

The Genocidal Pogrom in Gujarat: Anatomy of Indian Fascism

Statement by Maitree on the Gujarat Communal Violence

Maitree, a network of women's rights groups, NGOs and individual activists functioning in West Bengal, is registering its protest against the large scale devastations and communal violence in Gujarat. The developments in Gujarat and in Ayodhya for the last one month make it clear that this violence is not a riot in the traditional sense, but an extremely planned, systematic, state sponsored, and one-sided pogrom.

We do not hesitate to condemn unequivocally the Godhra killings. We do however find it necessary to point out certain things. Godhra, a town where Hindus and Muslims are equal in number in a province that has been for a decade or more the laboratory of the Hindutva forces, has long been a powder keg. Why did the administration react so slowly in such a place? Was it mere inefficiency, or, in the light of later events, did it imply something more? Why does the Gujarat government keep silent about the repeated provocative behaviour of the kar sevaks to Muslims, along the stations which the Sabarmati Express passed? The BJP government of Gujarat, as well as the NDA government at the Centre, have attributed the communal violence which broke out in Ahmedabad and other places on and from 28th February 2002, to the anger of the Hindus over the gruesome burning of *ram sewaks* in Godhra in the early morning of 27th February. The "spontaneous outburst" of the people following the massacre of the VHP activists, they argue, reached such proportions because of the 'failure' of the Opposition parties to condemn the incident unequivocally as well as the role of the national media which publicized 'one sided stories'. The Home Minister has also commended the role of the Narendra Modi government in the Parliament, in having created a record of sorts by controlling the violence within '72 hours'. This theory of a spontaneous outburst of popular Hindu anger contrasted to the pre-planned massacre of VHP 'pilgrims' by ISI funded Islamic fundamentalists, lies at the core of the overt and covert justifications of the pogroms, put forward by the RSS-VHP-BD-BJP along with some of their NDA allies.

For close to two decades, the most organized and concerted efforts have been made by the Hindutva forces – more openly by the VHP and BD with BJP and RSS in the background but with full support – to communalise civil society, polity and administration and educational institutions. During this period, communal riots have at regular intervals broken out in different parts of the State. Modi himself has been the principal source and rationaliser of the pogrom. In 1992, during the Surat riots, he is said to have been the mastermind behind atrocities against women, reported at that time by a joint women's team. After September 11, 2001, he said all Muslims may not be terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims.

The Gujarat pogroms were planned and carried out with massive state sponsorship. Ministers are reported to have held meetings berating people for not taking part in violence, while attempts at solidarity action have been blocked. Thousands of LPG cylinders were carted off and used to burn down Muslim areas with impunity, and with no resistance from the police. A number of reports confirm the assistance given by the police to local VHP-BD leaders in storming Muslim areas with the help of thousands strong mobs. The mobs had full details about Muslim houses, Muslim residents and shops to big hotels and made selective attacks, with utmost care not to touch or damage Hindu houses or properties or businesses. A factor in Gujarat's violence is a trend over the past two years of the hiring of young men, on high salaries, by the Bajrang Dal for the express purpose of wielding the *talwar* and the *trishul*. In short, there has been the creation of a trained, private militia.

The worst instance of such an attack was at *Naroda Pattiya* where a big settlement of Muslims of about 25,000 inhabitants was completely destroyed by the rioters. When some of the Muslim youth tried to

resist the mob, the police fired at them and even killed some. Eyewitness after eyewitness in the relief camps described gory incidents of children being burnt alive and women being raped. One expectant woman's belly was cut open, her foetus wrenched out and dashed to the ground. Indeed, reports from everywhere attest to the excessive brutalities including sexual violence against women and children and burning alive of helpless people. In view of this, the government claim of only 70 dead in Naroda is a palpable falsehood.

For most of March, the Gujarat Government went on arresting only Muslims under the POTO, and in persisting to give negligible aid to the victims cooped up in the camps. While Rs. 2 lakh compensation has been announced for the kin of the Godhra incident, for the thousands who have died in Gujarat there is no such announcement. None of the VHP-BD hooligans or the police who assisted them, or the ministers reportedly behind them, have been touched.

The VHP, through a coordinated campaign, has been trying to economically cripple the Muslims as a community. The communal carnage systematically carried out is a part of the larger strategy namely to provide a model of a pure Hindutva ideology driven Government determined to carry out the RSS ideology and warnings to the minorities.

We demand:

- ☆ The immediate dismissal of the Gujarat Government;
- ☆ Pending all rehabilitation, the immediate provision of adequate aid to the relief camps, including the supply of food, clothes, medicine, the setting up of adequate sanitary facilities;
- ☆ Special protection for new-born babies and their nursing mothers in the relief camps;
- ☆ The abolition of community distinctions in the matter of providing relief and rehabilitation, and also in the matter of providing compensation;
- ☆ The banning of all private militias and the arrest of their ringleaders;
- ☆ Immediate steps for the poorest layers, for example the daily wage-earners who have not been getting wages for close to a month;
- ☆ The setting up of a time-bound judicial commission of investigation under one or more serving Supreme Court judges;
- ☆ The registering of cases under criminal law against every minister, official and police personnel mentioned by survivors/eyewitnesses;
- ☆ The resignation of L. K. Advani, Union Home Minister, for the support and patronage extended to the Modi Government;
- ☆ The creation of an atmosphere of trust so that the Muslim victims of the pogroms can return to their areas, and where that is not feasible, the provision by the state of alternative land so that they can be resettled;
- ☆ The scrapping of POTO;
- ☆ Immediate action under existing criminal laws against the VHP and BD and any other organisations promoting hate campaigns, and specific action against all leaders implicated in violence.