

Hindus have also suffered greatly from the violence in Gujarat. In addition to the fifty-eight people killed during the torching of the Sabarmati Express in Godhra on February 27, 2002, over ten thousand Hindus have also been made homeless as a result of post-Godhra violence.¹⁴⁹ Many also fear retaliatory attacks by Muslims communities-promoted in some areas by false reports in the local language media -or fear of being mistaken for Muslim by Hindu mobs.¹⁵⁰ To provide some protection from the latter, some Hindus, and possibly some Muslims, resorted to adorning their homes and places of business with prominent Hindu symbols, including pictures of Hindu gods and goddesses, both during and since the initial attacks.

An adjoining Hindu home stood unscathed in the row of burned Muslim homes in Naroda Patia, a site visited by Human Rights Watch on March 22. The Hindu residents had a picture of the Hindu goddess Saraswati and a saffron flag, the representative flag of the Hindutva groups, on prominent display at the entrance of their home. On an outside facing wall, the words Jai Ram, Jai Ram appeared in big bold letters. They told Human Rights Watch that they needed to identify themselves as Hindu for protection.¹⁵¹ Homes and commercial establishments throughout Ahmedabad and elsewhere have taken to "wearing their religion on their sleeve."¹⁵² According to an article in the *Times of India*:

"Jai Shri Ram" and posters of Hindu gods and goddesses have become passwords to survival for those who live in mixed localities or have controversial names that can be mistaken as belonging to that of the minority community.... The humble mango leaf is suddenly in demand as well.... Others have fallen back on simple symbols. Fresh swastikas [a traditional Hindu symbol], the symbolic Om and Jai Shri Ganesh [Praise Lord Ganesh] surfaced overnight on rusted shutters of mechanics and greengrocers at Naroda, Bapunagar and Memnagar. In Vadodara, a number of houses have Ram inscribed on doors and shopkeepers have hung boards proclaiming: "This shop belongs to a Hindu". Others have resorted to decorating doorways with coconuts on a kalash near their doorsteps. In Karelibaug, even housing societies have pasted posters of Hindu gods and goddesses at the main gates.¹⁵³

An *India Today* article contained the followings accounts of retaliatory violence against Hindu communities, though the list is far from complete:

In Ahmedabad, violence broke out on March 17 when Dalits in the Danilimda area were attacked by Muslims. On March 19, it was Modasa, a town in Sabarkantha district. A police officer's son was stabbed and two communities went berserk.... The stories only got more macabre. In Himmatnagar, a young man who went to a Muslim-dominated area to do business was found dead, with his eyes gouged out. In Bharuch, the murder of a Muslim youth led to mass violence. Next the Sindhi Market and Bhanderi Pole areas of Ahmedabad, hitherto calm, were attacked by mobs. This phase, really, was one of Muslim mobs attacking Hindus. By the time [Prime Minister] Vajpayee arrived [on April 4] the Hindu throngs

were looking for blood again. The cycle seemed unending, at least for the immediate future.¹⁵⁴

On March 21, fifty shops in Revdi Bazaar—a market place for wholesale cloth in the Panchkuva area of Ahmedabad—were set ablaze. According to former BJP corporator (local official) and local shop owner Balram Thavani, "Since morning, there were instances of stone-throwing and abortive attacks on local shopkeepers and their residences. Matters turned worse after a mob attack on the Sindhi Market was foiled by SRP personnel stationed at the site. The mob then turned its fury on the Revdi Bazaar and started sprinkling acid, oil, petrol, and inflammable chemicals on cloth shops. The next thing we knew, our shops were ablaze."¹⁵⁵

Mahajan No Vando, Jamalpur

Human Rights Watch visited Mahajan No Vando, a fortified Hindu residential area situated within the Muslim dominated area of Jamalpur, on March 23. Mahajan No Vando was the site of a retaliatory attack by Muslims on March 1.

According to residents, approximately twenty-five people were injured in the attacks and at least five homes were completely destroyed. Residents closer to the periphery of the fortified compound and its entrance also suffered extensive property damage. Muslim residents attacked the compound from the higher Muslim-owned buildings that surrounded it using light bulbs filled with acid, petrol and crude bombs, and bottles filled with kerosene and set some Hindu-owned houses on fire. According to the residents, who had collected and saved the remnants of what was thrown in and showed them to Human Rights Watch, "There was acid in the glass bottles and in the light bulbs that were thrown in. They used solvent petrol, kerosene, and acid. They filled some Pepsi bottles with them."¹⁵⁶

Like many Muslim victims of attacks, the Hindu residents of Mahajan No Vando were surprised at the overnight animosity of their neighbors. One resident told Human Rights Watch: "There were no problems before February 27. On the 28th, the VHP declared all of Gujarat closed. We didn't attack anyone. We are all poor people, we live on our labor."¹⁵⁷

The appointed head of the community described the method of attack:

On March 1, at around 2:15 p.m. they surrounded us. There were so many people you couldn't count them. They attacked us from all sides. There was a row of twenty-four houses on the periphery of the vando [courtyard] and they burnt them all using petrol. Five or six were completely destroyed but we saved some using water. They also burned other homes and tried to break down the houses and enter. This went on for three-and-a-half hours. The police were few and couldn't really do much so they left. We are trapped here. We haven't left here since then. Some organizations are helping us. The VHP and RSS have helped us a bit as well. We are

worried that once the protection lifts at the end of the month, what will happen to us? We cannot leave for work because it is difficult to come back after 6:30 p.m. No one was killed in this area but some were injured. NGO doctors also came.¹⁵⁸

A resident named Harki Bhen added:

Kerosene bottles were thrown in through the roof. They threw it through the windows and the openings in the walls. We called the police thousands of times but they told us, "Sir is out". In the morning the mosques began announcing that Islam was in danger, that there was poison in the milk. This is their code word. We are the only Hindus here, poison here means us. The rioting lasted between 2:15 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. First they destroyed the police stall outside. At 11:00 p.m. two police people came to us. We had to give them security.¹⁵⁹

Kankubhen Kanjibhai lives in the first home on the left next to the colony gates, where the attackers first started to force their way into the area. "Everything was burned, clothes, dishes, everything. I only have left what I am wearing."¹⁶⁰ Her one-room house was completely charred. A few houses down, a Hindu shrine had also been destroyed.

A very elderly and frail woman called Ukibhen Sawaji told us: "I was sitting inside my home and everything started burning. They jumped in; they looted us also. They took our dishes and our bedding that we had kept for the dowry."¹⁶¹ Seven-year-old Bharat Rameshbhai showed us the raw exposed skin that covered his right arm: "They threw bottles down into our home, I was inside the house. The house started burning."¹⁶² Resident D. R. Rathod whose home was partly damaged in the attacks said, "Just like the train was burning, that same way our homes burned too."¹⁶³

When asked about police response during the attacks, Human Rights Watch was told:

After 5:30 p.m., the brigadier came in. The Rapid Action Force and the military said, "We got no message to come here. We have been close by for seven hours but got no message that there was any problem here." The police said, "We are on our way." They cut off our phones from the outside. When the police arrived they threw tear gas inside here.¹⁶⁴

A strong police presence outside the colony that included several members of the Border Security Force (BSF) was helping to prevent further attacks. But residents feared what would happen once the BSF protection was lifted. While they were frustrated with the pace of police investigations, they noted that the police filed the complaints and even sent an acid bottle to be lab tested. One resident told us:

There are twelve to thirteen people stationed outside. But they will leave on March 30. We don't know what will happen after that. After the first incident, another acid bottle was thrown in around March 15. Nothing has

happened since then. The police took the acid bottle and sent it to the lab. We are working with the Gaikwad police station. We have filed complaints with the police. The police noted everything down but there is no combing of the areas.¹⁶⁵

Two members of the Ahmedabad Home Guard who were stationed at Jamalpur even prior to the attacks entered the colony during Human Rights Watch's investigation. They encouraged us to take more photos, carefully note down all the damage and visit each and every damaged home to talk to the resident. Their behavior stood in sharp contrast to that of police stationed near sites of destruction of Muslim homes, such as Naroda Patia, where a member of Gujarat intelligence worked diligently to note the comings and goings of those viewing the damage interviewing remaining residents.

When asked where they were during the attack one noted: "The whole city was in a storm, but this incident was the worst incident of Jamalpur. Everywhere else there was just a little bit of stone throwing. These people cannot sleep, they are afraid that someone will come again."¹⁶⁶

On March 6, Chief Minister Narendra Modi visited Mahajan No Vando and according to the residents told them, "You will be taken care of." Still, the residents claim that no arrests have been made.

¹⁴⁹ Sanjay Pandey, "Riots hit all classes, people of all faith," *Times of India*, March 18, 2002.

¹⁵⁰ See People's Union Civil Liberties, "The Role of Newspapers During the Gujarat Carnage."

¹⁵¹ Human Rights Watch visit to Naroda Patia, March 22, 2002.

¹⁵² Amit Mukherjee, "Shops in Gujarat wear religion on their sleeve," *Times of India*, March 18, 2002.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Udhay Mahurkar, "Gujarat: End of Hope," *India Today*, April 15, 2002.

¹⁵⁵ "Rioters torch 50 shops at Revdi Bazaar," *Times of India*, March 24, 2002.

¹⁵⁶ Human Rights Watch interviews, Mahajan No Vando residents, Ahmedabad, March 23, 2002.

¹⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Ahmedabad, March 23, 2002.

¹⁵⁸ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Ahmedabad, March 23, 2002.

¹⁵⁹ Human Rights Watch interview, Harki Bhen, Ahmedabad, March 23, 2002.

¹⁶⁰ Human Rights Watch interview, Kankubhen Kanjibhai, Ahmedabad, March 23, 2002.

¹⁶¹ Human Rights Watch interview, Ukibhen Sawaji, Ahmedabad, March 23, 2002.

¹⁶² Human Rights Watch interview, Bharat Rameshbhai, Ahmedabad, March 23, 2002.

¹⁶³ Human Rights Watch interview, D. R. Rathod, Ahmedabad, March 23, 2002.

¹⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Ahmedabad, March 23, 2002.

¹⁶⁵ Human Rights Watch interview (name withheld), Ahmedabad, March 23, 2002.

¹⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch interview, Ahmedabad Home Guard member, Ahmedabad, March 23, 2002.