

**Threatened Existence: A Feminist Analysis of the Genocide in Gujarat**  
**Report by the International Initiative for Justice (IIJ)**  
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**Chapter 3**  
**Centrality of Sexual Violence and Sexuality to the *Hindutva* Project**

Rapes, especially gang rapes, have functioned as one of the central planks of the sexualised violence that took place in Gujarat.

We went to AA5 area. Young men came and started beating us and asked us to leave. Then we went into AA6 area. Again the people from AA6 area people started beating us up. We again started running. We saw smoke, they told us tyres are burning. Lots of women, children were running. We went running there, we saw on the road between AA6 area and the State Transport depot, many girls were stripped and were being raped. Girls were shouting. I saw 4-5 girls being raped... Hindu men AHM14, AHM15, his son AHM16, AHM17 (all from AA6 area) were doing all this.... While raping the girls, the men were shouting *bar bar mahadev*. They were saying, “Go to Pakistan, why are you in Hindustan?” (Safia, woman survivor, AA1 area, Ahmedabad).

They cut off the breasts of her (neighbour’s) daughter, it is difficult to forget, it still swims in my vision. I have lost my mental peace. (Yasmin, woman survivor, PV2 village, Panchmahals).

What had those kids done to them? I cannot forget those girls [who were raped]. We have to try and arrest them [the rapists]. They say that if the police arrests, let them, because they have gathered enough for their families to survive for two years. They say that the police can keep them in for two years.” (Sabah, woman survivor, PV2 village, Panchmahals).

My father-in-law, a retired schoolteacher, refused to leave the village with the other Muslim families who fled to PV3 on February 28<sup>th</sup>. He believed no one would harm us. From the 28<sup>th</sup> about 13 members of my family sought refuge in various people’s houses and the fields. On Sunday afternoon [March 3<sup>rd</sup>] the hut we were hiding in was attacked. We ran in different directions and hid in the field. But the mob found some of us and started attacking. I could hear various members of my family shouting for mercy as they were attacked. I recognized two people from my village – Gano Baria and Sunil – pulling away my daughter. She screamed, telling the men to get off her and leave her alone. The screams and cries of Ruqaiya, Suhana, Shabana, begging for their *izzat* [honour] could clearly be heard. My mind was seething with fear and fury. I could do nothing to help my daughter from being assaulted sexually and tortured to death. My daughter was like a flower, still to experience life. Why did they have to do this to her? What kind of men are these? The monsters tore my beloved daughter to pieces. After a while, 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. (Sabah’s testimony that appeared in another report).<sup>1</sup>

### 3.1 Extent of Sexual Violence in Gujarat

As has been reported by the Citizens’ Tribunal, in various other reports, and through victims testimonies to the IJ panel it is clear that rapes were not the only form of sexual assault. There were many others like verbal abuses, molestation and taunts that continue till today and a humiliation that knows no bounds. Behind all of these lies a crucial pattern that is central to the agenda of *Hindutva*. In Tanika Sarkar’s words:

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.<sup>2</sup>

The women in a community suffer attacks in two ways. In the first case they are members of the collective, like any other, and are liable to be attacked. At the same time, they are the biological and cultural reproducers of the community and their bodies symbolize the body of the community and its boundaries. In the *Hindutva* project, the control of the Muslim Other through gender and sexual domination is at the forefront of the political strategy in Gujarat and elsewhere. In fact, Hindu men see it as their function and duty to violate the bodies of Muslim women. Women who were gang raped during the Gujarat carnage reported their attackers as saying: “Use her as much as you want now, we won’t get her tomorrow”, or, “Today we have them, tomorrow we may not.” (Rehana, woman survivor, BV9 village, Anand). Individual male attackers thus get a licence to rape and vent their hostility on women without consequences.

Hence, the sexual assault incidents were not just random, impulsive or isolated incidents. They were widespread and pre-planned. For many cases—Gujarat, Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia—such wide scale violence could not have been conducted without a significant measure of complicity, if not participation, by the State. In Gujarat, it is clear that all events, including the mass use of rape and sexual assault, occurred with the knowledge of highly placed State actors, and, in many instances, were carried out with the full participation and support of the police. A large number of witnesses from Baroda mentioned that the police often hit the stomachs of pregnant Muslim women in “combing operations” (house-to-house searches for Muslims) while shouting, “Kill them before they are born!”

Many witnesses from Ahmedabad and Baroda corroborated this claim with more accounts of police violence:

On April 30<sup>th</sup> they mobbed us from both sides. We were hiding. The Rapid Action Force came. They threw a child from the third floor. P.S.I. Modi was very bad. He even got inside AA53 area Camp no. 5 and sexually assaulted women in the camp. (Farah, woman survivor, AA32 area, Ahmedabad).

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<sup>1</sup> Women's Panel, The Survivors Speak—How has the Gujarat Massacre Affected Minority Women? (Ahmedabad: Citizen’s Initiative, April 2002).

<sup>2</sup> Tanika Sarkar “Semiotics of Terror: Muslim Women and Children in Hindu Rashtra,” Economic and Political Weekly 37. 28 (July 13, 2002).

In AA56 area, D.C.P. Sawani himself entered the house and beat up small girls, beat up women. One woman who was six months pregnant had an abortion. They said, “We will keep all your men and make you prostitutes.” They used real bad words. So then I also used bad words. I told them, “Even eunuchs can use guns, if you are really men I will take you on”. (Nahida, woman survivor, now living in AA32 area, Ahmedabad).

There was a lot of suggestive sexual violence, verbal [abuse], hitting women on the breasts, targeting private parts, pregnant women were specifically targeted. The policemen also said that the [Muslim] child should not be born. There have been incidents of children being flung across the room. (Sonia, woman activist, organizations BO18 and BO8, Baroda).

Police were also reported to be inactive while they witnessed violence in the most seriously affected places. The State administration colluded with perpetrators of the violence at all levels and continues to do so till today. Investigations into most cases have been shoddy and there are many reasons (elaborated in greater detail later in the report) to believe that the judiciary has also been biased against the Muslim community. Tacit and active support had begun before the violence, which allowed the Hindu right-wing to propagate its ideology among people, carry out its training camps and lay the ground for violence of this nature.

We were told in many places that pamphlets produced by *VHP* and *RSS* were distributed extensively among Hindus for up to three months before the carnage. These pamphlets called upon men from the Hindu community to rape women from the Muslim community. The pamphlets argued for the necessity of violence and murder of Muslims. According to an activist Lata from AO9 organization in Ahmedabad, a pamphlet that stated, “Don’t feel guilty to rape women of the other community,” was distributed in a *Bajrang Dal* training camp prior to the violence. The gendered and sexualised character of the *Hindutva* project associates manhood and potency with Hindu domination of “foreign invaders.”

### 3.2 The making of “Real Hindu Men”

When the brother of Mahatma Gandhi’s assassin,<sup>3</sup> affiliated to the RSS, was interviewed he claimed, that they wanted to show Indians that there were Indians who would not suffer humiliation— that there were still **men** left among the Hindus. Similarly, Reshma, an activist of BO8 and BO9 from Baroda, reported:

Actually bangles were being sent to areas that were not experiencing violence to incite them into violence. Now there are similar pamphlets being distributed that say that now that we will win elections, there will be time for those people that have not participated in the violence to redeem themselves.

The bangles signified cowardice by feminizing the recipient, but they also alluded to womanhood as the negation of manhood and of potency. People in Ahmedabad also reported that Hindu men, including policemen, would stand in line and expose their penises to show that they were taking part in the violence as “true men.” Lata, an activist from AO9 organization in Ahmedabad reported an incident where Hindu men exposed their penises saying: “Your men are weak, we’re strong, you’re not strong enough to fuck your own

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<sup>3</sup> Gandhi’s assassination by RSS member Nathuram Godse shortly after India gained its independence is in many ways considered the symbolic founding moment of the modern *Hindutva* movement in India.

women.” The police too was party to such attacks as Shazia from AA32 area in Ahmedabad testified:

...(on March 1) they set our house on fire and continued rampage. P.S.I. (Police Sub-Inspector) Modi was standing in front of our house. He unzipped his trousers and started making vulgar gesture at women. We were totally shocked and embarrassed. Then we saw that the mob which was standing on the terrace of AA54, AA55 area followed suit. They took off their trousers and started to shout, “Where are the terrorists? Come out now. Call your God.”

Hindu manhood thus becomes the violent protector of Hindus, the basis for the creation of a “pure Hindu State” and a means of controlling the Muslim Other. The gender discourse of *Hindutva* advocates specific terms and parameters for Hindu women’s participation in society as well. Within the context of *Hindutva* it seems that two distinct female figures are emerging: one that is subordinate and docile and the other that is aggressive and rises to the nationalist call-to-arms against the Muslim Other.

### 3.3 The “Hindu Woman”

The construction of the ideal Hindu woman as dependent on the authority of her father/husband, subordinate, dutiful and sacrificing producer of children is connected closely to the concept of the Hindu woman as guarantor and defender of Hindu (and therefore “Indian”) culture. “Mother India” is a powerful image in *Hindutva* imagination and in the perception of national boundaries. Although originally the RSS, as a result of German fascist ideological influence, tried to create an image of India as “The Fatherland,” it did not gain much currency. Instead, one of the repeated campaigns of the BJP has been to oblige children, during school assembly, to sing/swear allegiance to “Mother India” or *Matrubhumi*, whom they must be ready to “defend” like her numerous “offspring” have done in the past. *Hindutva* forces have mobilized this rhetoric to great advantage by recruiting women in thousands to provide strategic support (cooking food, handling equipment) for men who were wreaked the worst violence that took place in Gujarat in 2002. Women also themselves actively participated in looting and violence during the riots.

Safia, a woman from AA1 area in Ahmedabad testified, “AHM15’s daughter was pulling women by hair and throwing them in fire.... We saw women from AA6 area pouring kerosene or some chemical powder so the bodies used to burn.”

RSS and VHP camps that offer women training in the use of *trishuls* and in hand-to-hand combat are becoming more popular. This kind of training and distribution of weapons is also being done in schools. In addition to rhetorical appeals, active participation in Hindu right wing spaces may also attract some women due to the social and, increasingly, political recognition this kind of participation affords.

They have been targeting 16-17 year old children since five years back. I know that they have been approaching schools and giving tridents to school children for Rs. 25. They are told this is to protect your religion. If they want to fight, join the militant group that is go into VHP or *Bajrang Dal* or *Durga Vahini*, if interested in intellectual work, you can go into RSS. (Aamir, AO7 organization, Ahmedabad).

In Gujarat, as in Bosnia or Rwanda, the widespread and furious attacks against women of the minority community were regarded as legitimate not only by male attackers but also by women belonging to the majority community. We heard from testimonies that in some

places the rapists were actively supported or even instigated by women of the majority community.

As Sarah and Aamir, both working with AO7 organization in Ahmedabad, testified:

They (right-wing groups in the area) have started working with women last six months or so. They tell them, “Look Muslim women eat meat, so also you. But look how strong they are. They come out and fight police, they protect the men. You also must do that.”

### **3.4 The “Enemy Other”**

History shows that sexuality is pivotal to nationalist projects in general, and in the construction of the Enemy Other, in particular. German Nazi propaganda portrayed male Jews as seducers and rapists of Aryan girls and women. Similarly, US war posters in World War II mobilized public opinion by portraying Nazi and Japanese men as notorious rapists. Before the outbreak of war in former Yugoslavia, Serbians spread fear and hatred with false propaganda that men belonging to the Muslim Albanian community were raping and seducing Christian Serbian girls. Similarly, the Gujarati language press in the state was flooded with reports of Muslim men raping Hindu girls before the Gujarat pogrom.

Reshma, from organizations BO8 and BO9 in Baroda reported the following regarding the media’s role in the attacks:

Sandesh has played a role in actually manipulating sentiments by misreporting, fanning rumours and creating a communal wave. Right from the first day there was a trial of Muslims. They echoed blood for blood after Godhra. They said that Muslim fanatics attacked the train. ...There were reports of mobs of armed Muslims clashing with Hindus. They splashed front page with photos of mangled bodies.

They would publish unsubstantiated report as headlines. They, for example, reported that ten Hindu girls were abducted in Godhra as front page news and then later denied it on an inside page as a small news item, but by then the damage was done. Incidents were interpreted in a communal and in a completely opposite way to make the Muslims look like the aggressors. They fed into Hindu fears and bias. From the first day they said that ISI was involved in the Godhra incident. They also quoted Taslima Nasreen and gave news of how Hindus were being ill treated in Bangladesh.

Many of these reports included gory details of fictitious sexual violence accompanied by horrifying images of Hindu women whose breasts had been cut off. These rumours fed into already established biases against the Muslim community and made attacks against them appear “justified” and retaliatory.

Taslima an activist from AO3, Delhi, who had worked in different areas of Gujarat, said:

We have woken up to Gujarat now. VHP has been working here for last 15 years, their leaflets are regular features in newspapers, colleges—hatred for Muslims, Christians, secular people, only thing that reaches every home is this and people have nothing to counter it...The leaflets say all Muslims have four wives and their population is growing, even though polygamy is more prevalent in Hindus than Muslims.

The male Other is demonised and presented as a deadly threat to and enemy of the woman who is nurturer, guardian of home, hearth, and family of the community. But at the same time, women and girls of the “enemy” community are seen as central targets.

Hindu Right discourse has successfully circulated stories and myths about how Muslim rulers looted and desecrated temples and picked up Hindu girls at will to satisfy their lust. The body of the mother-nation in these stories is conflated with the body of the Hindu woman, and the “rape of both” in such narratives becomes the justification for retaliatory rape on the bodies of the “enemy” Muslim woman. Muslim men, in the Hindu Right discourse, are not seen as “men” at all: they are either “oversexed” to the extent of being bestial (they can satisfy four wives!) or they are effeminate and not masculine enough to satisfy their women.

This racist construction, very similar to constructions of the Black male in White supremacist discourse and of indigenous sexuality vis-à-vis the colonizer, serves very specific ends. It dehumanises the Other (in this case the Muslim) by making him beast-like and thus easy to kill, and it transforms him into a symbol of the “sexual superiority” the emasculated Hindu man must recover by raping and defiling Muslim women. In a way that is similar to the common White man’s envy of Black masculinity, there have been calls to Hindu men to join gyms and develop muscular bodies to counter the “animal” attraction of the over-sexualised Muslim man. Of course, when Hindu men commit rape and assault their actions are not seen as bestial or animal-like but are considered signs of valour.

Simultaneously, there is an attempt to show that Muslim men are not real men, but rather, homosexuals or *hijras* (eunuchs) -- considered synonymous and undesirable and are therefore unable to satisfy their women. As a VHP leaflet called *Jihad* (holy war) boasts:

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* (women)...  
Wake up Hindus there are still *Miyas* [Muslim men] left alive around you  
Learn from Panvad village where their mother was fucked  
She was fucked standing while she kept shouting  
She enjoyed the uncircumcised penis.<sup>4</sup>

A young man who had been working in a retail shop for five years was questioned thus by his co-workers after the initial violence: “We have taken the honour [raped] of the wives/women of you *miyas*. So what are you doing coming here to work? Will you become a terrorist or will you just stand and watch like a *hijra* [eunuch]?” He could not return to work after this incident. (Mohsin, male survivor, AA45 area, Ahmedabad).

By extension, this is the way for all of emasculated Hindu society to recover its honour. Women’s bodies thus become the arena where the honour and dishonour of communities is played out. This critical aspect of the *Hindutva* discourse has allowed for terrible brutalisation in the form rapes and gang rapes of Muslim women across Gujarat. According to Javed from BO8 organization in Baroda, “[One woman’s]...3-year-old baby was flung against a wall. The head was smashed and the child was instantly killed and the mother was repeatedly raped after that right there.”

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<sup>4</sup> Communalism Combat, 77-78 (2002).

### 3.5 Women as Reproducers of Communities

While many women in Gujarat were brutally killed by burning after the rapes, others were raped with the intention of impregnating them. Women bear children not only to their families but also to their ethnic and national collectivities. One of the major sources of fear of the Muslim Other in the *Hindutva* imagination was that “Muslims breed like rabbits.” This was fuelled by Chief Minister of Gujarat Narendra Modi himself who, during an election campaign speech following the violence, characterized Muslims as subscribing to the philosophy of “*Ham panch, hamare pachees*” (We five, and our 25 children).

Many testimonies of rape victims include narratives where the rapists defined their acts of rape as “making a little Hindu”—their own “contribution” to the demographic race between Hindu and Muslim Indians. They said, “We will make you conceive and give birth to Hindu children.” (Rehana, BV9 village, Anand). Tahira, from AA1 in Ahmedabad, testified that her attackers said, “After we impregnate you, only then we will leave your family.” The same was reported by many women from the Muslim community in Bosnia but also, one must add, by some women from the Serbian community who were raped by Muslim men. This reflects the fact that rape is a part of the overall nationalist project based on the racist and patriarchal assumption that only the male seed and patrilineage constitute membership to a particular group, and that the female body serves only as its vessel.

The deliberate shaming, especially of girls and young women, by raping them publicly or in front of other family members, including children, speaks of the intentional attempt to subjugate the community by attacking the female body. Rehana from BV9 village in Anand district told us how she and seven women and seven girls from her village were raped in front of men from their own community”

They took us to the fields and started shouting dirty abuses at us. Some men were tearing at our clothes and some were scratching our bodies, pricking our bodies. Some men were kissing our face. Some were pressing our breasts and some were pricking our thighs and kicking us. After this one by one we were taken to the wheat fields and we were raped. While they were raping us they were talking and doing obscene things and abusing us.

She went on to recount how the leader of the attacking mob constantly spurred the others on by saying: “Not even one should remain *kori* [untouched],” and “Don’t let a single one go.”

While the torture of men generally creates empathy and solidarity among the targeted community, the sexualised torture of women is particularly destructive to patriarchal notions of female honour. The attackers knew this. Many women we met told us that they could not seek comfort and support from their male relatives. They were afraid of what would happen to them if their complaints instigated fresh violence between men of the two communities. Further, being a victim of violent sexual assault in a patriarchal system is primarily a source of shame to the woman and by association, her family and community.

In fact, one result of the deliberate targeting of girls and young women during the pogrom has been the hasty marriages of girls. One of the reasons for these marriages is the fear of further targeting of single girls in the future. The sense of insecurity that the community lives with and the overtly sexualised rhetoric of violence translate into traditional practices, such

as early marriage, restriction of their mobility, withdrawal of girls from schools, colleges and work. Such panic is an inevitable reaction to a very real lack of safety for women.

### **3.6 Marriage: The legal institution for reproduction of communities**

The control of women through marriage has been an important way of maintaining caste, religious, class and community boundaries in Indian tradition. The importance of marriage in preserving social order is elaborated here:

For the Hindu lawmaker, marriage is above all a social institution, whose exclusive purpose is the propagation of the species and preservation of the caste, community, even the nation itself.... Based on respect for the species as the work of the Creator, marriage as an institution concerns caste, race, profession and nation, with which the individual has no right to tamper because it affects everyone else.... Hindu legislation is not puritanical and gives much leeway to human weakness, but marriage outside the caste is considered an antisocial act jeopardizing the entire structure on which society is balanced.<sup>5</sup>

Although there has been a certain weakening of these considerations, largely among a certain economically and socially mobile population, it has remained limited. The notion of a Hindu nation allows some flexibility to certain castes who are in specific class and spatial locations. The attempt to control national boundaries finds expression, for instance, in the especially virulent ways in which marriages between Hindus and Muslims have been treated. Women from the Hindu community who marry men from the Muslim community are necessarily seen as either victims of abduction and/or as traitors. Over the last few years women from the Hindu community in Gujarat wishing to marry men from the Muslim community are being policed and terrorized to dissuade them from doing so.

According to Seema, an activist of organizations BO8 and BO9 in Baroda,

Soon after the BJP came to power in Gujarat, it dismantled the Violence Against Women Cell of the police and started a Cell to monitor inter religious marriages claiming that Hindu women were going through violence on account of this... Parents complain to the VHP. Sometimes the neighbours also inform the VHP. When parents complain to the police about their daughter leaving home, the police forward that case to the VHP. Even when parents refuse to ally with VHP, the police state their inability to do anything without the help from the VHP. They also have a state shelter home, which they use to put the girl in once she is caught. Cases are registered as abduction. The issue does not become an issue of the family but issue of the state and can even result in riots. Inter caste marriages become an issue of the village and disturbances due to these are restricted to the village level unlike inter religious marriages where even judges try to persuade the girl against it.

Sarah and Aamir from AO7 organization in Ahmedabad said,

If a Hindu girl marries a Muslim boy, she gets a letter in the mail from *Durga Vahini* (Hindu Right women's organization), "If you are trapped in this marriage, our women will come and save you."

The situation has continued to worsen over the past few years. In a detailed testimony, Naina, an University teacher and activist of BO8 organization from Baroda, recounted:

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<sup>5</sup> The Caste System, from [www.tributetohinduism.com](http://www.tributetohinduism.com)



In 1997 there were a series of articles in the Gujarati press about Hindu girls marrying Muslim boys and being converted to Islam as part of an international conspiracy. The media reports form the background for the *Durga Vahini's* pamphlet. It says, "Hindus beware, the Sita of your street is going to become a Ayesha or Fatima or Julia," and, "Muslim thugs are going to seduce girls by marrying them and taking them to foreign nations and then killing them." It says that their children will be Muslim and enslaved in that country. There is a particular focus on M.S. University the pamphlet says. It says, "Be very careful of your children." It has an address and phone number. The pamphlet was found with a truck driver. VHP would police Hindu women outside hostels etc.

They use motherhood in significant ways. In 2001 RSS and ABVP entered my class and all classes of F.Y.B.A. on 14<sup>th</sup> August, giving out pamphlets calling India Mother India and referred to Bangladesh and Pakistan as the two arms of India that were ripped apart. They asked the students to celebrate 15<sup>th</sup> August as the day their mother was ripped asunder. Look at the violence of the imagery and the sense of family. Muslim women also equally becomes the carrier of her community. Now there are gangs of Muslim boys and Hindu boys. If a Hindu girl talks to a Muslim boy, the Hindu gang will threaten him, and vice versa. Great deal of sexual policing as a result of communal polarisation. Striking thing about Gujarat for me as compared to other parts of the country used to be the complete ease with which boys and girls could talk to each other. Have never felt that kind of safety in other places.

For those who had already transgressed the boundaries the violence was a means of sending out a threat to women who might not conform in the future. Hindu women who had married Muslim men were targeted and punished for their transgression by publicly stripping them. A crowd of men tried to attack a woman activist near the RSS headquarters in Ahmedabad but she was saved by a group of people who she had worked with earlier. Another woman, Geetaben, was not so lucky. She had committed the cardinal "sin" of marrying a Muslim man and she was dragged out of her house, stripped and killed, and her corpse was left naked on the road.<sup>6</sup> Heena, a Hindu woman married to a Muslim man in village BV16 in Anand district, in her written testimony to the panel, recounted how she was publicly raped by nine people who then threatened to kill her if she filed a complaint.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> March evening, at around 5, a mob of 200-250 people from the Hindu community came to my house and started looting and destruction. I was alone in the house. I was dragged out of my house, when I tried to run my legs were hit by sticks and I fell to the ground. At this time one of the men BM25 cried to the crowd, "Take her to the village dump." Those people carried me to the dump and tied me to a car. They tore off my clothes. They took Rs.600, my *mangalsutra*, my anklets, nose ring and shouted at me that if I filed a complaint they would kill me, "Police has given us freedom to do what we want, we have no fear." Some people said, "Kill her." After this one person scratched my face with his nails, the other held me down and they tore off my clothes and then dragged me to the ground. Two people held my hands and after this one person raped me. When he was raping me another man was at my breast. After that nine people raped me one by one. I was unconscious. When I regained consciousness it was around 8 at night. I saw two people were standing there to kill me. One of them BM26 assaulted me with a *dharria* [sharp metal

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<sup>6</sup> Times of India, April 19, 2002.

weapon]. I ducked the blow. It hit me on the stomach. I was bleeding now. They left. When I reached home, my house had been broken. The mob was saying, “Cut her to pieces, don’t leave her alive, we don’t want her alive in the village.”

### 3.7 Continuing impact of the violence

The effects of sexual violence conducted on such a mass scale continue to be exploited by the majority community and Muslims experience its impact everyday (discussed in detail in chapter 5). The sexual violence that was inflicted upon the women from the Muslim community during the pogrom also continues in various forms. During the December 2002 state elections in Gujarat, election campaign slogans, victory processions, and speeches, all publicly acknowledged these sexual crimes, and openly threatened that these can, and in fact, would be committed again. This was especially true of BJP victory rallies after the announcement of election results in areas severely affected during by the violence.<sup>7</sup>

The absence of any redressal or justice makes the trauma of the sexual assault even worse for most women. As is, women hardly talk about the sexual violence that they experience. The scale of the violence this time was so immense that total silence was not possible. Yet for every woman that gathered the courage to speak, there are many more who have not spoken at all. In fact, the panel met a woman who had not spoken to anybody, other than those present at the time of the attack, until she spoke to us, almost eight months after the incidents.

The silencing has been in multiple ways as it usually is in the case of sexual assault. Some women have chosen silence because it is shameful to proclaim sexual violence on one’s own body in traditional ethos. In the patriarchal family structure and system of values, the violation of women’s bodily integrity becomes a source of shame not only for the women as individuals but for them as members/symbols of the family and community. In many cases support and acceptance from male members (fathers/ husbands) has been lacking.

Haleema, a lawyer, feminist and activist from PO14 says:

When I first went to PV10 there were 6 women who said it (rape) happened to them. One woman told me about her relationship with her husband, who does not talk to her, does not have a physical relationship with her, nothing. But she was very grateful to him for accepting her.

Comment by IJJ team member:

In a relief camp in Ahmedabad, I met a young girl whose father had just taken her for an abortion. And he was telling her, “How come your sister was not raped?”

In Gujarat, where the attacks were meant to “dishonour” the community, the silencing came from the community as well. Finding themselves in a vulnerable situation, Muslim communities many a times negotiated peace and apparent harmony by silencing women. One way to combat the use of sexual assault as a weapon by *Hindutva* forces was for the community to behave as if the violence never took place at all. The shared patriarchal value systems of both communities led to many women survivors not being able to talk about their pain and violation.

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<sup>7</sup> These rallies were witnessed by some of the organizers of the IJJ while we were in Gujarat when the election results were announced. Other examples of this violence are covered in Section four of this report.

This “chosen” silence is also directly linked to the State’s refusal to listen, to take action or provide a gender sensitive support system that would encourage women to come forward.

As Haleema, an activist from PO14 organization testified:

I have met two rape victims in Anand district, who said that if I could assure them that their case will go somewhere, they would go ahead with the cases. But I simply could not assure them of that. I do think that a lot more people would be willing to fight if they can see something happen....

Furthermore, no action has been taken against those named in complaints, the investigations have been shoddy and women and other witnesses have not been given any protection by the State.

I stayed two months in (the locality where her case is filed). Then I went back home but I was scared because I had filed this complaint. People are saying that they will beat me up and kill me. They throw stones at my house. And at night, they knock on the door to intimidate me. Only I am threatened – because I am the only eyewitness who has seen the raping and killing. (Sabah, PV2, Panchmahals).

The minimum expectation from a democratic State is the guarantee of equal citizenship rights for all citizens. The State of Gujarat failed in this basic duty and thus made women from the Muslim community particularly vulnerable. It is this complicity of the State that is the final blow to women’s hopes.