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**Communal Riots in Gujarat: The State at Risk?**

by

Christophe Jaffrelot

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# Communal Riots in Gujarat: The State at Risk?

CHRISTOPHE JAFFRELOT

*Centre d'Études et de Recherches Internationales, Paris<sup>1</sup>*

## INTRODUCTION

Violence between Hindus and Muslims is a structural given of Indian society. One finds its traces very early in the country's history<sup>2</sup>, a fact that can drive the analyst to explain the phenomenon by referring to the incompatibility of Hindu and Muslim cultures.<sup>3</sup> However, those historians interested in the phenomenon have always emphasized the economic dimension of the rivalry between Hindus and Muslims, which springs from territorial conflicts or commercial competition.<sup>4</sup> Among sociologists and political scientists, this approach has found favour with many authors more or less inclined to Marxist categories.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot is Director of the *Centre d'Études et de Recherches Internationales*, Paris.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the description of Ibn Battuta dating from the 14th century (Ibn Battuta, *Voyages d'Ibn Battuta*, Paris, Anthropos (1969), p. 80).

<sup>3</sup> Louis Dumont is not far from a culturalist reading of this kind when evoking "l'hétérogénéité sociale définitive des deux communautés" (see *Homo Hierarchicus*, Paris, Gallimard (1966), p. 382).

<sup>4</sup> See in particular, C. Bayly, "The pre-history of 'Communalism'? Religious conflict in India, 1700-1800", *Modern Asian Studies* 19 (2), 1995, pp. 190-91.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, I. Ahmed, "Political economy of communalism in contemporary India", *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2.6.1984, pp. 903-906 and A.A. Engineer, "The causes of communal riots in the post-partition period in India", in A.A. Engineer (ed.), *Communal riots in post-independence India*, Bombay, Sangam Books, 1984, pp. 33-41.

The interpretation of violence between Hindus and Muslims that I have suggested during the last wave of riots between 1989 and 1992 is very different.<sup>6</sup> This interpretation values the role of politics in two complementary aspects, the ethno-religious ideology and the exploitation of communal issues by political parties.

Indeed, research on communal riots in India after 1947 suggests that these riots largely originate from a distorted idea – ideology – of the Other; the Hindu though representing an overwhelming majority, often perceive of the Muslims as a ‘fifth column’ threatening them from within Indian society. And the Hindu nationalist parties, which have codified this ideological pattern, employ it for electoral means in the course of campaigns laying the ground for the outbreak of violence. These parties have, in fact, learned to mobilise Hindus against Muslims on the basis of real or presumed ‘sacred’ issues since the emergence of electoral politics in colonial times. Their goal is to provoke such kinds of riots in order to polarise the electorate along the religious cleavage more effectively.

This explanatory model of Hindu-Muslim riots has to be verified again in the light of the Gujarat riots of 2002. Moreover, these riots also commit us to reconfirm the role of the Hindu nationalist party. The latter has to be weighted even more heavily due to the events in Gujarat, for the party held political power in that State. This state of things explains the rather exceptional intensity of the Gujarat riots. Because, this time, communal violence was not so much a reflection of the common logic of communal riots in India, but rather the result of an organised pogrom with the approval of the State acting not only with the electoral agenda in mind, but also in view of a veritable ethnic cleansing. Beyond that, the intensity of the riots has also demonstrated that this kind of violence has triggered a feedback in society even among groups so far less inclined to ethnic nationalism like, for example, the tribals. But there is an effect of yet another political strategy at work, which reminds us of the ideological core of our explanatory model: the more and more thorough diffusion of Hindutva in reaction to a fear of Jihad.

#### GODHRA, 27 FEBRUARY 2002: A RIOT PROVOKED

Gujarat has long been known for its communal violence.<sup>7</sup> The riot in Ahmedabad in 1969, which left approximately 630 dead, remained the most serious riot in India after Partition until the Bhagalpur riot, twenty years later, which was part of the wave of clashes between Muslims and Hindus from the Ramjanmabhoomi movement set on building a Hindu temple on the Babri Masjid site in Ayodhya. But this same movement also brought Gujarat to the fore: throughout the 1980-1990s, this state counted the most riot victims per inhabitant. In 1990, L.K. Advani's *Rath Yatra* sparked riots that left about 220 dead in this state. In 1992, the

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<sup>6</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, “ Les émeutes entre hindous et musulmans. Essai de hiérarchisation des facteurs culturels, économiques et politiques ”, *Cultures et Conflits*, n° 5, printemps 1992, pp. 25-53.

<sup>7</sup> Between 1970 and 2002, Gujarat experience, 443 Hindu-Muslim riots.

demolition of the Babri Masjid also set off a wave of violence that killed 325 people, mostly Muslims. The heightening of this phenomenon in the 1990s already reflected nationalist Hindu activism. The clashes in 2002 must also be analyzed as a political phenomenon.

Violence broke out on 27 February in Godhra, a district headquarters in eastern Gujarat. Fifty-seven Hindus were killed, including 25 women and 14 children, who were burned alive aboard the Sabarmati Express. The train was carrying back from Faizabad (Uttar Pradesh) nationalist Hindu activists who had travelled to Ayodhya to build a temple dedicated to the god Ram on the ruins of the Babri Masjid. A campaign to build this temple had been instigated by the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), a key element of the Hindu nationalist movement, within the context of the election campaign in Uttar Pradesh where the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), another component of this movement, was attempting to retain power by all possible means. The undertaking had once again been postponed through central government mediation and the judges' vigilance, which had increasingly frustrated the *kar sevaks* (literally "servers-in-action"), Hindu nationalist activists who had come to Ayodhya to erect the temple.

Those who were originally from Gujarat and were returning home aboard the Sabarmati Express had gathered together in a few coaches. They chanted Hindu nationalist songs and slogans throughout the entire voyage, all the while harassing Muslim passengers. One family was even made to get off the train for refusing to utter the *kar sevaks'* war cry: "*Jai Shri Ram!*" (Glory to Lord Ram!). More abuse occurred at the stop in Godhra: a Muslim shopkeeper was also ordered to shout "*Jai Shri Ram!*" He refused, and was assaulted until the *kar sevaks* turned on a Muslim woman with her two daughters. One of them was forced to board the train before it started going again.

The train had hardly left the station when one of the passengers pulled the emergency chain. It was yanked several times, until the train came to a halt in the middle of a Muslim neighborhood inhabited by Ghanchis, a community from which many of the Godhra street vendors hail. Anywhere from 500 to 2,000 of them, depending on the sources, surrounded the coaches occupied by the *kar sevaks* and attacked it with stones and torches. Coach S-6 caught fire, killing 57 people.

The anti-Hindu riot was thus a reaction to provocation from Hindu nationalist activists. The aftermath of the events clearly showed that the violence reached unprecedented proportions precisely because of the political strategy these Hindu nationalists employ.

## FROM RIOT TO POGROM: STATE-SPONSORED VIOLENCE

Narendra Modi, the BJP Chief Minister in Gujarat, is a former cadre member in the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) which spawned the Hindu nationalist movement, and where most of the VHP and BJP leaders got their start. Modi, known for his radical hostility toward Muslims, already on 27 February, orchestrated retaliation. Whereas Godhra District Collector had spent the day

explaining that the incident was not premeditated, Modi imposed his official version of the event that very evening, stating that it was a “*pre-planned violent act of terrorism*.”<sup>8</sup> In addition, Modi called together police officials at his home and gave them orders not to put down the Hindus who would inevitably react to the Godhra attack: the “Hindu backlash” was not only foreseeable, it was legitimate.<sup>9</sup> And that very evening, on the government's orders, the bodies were taken to Ahmedabad for a post-mortem and public ceremony. The arrival of the bodies at the Ahmedabad station was broadcast on television, causing considerable agitation among the Hindus, all the more so since the bodies were exhibited covered with a sheet. The following day, the VHP organized the shutdown of the city (*bandh*) with the support of the BJP. This mobilization established the conditions for a Hindu offensive in Ahmedabad.

But in addition to Godhra and Ahmedabad (two cities with histories steeped in communal strife),<sup>10</sup> other towns in Gujarat experienced clashes they were unacquainted with. On the evening of 28 February, Gandhinagar, the capital of Gujarat, located 30 km from Ahmedabad, was the scene of Hindu-Muslim rioting for the first time in its history. Twenty-six towns in all were subject to curfew. Ahmedabad and Godhra saw the most serious clashes, with 350 and 100 victims respectively in early March, according to official statistics. After these two cities came Mehsana (50 dead ) and Sabarkantha (40 dead).

Reviewing the sequence of events, even in a condensed version, gives an idea of the power of destruction that came over Gujarat during those few days. On 28 February, in Ahmedabad, in the Naroda Gaon and Naroda Pattiya areas, an armed hoard of several thousand people attacked Muslim houses and shops, killing 200. Six other neighborhoods in the city were subject to similar attacks on a lesser scale. Three other districts, Vadodara, Gandhinagar and Sabarkantha, were host to comparable violence. In the latter district, several settlements were the scene of clashes. Elsewhere, too, but to a lesser degree, the previously spared rural areas were involved.<sup>11</sup> The next day, on 1 March, mainly rural districts were added to the list of hotspots: Panchmahals, Mehsana, Kheda, Junagadh, Banaskantha, Patan, Anand and Narmada. On 2 March, Bharuch and Rajkot, which had yet to be affected by communal violence, were hit in turn. On the 4th, riots broke out in Surat, a town that had seen considerable Hindu-Muslim violence in the 1990s and was much less affected this time.

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted by *Communalism Combat*, March-April 2002, vol. 8, no. 77-78, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> See the report by the Concerned Citizens' Tribunal presided by Krishna Iyer.

<sup>10</sup> With 1,119 victims of Hindu-Muslim riots between 1950 and 1995, up to then Ahmedabad ranked just behind Bombay (1,137 dead) in this grim classification. It most likely took the lead in 2002 (See A. Varshney, *Ethnic conflict and civic life. Hindus and Muslims in India*, New Heaven/London, Yale University Press, 2002, p. 7).

<sup>11</sup> Hindu-Muslim riots for a long time remained basically an urban phenomenon in Gujarat and elsewhere: from 1950 to 1995, 80% of the victims of all the rioting in Gujarat were in Ahmedabad and Vadodara (A. Varshney, op. cit., p. 7).

## PREMEDITATED AND COORDINATED CLASHES

The clashes in Gujarat could not have spread so quickly and taken on such proportions unless they had been orchestrated by well-organized actors and the attackers' plan had been prepared prior to the events in Godhra. The evening of 27 February, two of Modi's ministers, Ashok Bhatt and Prabhatsingh Chauhan, along with 50 other *Sangh Parivar* officials, organized a rally in Lunawad, a village in Panchamahals, of which Gohad is district headquarters, to plan "reprisals."<sup>12</sup> As early as 28 February, 24 hours after the attack on the Sabarmati Express, and shortly after Modi stirred up the anger by repatriating the victims' bodies to Ahmedabad, the VHP *bandh* degenerated into a well-tuned orgy of violence: nothing was left to chance; it was a far cry from the spontaneous rioting Modi later described to excuse the Hindus.<sup>13</sup>

Actually, everything went according to a military-like plan in Ahmedabad and elsewhere.<sup>14</sup> The troops were perfectly disciplined and incredibly numerous: groups of attackers often included up to 10,000 men. These squads generally arrived in the Muslim neighborhoods by truckloads. They wore a basic uniform — the RSS khaki shorts and a saffron headband — and carried daggers and pitchforks as well as bottles of water to quench their thirst en route. The lists that the ringleaders had in hand attest to the premeditated nature of the assault: these indicated Muslim homes and shops, some of which bore Hindi names, thereby proving that investigation had actually been undertaken beforehand to ascertain the owner's identity. These lists — on computer print-outs — had partly been drawn up on the basis of voter registration lists, as a former VHP member himself explained.

That the entire plan had been carefully organized can also be inferred from the assiduous use the aggressors made of cellular telephones. They apparently reported regularly to a central headquarters and received their instructions from this same center. It is not entirely impossible that these headquarters had been simply set up in the police stations of the towns involved, or of the state itself, because a number of Hindu nationalist leaders took up residence there throughout the period of violence. Several senior civil servants — on condition of anonymity — admitted to National Human Rights Commission investigators that on 28 February, the Gujarat Interior Minister, Gordhan Zadafira, and Health Minister Ashok Bhatt directed the advance of the assailants from the "City police control room" of Ahmedabad. At

<sup>12</sup> See the report by the Concerned Citizens' Tribunal presided by Krishna Iyer.

<sup>13</sup> He even justified the most violent doings among them in these words: "The violence in Godhra was communal violence, the violence after that was 'secular violence'." Why did Modi claim the Hindu acts of vengeance were spontaneous? Because it is crucial for the Hindu nationalists to make people believe in the spontaneity of the masses. The VHP in fact published a manual to teach its activists to make planned riots appear as spontaneous acts of violence.

<sup>14</sup> The VHP president in Gujarat in fact stated that the Muslims shops in Ahmedabad were divided up the morning of 28 February. He added that the most active thugs in the violence were Waghri untouchables - which recalls the use of untouchables as real mercenaries during the Merut riots in the 1980s; the "payoff" came in the form of looting Muslim shops (rediff.com, 12 March 2002).

the same time, the Urban Development Minister, I.K. Jadeja, a close associate of Modi, had set up his headquarter in the Gujarat “State police control room” in Gandhinagar. All gave the police forces orders not to intervene.

The attackers were trained to kill and had planned their criminal undertaking. This was obvious in the use of gas cylinders that they had had shipped to their attack sites. The typical scenario of this new-style violence involved looting Muslim shops then blowing them up with these makeshift but extremely powerful bombs. Not only does the course of these operations show carefully planned organization, but they also indicate official state support. It would be impossible to transport that many men (and gas cylinders) with that many trucks without the benefit of state logistic support. Above all, the protected nature of the clashes over days, weeks, and even months can only be explained by active government cooperation.

This bias was tested beforehand by the Hindu nationalist activists, after their leaders had given them assurances: they set fire to a few automobiles in the vicinity of police stations to make sure their schemes could be carried out with no fear of punishment. This was almost always the case, given that the leaders of the party in power, the BJP, had quickly occupied central police headquarters. The administration — when it did care to act — was paralyzed. But in any event, since their rise to power in Gujarat, Hindu nationalists had already penetrated deep into the state apparatus, starting with the police. Hence the standard response, they gave to the Muslims who called them to their rescue : “We have no order to save you”<sup>15</sup>

Local BJP and VHP leaders were out in the streets alongside the attackers. Victims of their violence gave names and descriptions about which there can be no mistake. On the basis of these, the editor-in-chief of *Communalism Combat*, a secularist publication, revealed that charges had been filed against a BJP MP and four city councilors.<sup>16</sup> No tangible effective action was taken.

An indication that the Modi government wanted to see the clashes last, the army, which was already in the vicinity on 1 March — 12 columns with 600 men were stationed at the time in Ahmedabad and other hotspots in Gujarat — was not sent to the places where it could have been the most useful. Aside from a few “*flag marches*,” it had to settle for remaining on stand-by under the pretense, for instance, that no “official” was available to accompany the troop.

The state partiality also appeared blatantly in the treatment inflicted on the Muslims who took shelter in refugee camps. At the height of the violence, there were as many as 125,000 refugees in these camps. Officially, they still numbered 87,000 in April 2002, 66,000 of them in Ahmedabad alone. In three months, the government registered the return home of 73,500 refugees (52,500 in Ahmedabad) to pretend that law and order had been restored and that elections could be held. In any case, the authorities never took the necessary steps to help the refugees: most of the aid came from Muslim NGOs.

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<sup>15</sup> See, Human Rights Watch, “India, ‘We have no order to save you’, state participation and complicity in communal violence in Gujarat”, 14 (3), April 2003.

<sup>16</sup> Letter of Teesta Setalvad to Election Commission of India, 26 July 2002. E-mail communication.



## CLASHES IN RURAL GUJARAT: THE COMMUNALIZATION OF TRIBAL ZONES

Riots between Hindus and Muslims have traditionally been an urban phenomenon. This was all the more true in Gujarat where there are, moreover, proportionally more Muslims in cities than in the countryside (the share of Muslims living in rural areas is only 42 % in Gujarat compared to 65% for the national average). Yet the violence in 2002 spread to the villages and so, in many cases, to villages where very few Muslims resided. The districts of Mehsana and Gandhinagar, for instance, which have only 6.6 % and 2.9 % Muslim residents respectively according to the 2001 census, were heavily affected, even in the rural areas.

This singularity can be largely explained by the fact that the small Muslim minority is made up mainly of shopkeepers and moneylenders: unlike their coreligionists in the rest of India, the Gujarat Muslims have a small, fairly successful economic elite. This social class is primarily from the Bohra, Khoja and Memon castes. In many villages, these groups own several businesses and are the main moneylenders (*sahukar*), to whom peasants become indebted, sometimes to pay their daughter's dowry, sometimes to buy seed for the year. These Muslims were one of the attackers' prime targets. Often this target was pinpointed by Hindu nationalist activists who had come from the city. They exploited the peasants' resentment toward this small economic elite; they also lured them with the appeal of financial reward in the form of looting shops. This has led Dipankar Gupta to interpret the spread of rioting to rural areas in Gujarat as due mainly to economic reasons.<sup>17</sup> The study conducted by Bela Bhatia in Sabarkantha partly corroborates this analysis. The author in fact observes a shift in the violence from cities to villages between 28 February - date when the cities of Khedbrahma and Bhilodas were hit — and the evening of 1 March, when it spread to the villages.<sup>18</sup> The agents of this spread were Hindu nationalist activists from the city or nearby towns. These *tolas* (groups), whose members were wearing the saffron-colored headband and chanting anti-Muslim slogans, entered the villages on tractors or in jeeps. Most of them were from the Patel caste – a caste of landed peasants who had prospered in farming before going into trade and industry to such an extent that the urban economy in Gujarat today is as much in their hands as those of the traditional merchant castes in the region. These assailants proved to be perfectly organized: divided into three groups, *todwavalla* (those who were destroying), *lootwavalla* (those who were looting) and *baadwavalla* (those who were burning), they went through several villages. In all, 2,161 houses, 1,461 shops, 71 workshops and factories and 38 hotels were looted and entirely or partly destroyed in the district of Sabarkantha. In addition, 45 places of worship underwent the same fate, which suggests that beyond the purely economic aspect, the violence reflected xenophobic feelings. In fact, one of the most repeated slogans was: “*Muslai ne*

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<sup>17</sup> D. Gupta, “The Limits of Tolerance: Prospects of Secularism in India After Gujarat,” Prem Bathia Memorial Lecture, 11 August 2002.

<sup>18</sup> B. Bhatia, “A Step Back in Sabarkantha”, Seminar n° 513 (<http://www.india-seminar.com/2002/513/513%20bela%20bhatia.htm>).

*gaam ma thi kado*” (soiRun the Muslims out of the village), a slogan chanted by local villagers as well as activists from outside the village.

Altogether, over 1,200 villages were affected, particularly in the districts of Panchmahals, Mehsana, Sabarkantaha, Bharuch, Bhavnagar and Vadodara. In this latter district, the army had to be called in on 5 March. 2,500 Muslims from 22 different villages were evacuated and moved to refugee camps. These villages no longer had a single Muslim according to the District Magistrate.<sup>19</sup>

But the most surprising development still, lies elsewhere: of the villages involved, many of them were in the tribal zone, the eastern “*tribal belt*,” bordering Madhya Pradesh, from Ambaji to Narmada. Never before had there been such massive participation of indigenous peoples (*adivasis*) in the anti-Muslim riots alongside Hindu nationalist activists.

This phenomenon has usually been interpreted by local observers in the same way villager involvement has, the *adivasis* being a subgroup of them. Bela Bhatia's study in Sabarkhanta – a district where tribes make up 17 % of the population – thus leads her to conclude that the *adivasis* “were used by upper caste and class Hindus in their program against the Muslims.” Testimonies Bhatia gathered in the field among Muslim survivors even made excuses for the aggressions the *adivasis* perpetrated, considering that it was not surprising to see them loot Bohra, Khoja and Memon shops, given the drought they had long suffered and the atmosphere created by the riot.

## ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

The Modi government's involvement in Hindu/Muslim violence – a fact that largely explains its exceptional scope – is part of an unavowed but easily reconstructed political strategy. His party, the BJP, and the Hindu nationalist movement on the whole, honed this strategy between 1989 and 1991 when their activists worked at provoking anti-Muslim riots as election time approached. This violence in effect polarises society along a religious line of cleavage, which generally leads the Hindu majority, with a heightened sense of Hindu identity, to vote more in favor of the BJP. This explains the correlation between the election calendar and the cycle of riots. Steven Wilkinson has thus shown that “[...] both riots and deaths do tend to cluster in the months before elections, and then drop off sharply in the months after an election is held.”<sup>20</sup>

This analysis began to lose some of its relevance in 1993 when the BJP was defeated in regional elections in Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Delhi precisely due to excessive violence: too many riots tend to cancel out the impact of what is gained in terms of votes, because even the Hindu majority suffers from the anarchy resulting from repeated violence and curfews. Shopkeepers and industrialists — from which the BJP traditionally draws its support— are particularly at risk when

<sup>19</sup> These figures come from a confidential report of the National Human Rights Commission, following its March 2002 investigation in Gujarat.

<sup>20</sup> Steven I. Wilkinson, “Froids calculs et foules déchaînées. Les émeutes intercommunautaires en Inde,” *Critique Internationale*, no. 6, Winter 2000, p. 132.

violence is heavy and drawn out. The violence of the 1992-93 riots following the demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya on 6 December 1992 exceeded anything India had yet experienced since Partition. Afterward, the BJP was also dissuaded from using riots as a strategy by the mere fact of its rise to power in New Delhi in 1998, since it was henceforth responsible for public order and it had to accommodate coalition partners which did not share its ideology. But this new rule of conduct was challenged by many party activists and cadres as the BJP was declining. With the end of the 1990s, the party in fact started losing local and state elections one after the other. The most radical members then suggested doing away with the moderate official line and returning to a strategy of ethno-religious mobilisation, of which communal violence was a key element, so as to win the elections again.

In Gujarat, elections were not scheduled until 2003, but the rioters' high level of organization proves that the Hindu nationalist movement was already preparing for this date with strongarm tactics. Nothing could be more logical. First, the state was accustomed to pre-election riots (between 1987 and 1991, 40 % of the 106 Hindu-Muslim riots that afflicted Gujarat took place at election time)<sup>21</sup>. Second, the BJP had stacked up repeated electoral setbacks here as elsewhere: in December 2000, the party lost two cities in municipal elections (one of which was Ahmedabad) out of the six it had held up to then, and above all, it was marginalized in nearly all the district committees (a sort of county council) whose elected officers were being renewed at the same time.

Modi thus used Godhra as an opportunity to unleash violence that he hoped to capitalize on during early elections. It was to provoke early elections that he decided to recommend that the governor —S.S. Bhandari, another RSS activist— dissolve the Gujarat assembly on 19 July. At the same time, he resigned as Chief Minister, while remaining at the helm to handle routine proceedings. And he immediately set about calling for early elections. These tactics were all the more shocking since the violence had far from subsided everywhere. Several months after the paroxysm of late February – early March, skirmishes were still claiming victims: on 21 April, the death of a policeman in Ahmedabad led to acts of vengeance – six Muslims were shot down by men in uniform. On 20 July, the day after the assembly was dissolved, two people were killed and 14 others wounded by stone-throwing and police gunfire, again in Ahmedabad. On 13 August, still in Ahmedabad, sporadic clashes wounded three. On 17 September, violence again broke out in Borsad (a small town in Anand district) after a Muslim motorcyclist accidentally hit a young Hindu. Shops owned by Muslims were torched in retribution. The riot left one dead and 13 wounded. The town had to be put under curfew. On 29 September, a makeshift bomb exploded, wounding one person in Godhra. On 2 October, the festivities organized to celebrate Gandhi's birthday (Gandhi Jayanti) gave rise to violence in Bhavnagar (where the police had to open fire to disperse the attackers), Vadodara and Piplod, where police forces had to use teargas. On 6 October, the police again had to intervene, leaving two wounded, after Hindu-Muslim clashes. On 15 October, a makeshift bomb exploded in a bus

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<sup>21</sup> K.M. Chenoy et al., *Gujarat Carnage 2002. A Report to the Nation*, April 2002, p. 19.

in Godhra, wounding six. The following day another bomb went off in a bus in Lunawada (Panchmahals district), wounding two people.

In such conditions, James Michael Lyngdoh, Chief Election Commissioner, who visited 12 of the state's districts between 31 July and 4 August, was reluctant to organise any poll, especially since many voters, a vast majority of them Muslims, were still living far from their homes in refugee camps. So Modi and the BJP strove to demonstrate that calm had been restored, leading them first to hurriedly close the refugee camps or lower the number of their occupants reported in official statistics, and argue that in accordance with article 174 of the Constitution, the time between dissolving the assembly and holding new elections could not exceed six months. National BJP leaders – starting with deputy prime minister L.K. Advani – joined in the call for early elections. Given the objections of the Election Commission, which preferred that President's Rule be declared because the election could not be organized under proper conditions and because, in this case, article 174 did not apply, the BJP brought the case before the Supreme Court. The Court refused to express an opinion, referring to the Election Commission decisions. In early November, the Commission set a date for the elections to begin on 12 December.

On 8 September, Modi relaunched the campaign he had started in the immediate aftermath of the violence, in preparation for the elections. He then undertook a tour of the state that was highly reminiscent of L.K. Advani's Rath Yatra in 1990. Like this huge political pilgrimage that left from the Somnath Temple in Gujarat, Modi's Gaurav Yatra left from the Bhathiji Maharaj Temple in Phagval (Kheda district). This tour instantly met with great popular success. On 9 September in Himmatnagar, for instance a huge crowd gathered along the roadside and at the place where Modi was to hold his rally, which he did not even reach until 2 a.m.

Throughout this entire tour, Modi's speeches were peppered with anti-Muslim references. In Becharaji, he stooped to portraying Muslims as abiding by the motto "*hum paanch, hamare pachchees*" (We are five – allusion to Muslim polygamy – we will have fifty children – an open criticism of the high Muslim birth rate that many Hindus fear). The VHP distributed thousands of copies of this speech. The BJP and the VHP carefully divided up the work: Modi was bound by the Election Commission's model code of conduct obliging political parties to maintain a certain reserve, whereas Togadia, VHP international general secretary, used all means at his disposal: he held 220 rallies during the election campaign, taking "jehadi terrorism" as his main target. The VHP not only handed out CDs describing the massacre in Godhra, but also had T-shirts printed up stating: "We will not allow our area to be converted into Godhra."

The Election Commission was obliged to react. It demanded that Modi take the necessary steps to end the Vijay Yatra – Victory Pilgrimage – that the VHP had begun in mid-November. Modi had Togadia and 42 other VHP militants arrested when their movement set off on 17 November from a temple in Ahmedabad. The VHP initiated another movement called "Jan Jagaran," a mass awareness campaign. The government settled for denying Togadia access to Panchmahals of

which Godhra is the district headquarters. This gesticulating fooled no one: Modi and Togadia had divided up the work for an extremely aggressive election campaign.

Not only was the BJP campaign rife with anti-Muslim references, but it was also based on an obvious equation between Islam and terrorism. One of the BJP's television commercials began with the sound of a train pulling into a station, followed by the clamor of riots and women's screams before the ringing of temple bells was covered by the din of automatic rifle fire. After which, Modi's reassuring countenance appeared, hinting to voters that only he could protect Gujarat from such violence. The BJP Election Manifesto pledged to train Gujarat youth, particularly those living on the Pakistani border, in anti-terrorist tactics. Self-defense militias would be set up in border towns where large numbers of retired servicemen would be brought in. Special gun permits would be issued to the lifeblood of a nation under siege. Not only to Modi did Muslim mean terrorist, but the equation went a step further by establishing an equivalence between "Muslim" and "Pakistani" as well: any adept of Islam was potentially a fifth column Pakistani. This explains the attention devoted to attacks against Musharraf in Modi's election campaign. He for instance declared at a rally in Ahmedabad on 1 October – for "Anti-Terrorism Day": "India will continue to refer to him as Mian Musharraf. If the pseudo-secularists don't like it, they can go and lick Musharraf's boots. I dare him to send more terrorists to Gujarat, we are prepared this time. *Arey mian, taari goli khuti jashe* (Mian, your bullets will run out)."

Modi spared no efforts throughout his campaign to spread this anti-Muslim security-based obsession: He covered 4,200 kilometers during the Gaurav Yatra, which began on 8 September and ended at the same time as the election campaign. He held 400 rallies in 146 of the state's 182 constituencies. He did what he could to discredit his main opponent, the Congress, accusing it in particular of being the "mother of terrorism" during a rally in Bhuj on 4 December. The outcome was in his favor: 63% of the registered voters took the trouble to go out and vote and the BJP garnered a majority of seats for the third time in a row (unprecedented elsewhere in India) with a record score of 126 seats out of 182 (compared to 117 in 1998) and about 50% of the votes cast. As for the Congress, it won only 51 seats (2 fewer than in 1998 despite a slight increase in votes, 38% compared to 34%). Only the violence made this landslide possible: the BJP won all the seats in the three districts most heavily affected by this violence, Panchmahals, Dahod and Vadodara. This is what allowed it to transcend caste cleavages and attract the Hindu masses: an exit-poll mentioned for instance that while 76% of the upper castes and 82% of the Patels voted for the BJP, OBC castes supported this party to – between 54 to 61% according to the *jati*<sup>22</sup>. Another survey showed that 59% of the respondents did not wish to have someone from another community as a neighbor, indicating just how deep the divide is and calling forth explanations other than mere electoral tactics on the part of politicians<sup>23</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> S. Kumar, « Gujarat Assembly elections 2002. Analysing the verdict », *Economic and Political Weekly*, 25 (January 2003, p. 275).

<sup>23</sup> *India Today*, 16 December 2002, p. 27.

## THE COMMUNALISATION OF A POLITICAL SOCIETY AND THE JEHAD SYNDROME

The political strategy of a movement solidly entrenched in the state apparatus and desperate for electoral gains is not enough to explain the scope and intensity of the violence in Gujarat. These methods must be replaced in a broader context: that of a reactivation of the Hindu majority's inferiority complex caused by the 11 September syndrome, and, more generally speaking, that of the communalisation of the state of Gujarat and its society.

Since the 1990s, Gujarat has become the main stronghold of Hindu nationalists, to such an extent that today it is one of the states where the BJP has remained in power the longest, a situation which enabled the party to reshape the administration. One of the BJP government's favorite targets was the police. Muslim police officers have systematically been barred from executive positions. Of the 65 "IPS Officers" (Indian Police Service) on active duty in the state in 2002, only one of them still fulfilled such a role as Deputy Superintendent of Police. All the others had been transferred to railway surveillance, organisation of computer training programme, etc.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, a vast number of Hindu nationalist activists and sympathisers were recruited by the Gujarat Home Guards, a form of municipal police: 12,000 of its members belong to the movement .

In addition to the police, the state machinery has been infiltrated by Hindu nationalists and is under BJP influence. This explains that, during the outbreak of violence, the rioters had access to documents that could only come from the state administration. They were thus able to identify, and torch, a shop in Ahmedabad that did not have a Muslim name but of which 10% of the capital was owned by a Muslim, as well as a factory owned by a Hindu who had just secured a contract in the Middle East. The aggressors could not have identified these targets without documents supplied by the administration.

Hindu nationalist control over the state apparatus is a determining factor in explaining the violence in Gujarat, but the collective psychology is an equally significant variable: the society itself is profoundly steeped in Hindutva ideology.

## THE NEW DOMINANT IDEOLOGY: HINDUTVA AGAINST JEHAD

In August 2002, a survey conducted among a sample of 17,776 citizens spread over 98 parliamentary constituencies showed that for a relative but nearly absolute majority of respondents, the Gujarat riots were not due to the state government or Hindu nationalists or even — the most plausible cause— to local rabble-rousers, but to "Muslim fundamentalists" and Muslims aggressors from Godhra (29% and 20 % of the answers respectively).<sup>25</sup> Moreover, many of the respondents rated Modi highly, ranking him in second place among regional chief ministers in terms

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<sup>24</sup> *Communalism Combat*, n° 77-78, op. cit., p. 119.

<sup>25</sup> *India Today*, 26 August 2002, p. 33.

of popularity, with 45 % favorable opinions (compared to 22 % six months earlier in a similar survey).<sup>26</sup>

The notion that the Hindus were in a position of self-defence and that Islamism was the guilty party can be explained by the post-September 11 context and nationalist Hindu propaganda that found a foothold in the attacks on New York and Washington. Added to these attacks are those that affected India directly, in Kashmir of course, but also in New Delhi where, on 13 December 2001, a suicide commando gained entry to the Lok Sabha, killing 15 people.

These attacks reactivated the feeling of vulnerability Hindus have evidenced toward Muslims periodically throughout the 20th century<sup>27</sup>: in the 1920s, the Khilafat movement gave rise to the first Indian Muslim show of pan-Islamism and in return triggered the creation of the RSS during a series of communal riots; in the 1980s, Islamic proselytism, which appeared in a more fundamentalist light since the Iranian revolution, fuelled a Hindu nationalist counter-mobilization — which ended up focalizing on the Ayodhya incident —, and several riots; in 2002, the terrorist attacks of 2001 similarly reactivated a majority inferiority complex on the part of certain Hindus in Gujarat. A tract distributed during the riots opened with this characteristic assertion: “*Today the minority community is trying to crush the majority community.*”<sup>28</sup> Another declaration, made by the Bajrang Dal (the VHP's paramilitary branch), began the same way: “*50 years after independence it appears that Hindus are second [class] citizens of this country. Religious conversions, infiltration terrorism and bomb blasts have surrounded Hindustan.*” This feeling of insecurity is justified a little further on by designating a culprit: “*Jehad is being carried out in order to establish an Islamic state in Hindustan.*”<sup>29</sup> A VHP tract distributed in Ahmedabad goes into detail on this point:

*“America found Laden alone too much whereas we have in our lanes and by-lanes thousands of Laden [...] and two lakhs [200 000] mullah-maulvis who poison one lakh [100 000] madrassas and mosques day and night with terrorist activities. Organisations like SIMI [a Muslim student union], Lashkar-e-Toiba [a paramilitary Islamist movement active in Kashmir and other places in India] and ISI [the Pakistani secret service] with the support and help of Pakistan, are carrying on terrorist activities. They train lakhs of terrorists in thousands of institutions. They have formed an army of single, unemployed Muslim youth of India by paying high salaries. The terrorist and traitorous Muslims of this country get weapons from more than 50 Muslim nations to carry out their religious war. They are supplied with AK-56 and AK-47 rifles, automatic machine guns, small canons, rocket launchers and several kilos of RDX [...]. When Pakistan attacks India, the Muslims living here will revolt”.*

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>27</sup> For more details, see C. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1920s to the 1990s*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in *Communalism Combat*, op. cit., p. 136.

<sup>29</sup> *Communalism Combat*, op. cit., p. 137.

Which led Pravin Togadia to clip: “*What is happening in Gujarat is not communal riots but people's answer to Islamic Jihad.*”<sup>30</sup> A leaflet distributed by Bajrang Dal activists during the Gujarat riots went one step further since it requested the Hindus to “*reply in the same language that is used for Jihad*”.

This strategy of stigmatising and *imitating* the Other, who, by its assumed strength, represented a danger to the Hindus has been the brand mark of Hindu nationalism since its inception<sup>31</sup>. For long it fuelled an ethnic nationalism that did not preclude community cohabitation: Muslims were required to pledge allegiance to the majoritarian Hindu culture, even publicly assimilate it, although they could continue to practice their religion in private. But a new juncture was arrived at in 2002 in Gujarat. From then on, the nationalist Hindu discourse openly advocated elimination of the Muslims.

#### TOWARD ETHNIC CLEANSING: SADISM AND SAVAGERY

Over and above the geographic and social extent of the violence, the intensity and savagery of the rioting of Gujarat is what was most striking. The countless accounts gathered by spontaneous NGO investigations and more official inquiries all concur: never has Hindu-Muslim violence reached such extremes in both the systematic nature and duration. This analysis could leave things at that and drape a veil of discretion over these unbearable scenes, but instead of shying away from this violence, it must be told. Putting a damper on the survivors' accounts would boil down to denying what for some was their last wish: to recount the unspeakable. What happened? Entire families were electrocuted in their houses, which were first flooded by the murderers. Children were forced to drink kerosene before a match was set to their mouths. Foetuses were cut from the bellies of pregnant women and held up to see. Women, again, were gang raped before being mutilated and burned alive before their children's eyes. No one was safe. Not even former Ahmedabad MP, Ahsan Jafri, a Muslim of the Congress Party. Holed up in his home, he repeatedly called the police for help as the hoards besieging him continued to grow. Dragged outside and delivered up to public condemnation, he was covered with wax and burned alive along with his brother-in-law, the latter's wife and their two sons.

Women were the primary targets of the rioters. For example: in the mass grave dug by the Naroda Padiya victims in Ahmedabad, 46 of the 96 bodies buried there were women. Never had communal violence reached such heights of sexual cruelty. Among the Hindus, it harks back to an ancient obsession: Muslims have always appeared more virile to them, partly because of their diet (meat-eating) and their ritual animal sacrifices. Hindu women themselves tend to see Muslims as threats. According to Nonica Datta, “The imaginary suspicion of the Muslim as an aggressor and a sexual predator continues to haunt the Hindu nationalist's

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<sup>30</sup> *Asian Age* (Delhi edition), 2 April 2002.

<sup>31</sup> C. Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist movement*, op. cit.



psyche,<sup>32</sup> including that of women who sympathize with this ideology. The widespread practice of gang rape in the course of clashes in Gujarat no doubt reflects a desire to equal and even surpass Muslims in the sex act. But there is much more than that. First, the desire to dishonor and destroy an entire community by raping and torturing its women, which of course also aims to destroy their reproductive capacity<sup>33</sup> - a method akin to the rationale of ethnic cleansing.

Another tract distributed during the riots of Gujarat, bearing the title "Jehad" and written in Gujarati in the form of a poem is most edifying in this respect:<sup>34</sup>

*"The people of Baroda and Ahmedabad have gone berserk  
Narendra Modi you have fucked the mother of miyas  
[derogatory term for Muslims]*

*The volcano which was inactive for years has erupted  
It has burnt the arse of miyas and made them dance nude*

*We have untied the penises which were tied till now  
Without castor oil in the arse we have made them cry*

*Those who call religious war, violence, are all fuckers  
We have widened the tight vaginas of the 'bibis'  
[term referring to married Muslim women]*

*Now even the adivasis have realised what Hinduism is  
They have shot their arrow in the arse of mullahs*

*Wake up Hindus there are still miyas left alive around you  
Learn from Panwad village [a village in Panchmahals district that was  
the scene of serious rioting] where their mother was fucked*

*She was fucked standing while she kept shouting  
She enjoyed the uncircumcised penis*

*With a Hindu government the Hindu have to power to annihilate miyas  
Kick them in the arse to drive them out of not only villages and cities  
but also the country.*

The violence in Gujarat, due to its very geographic scope and unbearable intensity, in fact marks the first example of ethnic cleansing targeting Muslims since India's Partition in 1947: the aim here was not only to loot and destroy private

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<sup>32</sup> N. Datta, "On the Anti-Muslim Ethos of Hindu Women in Gujarat," *Muslim India*, n° 237, Sept. 2002, p. 408.

<sup>33</sup> T. Sarkar, "Semiotics of Terror. Muslim-Children and Women in Hindu Rashtra," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 13 July 2002, pp. 2872-2876.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

property, even if such events also took place, but indeed to murder and run off those perceived as intruders. In Sabarkantha, Hindus in Khetbrahma, the district headquarters, after having emptied the place of its Muslim inhabitants, wrote on a sign at the entrance to the town: “*Muslims not allowed.*”<sup>35</sup>

A tract distributed in Gujarat during the riots says it plainly:

*“We do not want to leave a single Muslim alive in Gujarat. [...] Annihilate Muslims from Bharat [...] when there were kings, the Muslim kings forced Hindu brethren to convert and then committed atrocities against them. And this will continue to happen till Muslims are not exterminated [...]. Now the Hindus of the villages should join the Hindus of the cities and complete the work of annihilation of Muslims.”*<sup>36</sup>

This obsessive desire to eradicate Islam from India also explains the many attacks against Muslim places of worship. Though underestimated, the official figures regarding the casualties of the Gujarat riots and these destructions provide some valuable indications: between 27 February and 1 April, the official number of Muslim victims was 536 (67 of which were killed by the police) and Hindus, 95 (73 of which were killed by the police); the number of Muslim wounded was 1,143, Hindus, 529. (These figures are considerably lower than those published by *Muslim India*, which reports the total number killed in Gujarat as 1,071 and wounded, 1,973).<sup>37</sup> In fact, the total number of casualties was most certainly over 2,000 dead. As for places of Muslim Culture, they were attacked at least as repeatedly as Muslim shops, an indication that these symbolic targets were also of major importance. Altogether, 527 mosques, madrassas, cemeteries and other *dargahs* were damaged or destroyed.<sup>38</sup> Most places of worship that were demolished were “replaced” by a statue of Hanuman and a saffron-colored flag.

The very fact that communal violence in Gujarat acquired the character of ethnic cleansing forces us to resort to explanations other than the instrumentalist one : the Hindu activists were not only trying to polarise the society according to a religious live of cleavage ; their actions were over determined by an obsessive fear of the Muslim Other and an incontrollable desire to annihilate Islam in India. The systematic dimension of the pogroms is an indication of the unprecedented responsiveness of society to this deep rooted xenophobia. In a way, the pervasiveness of this feeling was evident from the incredible passivity of all actors in the public sphere, with the exception of a few NGOs and newspapers: the debate organized at the Lok Sabha shows to what extent anti-Muslim violence has become

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<sup>35</sup> K. Balagopal, “Reflections on ‘Gujarat Pradesh’ of ‘Hindu Rashtra,’” *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1 June 2002, p. 2119.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>37</sup> *Muslim India*, no. 235, July 2002, p. 305.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 305.

part of everyday life and how much the political class has become accustomed, or even sympathetic, to this fact. Even BJP allies (such as the Telugu Desam Party) which were sworn secularists and counted Muslims among their electoral supporters protested as a matter of form. It is mainly for this reason that one can agree with Ashis Nandy's statement that "*The Gujarat riots mark the beginning of a new phase in Indian politics.*"<sup>39</sup> This is the demise of a culture of relative tolerance. The violence in Gujarat reflects the dissemination of hatred of the Other that had never before reached such intensity – ethnic cleansing – or had ever been so widespread – extending even into the tribal areas, a place to test these assertions.

#### THE MILITANT HINDUIZATION OF THE *ADIVASIS*

The interpretation is a limited one that views the riots as spreading to the tribal zones only because Hindu nationalist activists from the city exploited the *adivasis* by luring an impoverished community jealous of Muslim merchants' wealth with the mirage of looting their riches. Such an analysis disregards how the *adivasis* appropriated the riots. If, at the start, the violence came from the outside, exported, so to speak, by city dwelling activists, the *adivasis* devised their own version of it. This process was particularly obvious in the first tribal village in Gujarat to be affected, Tejgadh, in the district of Panchmahals. There again, the first shops were torched by outsiders, but "*once the first attack was over, other villagers joined in on their own with no further need for instigation and the looting continued,*" writes Ganesh Devy, who observed the riots in the field for the most part.<sup>40</sup> To Devy, from that point on it was clear that rioting "*was not included in the master plan of violence.*" It became "*leisurely*": one or two shops were torched every day. Twelve days after the outbreak of violence, one house was burned down, then another the next day, and another the day after: "*It was cold-bloodedness in slow-time. This ritual quality was a clear indication that at this end of the Gujarat riots, the theme of communalism was taking a back seat, having been taken over by the norms of tribal culture*". This process of tribal takeover was even more clearly illustrated in Panwad, a village 30 kilometers from Tejgadh where about 200 *adivasis* took part in the violence, armed with their ceremonial bows and arrows.

Although Devy is convincing when he temporizes the importance of mechanisms simply instrumentalizing the *adivasis*, his emphasis on the influence of visible marks of tribal culture during the violence poses a problem. Outer signs of culture, such as bows and arrows, are not enough to make the violence the expression of that culture. Actually, the spontaneous involvement of the *adivasis* in the rioting reflects the Hinduization of their culture under the influence of a campaign led by the RSS, VHP, BJP and especially the Vanavasi Seva Sangh (Vanavasi Service Association).

This organization is one of the regional branches of the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram created in 1952. The very name of this "ashram" for the organization of

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<sup>39</sup> A. Nandy, "Obituary of a Culture," <http://www.india-seminar.com/2002/513>.

<sup>40</sup> G. Devy, "Tribal voice and violence," Seminar, <http://www.india-seminar.com/2002/513>.

“forest (*vana*) dwellers” translates both the vision that Hindu nationalists have of tribals and the strategy they have developed towards them. Hindu nationalists refer to tribals as “those who live in the forest” (*vanavasis*) rather than “those who were there first” (*adivasis*), simply because to them, “first” among the people of India can only be Hindus. But the *vanavasis* are nevertheless a target group, for the Hindu nationalists are determined to increase their numbers in proportion to their true enemies, the Muslims and the Christians.

They first sought to pit tribals against Christians to counter the latter's evangelizing efforts of these animist tribes, which had met with a degree of success since the 19<sup>th</sup> century: the conversion rate of tribals to Christianity was particularly high in the Chhattisgarh tribal belt where the RSS set up the Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram in 1952. Its strategy of gaining access to the tribes was simply to imitate the Christian missionaries' approach, which owed its popularity to its social work, most commonly in the form of free schooling and access to medical care by opening dispensaries. The VKA duplicated this technique by attempting to inculcate nationalist Hindu ideology in schools it opened in Chhattisgarh and later elsewhere. The organization in fact set up branches in nearly all states in India over the years, a development confirmed by the name change to Bharatiya Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram in 1977.

In Gujarat, this movement was known as Vanavasi Seva Sangh (*Vanavasis* Service Association). The name well reflects its primary vocation: social work. There, as in other places, the VSS strove to attract tribals by duplicating the missionaries' charity strategies, at the same time stigmatizing Christians all the better to Hinduize them. Their most ordinary form of Hinduization involved free distribution of statuettes of Lord Ganesh, to encourage the tribals to worship him. Another, more conflictual strategy was to build temples devoted to Hanuman.

In the end, Devy is obliged to remark that “*the VSS and the BJP have achieved a measure of success in providing the tribals a political agenda of hatred...*” So tribal culture has indeed been altered under the influence of Hindu nationalist propaganda. D. Gupta also underscores the receptivity of certain Bhils to Hindu nationalists ideas in the districts of Panchmahals and Sabarkantha, through propaganda from the RSS and its sister organizations. As a matter of fact, other tribes refer to these tribals somewhat ironically as “*Ramayana Bhils*,” a name coined from the great classic in Hindu literature, the *Ramayana*.

The last communal violence is bound to accentuate this trend, not only because Muslims – from whom tribals used to borrow funds – do not trust Adivasis as much as before, but also because these Adivasis have realised that they could draw dividends from riots in terms of looting and exerting power<sup>41</sup>. For Lobo, the Adivasis are even more attracted to Hindutva than before, and their culture has been irreversibly affected. Indeed, more than one third of the Scheduled Tribes have voted for the BJP during the Gujarat election according to the CSDS exit poll.

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<sup>41</sup> N. Lobo, «Adivasis, Hindutva and Post-Godhra Riots in Gujarat» *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30, Nov. 2002, p. 4848.

## CONCLUSION: THE SPIRAL OF VIOLENCE

If Hindu nationalist propaganda prospers, as we believe it does, on the foundation of an increasingly widespread Hindu sense of insecurity, the rise in Islamic attacks is in danger of rekindling Hindu activism and fuelling a literally infernal spiral of which the Muslims will ultimately be the victims.

The violence in Gujarat has already put the Muslims in this state in an unbearable situation. No riot had yet equalled this pogrom, either in the number of victims or the savagery of the violence; no government had to this extent sided with the assailants — to the point of becoming an aggressor itself; no administration, from the bureaucracy to the police, had ever shown such open complicity with the attackers. Who can the Muslims turn to? The media? The English language press — whether it is national or regional — demonstrated its support and criticized the abuses, but the Gujarati press continually fanned the fire. For instance, on 1 March the daily newspaper *Sandesh* published an entirely fabricated story claiming that two Hindu women in Godhra travelling on the same train as the *kar sevaks* had been attacked by Muslims, raped, mutilated, then murdered.<sup>42</sup> The story proved to be unfounded.

Alone and traumatized, the Muslim community became entrenched in camps forming ghettos and continued to be harassed by the police after the riots. When Nivedita Menon came to Ahmedabad from Delhi, like so many other human rights and minority rights activists, she recounted that in June, “*every day the police would raid Juhapura, the Muslim ghetto, to try to round up ‘suspects’, they would be resisted by the residents, there would be police firing, and the papers were full of front-page photographs of ‘Muslim mob marching towards Juhapura police station’. The photograph clearly showed an unarmed, peacefully marching demonstration.*”<sup>43</sup> And Menon added: “*Every Hindu knows full well that what was perpetrated there is beyond human endurance. They have looked into the void - will there not come a moment when the void will look back?*”<sup>44</sup>

The moment of “*Muslim backlash*” finally arrived in September. On the 23rd, a makeshift bomb hidden in a bus in Ahmedabad wounded 5. But the most spectacular operation took place the next day, on 24 September, in Gandhinagar, when two armed men entered the Akshardham Hindu temple, a huge complex that can accommodate up to 5,000 worshippers. With AK-56s they shot at everything that moved and launched grenades, killing 28 people. They holed up in the temple until a National Security Guard commando flushed them out the next morning. Three members of the police forces were killed in the siege.

Modi immediately declared that the terrorists were from Pakistan but the fact that it was an act of vengeance was made clear by the notes found in the two men's pockets, in which they claimed, in Urdu, to belong to a group called “*Tehreek-e-Kasas*” (Movement for Revenge). Addressing “*thousands of conscienceless*

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<sup>42</sup> K.M. Chenoy et al., *Gujarat Carnage 2002*, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> N. Menon, “Surviving Gujarat,” e-mail communication.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

*enemies of the Muslim of India,” they declared: “We will never rest in peace if we do not take revenge for the killings of our people.”*

This act is indicative of the risk of escalation India faces today: if the Muslims continue to be subjected to abuse of the likes that occurred with the outbreak of violence in Gujarat in 2002, they may well increasingly resort to terrorism as a weapon of the weak – naturally with the support of Islamist fundamentalist groups, including those based in Pakistan.