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Semiotics of Terror

Muslim Children and Women in Hindu Rashtra

What is new about Gujarat, it is argued here, is best exemplified by what happened to Muslim women and children on the days of the long knives. Not just their killing, not just the sadism, but the larger symbolic purpose behind the killing and the sadism that sums up the nature of ethnic cleansing, the shape of Hindu Rashtra.

TANIKA SARKAR

A serious inadequacy plagues our known vocabularies of horror. Words like communal violence or carnage or massacre have been over-used to describe far too many situations whose horror is minimal, even relatively 'innocent', compared to the last four months in Gujarat. The problem is that we naturalise, domesticate, make somewhat bearable and comfortable, Gujarat events when we stretch old words to cover radically new meanings. What is at issue in Gujarat is not simply a recurrence of the perennial communal tension, but a fundamental political transformation: the installation of Hindu Rashtra – the dream of V D Savarkar, the vision of a nearly 80 year-old Sangh. It has been inaugurated with the rituals and rites and sacrifices appropriate to itself. Bystanders and survivors during the days of maximal violence were struck by the festive, carnivalesque aspect of rampaging mobs. Indeed, one such mob looked like a 'barat', a wedding band, to unsuspecting Muslims on the fateful morning of February 28.

Gujarat was also a testing-ground, a measuring of the tolerance-level of the Indian polity, by the fathers of the new nation. There has, indeed, been horrified anguish, protest, sincere relief and rehabilitation efforts from the whole world. Nonetheless, the Modi government continues to enjoy the full support of the centre, the NDA holds firm, the Sangh is going to get its chosen president. In a revealing declaration of self-confidence, Vinay Katiyar has been made the BJP chief in UP, even though the rest of the Sangh combine had so far been careful to publicly distance itself from the Bajrang Dal. Obviously, the Sangh has decided that reticence is no longer necessary. The VHP's 'Ayodhya campaigns,' slated for March 15, had drawn strong protest from

sections of the NDA. The forthcoming Ayodhya plan, in contrast, has been received in coy and modest silence by the allies. It seems, then, the Sangh can rely on the emergence of a new moral order, or, rather, on an abrogation of all morality among significant sections of Indians, to risk such telling self-disclosures.

What does the new dispensation look like? State relief and rehabilitation in Gujarat is less than the proverbial fig leaf, and the tawdry relief camps are closing even as Hindu goons are encouraged to kill, intimidate and terrorise Muslims who attempt to return to their homes. Few arrests have been made of Hindu killers, and none of the political characters has been apprehended. The VHP plans another 'rathayatra' – a ceremony that punctually unleashes violence, counter-violence and pogroms. The signals seem to be green all along the way, for the Bajrang Dal now holds training camps in combat in far-off states. According to a report in the *The Times of India*, Calcutta edition, of June 13, a 10-day training camp successfully concluded its session in Medinipur in West Bengal, under the guidance of Praveen Togadia.

The irony is that the Indian people, in election after election, gives its mandate against the Sangh. The BJP is the only party that has never been returned twice consecutively to the same state. That only renders the quicker advent of the Hindu Rashtra to replace the democratic polity an urgent necessity for the Sangh. It is a precarious balance of opportunistic allies and inept opposition that keeps it in power. Before a new political constellation emerges, it needs to topple the fundamentals of the democratic constitution. Golwalkar, the ideologue of the Sangh, was able to fulminate against democracy openly, in the happier days when the Sangh did not have to woo an electorate based on universal adult franchise. In a revealing statement, Vajpayee, in a mild criticism

of Gujarat excesses said that 'rajadharma' has been offended: he did not refer to democracy.

If Gujarat is new, a landmark in the annals of horror, it is dangerous to over-stress its radical emergence. The intrepid journal, *Communalism Combat*, had predicted the situation at least four years back. Each individual feature of Gujarat has been anticipated and experimented with since the Ramjanmabhoomi movement began: in Meerut, Maliana, Bhagalpur, at Ayodhya, Mumbai, Surat, Bhopal, at Manoharpur in Orissa and at countless other places. "After such knowledge, what forgiveness?"

What, then, is radically new in Gujarat? More important than the statistics of loss, is the nature of terror, for violence now consists of public acts of sadism that have been missing from earlier histories of carnage in our country. Looked at dispassionately, we have exceeded the achievements of Nazi terror, Bosnian atrocities, our own partition violence – if not in scale or numbers, then in the intensity of torture, the sheer opulence and exuberance in forms of cruelty. It is as if the most gruesome elements from all the annals of mass destruction have been pulled together to form a whole that is Gujarat today. However, I would like to argue that what is new about Gujarat can best be exemplified in what happened to Muslim women and children on the days of the long knives. Not just their killings, not just the sadism that effected their killings, but the large symbolic purpose behind the deaths sums up the nature of ethnic cleansing, the shape of Hindu Rashta. I will return to this point a little later.

The facts of Gujarat violence are well known. I will try to locate a few patterns and trends within this violence. My main contention is, it is not the collapse of the state machinery that we are looking at, but the penetration of state and grass roots institutions – from police to hospitals – by the Sangh parivar. When talking of Gujarat events, it is very common to use terms like the failure of the Modi government, the weakness of the state, or the limits of the BJP-led coalition at the centre. I would strongly insist that, on the contrary, the Modi government as well as the Sangh as a whole, have been spectacularly successful in their agenda. What is happening in Gujarat is not a mark of

weakness or inadequacy but a sign of the strength of the Sangh parivar, its firmness of resolve, its ideological consistency. This is the first time in our history that a state is headed by a RSS 'pracharak'. The state governor, S S Bhandari, is a leading light of the Sangh, while the central government has as its prime minister and home minister, two very senior and experienced Sangh leaders. Vajpayee chose to remind us of his basic allegiance in the middle of the carnage during the Goa Conference: "The Sangh is my soul". Gujarat's Lokayukta, its chairman of the state public service commission, the vice-chancellor of the Gujarat University, are all old RSS hands. So is Arun Oza, the senior government pleader at the Ahmedabad High Court. Narendra Modi freely used the services of the state radio or Akashvani to put forward his views, and the vernacular press, especially *Sandesh* and the *Gujarat Samachar*, manufactured stories of Muslim violence and freely circulated them.

K G Shah, who leads the judicial commission to enquire into Gujarat events, is well known for his Hindutva leanings and his anti-Muslim judgments during TADA trials. Among senior police officials, Sangh links abound. V B Rawal, inspector, Crime Branch, was a 'karsevak' at the time of the demolition of the Babri masjid and he proudly displays a photograph to prove his contribution to the cause. DCPs R D Makadia and D G Patel, are close to the VHP general secretary Pravin Togadia, while DCP Parghi is an intimate associate of Haren Pandya, the state home minister, and accused by many of inciting the violence and actively assisting it. We may remind ourselves here that at the time of his election, Pandya had promised to "wipe out any trace of Muslims of Paldi", Paldi being his constituency, and a site of great violence in recent months. In 1999, Mahen Trivedi, minister of state for home, publicly declared at a police function, "We told you that we don't want Muslims in controlling posts." Gujarat, incidentally has only 65 senior Muslim police officers, none of them at present in active field service.

A happy conjuncture for the Sangh parivar, with all contingencies taken care of, all loopholes sealed. As a result, no important member from the entire combine – not even from the Bajrang Dal – has so far been arrested. This, despite the fact that several FIRs had been launched and numerous complaints made by eyewitnesses that not only local BD and

VHP office-bearers, but also municipal corporators and MLAs – both men and women – led the mobs. Even BJP ministers have been named by many: Gordhan Zadaphya, home minister; Bharat Barot, food and civil supplies minister; Nitin Patel, finance minister; Ashok Bhatt, health minister and I K Jadeja, development minister. VHP leader Jaideep Patel and Maya Kodnani, BJP MLA, have been explicitly implicated in the gruesome massacres at Naroda Patiya.

Great Solidarity

All the affiliates and the sub-affiliates of the Sangh parivar have displayed great mutual solidarity and protectiveness. BJP supported each of the VHP bandh calls that led to massive carnage; as VHP bandhs over the last four years unfailingly had similar results, there was thus sure foreknowledge about what a bandh call would mean. Modi consistently concealed the extent of damage and claimed that things were almost normal even while massacres were happening. The RSS and the BJP cleared Modi of all blame and responsibility. Vajpayee's explanation for the violence echoed Modi's action-reaction thesis: Godhra led to a spontaneous outburst from all Hindus, Muslims have never lived in peace with non-Muslims anywhere in the world. Advani had cleared the BD of all charges of violence at the time of the murder of Graham Staines and his children: "I know these people, they will never do such a thing". K K Shastri, a nonagenarian VHP leader and noted Sanskritist, issued a circular which claimed that a team of 50 lawyers were working to release the arrested and to fight their cases.

It is not accidental that the RSS had described Gujarat as "the laboratory of the Hindu Rashtra". The experiments are now showing results. So magistrates sat quietly while the state burned, the police refused help at best, and, at worst, shot, tortured and raped Muslims. Fire brigades did not come to help, hospitals turned away Muslim victims, Muslim ambulance services were systematically disrupted by the police. FIRs were either not registered, or registered at a collective level which left no room for individual complaints. Arrests were not made and relief came mostly from Muslim, Christian or non-governmental organisations. There are no rehabilitation plans, compensation claims are impossible to establish, and if established, they are either not paid at all or paid fractionally.

For the last six months, charges had been made by independent agencies that the BD was holding congregations on Saturday evenings, where tridents and swords were distributed and martial training given. It was also pointed out that systematic lists of Muslim addresses, business concerns and collaborative ventures with Muslim capital were compiled. The truth of the allegations was borne out in the knowledgeable and sure-footed way in which mobs identified households and residences, selecting Muslim apartments in mixed housing societies, or burning hotels that carried Hindu names but included some amount of invisible Muslim capital. Government departments and their official records had obviously been pressed into service. The pile up of weapons and the training to use new and deadly chemicals to burn houses and bodies, the ability to deftly light and throw burning gas cylinders, the availability of swords which is legally a contraband object – all this proves months of systematic planning and not at all a spontaneous outburst immediately after Godhra.

More sinister is the management of the aftermath of the major flashpoints of violence. Bodies were not just massacred, they disappeared, as did houses, shrines, mosques. Overnight, roads were laid, and Hindu temples were built where Muslim homes used to be. Identities disappeared as well, for refugees in relief camps have neither documents nor identification papers of any sort to prove that they ever had property, jobs, bank balances, land, families, Indian citizenship. How can they legally refute charges, daily made by the Sangh, that camps harbour terrorists? Was the role of the NDA allies also foreknowledge, or was it an inspired guess? Was it anticipated that allies like Fernandes would applaud rape as natural, that TDP would demand the dismissal of the Modi government but would not vote against BJP, that Trinamool would demand president's rule but would vote with the BJP?

Be that as it may, there is no doubt that without a unique conjuncture of events – BJP at the helm at the centre, an RSS pracharak at the state – ethnic cleansing on such a scale could not have been carried out. It was not criminal elements who caused the massacre, nor was it the independent work of lumpen BD activists. At any given time, mobs of thousands were roaming the streets, in as many as 16 districts, and no state can harbour that large a professional criminal population. Faces in the mob that were recognised by

victims included well known political leaders, teachers, advocates, shopowners and traders, sarpanches, farmers, labourers, tribal and dalit groups. The recruitment of widely divergent social groups, the training in combat action, the mobilisation of an immense will to violence bespeak tenacious and long-standing political activity within the very pores of civil society.

II

What kind of politics accomplished all this? The BD is the official youth wing of the VHP which, in turn, is the religious wing of the Sangh, established and trained by the RSS. Its top leaders are all RSS members, and many also have BJP membership. The Sangh leaders told us in 1990 that Bajrangdalis were junior members of the Parivar, important only during vendettas and scuffles – “during tit-for-tat situations” – but important, nevertheless. Incidentally, on the day of the VHP bandh on February 28, a group of ABVP students ransacked the Delhi University library building. They sported saffron headbands with Jai Shri Ram stamped on them, they carried swords – the typical gear of BD mobs in Gujarat. The ABVP, however, is an official organ of the RSS.

Savarkar had proclaimed in 1923 that Indians were essentially Hindus in their cultural ethos, and all those who had any affiliation with religious or cultural movements outside the land were not Indians. The formula excluded Muslims and Christians from the body-politic. Later, the VHP constitution added communists to the list. At one stroke, therefore, citizenship was reserved for Hindus alone and nation and Hindus were made synonymous. In his multi-volume histories of India, Savarkar painted a bleak picture of Muslim tyranny in India, emphasising especially the alleged abductions of Hindu women. The RSS drew a single corollary from this. All Muslims are a threat to faith and nation, and especially to women at all times, and, therefore, revenge must be taken on present-day Muslims both for historical wrongs and for the future danger that they embody.

So either Hindus avenge themselves or suffer emasculation. Revenge emerged as a mobile concept, as did the figure of the Muslim. For the Muslim of today embodies all past offences and future threats that have been allegedly committed and could be committed. Therefore, revenge may be taken on any Muslim anywhere for anything that any Muslim could do or had

done. This is crucial, for it alone explains Modi's action-reaction theory: Muslims of far-away Panch Mahal or Ahmedabad justifiably paying for an action done at Godhra. Or take the notion of Ram-janmabhoomi, for instance. Present-day Muslims must be attacked to avenge an alleged attack on an alleged Hindu temple in the days of Babur. Again, a 15th century Muslim poet's tomb or a 20th century Muslim singer's tomb can be smashed to avenge Godhra. Even Muslims of the past must pay for what Muslims of the present are doing, just as Muslims of the present are paying for past sins.

If the motif of infinite, elastic revenge unifies past, present and future, then the production of an appropriate historical memory is crucial for the generation of the new political culture. History teaching, textbooks and historical scholarship have been special targets of Sangh attacks. They need to assert their monopoly over historical truth, for there is a strange symmetry between their historical allegations and their present violence. They assert that Muslims broke temples, and then they demolish mosques. They allege forced conversion, and then they command victims to utter the name of Ram or to convert. Legends of rapes of Hindu women abound, and Muslim women are then raped freely.

If the conceptual apparatus is simple, crude, monochromatic and one-dimensional, the organisational and communicational apparatus is singularly protean, pluralised, innovative, hegemonic. The RSS shakhas have ideological and combat training schedules on a daily basis. The training is a blend of physical exercises, martial arts training, speeches and tales, songs and theatre, games and organised sports. Each effort replicates the same message and sense of purpose in a different medium. They also run schools, leisure centres, cultural organisations, welfare societies, tribal and slum-level educational projects, audio and video stations. They control temple networks, associations of priests and sadhus. They, of course, rule over states.

The cadres and all members of their various mass fronts are taught this message as history, as religion and as nationalism. Two facts stand out within this ideological formation. One is that both religion and nationalism are being recast as a crusade against Christians and Muslims. At the same time, religion and nation are fused into a single entity whose

lifeblood is vindictiveness for alleged past wrongs committed by Muslim rulers. The second is that Hindu unity is based on its antagonism against other Indian religions, which would overrule any engagement with power relations and social abuses of class, caste and gender within the Hindu community. In fact, even a reference to such problems is described as divisive of both religion and nation. The second ‘sarsanghchalak’ and ideological guru of the Sangh, Guruji Golwalkar, was quite frank in his denunciations of democracy, low castes and labour agitations. These open statements, however, became covert and muted once independent India adopted a Constitution based on universal franchise and the electoral wing of the RSS needed to broaden its constituency. The new tactic was, therefore, to silence discourses on rights, equality and social justice by promoting a militant Hindutva and a militaristic nationalism in its place. Savarkar was a staunch supporter of nuclearising of India. The Sangh works among exploited social groups to Hinduise and communalise them, it does not tolerate work for social justice.

These are themes that are poured out of RSS shakhas every day, since 1925. A multifarious cluster of numerous mass fronts supplement their dissemination. Narendra Modi is no ordinary politician. He is a Sangh pracharak, a celibate man without any ties of family, job, totally immersed in the work of organising, teaching and disseminating Sangh values. He has spent an entire lifetime spreading the message of hate.

III

There is a dark sexual obsession about allegedly ultra-virile Muslim male bodies and overfertile Muslim female ones, that inspire and sustain the figures of paranoia and revenge. VHP leaflets, openly circulating in Gujarat today, signed by the state general secretary, Chinubhai Patel, promise: “We will cut them and their blood will flow like rivers. We will kill Muslims the way we destroyed Babri mosque”. This is followed by a poem

“The volcano which was inactive...has erupted
It has burnt the arse of miyas and made them dance nude
We have untied the penises that were tied till now
We have widened the tight vaginas of the bibis...”

One of the most spectacular forms of sadism in the recent events had been the way Muslim female and infantile bodies were made to function in the drama of Hindutva terror. There had been earlier anticipations of that. The investigations made by the AIDWA in 1992-93, especially in Surat and Bhopal, had pointed out several similar features. Women were "tortured, molested, raped, and then burnt to death". Sometimes, their children were killed before their eyes. At the same time, more often than not, such atrocities were whispered about and not always confirmed openly. This time, rape victims as well as their male relatives have no inhibition about reporting rape and sexual torture. The police, however, do not admit FIRs on rape, a senior officer claims that mobs have no time for raping, and that Hindus, moreover, do not rape. Fernandes, on the other hand, says that rape is so universally prevalent that Gujarat rapes are not worth talking about. So, either it has not happened, or it happens universally; in either case, it cannot or need not be mentioned.

Women have been killed in very large numbers. At the mass grave that was dug on March 6 to provide burial to 96 bodies from Naroda Patiya, 46 women were buried. Bilkees Beghum from the Godhra relief camp told a tale that seemed to confirm a recurrent pattern in most places, according to survivors' accounts. She was stripped, gang-raped, her baby was killed before her, she was then beaten up, then burnt and left for dead. For variety's sake, other women also had acid thrown upon them, and then burnt in fires. A women's fact-finding report sums up the usual procedure: "...rape, gang rape, mass rape, stripping, insertion of objects into their body, molestation... a majority of rape victims were burnt alive." Before they were finally killed, some were beaten up with rods and pipes for almost an hour. Before or after the killing, their vagina would be sliced, or would have iron rods pushed inside. Similarly, their bellies would be cut open or would have hard objects inserted into them. A 13-year old girl, Farzana, had a rod pushed into her stomach, and was then burnt. A mother reported that her three-year old baby girl was raped and killed in front of her, while elsewhere daughters reported on the rapes of their mothers, now dead. Kausar Bano, a young girl from Naroda Patiya, was several months pregnant. Several eyewitnesses testified that she was raped, tortured, her womb was slit open with a sword to disgorge the

foetus which was then hacked to pieces and roasted alive with the mother.

At Fatehpura, young girls were paraded naked. After they were rescued by a Muslim ambulance service, they travelled to the camp without a stitch on them. Other victims arrived naked at camps, too, after acid had been poured upon their clothes, which they tore off in agony from their burning and peeling bodies.

Medina Mustafa Ismail Shaikh reported from Kalol camp: "My daughter was like a flower, still to experience life... The monsters tore my beloved daughter to pieces... the mob was saying, cut them to pieces, leave no evidence... I saw fires being lit. After some time, the mob started leaving. And it became quiet."

It had become very quiet, for the voices of children could not be heard. A very large number of parents, especially mothers, had to see their children die in excruciating agony before they, too, were tortured and burnt. At the mass grave for 96 people, they buried a six month old baby. Fatimabibi, who came to Delhi to testify to the violence, kept repeating dementedly: "Innocent (masoom) tender babies were crying for water, they filled them up with petrol and then lit them up." At Randhikapur village, a young pregnant woman first saw her baby cut to pieces. Then she was raped and her foetus was ripped out and killed. They beat her up and left her for dead. Four year old Asif died of 90 per cent burns after several days' of agony. Before he died, *The Hindu* took a photograph of his bandaged face, out of which his large, beautiful, fully aware eyes were blazing out.

Pattern of Cruelty

One can go on narrating the ways in which babies and women were tortured and killed, but the point here is often the two acts were coupled together. The pattern of cruelty suggests three things. One, the woman's body was a site of almost inexhaustible violence, with infinitely plural and innovative forms of torture. Second, their sexual and reproductive organs were attacked with a special savagery. Third, their children, born and unborn, shared the attacks and were killed before their eyes.

In readings of community violence, rape is taken to be a sign of collective dishonouring. The same patriarchal order that designates the female body as the symbol of lineage and community purity, would

designate the entire collectivity as impure and polluted, once their woman is raped by an outsider. Rape, in Gujarat violence, obviously performed that function. But what, then, is the point of the elements of excess, the surplus of cruelty, and its multifarious forms? We need to remember that the Gujarati press invented the murder of 80 Hindu women on the Sabarmati Express at Godhra, who had been raped and had their breasts cut off – a complete invention, since even the Gujarat police denied the story. However, it served to justify rapes and mutilations of Muslim women within the structure of 'action-reaction' discourse. The fact that revenge went far beyond that is not surprising for revenge is not revenge if it does not outstrip the original offence. In Delhi, on February 28, we heard RSS boys shouting: 'Ek ka badla sau me lenge' (We will avenge one death with a hundred).

Beyond Godhra are the legends that all boys in the shakhas are bred on: partition time rapes of Hindu women, rapes of Hindu queens under Muslim rule, abductions of Hindu women all through history by Muslims. There is also the perpetual fear of a more virile Muslim male body that lures away Hindu girls, a kind of penis envy and anxiety about emasculation that can only be overcome by doing violent deeds. Violence, for the Sangh, is both source and proof of maleness. In the 1990s, when communal violence had intensified, bangles were sent to localities where riots had not taken place, to taunt Hindu men with effeminacy. At Jawaharlal Nehru University, a post-Godhra procession of the ABVP chanted: 'Jis Hinduon ka khoon na khola, woh Hindu nahin, woh hijra hain' (Those Hindus whose blood does not boil, are not Hindus, they are eunuchs). This identification between killing and masculinity, is a strong and uniquely Sangh teaching. In Gujarat, mobs who raped, sometimes came dressed in khaki shorts or in saffron underwear, rape being obviously seen as a religious duty, a Sangh duty. In times of violence, Hindu male sexual organs must function as instruments of torture.

But why, then, the deliberate and large-scale killing of children, of babies, most often in the presence of their parents? For generations, anxieties had been whipped up about Muslim fertility rates, of their uncontrolled breeding and imminent outnumbering of the Hindu majority. So coupled with anxieties of a comparatively less potent Hindu maleness, there is a fear of infertile Hindu femaleness, and a drying

up of future progeny, – the long-standing image of dying Hindus. This is counterposed to that of vigorously self-multiplying Muslims. Muslim children are a promise of future growth, of community self-strengthening, of survival of the community beyond the pogroms.

Fed on such self-invented self-doubt, Hindu mobs swooped down upon Muslim women and children with multiple but related aims. First, to possess and dishonour them and their men, second to taste what is denied to them and what, according to their understanding, explains Muslim virility. Third, to physically destroy the vagina and the womb, and, thereby, to symbolically destroy the sources of pleasure, reproduction and nurture for Muslim men, and for Muslim children. Then, by beatings, to punish the fertile female body. Then, by physically destroying the children, to signify an end to Muslim growth. Then, by cutting up the foetus and burning it, to achieve a symbolic destruction of future generations, of the very future of Muslims themselves. The burning of men, women and children, as the final move, served multiple functions: it was to destroy evidence, it was to make Muslims vanish, it was also to desecrate Muslim deaths by denying them an Islamic burial, and forcing a Hindu cremation upon them; a kind of a macabre post-mortem forced conversion.

There were, thus, many layers of signification, of symbolic meanings that went into the act that were repeated by different mobs at different locales, but on fairly identical lines. They can be aligned to Sangh teachings, stereotypes and fantasies. This also explains why the same female body was subjected to a series of sexual humiliation, torture, mutilation and obliteration. Conjoined with the bodies of their children, they provided a site where the entire drama of revenge was enacted in its long and complicated sequence.

IV

There can be no political implication, no resource for struggle, if we deny the truth claims of these histories of sadism, if we say that such facts need not have a basis in the realm of what actually happened, if we denigrate the search for true facts as mere positivism, a spurious scientism. For the life and death of our political agenda depend on holding on to the truth claim, to that difference with VHP histories, to that absolute opposition to their proclama-

tion that they will make and unmake facts and histories according to the dictates of conviction. There will be a massive effort by Hindu Rashtra to produce a will to forgetting, to make things that happened disappear from memory, to fill up memory with images of things that had not happened, to generate counterfeit collective memories, amnesias. We need, as a bulwark against this, not simply our story pitted against theirs, but the story of what had indubitably happened.

It is also important to go back to some old but urgent convictions. Survivors in Gujarat unanimously demand the punishment of the guilty. Note that they do not talk of retribution or revenge, the vocabulary of the VHP, but of the restoration of legal processes, of the constitutional order, of their citizenship rights which have been spectacularly cancelled in Gujarat. For they have been killed because they are Muslims and not Hindus, and the fact of their being capitalists or labourers, farmers or artisans, is subordinate to this metanarrative. Their particular socio-economic locations in Gujarat may produce local conjunctures but these invariably flow into a larger frame which is their religious identity. Muslims and Christians can be tortured and killed at will because they are different, because they stay different, from the majority religious community. It is the secular-democratic constitution that allows them to be different with impunity. As Sudipta Kaviraj recently pointed out in a conference at Pavia, citizenship is the only ground on which cultural difference can be sustained and asserted. We reject this truth as dated, as an old and therefore unusable brand in the marketplace of ideas, at our peril. The only opposite term to equal citizenship rights is unequal citizenship or the denial of citizenship. That is precisely what happened in Gujarat.

V

The communal fascism of the Sangh is not simply an ethnic cleansing. The minorities will not be extinguished in a single apocalyptic gesture, but the possibility of extermination at will is going to be displayed and demonstrated again and again, with spiralling sadism. This is a structural necessity for the Sangh. The necessity performs two distinct functions. By producing violence, it holds aloft the threat of Muslim reprisal, terrorism, war. The originary or dominant source of violence is overshadowed by fears of Muslim

retaliation to such an extent that further terror against Muslims becomes a perceived necessity in large Hindu circles, especially in places where Muslims had been butchered. For people fear the consequences of the evil that they themselves have done, and, fearing that, they externalise their own deeds as a revengeful Other. As always, the fear of Muslims who have been killed, is embodied in the living figures of terrorists and Pakistanis. Once that living shape becomes available, further violence against Indian Muslims is seen as fully legitimate, entirely necessary for the Sangh teaches that each Muslim stands in for all possible Muslims. And, so it goes on.

This breathless climate of terror and counter-terror is the cement that consolidates Hindu unity under Sangh terms. It is a unity that not only ensures perpetual hatred and violence, but also perpetually defers the questions of class, caste and gender power, of the abuses of such power within the community. Not only are abuses of Hindu by Hindu forgotten, all struggles against those power lines can be delegitimised as anti-faith, anti-national, divisive, treacherous. Only on such a ground can patriotism be defined as an act of hatred, of death, not as love for the people of India, not as commitment to the survival and welfare of those who have nothing, not a protection of the country's environment, rivers, water and air. **[PW]**

[A shorter and quite different version of this article is forthcoming in the next issue of *Equality*. I have benefited from discussions with Teesta Setalvad, Kavita Punjabi, Bolan Gangopadhyaya. I have drawn extensively from many investigation reports, and especially from the following:

- (1) 'Genocide: Gujarat 2002', *Communalism Combat*, Mumbai, March-April 2002.
- (2) 'State-Sponsored Carnage in Gujarat', Report of a CPM – AIDWA Delegation, New Delhi, March 2002.
- (3) Syeda Hameed et al, 'How Has the Gujarat Massacre Affected Minority Women?: The Survivors Speak', Fact-finding by a Women's Panel, sponsored by Citizen's Initiative, April 16, 2002.
- (4) Kunal Chattopadhyay (ed), 'The Genocidal Pogrom in Gujarat: Anatomy of Indian Fascism', Inquilabi Communist Sangathan, Vadodara, May 2002.]

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