

# The Genocidal Pogrom in Gujarat: Anatomy of Indian Fascism

## Introduction

The diabolical and tragic burning of bogie S6 in Godhra on the morning of 27<sup>th</sup> February seemed to fit into the classical and historical pattern of communal rioting in the area and in Gujarat generally, wherein a provocation on one side provided the trigger for a terrible and utterly unjustified over-reaction by members of the other religious community. There is really no basis for the claims that this was a deep-seated conspiracy, either foreign or domestic inspired. Nor has this claim been proved in the close to two months that have gone by. But nor was this incident to end, as in the past, with sporadic violence on both sides confined to one locality, with perhaps a little spread.

The forces of the fascist right had been ready for a long time. They picked up the incident to unleash a level of violence that is unique in Indian history since independence and the immediate violence of partition. One way of understanding this uniqueness, as Achin Vanaik suggests, is to see how different Gujarat 2002 is from the anti-Sikh riots of 1984, since these are the two worst examples of large-scale communal killings in post-independence India. While there had been an Akhali-Congress rivalry, as well as the rise of the small, but vocal Khalistani movement, and though Operation Bluestar magnified the communal divide on both sides, there was no sustained and systematic creation of communal hostility. In the present case, there exists a fanatic Hindu communal cadre force fighting steadily against the supposed Muslim enemy.

The 1984 violence was of much shorter duration than the violence in Gujarat 2002, and was brought to a halt much more rapidly. In respect of the nature and degree of brutality, both cases exhibit shocking atrocities - rapes, burnings, and so on - against even women and children in a context of mob violence. But even here, the sheer frequency and scale of such atrocities, and the depths of sadism to which violence in Gujarat has descended, is far greater.

In Gujarat, communal violence from February 28 onwards involved far deeper and wider levels of complicity of government structures, civilian and police, as well as of party/front leaderships. In both, the complicity starts at the very top and continues all the way down. In the last 4 years, the Sangh combine has transformed the Gujarat level state structures in a way which shows with utmost clarity what their proposed "Hindu Rashtra" will bring. Between the Godhra

incident and the outbreak of mass violence all over the province, there was a 24-hour gap. This was more than enough time to take all police and law-and-order measures (including preventive arrests and detentions) to ensure that the outbreak of violence would either be halted or minimised.

Finally, if the 1984 riots are set in a longer time perspective, it is clear that the insecurity felt by Sikhs is qualitatively different from that felt by the Muslim minority in India today. anti-Sikh communalism has not been sought to be publicly legitimised in the way that anti-Muslim communalism has been done. The view that anti-Muslim sentiments are but a reaction to a Muslim villainy that has "hurt Hindu sentiments" is one that has been assiduously propagated and widely accepted. VHP international general secretary Praveen Togadia now speaks openly of a "Final Settlement" of the Hindu-Muslim question — much like the Nazis' "Final Solution" of the Jewish question. The Gujarat massacre fits the definition of "genocide" in the United Nations-sponsored 1948 Genocide Convention. According to this Convention, 'Genocide' means

"acts with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group", such as "killing members of the group"; "causing serious bodily or mental harm"; "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction", or "imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group"; etc (Article II). When Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee turns on others and says no sermons are necessary from abroad, let us remember the complexities involved. Certainly, imperialism, and institutions dominated by imperialism, will use terms like genocide selectively. But does the US crime of Hiroshima mean that Goering, and a host of other Nazis sentenced to death at Nuremberg were not guilty of the Holocaust? There can be no question of urging any form of international state level intervention in India. If Bush decided to turn his guns on India that would be because US imperialism's calculations demanded it, not because he had realised the gravity of Vajpayee's crimes. But for the Indian and international working class movement, for all progressives, it is necessary to understand exactly what is happening in India. It is pogroms at the level of genocide. And it must be fought all out, including by progressive, to start with proletarian, internationalist protests.

Much of this collection deals with the facts of the case. We are grateful to our colleagues at [www.sabrang.com](http://www.sabrang.com), and *Communalism Combat*, particularly to Teesta Setalvad. Many of the reports are reproductions of reports sent by them regularly during the most terrible days, when much of the country could only look aghast. Analyses and articles of different kinds have also been reproduced courtesy of SACW [an informal, independent & non-profit citizens wire service run by South Asia Citizens Web (<http://www.mnet.fr/-aiindex>)]. Many of the articles, much information, are reproduced from these two sites, and we acknowledge them here, in case some particular pieces do not carry, by any oversight, the necessary acknowledgement. We are also reproducing several reports from Ahmedabad, Vadodara etc, notably those by PUCI-Shanti Abhiyan, by Arch-Vahini, etc so that readers understand how different sections of people fared. Apart from showing the pre-planned nature of the pogroms, these reports bring out certain class and gender dimensions. But above all, they show how deeply rooted the Sangh Parivar's ideology has become, in Gujarat in particular. But the success of the Sangh Parivar in spreading its ideology and agenda should be gauged, not merely from the number of people in the organised mobs that butchered, raped and looted; but equally, in the degree of ease with which the strategy of creating a two-faced approach was swallowed. The rampaging VHP-BD were contrasted with the supposedly sober, secular Vajpayee. Even the proposal of the Kanchi Shankaracharya was hailed as a good compromise, neglecting its imposition of communal identities and its call to negotiate with the very criminals who were then carrying out the pogroms. It is therefore necessary to understand how this transformation has come about, by tracing the evolution of the Sangh strategy alongside efforts within the secular and progressive camp to understand and fight it.

However, while talking about the secular and progressive camp, and about anti-communist struggles, it is necessary to take a clear class approach. This does not mean the absurd ultraleftism according to which all bourgeois parties are communist in the same way, or that there is no significant difference between bourgeois democracy and fascism and that all bourgeois parties are fascists to some degree or other. The main currents of Indian leftism, unfortunately, have imbibed heavy doses of Stalinism and never got rid of it (unless it was to keel over into a purely Social-Democratic position). In the 1920s and 1930s, the Stalinist approach to fascism swung from one gross error to its polar opposite. During the struggle against fascism in Germany, the Communist Party of Germany and the Communist International proclaimed that the Social Democracy and Fascism were not antipodes, but twins, and that "social fascism" was even more dangerous. The German Stalinist leader Ernst Thaelmann proclaimed fatuously, After Hitler – Us!

Leon Trotsky, from his exile in the island of Prinkipo in Turkey, was waging a steady struggle against this disastrous Stalinist policy. In an article immediately after the Nazi capture of power, he commented: "Out of the vast literature devoted to the question of fascism it is enough to refer to the speech of Thaelmann, official leader of the German Communist Party, who, at the plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International in April 1931, denounced the "pessimists," that is, those who knew how to foresee, in the following terms: "We have not allowed the moods of panic to rout us.... We have soberly and firmly established the fact that September 14 [1930] was in a certain sense Hitler's best day, and that afterwards will come not better days but worse. This evaluation which we made of the development of this

party is confirmed by the events.... Today, the fascists have no reasons for laughing." Referring to the creation of defence groups by the Social Democracy, Thaelmann demonstrated in the same speech that these groups differ in no respect from the shock troops of the National Socialists and that both of them are likewise preparing to annihilate Communism.

Today, Thaelmann is under arrest. Faced with triumphant reaction, the Bolshevik-Leninists are in the same ranks as Thaelmann. But the policy of Thaelmann is the policy of Stalin, that is, the official policy of the Comintern. It is precisely this policy which is the cause of the complete demoralization of the party at the moment of danger, when the leaders lose their heads, when the party members, unaccustomed to thinking, fall prostrate, when the principal historic positions are surrendered without a fight. A false political theory bears within itself its own punishment. The strength and the obstinacy of the apparatus only augment the dimensions of the catastrophe."

Having contributed immensely to the disarming of the working class through its criminal sectarian policy, one that ultraleft variants of Stalinism hail from time to time even now, Stalinism then swung over to an equally criminal policy of class collaborationism in the name of United Front. In France and Spain, working class struggles were strangled by insisting that anti-fascist united fronts meant class goals of the workers had to be subordinated to class goals of the democratic, anti-fascist bourgeoisie. Responding to them, Trotsky wrote: "According to the Socialists and Stalinists, i.e., the Mensheviks of the first and second instances, the Spanish revolution was called upon to solve only its "democratic" tasks, for which a united front with the "democratic" bourgeoisie was indispensable. From this point of view, any and all attempts of the proletariat to go beyond the limits of bourgeois democracy are not only premature but also fatal. Furthermore, on the agenda stands not the revolution but the struggle against insurgent Franco.

Fascism, however, is not feudal but bourgeois reaction. A successful fight against bourgeois reaction can be waged only with the forces and methods of the proletariat revolution. Menshevism, itself a branch of bourgeois thought, does not have and cannot have any inkling of these facts....The theoreticians of the Popular Front do not essentially go beyond the first rule of arithmetic, that is, addition: "Communists" plus Socialists plus Anarchists plus liberals add up to a total which is greater than their respective isolated numbers. Such is all their wisdom. However, arithmetic alone does not suffice here. One needs as well at least mechanics. The law of the parallelogram of forces applies to politics as well. In such a parallelogram, we know that the resultant is shorter, the more component forces diverge from each other. When political allies tend to pull in opposite directions, the resultant proves equal to zero.

A bloc of divergent political groups of the working class is sometimes completely indispensable for the solution of common practical problems. In certain historical circumstances, such a bloc is capable of attracting the oppressed petty-bourgeois masses whose interests are close to the interests of the proletariat. The joint force of such a bloc can prove far stronger than the sum of the forces of each of its component parts. On the contrary, the political alliance between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, whose interests on basic questions in the present epoch diverge at an angle of 180 degrees, as a general rule is capable only of paralysing the revolutionary force of the proletariat."

In the section of this book devoted to the evolution of a Marxist analysis of the politics of the Sangh parivar, an attempt has been made to situate the argument about their being fascists away from mere name calling or argument by analogy. An analysis of class forces is essential if we want to understand what fascism in India means. While it means in all seriousness an all out offensive on people holding different non-Hindu religious beliefs, that is not the totality nor even the essence of fascism. It is a movement which wants to replace one type of bourgeois state (bourgeois democracy) by another type which is utterly authoritarian and where, therefore, the ruling class will find it much easier to atomise the working class in its search for restructuring of the capitalist economy in the era of privatisation, globalisation, etc. Marxists or would be Marxists wedded to the model of a two-stage theory of revolution end up failing to make an adequate class analysis of the situation. As long as it is a question of concretely resisting the fascists, or taking public action, there can be no disputing the fact that certain bourgeois figures and groups may, from time to time, join in. It is incontestable, however, that such joining in will be hesitant. Congress(I) activists joined hands with BJP leaders in the violence at the Sabarmati Ashram,

when Medha Patkar's presence was used as a plea to break up a peace meeting initiative. But when it is proposed to build so-called United Fronts where the working class is urged to abandon its class demands so that "all concerned" can resist the Sangh parivar in a spirit of camaraderie, one must point out that new betrayals are being planned. Any **such** united front will compel the working class to submit to IMF-WTO terms, and to the terms of the Indian big bourgeoisie. If there is resistance to the fascists, if business suffers, it is not impossible that the big bourgeoisie would prefer the "United Front". But the United Front in such a case would have to toe the ruling class economic line. Even if marginal modifications are made, there would be no fundamental difference, as a glance at the functioning of the "improved left front" under Buddhadev Bhattacharjee shows. We do not thereby seek to renounce the united front with the left Front or to equate the Left Front government with the BJP government. But we do want to explain to our readers that a working class united front is a front between people who disagree on other issues but feel that they can still combine on the particular issue concerned. A united front against fascism is essential, because we must unite in defence and resistance. But an extension of that united front to a governmental option and a non-aggression pact with the bourgeois parties is suicidal.

The gender dimensions of the Gujarat violence require fuller presentation. In this collection, we were able to bring out one report by PUCL, but not the much more detailed report by a number of women activists entitled *The Survivors Speak*. These reports all show the centrality of gender violence. The myth of Hindu women being raped was deliberately spread after the Godhra incident. The "self-respect" of a 'community' is supposed to reside in its women. The rape, mass rape, gang rape, molestation, stripping and burning of a very large number of Muslim women, with utmost brutality, was not the work of an accidental mob suddenly turned frenzied. It was the work of forces who have been trained in this. Many years ago, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar excoriated Hindus for praising Shivaji's humane treatment of the daughter of the governor of Kalyan, advocating a so-called "tit-for-tat" policy. At the heart of the Hindutva myth-history is the tale of the thousand years long depredation by the lustful Muslim male, constantly out to demolish the pride of the Hindu community by raping "their" women. The appropriate response, according to the fascist brand of communalism, is the counter-rape of Muslim women. It is worth remembering that this is a systematic weapon. When nuns were raped at Jhabua, a prominent VHP leader had remarked that this was the response of patriotic Indians to conversions. This time too, a spurious patriotism was invoked by talking of the ISI hand – unproved after two months. A spurious patriotism is still being invoked by telling the world to shut up and not express its sense of shock at what is happening in Gujarat.

Finally, given the centrality of history in the creation of the Hindutva discourse, we have added a few articles on history and Hindutva politics. Many of these were written at specific junctures, and in many cases the authors might revise their arguments. This anthology, however, is being viewed essentially as an act of political intervention. It is by reaching out to wider audiences, and not by simply producing more refined analyses, that we can hope to counter the onrush of the fascists.

As we go to press, the situation has become, in many ways, grimmer than before. There are constant attempts by the Gujarat administration to declare that normalcy has been restored, and to force the camps where Muslims have taken shelter to close down. This will have the immediate effect of further making those Muslims vulnerable, and bring about an exodus from Gujarat. One needs to remember that some 100,000 were forced to migrate from Bombay after the 1993 violence. In addition, such actions have the further aim of "showing" that since normalcy is restored, elections can be held. It is an attempt by the Sangh Parivar to put its NDA allies in place and to declare that fully communalised, fascist style elections are now going to be the norm if democratic elections do not return the BJP to power, as they have not done in UP, Uttaranchal, etc.

At the same time, the media has come under sharp attacks. On one hand there have been attacks by Modi, by Advani and others, for presenting the truth. The media has even been told that sometimes it is necessary not to present the truth. On the other hand, along with verbal abuse and pressure, there have been physical attacks, right from 28<sup>th</sup> February. On 28<sup>th</sup> February, Bhargava Parikh of ZEE TV along with his cameraman, was attacked. Dibang from Aaj Tak was attacked near the Kabadi Market on March 2. Rajdeep Sardesai and Star TV were threatened and attacked. ANS staff was attacked. Two correspondents of NDTV, Sanjay Singh and Sanjay Rokhade were held at Bhavnagar for five hours and

traumatised by a band of Bajrang Dal goons who kept threatening possible death for them. On 3<sup>rd</sup> April, the *Asian Age* reporter Sonal Kellogg, along with the reporter of a Surat-based daily, was beaten up by the police in the Mariam Bibi Ni Chawli area in Gomtipur. When she complained to the deputy commissioner of Police [Zone V] RJ Savani, he simply shrugged it off with the response that "it might have been a mistake." When she protested to the Police Commissioner PC Pandey, he was dismissive. Five days later, on 8<sup>th</sup> April, the Ahmedabad police assaulted about two dozen reporters and photographers at the Gandhi Ashram. The journalists, who had assembled to cover two peace meetings, including one attended by Medha Patkar, were beaten up ruthlessly. Leading his men was Deputy Commissioner of Police VM Parghi. Three of the media persons, including *The Indian Express* photographer Harsh Shah, NDTV cameraman Pranav Joshi and E-TV reporter Harshal Pandya were seriously injured. Pranav had to be admitted to the ICU at a private hospital. On the other side there has been the communal media, on which one report is included.

It will take a lot of effort to fight a force like the BJP-RSS-VHP. It has already captured a number of institutions and key positions in state and civil society. It has a dedicated, utterly fanatical, cadre. Even in the short run, it will not be possible to isolate the Hindutva forces unless the perpetrators of the Gujarat violence are severely punished for their grave crimes. Clearly, the Sangh Parivar has collectively switched to an even more virulent form of Hindutva, one that bases itself on a contemporary version of the "Two-Nation" theory. Its shameless defence of Modi, its coercive tactics in the NDA, its prolonged refusal to discuss Gujarat under Rule 184 in the Lok Sabha, and its wholly unapologetic, brazen, attitude towards the continuing climate of fear, intimidation and terror in Gujarat all confirm this. To think that mere parliamentary machinations can head this off is utterly false. We are not anarchists, and we acknowledge the necessity of parliamentary struggles. But we question strategies of anti-fascism that rely on the institutions of the bourgeois state. What is needed is to intensify anti-communal propaganda, to resist the fascists, certainly to demand that the institutions of state be cleansed of the fascist elements, but above all to intensify proletarian struggles – and these not in a reductionist, economistic way, but structured to gather the oppressed under working class hegemony. At the same time, this struggle has to involve, also, the struggle against capitalist globalisation. The fascists are not merely promising to exterminate Muslims. If Indian capitalism is willing to put up with this price, they are also promising to ram through anti-labour measures and speed up the neoliberal offensive. The communal divide also divides the working class, and anti-Sangh, anti-fascist struggles also have to be anti-capitalist struggles.

Finally, it is inevitable, that if the left and working class forces fail to wage this struggle, then the threatened Muslims will seek protection from "their" community heads. This will only strengthen minority communalism, which in turn will be utilised by the Sangh Combine to further bolster their own cause by transforming more people who are Hindu by faith into people who accept Hindutva politics. The struggle is difficult, and it must be waged at once.