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GUJARAT 2002

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GODHRA: THE DIABOLIC LIE

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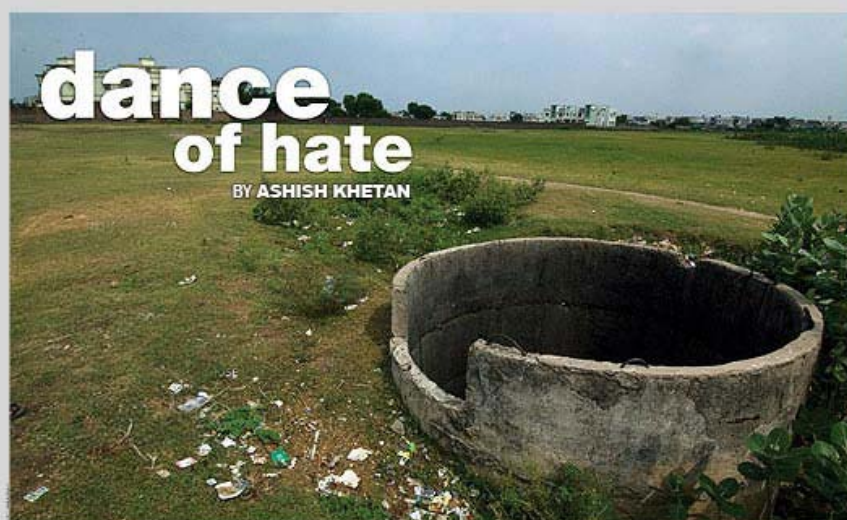


**LEST WE
FORGET
OUR SHAME**
Harinder Baweja

REPORTER'S DIARY:



**VOYAGER
BETWEEN
TWO WORLDS**
Ashish Khetan



BY ASHISH KHETAN

The truth behind Naroda Patiya, the grisliest massacre of 2002. Ahmedabad police's collusion in the pogrom and its cover-up. Gory details of how former Congress MP Ehsan Jafri was hacked limb by limb at Gulbarg Society, in the words of those who did it.

'Muslims, They Don't Deserve To Live'

Genocide was swift and total in Naroda Patiya. So was its cover-up. The perpetrators remain unpunished and unabashed [READ >>](#)

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Petrified Muslims in the area flocked to Gulbarg, sure of refuge for it housed former Congress MP Ehsan Jafri. Their worst fears came alive [READ >>](#)



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EARLIER IN TEHELKA

IN WITHIN HOURS of the tragedy on board the Sabarmati Express, the BJP and its affiliates — the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Bajrang Dal — started preparations for one of the worst acts of genocide in the history of this country. On February 28, 2002, a day after the Sabarmati Express fire, Ahmedabad witnessed mass killings of the most horrific nature. Armed saffron cadres roamed the streets, burning, looting, raping and killing Muslims at will. The neighbourhood that bled most was Naroda, a locality on the outskirts of Ahmedabad, with a mixed population of Hindus and Muslims.

In a most systematic manner, the BJP, the VHP and the Bajrang Dal formed an execution squad that carried out a pogrom from 10 in the morning of February 28 till after well past dark. Apart from firearms, tridents and swords, everything that could conceivably be turned into a weapon at short notice — from bricks to gas cylinders to diesel tankers — was unleashed on an entire neighbourhood of Muslims. Most victims were burnt alive. Before being set on fire, many were stabbed, raped and hacked apart.

Right through the massacre, the cellphones of the rioters were ringing constantly, with death scores being shared at regular intervals. By sundown, Naroda Patiya and Naroda Gaon, the Muslim neighbourhoods in the area, had been reduced to a vast wasteland of death. Sliced up like vegetables, burnt like charcoal and, bearing the testimony of slaughter at its crudest, corpses lay scattered across what had been a lively human settlement barely a few hours before.

Naroda was no nondescript, out-of-the-way place. It was just five km from the local police control room and less than four km from Shahibaug, the Ahmedabad Police headquarters. A mob armed with lethal weapons went on a killing spree for over 10 hours, yet nothing moved in the administration, no reinforcements were dispatched, no effort was made to disperse the mob. Civil society has had no doubt that it was Chief Minister Narendra Modi who was to blame for the genocide. Survivors have alleged that the police played partisan. The police have retorted that it was a riot and they were outnumbered. The government has denied any acts of omission or commission on its part. Five years on, the trial for the carnage in Naroda Patiya and Naroda Gaon is yet to start.

For the last three years, the Supreme Court has been sitting on a petition filed by the National Human Rights Commission and a few NGOs to have the case reinvestigated and transferred out of Gujarat. The accused are out on bail. Narendra Modi has won a landslide electoral victory and is preparing for another. Most survivors have shifted to ghettos on Ahmedabad's outskirts; the few who returned to their previous homes are living a marginalised life, under economic and social boycott by their Hindu neighbours.

NARODA: LAYOUT AND DEMOGRAPHY

About 15km from the centre of Ahmedabad city, Naroda Gaon and Naroda Patiya were once home to around 2,000 daily wage-earning Muslims, a majority of them migrants from Karnataka and Maharashtra. The area lies along a highway stretch just outside the city. Across the road from it is the State Transport warehouse; nearby are the Hindu-dominated Gopinath and Gangotri housing societies. Both Naroda Gaon and Naroda Patiya are over 70 years old and are typical urban slums; both come under the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation. The distance between the two is not more than a kilometre or so. While Naroda Gaon is relatively smaller, Naroda Patiya is a labyrinth of narrow lanes, flanked by close-packed, unsightly concrete structures, few of them higher than two storeys, inhabited by Muslims. Across the road from Naroda Patiya is Chharanagar, a large settlement of Chharas, a denotified tribe commonly deemed criminal and involved primarily in bootlegging and gambling. Though Hindu, Chharas are at the bottom of the caste hierarchy.

WHO WERE THE ACCUSED?

Two separate FIRs were registered for the Naroda Gaon and Naroda Patiya incidents. While only eight people were recorded as killed at Naroda Gaon, eyewitness accounts put the toll at Naroda Patiya in the hundreds. Nobody, however, knows exactly how many Muslims were killed at Naroda that day. Nobody, except, perhaps, the killers.

Among the dozens of Sangh Parivar cadres whom survivors identified as their attackers, the names of BJP MLA Mayaben Kodnani and Bajrang Dal leader Babu Bajrangi came up repeatedly as having led the mob. When filing the chargesheet, however, the police refused to prosecute Kodnani, citing lack of evidence. Bajrangi was chargesheeted along with a few BJP and VHP workers and a couple of dozen Chharas. In all, the police named 49 people as accused in the Naroda Patiya incident, and the same number were accused for Naroda Gaon as well. There are many names in common between the two lists, among them Bajrangi's. After absconding for over three months, Bajrangi was arrested amid high drama. Five months after his arrest, the Gujarat High Court granted him bail.

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EARLIER IN TEHELKA

BABU BAJRANGI

Just under 5'3", Babu Bajrangi—whose family name is Patel — is a towering figure in Naroda. Twenty-two years of association with the VHP and its youth wing, the Bajrang Dal, has firmly established him as the most dreaded local thug. Today, Bajrangi lords it over Naroda, and over Chharanagar in particular, where he commands a substantial following. Many Chharas appear to hold him in great reverence; he, in turn, is all praise for the criminal abilities he claims they possess, they are his “weapons”, he says, “just kill, nothing else”.

Bajrangi holds court at his office on the second floor of the Ajanta Ellora Shopping Complex, just off the highway that skirts Naroda. Though he claims to be a big builder with a steady monthly income of over a lakh and a half, his main vocation is beating up Muslims and Christians. “I just hate Muslims and Christians,” he says. And the cause dearest to his heart is to “rescue” Hindu girls who have married or eloped with Muslim boys. A majority of those who visit him each day are the parents of such girls. “When they go to the police, the cops don’t lodge a complaint, they send them to me,” Bajrangi claims. “Nine hundred and fifty-seven — that’s how many Hindu girls I have saved. On average, one girl married to a Muslim produces five children. So, in effect, I have killed 5,000 Muslims before they were born.”

Bajrangi has other claims to fame too. It was he who, virtually single-handedly, stalled the release of the film *Parzania* in Ahmedabad. While he openly threatened cinema hall owners to keep them from screening the film, the administration remained mute. “The film was anti-Hindu,” is all the justification he needed. Bajrangi’s love for Hindus is defined by his hate for Muslims and everything about them. “I would not mind if I were condemned to death, but if they ask me my last wish, I would want to drop bombs in Muslim localities and kill ten to fifteen thousand Muslims before I die.”

Apart from personal action, he has several suggestions for a “solution” to the “problem” of Muslim presence. “Delhi should issue orders to kill — higher caste people and the rich won’t do it but slum dwellers and the poor will and they should be ordered to. They should be told that they can take whatever they want of the Muslims — land, wealth, houses, everything — but they should do it in three days.” This will ensure that Muslims are wiped out across India. Bajrangi’s second suggestion is to have Muslims allowed only one marriage and one child by law. Additionally, it would also be a good idea to deny them the right to vote.

PREPARATIONS FOR GENOCIDE

Bajrangi went to Godhra on February 27, the day of the Sabarmati fire. He told TEHELKA that after he saw the Sabarmati victims’ bodies, he took a vow to avenge Godhra on the Muslims of Naroda Patiya the very next day. “*Humne unko wahi challenge kar diya tha ki isse chaar guna laash hum Patiya mein gira daalenge* (I challenged the Muslims — I would see four times the number of dead in Godhra felled in Patiya),” Bajrangi told TEHELKA at the very first meeting. He returned to Ahmedabad and began preparations for the massacre that very night. Twenty-three small firearms were rounded up from such Hindus as owned them; those who were unwilling to part with their weapons were told they’d be killed the next day, even if they were Hindus. Large quantities of inflammable material were also acquired — Bajrangi told TEHELKA that one petrol pump owner gave him petrol for free, this he later used to burn Muslims alive.

THE EXECUTION

The VHP and Bajrang Dal men arrived at Naroda Patiya at around 10 the next morning. They led the first attack but were forced to retreat as the Muslims put up a strong resistance, said Suresh Richard, one of the key accused in the Naroda Patiya massacre. At this point, a large band of Bajrangi’s Chhara followers joined ranks with the saffron mob and mounted a fresh attack. By around 10.30am, they had managed to destroy the minaret of Naroda Patiya’s Noorani Masjid. Subsequently, as Richard told TEHELKA, a full fuel tanker was rammed into the building, it burst and was then set on fire. The fuel from the tanker was also used to burn Muslims and their homes.

After the first round of assault, the Muslims barricaded themselves into their homes and remained there till around 3pm when the attack intensified. Between 5 and 6 that evening, the

mob reached the height of its frenzy; many women and girls were first raped and then doused in kerosene and petrol and burnt. A few dozen Muslims were able to make it to a State Reserve Police Force camp nearby. Bajrangi told TEHELKA that but for the Muslim commandant of the camp, who sheltered some Muslims, the death toll would have been much higher.

Some of the men in the Naroda attack were wearing khaki shorts and had saffron bands around their foreheads. According to witnesses, many were carrying jerrycans filled with kerosene, diesel and oil from the State Transport workshop. These they would empty on whoever came in range before setting them on fire; lit balls of fuel-soaked cloth were also thrown at those out of immediate reach. In Naroda is an open area with a large pit that is actually a cul de sac — a slope leads into it from one side but the other side is a sheer rise that cannot be scaled. Several Muslims had sheltered there; the mob surrounded the pit, poured fuel into it and set fire to it as well.

Ninety-seven people are officially said to have died that day in Naroda Patiya, but the actual death toll was much higher, as can be gleaned from the detailed lists survivors have made of missing persons and of their kith and kin whom they saw dying. Most of the dead were charred or mutilated beyond recognition. “We hacked, we burnt, did a lot of that,” said Bajrangi. “We believe in setting them on fire because these bastards say they don’t want to be cremated, they’re afraid of it, they say this and that will happen to them.” An overwhelming majority of the survivors were never able to claim the bodies. Dozens of eyewitnesses who deposed before the Nanavati-Shah Commission recounted scenes of children being burnt alive and women being raped. “We didn’t spare any of them,” Bajrangi said. “They shouldn’t be allowed to breed. Whoever they are, even if they’re women or children, there’s nothing to be done with them; cut them down. Thrash them, slash them, burn the bastards.”



Photo: Paras Shah

Kausar Bano, was nine months pregnant that day. Her belly was torn open and her foetus wrenched out, held aloft on the tip of a sword, then dashed to the ground and flung into a fire. Bajrangi recounts how he ripped apart “*ek woh pregnant... b*****d sala*”; how he showed Muslims the meaning of wrath—“If you harm us, we can respond — we’re no *khichdi-kadhi* lot”.

The scale and ferocity of the attack forced all surviving residents of the settlement to run away. Every house was looted, some were burnt. Many survivors had to be hospitalised; many were separated from their families and were not re-united with them for a week to 10 days, some for much longer. Several women were left with nothing to cover themselves with and were escorted to the relief camp completely naked. Suresh Richard told TEHELKA that there were many instances of rape and he himself was involved in one of them.

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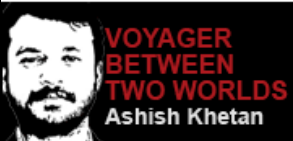
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EARLIER IN TEHELKA

TEHELKA: It is being said the Chharas also committed rapes...

Richard: Now look, one thing is true... *bhookhe ghuse to koi na koi to phal khayega, na* [when thousands of hungry men go in, they will eat some fruit or the other, no]... *Aise bhi, phal ko kuchal ke phak denge* [in any case, the fruit is going to be crushed and thrown away]... Look, I'm not telling lies... Mata is before me [gesturing to an image of a deity]... Many Muslim girls were being killed and burnt to death, some men must have helped themselves to the fruit...

TEHELKA: Must have been a couple of rapes...

Richard: Might even have been more... then there were the rest of our brothers, our Hindu brothers, VHP people and RSS people... Anyone could have helped themselves... who wouldn't, when there's fruit?... The more you harm them, the less it is... I really hate them... don't want to spare them... Look, my wife is sitting here but let me say... the fruit was there so it had to be eaten... I ate too... I ate once.

TEHELKA: Just once?

Richard: Just once... then I had to go killing again... [turns to relative Prakash Rathod and talks about the girl he had raped and killed]... the scrap dealer's daughter Naseemo... Naseemo that juicy plump one... I got on top...

TEHELKA: You got on top of her...

Richard: Yes, properly...

TEHELKA: She didn't survive, did she?

Richard: No, then I pulped her... Made her into a pickle...

Another victim, 22-year-old Sufiya Bano, was raped and burnt in front of her father. The Civil Hospital, where she was admitted and later died, confirmed the attack on her. When her father, Abdul Majid, a witness who deposed before the Nanavati-Shah Commission, tried to save his daughter, he was brutally seized and held and his beard cut off. Apart from Sufiya Bano, six other members of this family were killed: three boys — Mehmood, Ayub and Hussain; two other girls — Afrin Bano and Shahin Bano; and their mother, Lalibibi. At 22, Sufiya was the eldest of her siblings; seven-year-old Hussain and four-year old Shahin Bano were the youngest.

Police Commissioner PC Pandey came to Naroda Patiya only later that night, at around one. As he surveyed the devastation, he said the place looked worse than even the battlefields of Haldighati. So Bajrangi said.

On the day of the massacre, Richard told TEHELKA, BJP MLA Mayaben Kodnani drove around Naroda, exhorting the rioters to kill as many as they could. Worse yet, Bajrangi revealed that he had been giving VHP general secretary Jaideep Patel a blow-by-blow account of the massacre on his mobile phone. He said he made 11 calls to Patel, providing him the latest death toll each time, until his phone went dead. That evening, Bajrangi says, he also called up then Minister of State for Home Gordhan Zadaphia, and told him how many he had killed and said that it was now up to Zadaphia to keep him out of trouble with the law. He went to bed that night feeling like Maharana Pratap, he says. He didn't manage to meet Narendra Modi when the Gujarat CM visited the locality that evening. Modi never made it into the interior of Naroda Patiya, says Bajrangi. "Not even God had the power to enter Naroda Patiya that day."

THE ROLE OF THE POLICE



'They shouldn't be allowed to breed. I say this even today, even if they are women or children'-Babu Bajrangi

Bajrangi was emphatic in his claim that the killings would never have been possible had the police not looked the other way. There was only one entrance to Naroda Patiya, he said, "like a housing society", and there were some 50 policemen posted there. "They could have ripped us apart," he said. "But, though they saw everything, they kept their eyes and mouths shut." Richard said that the police fired at Muslims who were under attack. He also said that late that night, after the rioting had died down, some policemen specially told the Chharas to kill Muslims hiding in a ditch.



'Many Muslim girls were being killed. Some men must have helped themselves to the fruit'- Suresh Richard

THE COVER-UP

TEHELKA in collaboration with advocate Somnath Vatsa of NGO Action Aid — whose Ahmedabad chapter has been fighting for justice for the victims of the 2002 massacre — carried out a threadbare analysis of the police investigation and the chargesheets filed in the Naroda Patiya and Naroda Gaon massacres. We found that far from punishing the guilty, the police were involved in a massive cover-up.



'Mayaben(a local MLA) patrolled the streets, urging the rioters to kill more Muslims'-Prakash Rathod

▮ **Bodies disposed of to diminish magnitude of crime:** Once the massacre was over, the first task before the police was to whittle down the death toll. The larger the number of deaths, the more vociferous the outcry from civil society. As Bajrangi details, the police had the bodies from Naroda Patiya rounded up and dumped at various places across the city. According to Bajrangi, over 200 people had died that day; late that night, then Ahmedabad Police Commissioner PC Pandey came to Naroda and ordered the police to have the bodies removed.

"They were piled up in trucks, it took so many vehicles, some were even stuffed into jeeps." When the bodies were collected the second time and brought to the Civil Hospital for the post-mortem, they were recorded as being from the area where they were found. In this manner, the police managed to keep the death count down to 105, 97 from Naroda Patiya and eight from Naroda Gaon. The post-mortem records show that even these 105 bodies from Naroda were brought to the hospital piecemeal, with the last few bodies being brought in a full four days after the massacre.

▮ **No autopsies on 41 bodies:**With one piece of evidence destroyed, the police moved on to the next stage. The bodies — charred, hacked at, bearing shot wounds, stab marks and marks of rape — could have been strong evidence of a brutal massacre and of the administration's

complicity. They might have served as a potent indication of the fact that this was no spontaneous act of rioting but a systematic pogrom. But the police did not carry out post-mortems on as many as 41 bodies recovered from Naroda Patiya and Naroda Gaon. No explanation has been offered for this act of grave negligence and omission.

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Ninety-seven bodies had inquest panchnamas filed, a legal procedure under which the police, in the presence of two so-called “independent” witnesses, or panchas, physically verify the place from which the bodies were recovered and the nature of injuries on them and record their findings in writing. Thus, by their own records, the police recovered at least 97 bodies from Naroda Patiya. But, shockingly post-mortems were performed on only 58. Of the bodies recovered from Naroda Gaon, autopsies were not carried out on two. Apart from providing irrefutable evidence of the scale of the barbarity perpetrated that day, the autopsies, if done honestly, could have established the time of death, which would have given a fair indication of the total duration of the slaughter. These reports could have been a strong piece of evidence in court. But this is exactly what the police did not want.

❑ **Crucial evidence destroyed:** The scene of a crime gives an investigating agency its most critical pieces of evidence. In Naroda Patiya and Naroda Gaon, the accused had left behind a trail that the police set out to systematically obliterate. The pit in which a large number of people were burnt alive was not even examined — no samples were taken of the soil, of the traces of human tissue or of the remains of burnt fuel. On the contrary, the pit does not even figure in the police version of the massacre. The dying declarations of as many as seven victims were not recorded; two of them died on March 11 after prolonged treatment, but no explanation is forthcoming in the chargesheet of why their statements were not recorded.

❑ **BJP MLA exonerated:** Naroda massacre survivors had named local BJP MLA Mayaben Kodnani as having incited the murderous mob. However, at the time of filing the chargesheet for the carnage, the police dropped her name from the list of the accused, claiming that they had failed to find any evidence against her. But Richard had much to say about the role she had played. Richard and his co-accused Prakash Rathod said that Mayaben patrolled the streets of Naroda Patiya throughout the day, urging the rioters to kill more Muslims.

❑ **Destruction of Noorani Masjid not investigated:** In its records of what it found at the scene of the offence, the police mention the presence of an oil tanker, manufactured by Ashok Leyland, near the Noorani Masjid, with its rear in contact with the wall of the mosque. Its front number plate was intact and read GT-1T 7384. But the tanker was not seized. The Road Transport Office was not contacted to determine its ownership. No samples of its contents were taken for forensic examination. In fact, it is still a mystery as to how a tanker of this size managed to “sneak in” so close to the Noorani Masjid, a place where there were over 12 police personnel on “constant vigil”.

EARLIER IN TEHELKA



Photo: Cherian Thomas

❑ **No proceedings against absconding prime accused:** Many main accused went absconding after the police was forced to register an FIR against them. Babu Bajrangi, Kishan Korani, Prakash Rathod and Suresh Richard, for instance, were arrested three months after the FIR was issued. Bipin Panchal was arrested after a year and a half. But the police did not follow any of the usual procedures used when an accused absconds, such as pasting notices outside the accused's house declaring him an absconder, confiscating his properties, etc.

▮ **Not one confession recorded:** Those arrested for the Naroda Patiya and Naroda Gaon massacres were taken in on remand — a period the court grants to the police to take an accused into custody for interrogation. But the remand and interrogation were a farce. Not one confession has been annexed to the chargesheets filed in either of the Naroda massacres.

▮ **Just one weapon recovered:** Barring one sword recovered from Bipin Panchal in 2004, the police have not recovered any other weapon either from the scene of the crime or from any other accused. The survivors, however, had testified that their attackers, including the accused, were heavily armed with an assortment of weapons — knives, swords, trishuls, gas cylinders and firearms. In an instance where as many as 105 people, according to the police's own admission, were butchered, the failure to recover any weapon used in the massacre speaks volumes for the quality of the investigation carried out. In fact, the owner of a gas agency had given a written statement that 20-odd persons with a Maruti van had landed up at his godown on the day of the carnage and had looted a large number of gas cylinders. The agency owner said his watchman had been present when the incident took place. But neither was the statement of the watchman recorded, nor was any attempt made to identify those involved in the looting or to track down the vehicle used in the crime.

▮ **Not one accused sent for scientific examination:** Since not a single statement of any of the accused was recorded under Section 164 of the Criminal Procedure Code, it would indicate that the police failed to elicit any information by conventional interrogation methods. The next step would have been to subject the accused to scientific examinations like a polygraph test or narcoanalysis or brain mapping. The police, however, initiated no efforts in this direction.

▮ **No mention made of rapes:** Three chargesheets apiece were filed in the Naroda Gaon and Naroda Patiya massacres. However, despite the testimonies of dozens of survivors who had reported that women were raped, not a single instance of rape was recorded. At least one post-mortem indicated a possible case of sexual assault, yet no investigations in this direction were carried out. (It should be noted that since autopsies on 41 bodies were not carried out, there is no ascertaining how many of them were women's and whether they bore marks of sexual assault.)

▮ **Mobile phone recovered from the spot not examined:** On the day of the massacre, a survivor named Mirja Hussain Biwi Moherble recovered a mobile phone near her residence in Naroda Patiya. It had been inadvertently dropped by one of the accused, and was handed over to the police. On enquiry, Additional Commissioner of Police, Crime Branch, AK Surolia found that it belonged to one Ashok Sindhi, an accused in the massacre. Surolia launched a massive investigation and started collecting the call records of Babu Bajrangji and other accused, including Sindhi (Letters from Surolia addressed to telecom companies asking for phone records are with TEHELKA.

We also have handwritten notes by him in which he observed that he believed Bajrangji "to be behind all this".) But before the investigation could go any further, Surolia was transferred. Once he was gone, the police stopped looking into Sindhi's phone records. In the three chargesheets filed in the Naroda Patiya massacre, no mention has been made of any cellphone belonging to an accused being recovered from the scene of the crime.

▮ **Mobile phone records of the accused not made part of the chargesheet:** After the case was transferred to the Crime Branch of the Ahmedabad Police, the then DCP Rahul Sharma proceeded to collect the mobile phone call records of all the accused. But, a few weeks into the probe, he was unceremoniously taken off it and the case was handed over to Deputy Commissioner of Police DG Vanzara. Sharma, however, managed to make a copy of all the call records and produced it before the Nanavati-Shah Commission. These call records are a piece of strong corroborative evidence establishing not only how all the accused were making frantic calls to each other while the Naroda massacre was in progress, but also that they were present at the spot. Call records have not been included as evidence in the chargesheets.



Photo: Cherian Thomas

▮ **No mention made of use of firearms:** In the chargesheets, the police have only said that the mob was carrying sharp-edged weapons (of which only one has been recovered so far). The police have ruled out the use of any kind of firearm by the mob. The injury certificates of most of the survivors who were treated for gunshot wounds were not made part of the chargesheets; all the same, clear mentions of gunshot wounds did find their way into four injury certificates annexed with the chargesheets. One postmortem report also attributes the death to a firearm injury. The dimensions of the entry and exit wounds in all five cases show that the wounds were inflicted by small firearms and not by police rifles. In any case, though the police have claimed to have

fired 91 rounds to disperse the mob, it is not their case that anyone was injured in police firing. As to how these five people sustained bullet injuries, the entire investigation is silent.

▮ **No identification parades carried out:** In the case of both the Naroda massacres, dozens

of witnesses have stated that were the accused to be shown to them, they would identify their attackers. Yet, except for Ashok Sindhi, the police did not conduct any identification parades of the accused. The identification parade is of immense importance in cases of mob violence.

THE INVISIBLE HAND

In the course of their conversations with TEHELKA, numerous accused spoke appreciatively of the role of the police, and named senior Sangh Parivar functionaries, for their role in the carnage, including MoS for Home Gordhan Zadaphia, whom Bajrangi spoke to after the massacre. When so many arms of the government were involved at so many levels, was the man who headed the state also involved?

TEHELKA asked Bajrangi this question. In reply, the Naroda massacres prime accused said that Chief Minister Narendra Modi had visited Naroda twice after the massacre — first, in the evening of the day of the massacre, when he came to the locality but was unable to enter it, and second, on the next day, when he went inside Naroda Patiya. On both visits, Modi had encouraged the murderers, Bajrangi said, and told them that whatever they had done was good and that they should do even more.

Suresh Richard corroborated this account and said that Modi had also visited Chharanagar on the evening of the massacre and garlanded the rioters. Bajrangi said that if Modi had not told the police to stand back, the massacre would never have been possible. But Modi's support to the rioters did not stop at the facilitation of the killings. Bajrangi said after the Naroda killings, Modi kept him in hiding for more than four months and then stage-managed his arrest. If that was not enough he also brought in a favourable judge to hear Bajrangi's bail petition and got him out of jail.

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Dance Of Hate

Safehouse Of Horrors

Petrified Muslims in the area flocked to Gulbarg, sure of refuge for it housed former Congress MP Ehsan Jafri. Their worst fears came alive



Shell-shock Qasimbhai (foreground) of Gulbarg, who lost 19 members of his family. Photo: Cherian Thomas

IN THE FIVE months of TEHELKA'S investigation into the Gujarat genocide, many rioters and conspirators spoke of their role at length. But there was one place that had not been covered — Gulbarg. The housing society, situated in the eastern part of Ahmedabad, was once home to former Congress MP Ehsan Jafri. Despite the presence of a police contingent, a Hindu mob had laid siege to the society on the morning of February 28. For over five hours, Jafri kept making desperate phone calls to the police commissioner, to the chief minister's office, to Congress leaders in Delhi and to his friends, pleading for help.

For over five hours, about 30 Muslim families in the society prayed and hoped that they would be rescued. Along with them were many Muslims from the adjoining slums who had taken shelter in Gulbarg, thinking that a society housing a Congress leader would be an unassailable refuge. Finally, at around 2:30pm, the mob stormed into the society and killed whoever they could lay their hands on. The official death toll was 39. But the survivors claimed that a far greater number were killed. Jafri himself was burnt alive. The remains of his body were never found. Those killed at Gulbarg and Naroda were given a mass burial in freshly dug graves in a Muslim graveyard at Ahmedabad on March 6, 2002.

During TEHELKA'S last meeting with Babu Bajrangi on September 1, 2007, Bajrangi mentioned that he knew many VHP activists who were accused in the Gulbarg massacre. He said the VHP was not taking good care of them and that he could arrange a meeting if required. On September 8, I flew to Ahmedabad to meet the Gulbarg accused. One of Bajrangi's office assistants took me to Meghaninagar, the area where Gulbarg society was



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situated. We decided to meet on the road opposite Gulbarg society. The desolation of the society (it's abandoned now), located in the middle of a bustling, colourful neighbourhood, was eerie. The iron gate at the front, the walls within, the windows, the doors, the roof, they were all of the same colour — charcoal black.

Shopkeepers, hawkers, neighbours, passers-by, all went about their business without sparing a glance for this piece of land. We waited there for almost 20 minutes before two senior local VHP leaders arrived. One of them, Mahesh Patel, owned a shop close by. These two VHP men do not themselves figure in the police charge sheet but they were to introduce me to those named in the list of accused. Mahesh Patel took me to his house and sent word to the accused to gather at his place. Patel gave me a run-down of the things the VHP had done for the accused — from providing food in jail, to sending money to their families, to arranging legal aid (For Patel, I was an RSS man who had come down from Delhi to assess how the Hindu riots accused were keeping).

About 40 minutes later, three accused — Prahlad Raju, Mangilal Jain and Madan Chawal arrived (39 Hindus were chargesheeted but at that time only these three were available). To begin with, they demolished the grand claims made by Patel that the VHP took good care of them. Their list of complaints was long and bitter. I took their phone numbers and left after promising that I would ensure their complaints were properly addressed and that they received more help from the VHP and RSS in future. On my way back, I called up Mangilal Jain on his cellphone and told him to see me at my hotel near Ahmedabad airport. I told him to bring along the other two as well.

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THE SIEGE OF GULBARG

Prahlad Raju said the VHP and Bajrang Dal activists passed through Meghaninagar in large numbers early that day. They were out to enforce the bandh called by the VHP. He said he joined the groups at about 8:30am.

He said many activists were carrying tridents in their belts. Mangilal Jain added that many in the mob also had sticks and carted litres of petrol in their cars. According to Madan Chawal, some in the mob were also carrying firearms. Chawal said that soon after the VHP activists arrived, someone set a shop owned by a Muslim on fire. At this point, Chawal, who ran a grocery here, also joined the mob.

WHO LED THE MOB?

Chawal, Jain and Raju said that two VHP leaders — Atul Vaid and Bharat Teli — and a local Congress leader Megh Singh were leading the mob.

HOW EHSAN JAFRI WAS KILLED

Soon, the mob gheraoed Gulbarg society. While there were 30 to 35 Muslim families residing in the society, poor Muslims from adjoining slums had also taken shelter within the compound. Since the gates of the society were closed and the boundary walls enclosing the society were high, a few in the mob blasted the wall from the front and the rear.

Chawal said, “The mob took cylinders from other houses. The cylinders were placed along the wall and set afire... resulting in an explosion that damaged the almost two-foot thick wall.” He said some from the mob scaled the almost 20-foot wall by rope. Alarmed at the mob ambushing the complex, Jafri began to make frantic calls to police officers and political leaders. When nothing seemed to work, the accused told TEHELKA, Jafri opened fire on the mob and injured a few people. Then he offered the mob money pleading for them to spare him and the other Muslims in Gulbarg. At this, the mob told him to come down to them with the money.

Jain said that as soon as he stepped out, Jafri dropped the money on the ground and tried to rush back. But the mob pounced on him. Chawal recalled the killing: “*Paanch-chheh jan pakad liye the, phir usko jaise pakad ke khada rakha phir logon mein se kisi ne talwar maari... haath kaate... haath kaat ke phir pair kaate... phir na sab kaat dala... phir tukde kar ke phir lakda jo lagaye thhe, lakde uspe rakh ke phir jala daala... zinda jala daala...* (Five or six people held him, then someone struck him with a sword... chopped off his hand, then his legs... then everything else... after cutting him to pieces, they put him on the wood they’d piled and set it on fire... burnt him alive...)”

After killing Jafri, the mob dragged out other Muslims and slaughtered them and set them on fire. At around 4.30 in the evening, the police finally dispersed the mob and the survivors were rescued.

THE COMPLICIT POLICE

According to the three accused, the police not only gave them a free hand, but also exhorted the rioters to kill Muslims. Mangilal Jain said that the police inspector in-charge of Meghaninagar police station, KG Erda told the rioters that they had three to four hours to carry out killings. TEHELKA found that the police inspector had given this time since extra forces were expected to be in Ahmedabad that evening.

Jain said some in the police kept away, indicating to the rioters that they were to do whatever they wished in those few hours. This further fuelled the mob’s frenzy all over Ahmedabad and led to the deaths of many more Muslims.

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Raju also told TEHELKA that police personnel deployed in the area not only stood back but signalled to the rioters to go for the kill. Erda arrived to “rescue” the survivors after the massacre was almost over. At this point, relates Chawal, the rioters approached Erda and told him he was not doing the right thing as the survivors could testify against them. So Erda came up with a heinous plan — as the van carrying the survivors drew away from Gulbarg, the rioters were to pelt stones at it so the constable on the vehicle could claim to have been scared off. He would flee and the mob could then torch it. But the plan could not be executed because of the timely intervention of a Muslim inspector called Pathan, Chawal said.

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THE COVER-UP



What remains Five years on, the complex is deserted. Photo: Cherian Thomas



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The three accused TEHELKA spoke to said the actual toll was much higher than the official figure but the police had told the mob to dispose of the bodies to reduce the magnitude of the crime. The cover-up continued even after the investigation was initiated. All three spoke to TEHELKA of the royal treatment they received at the hands of the Crime Branch officials investigating the case. They all said that they were extended the best hospitality when they were in police custody and were not interrogated at all. Being in police custody itself, the three said, was a farce, a formality the cops needed to comply with. Chawal said DG Vanzara, who was then posted as DCP (Crime) and was the investigating officer of the Gulbarga massacre, never asked him to reveal anything about the massacre. The three said they lied in their police statements and the police didn't pressurise them to tell the truth.

Dozens of survivors wrote to the Ahmedabad police commissioner saying that their statements had been recorded incorrectly by the police. One survivor, Mohammad Raffik Pathan, made a sworn affidavit to the police commissioner stating that four assailants whom he had identified and named before the police were not included in his final statement. Another, Mohammad Sayeed, stated that nine of the assailants he had named were omitted from his statement while four persons whom he had named were included. Despite dozens of such representations, the police refused to correct the glaring discrepancies.

Many victims had told the police that they had seen VHP leaders Bharat Teli and Atul Vaid in the mob. As is recorded on the TEHELKA spycam, the three Gulbarga accused have corroborated the presence in the mob of the two VHP leaders. But the police is yet to include their names in the chargesheet.

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