular allies of the BJP in power. They were unwilling and unable to influence the centre to act. They, through acts of omission if not commission, condoned the Carnage. They failed to pull out of the government and thereby actually dug their own political grave. Some of them demonstrated their moral and political surrender to forces of communalism by justifying at least obliquely the massacre in Gujarat.

This was not true only of the political allies. Later the media too – including some media professionals who had during the Carnage taken courageous anti-communal stands at quite some risk to themselves – began to refer to the Carnage as post-Godhra violence, or even as the Godhra incident. This became the unfortunate whitewash during the run up to the parliamentary elections of 2004 when they felt that the BJP would return to power and probably on its own. This was crass opportunism to say the least.

A far more insidious effort is also currently in progress to rewrite history and to almost deny the occurrence of any massacre of the Muslims in Gujarat. Thus a scribe writing in a mouthpiece of the *Sangh Parivar* cites some court judgements in Gujarat that have convicted Muslims for killing Hindus during the violence. He obviously does not tell us that the entire judicial process in Gujarat related to the Carnage has been criticised by the Supreme Court. Even recently the Supreme Court has admitted a petition seeking to transfer all such cases outside the state of Gujarat, overruling the objections of the state government. Such whitewashing is not particularly new or original. This is also being attempted regarding the Nazi rule in Germany and the holocaust. The painful fact is that many people get taken in by such blatant lies and cite them as proof that the case against the *Hindutva* lobby is motivated and exaggerated to say the least.<sup>12</sup>

Numerous questions also came up – as real political posers, not just theoretical queries. These need some discussion.

<sup>12</sup>See Arvind Lavkare, *The Myth and Truth of Godhra*, Organiser, May 7, 2006, available at <http://www.organiser.org/dynamic/modules.php?name=Content&pa=showpage&pid=129&page=17>

[C. eldoc1/0611/24 nov 06 email.1.html]

## 01. The Question of Mass Violence

The problem at one level is very simple.

1. Mobs, incited, misinformed, enraged, or, far more so - frightened – for their own safety – justifiably or otherwise, and rarely in real or imaginary ‘kill or die’ or ‘life and death’ situations are capable of great violence. The violence can be mindless, grotesque, excessive, frightening, and sickening. It may make one wonder about the capacity of human beings for perverse destruction and mutilation.

2. Generally, once the fury is over – once life has returned to ‘normalcy’ – ‘sanity’ also returns. There is generally remorse and guilt over the occurrence – even disbelief. The involved collective generally keeps this within limits – since beyond a certain quantum it can mean nothing but self-penalisation – in its extreme forms *suicide*. Nevertheless, within survival limits, there is remorse and guilt – a sense of having done wrong, of having harmed another, of having done that without adequate reason. Infliction of bodily harm on another human being – particularly killing another – is not easy. It invariably produces strong feelings of having done something tremendously wrong. The idea of sin strongly relates to killing (apart from ‘illegitimate’ – and sometimes even ‘legitimate’ sex). Killing, unlike the latter, provokes spontaneous reaction of a human being and is not a conditioned response. Killing another human being is not natural or innate.

3. Once the ‘madness’ is over people are ready to accept punishment, to make reparations. They often wish genuinely to heal. (This feeling of course may disappear completely if there is a punitive counter-offensive with matching counter-violence. Then a vicious circle may come into being.) Remorse and readiness to atone – at least to an extent – generally mark the period of return to normalcy.

4. That is perhaps why genocides – in not just the definitional but real sense – as efforts to eliminate ‘another’ people – are not generally results of mass frenzy and mob violence. From the massacres of the indigenous peoples in settlers’ colonies to the holocaust by the Nazis, it was the state – in one form or the other – and a conquering triumphal state at that – which planned and executed the genocide or violence coming close to it.

5. In contrast to this, there have been examples – increasingly common in our situation in the recent past – where the perpetrators of

massacres show no remorse, no guilt. Gujarat is the most recent example. In Gujarat there seems to be a defiant pride in the carnage committed. The justifications run rampant. It is not only a few die-hard fanatic elements, by all reports, who remain firm in justification of the atrocities and massacre but a large number of ordinary citizens of that state that continue to sanction the horror and probably also call for its repeat! Significantly, this occurs even when there is no counter-violence, no reprisal, in Gujarat or anywhere else by the victims of the carnage. According to reports, it seems the violence at the time of the Partition – that claimed over a million lives - also did not lead to much remorse. (In fact, during the days of heightened communal hatred and violence of the recent past, some writings and films – e.g. *Gadar* – valorised the violent attitudes and actions at the time of the Partition. There was, however, one major difference, at the time of Partition. Both communities, on both sides of the border committed violence. Acts of both communities were equally despicable. Not even such slender shred of justification is available in the case of Gujarat carnage 2002.) The Mumbai riots of 1992-93 created a situation of ‘no-remorse/ no-guilt’ only for a short period. This too was restricted to a small section of the population of the city. The *Shiv Sena* (SS) Supremo and the clownish local chieftains of *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (VHP) – *Bajrang Dal* may continue to insist that the violence was a proud achievement but this does not carry much weight even among their own followers. In a strange way, this is true of the Gujarat violence too. Outside Gujarat – and outside parts of the cow belt - even the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) leaders/activists have had to adopt a tone of apology, (genuine or faked) remorse, and sometimes - even condemnation, regarding the carnage. The *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS) itself has done curious but expected flip-flops. This is not at all to state that the remorse of any elements of the *Sangh Parivar* is in anyway genuine but only to highlight the fact that the popular feeling – however unexpressed – has forced these elements to adopt or fake such a public stance.

## 02. Triggers and Explosions

*The question to address then is quite simple. What conditions produce a generalised mental situation that admits no guilt and harbours no remorse at grotesque gratuitous violence perpetrated on hapless victims? What conditions make this situation a perpetual one?*

One should perhaps immediately note some elements bearing in mind that the violence under discussion (in Gujarat in particular) is not individual violence but *mass* violence – or at least violence with explicit, vocal, and active mass support. The situation is also one where there is no desire to return to ‘peace’ or ‘normalcy’, whether actual acts of overt generalised violence actually occur or not. It is generally also a situation when elements (whatever the community they may belong to) opposed to the violence in any manner are ostracised, threatened, and overawed into silence or inaction. The situation was similar in Germany under Nazi rule. The German people in large numbers backed the Nazis and their acts, even if many were not aware of the holocaust. The people were definitely aware of the pogroms, of the arrests, and of the deportations – even if not of the genocide. The war and reverses in the war really shook them up.

Mass violence tantamount to genocide is never ‘spontaneous’. Episodic anger does not lead to such explosion of *sustained* violence. Excuses or triggering points – detonators in a manner – for the explosion and generalisation of the violence may be necessary, e.g. the deaths in compartment S-6 of the Sabarmati Express on 27th February 2002 at Godhra.

These, however, are purely *triggers*. In ‘normal’ circumstances, the killings in Godhra would have certainly provoked some reaction. That should be obvious to anyone – particularly any consistent observer of social occurrences. There would probably have been a general strike (*bandh*) in some towns, some demonstrations; some stray violence – mainly attacks on Muslim establishments, some looting, and some destruction – may be even some isolated killings. The so-called Newtonian reaction in Gujarat went far beyond any such spontaneous expression of disgust, shock, and anger.

The shocking facts about Gujarat are many. Relevant here is the fact that the violent incidents – except some stray stabbings at Vadodara station – were not spontaneous reactions. They took some time to surface, almost a day. *Obviously someone organised these ‘natural Newtonian’ reactions.* The most brutal violence had a clear-cut pattern – *determined* elements collected the mobs and directed them towards *specific* targets; *definite* individuals kept the mobs in continuous frenzy. These too provided only the backdrop to the brutality. The actual horrid acts were committed in all probability by *pre-chosen, pre-determined, pre-prepared, pre-assigned* elements.

Two more factors are unusual. One is the advance planning. The perpetrators it seems were waiting, as it were, for a Godhra to occur. It also seems that *they were certain that it would occur, some day, any day.* They may not have known in advance the exact date, time, and mode of the occurrence; that is all. Second is the complicity of the masses, in various forms of violence. The ordinary bystander-observer may not have wielded the actual weapon that cut open bellies of pregnant women, or beheaded outnumbered and ‘disarmed’ victims, or set fire to the pyres that burnt to death live men, women, and children but, s/he definitely observed with approval even if s/he may not have actually applauded the act. In many cases s/he did just that, and more – goaded the murderers on, formed a protective ring around them, lionised them. S/he also participated in the violence against property far more actively. *The image of a middle class woman coming in a car to loot a shop has become the stigma of shame for most people in the country (except in Gujarat, of course).*

To return to the point – the trigger came (perhaps) without foreknowledge, and forewarning, to be charitable – unexpectedly. Nothing else was left to chance. (One may therefore well wonder whether the trigger was at all left to chance, given the stakes that were involved. It is possible that the trigger too was a part of a careful dastardly plot.) The elements to incite, the lists of targets, the logistics of the weaponry and other equipment of violence, the individuals to perform the actual acts of most brutal violence were already in place and ready. These elements – from the planners to the perpetrators – had committed the acts of violence in their minds and in their imagination *already* and perhaps many times over. The violence was not new to them in imagination and thought; it was familiar and thus usual.

The state machinery too was prepared for the violence and waiting for it. The occurrences did not catch it by surprise. It knew that the massive violent carnage was to occur – one day or the other – even if *individuals* did not know the date. It knew exactly how it was to behave when the violence did occur. It knew it had to persecute the victims and protect the criminal perpetrators. *It had committed treason already.* It had violated the Indian Constitution in its mind and heart before the violence actually broke out. The actual violation of the Constitution and of the designated constitutional duties was a mere formality in March 2002 – continuing into April and May of the year. (One must mention

here various – though in number few and hence rare– exceptions of honourable officers who held that their pledge to the Constitution outweighed their loyalty to the immediate political bosses.)<sup>13</sup>

These were not the only elements of non-spontaneity. Trained killers cannot incite a mass only with their acts. In fact, they run a risk. The mass of bystanders may protest, may actually, and actively oppose them. It may apprehend them – and mete out an instant justice even if the state machinery wants to be ‘neutral’ or inactive. The police force itself – at least individual officers – may ‘lose nerve’ if the mass does not applaud their partiality – and may be forced to act to protect the letter if not the spirit of the law. The violence in Gujarat required a mass complicity and a mass approval even if not a mass participation. This too is not a spontaneous occurrence. If at all spontaneous, and incited only at the moment, the fury does not last too long. It exhausts itself soon – physically and emotionally. In Mumbai in 1993 and in Gujarat in 2002 – particularly in Ahmedabad, it did not. It did not even abate in Gujarat. It continued and went on and on, until the real planners feared national and international reprisals for their actions. (Characteristic of this attitude is the fact that the rioters of Mumbai in 1993 lost their nerve the day the Rapid Action Force and the army were deployed in the city. Aggressive till then they became meek thereafter.)

There was another extremely important concomitant factor. The conflagration refused – steadfastly refused despite desperate efforts – to spread beyond Gujarat. The explosion remained confined to the *laboratory of Hindutva* (read of fascism). It did not produce a chain reaction. Modi and Togadia were self-limiting traditional explosives – Pokharan II had not imbued them with any superlative qualities of perpetual continuous explosions, of setting off a chain reaction. It has now become fashionable amongst a set of academics to claim that the Indian people did not vote for secular polity in 2004. May be they did

<sup>13</sup>Strange off-the-record reports attributed to ‘trustworthy’, ‘honest’ and ‘non-partisan’ officers – often of the intelligence agencies – have done rounds in some circles. These all paint the Godhra killings as a careful non-terrorist pre-meditated and pre-planned conspiracy. They also exonerate the administration in Gujarat from all guilt except some acts of omission. They almost pass off the Gujarat Carnage as a spontaneous reaction of the masses to a heinous conspiratorial act. One must contrast these reports with two public facts. One of them is the testimony of officers from the Gujarat cadre that clearly indicts elements within the government with complicity in the planned violence that became the carnage. Second is the now infamous ‘religious’ census that cried wolf about the increasing population of Muslims in particularly sensitive border districts of the country. This has now been proved to be a gross misinterpretation if not creation of fraudulent data. The alarming fact is that a number of people who receive this confidential information believe it.

not. They certainly voted *against communal violence and vitriol* in 2002 itself by refusing to join in the carnage unleashed in Gujarat. In 2004, they merely confirmed that opinion through the ballot box. (One must also note the reaction of Gujarat to this response – to consider the state as the only true Hindu state and to pit it almost against the Indian republican union.)

### 03. The Specificity of Gujarat

What concerns this *Consideration* is the fact that a vast mass was, and could be, ready to support the violence in Gujarat – in all its nauseating and pervert forms.

It is obvious – and almost does not need to be stated – that this mass mentality did not come into being after the news of the Godhra deaths reached the rest of the state, particularly Ahmedabad. It is obvious that it had been *prepared* earlier. The word *prepared* is precisely what needs discussion in this context. It is obvious once again that (with the help of the power at the command of the government in the state, which the BJP ruled and still does, by itself for quite a few years) the propaganda and organisation machinery of the *Sangh Parivar* had communalised the atmosphere completely. The *Sangh Parivar* had spread venom about the Muslim community and created a hate-cum-fear complex amongst the Hindus. The almost perennial riots in parts of Ahmedabad and some other cities in the state had also kept the communal cauldron on the boil. (Obviously, it goes beyond that – Gujarat seems to clamour for a ‘final solution’! It also wants to be a law unto itself.)

Many scholars and analysts have also cited many specific objective factors to explain the communal violence in Gujarat – encompassing political economy, politics, social structure, culture, and current happenings.

Frankly, these do not suggest much that is uncommonly specific and peculiar to Gujarat.

The major *unique feature* was the BJP government and its totally ruthless and unscrupulous attitude. The rulers in Gujarat probably felt that the country was ripe for a fascist takeover and that the central rulers of the BJP were old men who dithered too much. Most fascist takeovers

(Germany and Italy – to cite the most infamous examples) follow or accompany street actions that threaten and almost dismember democratic institutions and democratic structures of the state. The Gujarat riots, it is conceivable, were to be precursors for such a take over. Had they spread in the same quantum to even a few more states there probably would have been a ‘march on Delhi’ and a dismantling of the democratic republic. The people of India did not allow that to occur. The carnage in Gujarat did not become a national conflagration.<sup>14</sup>

The more important question however is, why and how could the *Sangh Parivar* succeed in Gujarat? The *objective* factors do not adequately explain this. The factors were common to some other states – particularly the neighbouring ones. The communalisation in these states did not acquire the same magnitude and *dimensions*.<sup>15</sup> (Quite simply, sections of the masses may have become communalised and intolerant but did not clamour for or even accept anything approaching a final solution. The specificity of Gujarat is that it was prepared to wipe out, erase, decimate, completely finish a certain community – the Muslims to begin with, the Christians probably already in the line of fire, and then certainly the Dalits.) Moreover, the same *objective* factors could have led to a very different kind of an upsurge – for example a democratic revolt of the dispossessed. Some specificities of social and political history will be essential even to attempt to explain this particular direction taken by Gujarat. These include the absence of a genuine independent (not only in party and political but also in class terms) militant working class movement in the state, the entrenched idea of class collaboration, the

<sup>14</sup>An excellent piece on Gujarat – written almost five years after the carnage is ‘Gujarat as another Country: The Making and Reality of a Fascist Realm’ that appeared in **South Asia Citizens Wire** - pack #2 | October 03-4, 2006 | Dispatch No. 2298 [4] **Himal South Asian** October 2006 (<http://www.sacw.net/>). [C.eldoc1/L70\_/30oct06him1.html] It reports ground realities that echo many of the points made here. The only point probably misunderstood is regarding the use of the saffron flag in the Ganesh immersion processions – this is not a post-Modi development anywhere. The tradition of banners and pennants in religious processions is quite old and the colour in numerous Hindu processions is saffron. This is not to say that the Ganesh festival, among others, is not increasingly communalised – but this is not the correct indicator to suggest the occurrence.

<sup>15</sup>Similar partisan actions of the state governments can now be observed with increasing frequency in other BJP ruled states – Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Karnataka. These include patently partisan attitudes in cases of communal violence, open glorification of the RSS along with a call to government employees to support and join the organization, official falsification of history, rampant communalisation of education including the textbooks, etc. The communal features are found in the administrative actions of even some states not ruled by the BJP, e.g., Maharashtra.

role of the unstable insecure migrant labour, the communal violence nurtured and kept perpetually alive since 1969, the tradition of endemic communal violence in certain areas of Ahmedabad, the assurance that Hindu perpetrators of violence will be protected, the role of the Diaspora – specifically the Gujarati NRI, the political bankruptcy and opportunism of the *Congress*, the peculiar caste politics and its links with communal politics, the slow down of the growth in the state, the mounting economic stagnation, the dismal record on the human development front, the absence of a militant independent Dalit movement, and many other similar factors. Such a nuanced analysis of Gujarat is extremely necessary. That is not, however, the central point of *this particular* writing.

*What concerns this writing is the mindset that prevailed, and by all accounts continues to prevail, in Gujarat.*

The uniqueness of Gujarat lies in three facts.

- The above-mentioned mentality of ‘no remorse/ no guilt’ is widespread – almost generalised.
- It exists despite long drawn out shocking violence that threw the Gujarat economy into disarray, disrupted the social fabric, sought to assault the culture and civilisation, and dehumanised large sections of the population.
- It also has persisted for a long time – it is not a reaction but a settled mentality – a near permanent ideological-psychological make up.

Some features of this mentality are very clear. There is a total hatred for the ‘other’ – principally the Muslims but also the Christians. For the moment, at least overtly, there may be a pan-Hindu sentiment but at the core, the ‘other’ also includes the Dalits. The bases of the hatred are distrust, fear, a sense (imaginary and unfounded) of past historical robberies of the just share of resources, and contempt paradoxically and curiously mixed with envy.

The hatred creates impenetrable barriers between the sections of the society; the barriers are pronounced and vitriolic enough to make any coexistence impossible. (The anger towards mixed marriages – both religious and caste – is example of the barrier.) In fact, the ‘mainstream’ Gujarat society – upper & upper-middle caste, upper-middle & middle class (though also with participation of all other sections with different

intensities depending upon specific factors) Hindu denies the right of any other sections to exist in Gujarat at least as equal human beings and citizens. This 'mainstream' searches for a *final solution* to the 'minority problem' in Gujarat. The parameters of this solution vary from total economic isolation and ruination, ethnic cleansing or ghettoisation, to physical expulsion or elimination.

Is this behaviour or mentality unique to Gujarat? It is not so by any means! Such sentiments exist in many places in the country. A large number of persons, and not all of them members of this or that organisation of the *Sangh Parivar*, harbour such mentality. The uniqueness of Gujarat is that it is *the* prevalent – ruling mentality. It sets the norm in Gujarat and renders all other attitudes illegitimate and abnormal. It is the *core* in Gujarat not the *fringe*; it is the *norm* in Gujarat not the *deviation*. The communal divide in Gujarat has reached heights and depths that in many other places in the country would be insane and unthinkable. That is precisely what takes the happenings and mentality in Gujarat out of the category of merely communal and marks them as fascist.

#### 04. The 'Laboratory' and the 'Experiment'

The 'experiment' is the one in Gujarat – inaugurated by the *Sangh Parivar* that treats Gujarat as the laboratory of *Hindutva* – and by extension of contemporary fascism in India.<sup>16</sup>

There is no need to emphasise the importance of the Gujarat Carnage 2002 for Indian society and polity – if not civilisation. Of course, the Gujarat Carnage was the pinnacle of a series of developments inaugurated much earlier.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup>See for example, the following quote: "There are many villages in Gujarat today that have proudly been cleansed fully of their erstwhile Muslim residents. — Gaily painted boards greet you at the entrance of these villages, in ominous greeting: 'Welcome to this Hindu village in the Hindu Rashtra of Gujarat'." This is Harsh Mander writing 'Hope amidst Fear and Hate' in *Times of India* of 13th September 2005. Many other analysts and commentators have reported similar hoardings in different villages of Gujarat.

There is hardly any need to cite the literature on the situation in Gujarat – whether during the carnage or later. It is voluminous – in print, on CDs and on the net. The issues of **Communalism Combat** (Mumbai) and the website associated with it of Sabrang Communications are perhaps the most comprehensive sources on the carnage and its aftermath – though one must rush to add that these are not the only sources. Extremely important is the **South Asian Citizens Wire** cited earlier.

Another comprehensive source is the CD – **Gujarat Carnage 2002** – Second Edition 2003 – prepared and distributed by Indian National Social Action Forum (INSAF), New Delhi.

The Gujarat Carnage *per se* does not concern this Reflection in the main. The very occurrence of the carnage in Gujarat, and its specificities (brutality, scale, spread, duration, absence of remorse, complicity of government and administration, involvement of the ruling party and/or associated organisations, the continued communal divide in the Gujarat society – to name a few) threatened the civilisation, culture, society, and polity in India.<sup>18</sup>

It also marked a watershed in Indian politics. It became necessary again to ask whether the *Sangh Parivar* presented a fascist threat to the country and whether the Gujarat carnage represented a fascist onslaught. It also became necessary to ask whether the Gujarat carnage was only a reactionary communal outburst or much more – a portent of a fascist assault on the democratic republic. Further questions were bound to follow. Can an occurrence in 2002 be termed fascist? Is the phenomenon not fundamentally different from the classical fascism witnessed in the 1920s to 1940s particularly in Italy and Germany? Moreover, can a right wing violent formation in a developing country be ever termed fascism? Would this mean a dilution of the word fascism itself? The debate was not over words, of course. It was over the analysis and understanding of the entity. It was also not a mere theoretical debate but one that would dictate actual political stances by political and mass organisations, particularly of the democratic and progressive variety – including positions over the alliances they may and the ones they must not build.<sup>19</sup> Curiously, the debate becomes even more relevant after the electoral defeat of BJP in the parliamentary elections of 2004. The question of alliances becomes crucial and somewhat involved when the BJP is in opposition and not in a position to set the agenda of national politics. This writing concerns itself with these very issues – though perhaps in a round about manner.

<sup>17</sup>Revisiting Somnath, the site of the launch of his *Rath Yatra* (chariot tour) of 1990, the now-moderate-now-hard-line ex-President of the *Bharatiya Janata Party* (BJP) Mr Lal Krishna Advani recently (September 2005) claimed – quite correctly – that the *Rath Yatra* changed the face of politics in India.

<sup>18</sup>**Lessons from Gujarat** (Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai, 2003) [B.L70.P60] is a useful collection of essays that analyse the specificities of Gujarat as well as the nature of the fascist threat in India.

<sup>19</sup>See for example, Roy Ajit, *Footfalls of Fascism*, in **Fascism & Democracy: The Indian Experience**; Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, Mumbai, September 2004 [B.L41.M1]. Roy joins issues in this article with the Communist Parties in India (mainly the CPI-M) regarding their characterisation of the BJP as communal – and not necessarily as fascist. Also see Banaji Jairas, *Political Culture of Fascism* in the same volume.

## 05. Godhra 'incident' and Gujarat Carnage

No words are sufficient to express the disgust and nausea that the Gujarat Carnage brings forth. It may not have produced any such reactions within Gujarat in a major way – but affected every sensitive individual outside the state. Even leaders of the BJP agreed (much later, of course) – increasingly so in public statements – that the Gujarat Carnage turned the tide against the party at least in electoral terms. The defeat of the BJP in the parliamentary elections of 2004 really began in 2002. (This opinion is one of the issues of the differences that have cropped up in the *Sangh Parivar* in the recent past.)

Spokespersons of the *Sangh Parivar*, BJP leaders – and generally commentators sympathetic to the *Sangh Parivar* and BJP, of course, hold the Godhra incident solely responsible for the Gujarat Carnage.

In this incident reportedly 57 passengers – many of them allegedly volunteers of *Hindutva* organisations, *Ram Sevaks* (literally, servants of Lord Ram – the legendary/mythological god king of the Hindus), as they have been described, returning from a political pilgrimage to Ayodhya – the site of the demolished Babri Mosque and the proposed site of the 'great' *Ram Janmabhoomi* (birthplace) Temple - were burned to death in the infamous Coach S-6 of the Sabarmati Express on 27th February 2002 just outside Godhra station in Gujarat. They obviously have to claim that the Godhra incident was the sole cause of the Gujarat Carnage, at least of its onset.

### Immediately we need to make some points.

1. The Godhra killings, despicable and condemnable as they are, remain shrouded in mystery. The explanations put forth by the Government of Gujarat were instantaneous, glib, and not very believable. The government of Gujarat at once advanced theories of pre-planned conspiracy. The conspirators were either hard-core terrorists, or mischievous Muslims from Godhra town. The law and order machinery of Gujarat arrested over a hundred persons under the infamous POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act) and incarcerated them for the killings. The subsequent investigations have not been able to sustain the conspiracy theory. In fact, right now no one knows exactly what happened in and to coach S-6. Investigative agencies and inquiry commissions now seriously dispute the instant theories. Facts – even the partial ones that we now know - seriously

question the entire 'trigger' that apparently provoked the violence. It strongly evokes memories of the Reichstag Fire<sup>20</sup> – of manufactured excuses. The date too – February 27 – matches. (This is not the only suspicious occurrence of that period. The 'attack' on the Parliament House by terrorists just when the draconian POTA met legislative and popular resistance also seems such an action.)<sup>21</sup>

2. The Gujarat Carnage was not accidental or spontaneous. The character of the violence was planned, organised, and instigated. The CM made an infamous statement as the violence took an ugly shape, that it was a Newtonian reaction to the killings in Godhra. ('Every action has an equal and opposite reaction'.) This statement actually provided an instant justification to the perpetrators of the ghastly violence. It also encouraged them to continue the violence.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup>On 27th February 1933, the *Reichstag* (German Parliament House) caught fire. When the police arrived, they found Marinus van der Lubbe on the premises. After being tortured by the Gestapo (the German secret police during the Nazi period – infamous for its brutalities) he confessed to starting the Reichstag Fire. However, he denied that he was part of a Communist conspiracy. Hermann Goering (a prominent Nazi, head of the Storm Troopers or Brown Shirts – the military wing of the Nazi Party – SA; deputy leader and official heir to Hitler since 1938; head of German armed forces during the war; a convicted war criminal in Nuremberg trials who escaped execution by committing suicide) refused to believe him and ordered the arrest of several leaders of the German Communist Party (KPD).

When Hitler heard the news about the fire, he gave orders that all leaders of the German Communist Party should "be hanged that very night." Paul von Hindenburg (then the head of the German state) vetoed this decision but did agree that Hitler should take "dictatorial powers." KPD candidates in the election were arrested and Hermann Goering announced that the Nazi Party planned "to exterminate" German communists.

As well as Marinus van der Lubbe the German police charged four communists with setting fire to the Reichstag. This included Ernst Torgler, the chairperson of the KPD and Georgi Dimitrov of the Comintern.

Marinus van der Lubbe was found guilty of the Reichstag Fire and was executed on 10th January, 1934. Adolf Hitler was furious that the rest of the defendants were acquitted and he decided that in future all treason cases be taken away from the Supreme Court and given to a new People's Court where prisoners be judged by members of the National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP). The above information is from <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk>.

<sup>21</sup>Afzal Guru, an accused in the attack on the parliament, was subsequently found guilty of masterminding the attack. He has been sentenced to death by hanging. His family has appealed to the President for clemency. Several organisations as well as individuals have also joined the appeal and asked that the sentence of Afzal Guru be commuted. They have argued against capital punishment, and raised questions about the way the trial was conducted and proper avenues of defence denied to Afzal. The *Hindutva* brigade has launched a counter campaign to malign those who ask for clemency. It has gone further and insisted that Afzal be hanged immediately. In the wake of the controversy, different versions of the attack on the parliament have been proposed. One of them actually alleges that an elite unit of the security forces was responsible for the attack. The varied views can be found in PUCL Digest as well as India thinkers net (<http://www.pucl.org> and [indiathinkersnet@yahoo.com](http://indiathinkersnet@yahoo.com)).

<sup>22</sup>The typical statement, after expressions of great anguish and regret over the violence in Gujarat, always was "if there was no Godhra, there would have been no Gujarat violence". Leaders of the stature of Advani and Vajpayee have made this statement at different times in different but similar words.

- The national leadership of the BJP too indulged in doublespeak and more or less said that the Godhra incident caused the violence. It thus provided a constant though indirect justification for the violence. Repeatedly these leaders said that had there been no Godhra incident there would have been no Gujarat Carnage. Legally and strictly, none of these statements may be incitement or instigation but such statements did create the impression that the leadership did not condemn the occurrences on the ground. The leaders of the VHP of course vocally justified the violence.
3. Members of the ruling party in Gujarat and its associated organisations were directly involved in the violence. Victims, obviously the very few who dared to lodge official complaints, have named even elected representatives belonging to the BJP in First Information Reports that the police have at all registered. There was a brazen participation by identifiable and identified political elements in criminal acts of inhuman violence that they obviously considered legitimate and justified.
  4. The perpetrators of violence drew legitimacy and justification both from a *mentality* and an *ideology*. A complex (yet simplistic) hatred and fear of the Muslims – as the root cause of all evil and all problems that plague particularly Gujarat - was the pillar of the mentality that produced the carnage. The communal elements in the main and the communally mobilised society in general had nurtured the hatred to proportions where a total and permanent exclusion and expulsion of the Muslims from Gujarat life became the only guarantee to safe existence in their imagination. This also became their operative agenda during the Carnage. A mass paranoia was the basis of the violence. The ideology of course was of *Hindutva* – the political programme of construction of an exclusive Hindu nation (and nation-state) that would accommodate and ‘appease’ no minorities, would rejuvenate the entire Hindu community, and would restore the lost glory of the Gujarati Hindu. This mentality and ideology had become pan-Hindu to a large extent, bridging divides of sects, castes, ethnic groupings, and gender.
  5. The state government and administration not only collaborated in the violence but also in the aftermath of violence. It did not come to the aid of the Muslim victims of the carnage. It put obstacles in the path of those who tried to help the victims. The CM himself made disparaging and obscene remarks about displaced Muslim citizens who had to take shelter in the relief camps.<sup>23</sup> He many times

- threatened to close down the relief camps. The police did not properly investigate cases concerning the violence, if at all they registered them in the first place. The *Sangh Parivar* managed to subvert the judicial machinery too to such an extent that the local courts acquitted Hindu accused as a rule. The Supreme Court had to intervene in the matter and proclaim that there was gross distortion of justice in Gujarat. It transferred cases out of the state – to ensure that some modicum of justice would be available to the victims. The CM characteristically criticised the Honourable Chief Justice and made cheap jokes about his surname!
6. The Muslim victims of violence did not even get medical aid in some instances. The discrimination in all institutions and public facilities continues well after the cessation of the violent incidents. It seems an undeclared but definite policy.
  7. The carnage was no madness – no temporary mass insanity. There is no change in the attitude even after three years. The majority community – the Hindus - do not allow the victims to return to their houses, to their localities. This is as prevalent in the villages as in the urban areas. The permission to return where granted is conditional. Some conditions are ‘defensive’ – withdrawal of cases, refusal to name perpetrators of violence or rapists, etc. Some are aggressive. These lay down a code of behaviour and conduct on the Muslims returning to the locality or village. This code in effect annihilates their cultural identity and cripples their economic activities. Efforts it seems are on to prevent any restoration of communal amity and harmony. It seems that the Hindu community sees the carnage as a war it has won and imposes conditions and reparations for ‘armistice’!<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup>The uncouthness of Narendra Modi is almost without parallel. Only Bal Thakeray and Pravin Togadia can match him in pervert public utterances. Modi called the relief camps breeding camps for the Muslims.

<sup>24</sup>Seema Mustafa in her column in *Asian Age* (28th October 2006) sums up the situation. “The BJP-led government consolidated what had begun earlier, but had not been institutionalised and hence was a slow process: the complete marginalisation of Indian Muslims. One Gujarat was more effective than scores of little communal riots, as the violence, the terror, the hatred, the justification, the glorification of the worst kind of crimes against humanity had the impact of a nuclear bomb. The bomb was dropped in Gujarat, but the radioactive rays penetrated the soul of India. Today, Gujarat has become a state within a state, with New Delhi continuing to watch helplessly as the Muslims are further victimised and ghettoised. They have not been able to return to their homes, they have stopped sending their children to school out of fear, they are not given loans and credit facilities by the banks, they have not been allowed to return to their jobs, and secular India with a government in place is watching silently.” Not too long ago, for at least some time, Seema Mustafa was quite soft towards the NDA!



8. A number of people, at least in some pockets (in keeping with the above feature) in Gujarat, seem to consider Gujarat as the only Hindu state in the country. They show impatience with the secular, democratic constitution of the nation.
9. A last point about the Godhra killings themselves. Obviously they were brutal and despicable. They were in some respects an outbreak of communal sentiment. It is noteworthy however that only one compartment – the one that reportedly carried the *Ram Sevaks* who were held responsible for whatever happened at Godhra station – was attacked, if there was such an attack. The passengers of the train in general were not attacked. There was thus specificity to that violence. It did not target travellers on the train only on the basis of their religion. If it was a communal attack it was neither as mindless nor as indiscriminate as the Carnage that followed the incident.

## 06. The 'Experiment' in Gujarat

The Gujarat Carnage was different in every aspect from most other incidents of communal violence in the country. The situation in Gujarat too was different. Gujarat was the declared laboratory of *Hindutva* for the *Sangh Parivar*.

The 'experiment' probably had many dimensions, though the 'scientists' (of the Mengele<sup>25</sup> variety) never exactly explained what were the contours of the oft-hailed Gujarat experiment or pattern. Some results are visible to any observer who can then deduce the elements of the experiment.

- a) The creation of a pan-Hindu identity and pan-Hindu organisation<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> **Josef Mengele** (March 16, 1911–February 7, 1979) was a Nazi German physician who performed experiments that were condemned as murderously sadistic on prisoners in Auschwitz during World War II. He personally selected over 400,000 prisoners to die in gas chambers in Auschwitz. After the war, he escaped Germany and lived covertly abroad until his eventual accidental death in Brazil, which was later confirmed using DNA testing on his remains. (From Wikipedia)

<sup>26</sup> This is a dream of all votaries of *Hindutva* from the earliest times. Savarkar too constantly advocates and strives for a pan Hindu unity and pan Hindu organisation. In fact, his opposition to caste discrimination is based on the premise that caste creates internal fissiparous divisions within the Hindu fold and thus prevents the creation of a pan Hindu identity, vision, and organisation.

- b) The mobilisation of the Other Backward Castes (OBC) and the recruitment of Adivasis and Dalits to the cause of *Hindutva*
- c) A total communalisation of the society – with strong anti-Christian and anti-Muslim sentiments among the majority community
- d) A breakdown of social interaction amongst different communities – interruption of even day-to-day exchanges related to work etc.
- e) Total economic boycott of the minority communities – affecting trade, employment, investment
- f) Geographical demarcation of the communities – virtually creation of ghettos in the cities and ethnic cleansing in the rural and semi-urban areas
- g) Active and planned destruction of all notions, symbols, and practices of plural, composite culture
- h) A clear notice to the minorities that they were secondary residents/ inhabitants – not full citizens – surviving in the state only at the mercy and tolerance of the majority community in general and the *Sangh Parivar* in particular
- i) Creation of contempt for any notions of tolerance and coexistence as also rationality and liberal attitudes towards life
- j) Pressure on the civil society organisations – particularly those defending human & democratic rights, minority rights, and secular principles
- k) Demonisation of the civil society organisations and communal interpretation of their stances and activities (“anti-Hindu financed by foreign Muslim and Christian agencies”)
- l) Physical intimidation of civil society organisations and of other organisations not in agreement with the *Sangh Parivar*, as also of concerned individuals
- m) Invocation of a Hindu Gujarat and a national pride of Gujarat – creation of dreams of a resurgent glorious Gujarat opposed, at least implicitly, to secular India
- n) Glorification of violence – of direct violent action against the 'enemy other'
- o) The notion of a strict control of public culture including valorisation

of authoritarianism and obedience; this includes cultural policing – and attempts to impose (a single variety of) Hindu cultural norms particularly on youth and women

- p) Utilisation of the state machinery for unconstitutional activities – for example, survey of minorities, recording of inter-religious marriages
- q) Subversion of administrative machinery and processes to create a RSS dominated state apparatus essentially to mean an end to 'rule of law' in favour of a perpetual and flexible notion of natural justice – always in favour of the ruling community
- r) Subversion or devaluation of the judicial machinery and processes
- s) Suppression of all dissent – through any means possible – often violence that includes murder of dissidents even within the ruling party
- t) A notion of the all-powerful state – in control of all things – and in perpetual war with the enemies of the society – located outside the society – hence demanding a total obedience and subjugation of the individual in matters particularly political
- u) The responses of the CM to the onset of the carnage of 2002 and its most revolting incidents – the famous statement on 'natural' Newtonian reaction to every action – clearly exhibit the other fascist obsession – with nature in place of reason
- v) Intolerance of the notions of secularism (and perhaps also representative democracy based on universal suffrage) enshrined in the Constitution of India
- w) Projection – perhaps unwitting – of Gujarat as Nation with references to the Hindu Rashtra of Gujarat, pride, and glory of Gujarat etc
- x) The projection of the CM as the one leader – today of Gujarat, tomorrow of the entire nation and projection of all capacities and powers on to him

The BJP is in power in Gujarat for over a decade. It won a massive victory in the assembly elections held after the Carnage of 2002. It did suffer some setbacks in the parliamentary elections of 2004 but did not witness any serious erosion of its support base. The BJP in Gujarat perhaps ties up more organically and smoothly with the RSS than

elsewhere in the country. The modicum of autonomy of the legislative wing is also not present in Gujarat. Gujarat – or the middle class of Gujarat in particular – lionises the CM of Gujarat – held responsible for the Carnage by most observers – often in opposition to the 'compromising' national leadership.<sup>27</sup>

This as has been argued is the dream of the Sangh Parivar for the entire country. It was somehow realised to an extent in Gujarat.

---

<sup>27</sup>The actions of the Gujarat CM, Narendra Modi, often seem unbelievable. The National Minorities Commission recently appointed a three person committee to directly examine and investigate the conditions of the victims of Carnage 2002 because the Government of Gujarat did not reply to repeated queries. The eminent members of the committee were Michael Pinto, Dileep Padgaonkar, and Zoya Hassan. They found that there still exist 47 camps for the persons dislocated by the Carnage housing 5703 persons. The conditions in the camps are abominable. Even basic amenities have not been provided to the inmates. – In Ahmedabad one camp is set up next to the garbage dump of the city. The Government of Gujarat has provided only Rs 41 crores in compensation in the past four years against a loss of property of Rs 687 crores – a whopping seven per cent. In addition the inmates are harassed with numerous false cases and sometimes tortured by the police. The Government does not provide even electricity to the people living in the camps. It does not allow others – including NGOs to provide better shelters and amenities. These people are treated as detainees in a concentration camp. The Government of Gujarat even sent back Rs 19 crores that came from the central government for provision of relief to these victims. The nauseating fact is that this man is considered an ideal CM, a model to be emulated, the fountainhead of progress and honour of Gujarat. Not only the *Sangh Parivar*, even other parties including the NCP have praised him on occasions. Once again this indicates the state of mind in Gujarat – where the non Hindu is treated as a sub-human, the way the Nazis treated the Jews. (See Editorial in **Daily Loksatta** – the Marathi newspaper of the Indian Express Group – of October 26, 2006 for these details).

**Appendix 02:**Delhi: 1984, Gujarat: 2002

BJP and the *Sangh Parivar* counter any mention of Gujarat Carnage with strident mention of the killings of Sikhs in 1984, particularly in Delhi, following the assassination of Mrs Indira Gandhi. (They are not the only people who hold this against the *Congress* – many secular democrats also do that.) The massacre of the Sikhs was despicable and beastly. It was also essentially a communal act. The killer mobs victimised an entire community or any non-specific members of that community for an act committed by some specific members of that community. Members of the ruling party (then *Congress*) reportedly participated actively in the massacres. The law and order machinery remained a spectator for at least a couple of days.

The anti Sikh riots of 1984 were however different from the Gujarat Carnage in some important respects. The riots took place while there was a power vacuum. Mrs. Gandhi was dead and a new prime minister was not yet firmly in office. There was some uncertainty and confusion in the government. The riots were not pre-planned. They would not have taken place without the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi. The earlier political activities of some of the Sikh organisations – the separatist movement for Khalistan - had not given rise to any real communal tension between the Sikhs and the Hindus. The atrocities were horrendous but the security forces decisively controlled the situation after the chaos of the first two days. The sins of the *Congress* in connection with the 1984 violence are many. In the first instance was the unfortunate remark by Rajiv Gandhi when he had just taken over as Prime Minister about the earth shaking when a giant tree uproots violently. Moreover, the *Congress* never apologised to the Sikh community for the massacre of and other atrocities on innocent members of the community. (The apology has come in 2005!) It did not express regrets for the violence. It also did not demonstratively remove the leaders reasonably accused of involvement in the violence from positions of power within the government or the organisation, at least immediately. It did not

prosecute and punish the guilty. It did not adequately compensate the victims. The inquiry commissions failed to deliver justice to the victims of the violence. The wounds festered due to a denial of justice. It is however also true that the leaders of the government or the party did not justify the massacre or call for the continuation of the violence. Even when the politicians indulged in violence, the administration did not participate in it. At worst, it was guilty of paralysis and confused inaction for two days. The *Congress* did not term the Sikhs an enemy community – either directly or indirectly. It did not victimise the community as a whole, did not attempt to do so. In spite of a secessionist movement by a section of the Sikh community that even indulged in terrorist violence (against uninvolved, unarmed, non-combatant, non-specific, civilians) the *Congress* did not unleash any overt or covert communal campaign against the Sikh community. The government did allow the security forces to run amok in Punjab and commit gross and gory violations of human rights – mainly wanton killings of mostly innocent young men. This was gross state terrorism at its worst. The government also made efforts at a healing touch subsequently. Official machinery did investigate the human rights violations despite protests of police officials, and punished at least some of the guilty officials. This is by no means enough. It shows however that the state in India, or in Punjab, had not adopted a communal policy. The Sikhs were hurt and alienated by numerous government actions but the government did not in a communal manner hound them or victimise them. Even the *Congress* did not term the Sikh community anti-national or ask it to constantly prove its national loyalty despite the cross border connections of the secessionist terrorists. These features differentiate the 1984 massacres from the Gujarat Carnage 2002. The *Congress* is capable of opportunism including the adoption of a soft attitude towards communal acts and forces. It did not however adopt a communal programme against the Sikh community then or later. Social relations between the two communities or the economic activities of the Sikhs also did not collapse after the violence. There was neither ethnic cleansing nor any ghettoisation.