

## CHAPTER 3

### VADODARA: THE CONTEXT AND A PROFILE

Situated in the central-eastern mainland region of Gujarat, Vadodara (or Baroda) lies roughly between 21° 49' and 21° 49' north latitude and 72° 51' and 74° 17' east longitude. The district admeasures 7794 sq. km and accounts for 3.79 percent of the total geographical area of the state. It is bounded on the north by Panchmahals and Godhra districts, on the northwest by Kheda and Anand districts, on the east by Madhya Pradesh State and on the southeast by Dhulia district of Maharashtra state. The district comprises of the former princely states of Baroda, Chhota Udepur and minor estates of Chaliyar, Sankheda Mewas, Pandu Mewas and Bhadarva. Vadodara, which was the capital of the Baroda State, is now the headquarters of the district. The district has 11 subdivisions (*talukas*), viz, Chhota Udepur, Dabhoi, Jabugam, Karjan, Naswadi, Padra, Sankheda, Savli, Sinor, Vadodara, Vaghodia. There is another smaller subdivision called *mahal*, i.e., Tilakwada. Barring the city of Vadodara and a couple of small urban centres the communal relations in Vadodara district have been fairly intact in the past with Muslims having been settled in far-flung areas including the remote tribal segments.

The total population of the district according to 2001 census stands at 3,639,775 (36.39 lakh) which was 3,089,610 in 1991. Based on 1991 figures 1,761,546 belonged to rural areas whereas urban population was 1,328,064. The Scheduled Tribes constitute a sizeable proportion i.e. 26.6% whereas Scheduled Castes make up 6.2% of the district's population.

#### Vadodara City: Vital Statistics

Area:	108.22 sq. km.
Total Roads:	1839 km
Population:	
1951:	2,11,407
1961:	3,09,716
1971:	4,67,487
1981:	7,34,473
1991:	10,31,346 (males 53%; females 47%)
2001:	13,05,546 (males 683803; females 621743)
Number of households:	2,13,540
Population density:	9,527 per sq. km
Literacy:	71.11% (males 76.21%; females 65.41%)
Election Wards:	26
Seats (Corporators):	78

#### History

Vadodara is situated on the banks of the river Vishwamitri. The city was once known as Vadpatra/Vadapatraka because of the abundance of Banyan trees on the banks of the Vishwamitri. From Vadpatraka is derived its present name Baroda or Vadodara. Vadpatraka was established as the headquarters of the Muslim Sultans. Much of the old walled city area was developed during the successive Muslim rulers. The Moghal rule over the city came to an end in 1732, when Pilaji brought the Maratha activities in Southern Gujarat to a head and captured it. Except for a short break, Vadodara continued to be in the hands of the Gaekwads as their capital town from 1734 to 1949.

Sayajirao III (1875-1939) who did not come from the direct line of the ruling Gaekwad dynasty was the architect of modern Vadodara. It was the dream of this visionary ruler who, educated and oriented by English tutors, besides local teachers, to make Vadodara an educational, industrial and commercial centre. Under his rule Baroda showed tremendous progress and constructive achievements in all fields.

Maharaja Sayajirao initiated a series of bold socio-economic reforms. He attached great importance to economic development and started a number of model industries to encourage initiative, and then handed back the working

industries to private enterprise. He started model textile and tile factories. It is as a result of his policy of industrial development that Vadodara is today one of the most important centres for textile, chemical and petroleum industries. He introduced a number of social reforms. In no department of administration has the far-sighted policy of this wise ruler been more conspicuous than in education, and in none have the results been more real and tangible. He boldly introduced compulsory primary education and a library movement (the first of its kind in India) to augment his adult education scheme. It was he who visualised a general scheme of development in all branches of knowledge at different stages, with the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Vadodara at the apex. Modern Vadodara owes its beauty, its educational institutions and its masterpieces of architecture to the insight and vision of this great ruler.

The people of Vadodara proudly tell its visitors that their city is a 'Sanskar Nagari', that is, a 'city of culture'. It is also referred to as 'the cultural capital' of Gujarat. The city does indeed have rich traditions of composite culture. The outstanding trait about Vadodara's cultural life is that it is remarkably cosmopolitan. Vadodara has welcomed a wide variety of people from all over India and also from all over the world. A range of communities of India has had an active identity in this city.

### Composition of City Wards

The city has 10 administrative wards. The ward-wise population break-up is given in the tabular form below.

#### Ward-wise Population of Vadodara City

Sr. No.	Ward	Males	Females	Total
1	City	24563	23072	47635
2	Fatehpura	59901	54819	114720
3	Gajrawadi/Wadi	49101	45487	94588
4	Sindhwaimata Rd/GIDC	115263	102329	217592
5	Shiabaug/Babajipura	41430	36762	78192
6	Sayajigunj (N)	99621	90434	190095
7	Belbaug/Sayajigunj (S)	70083	62032	132115
8	Raopura	59017	55558	114575
9	Panigate/Kisanwadi	84376	77655	162031
10	Subhanpura/Gorwa	80448	73495	154043
	<b>Total</b>	<b>683803</b>	<b>621743</b>	<b>1305546</b>

Most of the wards have been recently renamed. The old names are also given after slash in the above table. Ward No. 1 is the old city area, which was once fortified with a strong surrounding wall. It has a mixed population. While Hindus belonging to various castes exist here there are Muslims in Dudhwala Mohalla, Yakutpura, Chhipwad and Chabuk Sawar Mohalla. The area has witnessed riots in the past especially between the residents of Bhavsar and Chabuk Sawar and Dudhwala Mohallas. Ward No 2, Fatehpura, has equally been prone to communal riots. This ward is inhabited by large sections of poor belonging to different communities. Working class Muslims inhabit Hathikhana, Bandhwada and Fatehpura localities as do poor Hindus including Dalits in Ranawas, Koli Falia (where large segment of Maharashtrians reside) and other quarters of the ward. There are around 65 Muslim families living in Swad Quarters near Sangam Char Rasta that came under attack for the first time. Wadi, in Ward No 3, had been a problem area of communal fires. It is a Muslim majority area where Muslims of all hues including Memons, Bohras, Tais, Ghanchis, Khojas, Shaikhs, Pathans, etc., who live in Mughalwada, Chokhandi and Gendigate localities. Hindus live in the neighbouring Bhoiwada, Ranawas, Rangmahal and Ladwada. These communities have clashed with each other earlier too whenever a major communal conflagration in Vadodara has occurred. Sardar Patel Industrial Estate with several industries owned by Muslims is situated in this ward.

Ward No. 4 covers the GIDC, Makarpura area. Muslims live in Tarsali, Pratapnagar, Danteshwar and Makarpura in small pockets. Most of them are daily wage earners. Though most of these areas remained undisturbed during the earlier riots, in 2002 all these Muslim pockets were badly affected. Shiabaug-Babajipura constitutes Ward No. 5 and there are few pockets like Navapura, Shiabaug and Mehboobpura with Muslim residents, with neighbourhoods inhabited by Malis, Rabaris, Dalits, OBC and other caste Hindus. Sayajigunj South also has pockets with mixed population. There are Muslim settlements at Parshuram Bhatta, Jetalpur, Akota, Tandalja, etc., though most of these segments have had no prior history of communal violence. This is also true of Sayajigunj North. Indeed Fatehgunj and Nizampura where Muslims have a fair presence were seen as the symbol of communal harmony and peace. For the first time that record was a disturbed and other pocket of poor Muslims like Shuklanagar and

Roshannagar in Navayard became the scenes of ghastly attacks on Muslims. The scattered houses of well to do Muslims were looted and completely burnt in this ward.

Raopura, Ward No. 8, has been traditionally the hotbed of communal disturbances. Nagarwada, Salatwada, Machhipith, and Shiapura where Muslims share neighbourhoods with Hindus had seen violence in the past. So has Ward No. 9, Panigate-Kisanwadi. If trading middle and upper class Muslims live in Shalimar, Kismat, Aman, Bahar, Borsali and Memon colonies, there are working class/labour class Muslims inhabiting Sulemani Chawl, Kisanwadi bastis like Hussaini Chowk, Jhanda Chowk, etc., and sharing the space with Bhois, Golas, Dalits, Maharashtrais and other Hindus. Large-scale destruction of Muslim properties occurred in this ward as well as in the Sardar Estate this time. Ward No. 10 in Subhanpura-Gorwa have also pockets of Hindu-Muslim mixed neighbourhoods. In the older villages like Subhanpura, Gorwa, Karachia, Bajwa and Koyali in the northwestern part of Vadodara, there are few Muslim habitations whereas in new colonies like Gujarat Housing Board there are fewer houses of Muslims.

What emerges from the population profile is that while the old city had exclusive localities inhabited by people belonging to the same faith, in the last few decades there has been an increase in mixed localities whether these were middle class societies or lower class slums. The old city areas like Wadi, Fatehpura, Panigate and Raopura were known for communal tensions and rioting; most of other areas used to remain free of any communal conflicts. But the 2002 riots saw to it that almost all of Vadodara, except Tandalja, was affected and under curfew for several days.

In all of this, the sprawling and cosmopolitan MS University campus and the large number of local, national and foreign industries act as a catalysing and unifying force. Vadodara is indeed synonymous with education. The patronage of education started with Maharaja Sayajirao and the city has built further on the academic infrastructure established by him. The present educational foundation rests on over 500 corporation and private schools. At the apex is the Maharaja Sayajirao University, the only university in Gujarat with English as the medium of instruction. It has 13 faculties and 16 residential hostels. The university caters to over 30,000 students.

People belonging to almost all faiths, different ethnicities and speaking most of the major Indian and some major foreign languages can be found in Vadodara. Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Parsis and Sikhs live together (Fatehgunj is a good example of such cosmopolitanism) and participate in each other's cultural and religious festivals with enthusiasm. Fine and performing arts have their keen followers and practitioners in Baroda. Various subcultures and traditions in the arts are both alive and being forever experimented with.

Attempts were made to communalise the atmosphere in the campus during the last decade by communalising the issue of sexual harassment, inter-religious friendship and marriages, etc., during 1996. The debate over the imposition of dress code was the latest such attempt in 2001.

The general deterioration in communal relations in Gujarat has affected Vadodara as well, showing its ugly side, the worst episodes being the recent bout of violence against Muslims. One wonders if citizens of Vadodara would still be able to call their city as '*sanskar nagar*' and the 'cultural capital of Gujarat' with the old gusto anymore.

### **Vadodara and Industrial Growth**

Vadodara enjoys a special place in the state of Gujarat now industrially as well. Till the early 1960s Vadodara was considered to be a cultural and educational centre. The first modern factory (Alembic Pharmaceuticals) was established in Vadodara in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and subsequently companies such as Sarabhai Chemicals, Jyoti, etc., came up in the 1940s. By 1962, there were 288 factories employing 27510 workers. At that time, the dominant industrial groups were chemicals and pharmaceuticals, cotton textiles and machine tools. In 1962, Vadodara witnessed a sudden spurt in industrial activity with the establishment of Gujarat Refinery. Several factors like raw material availability, product demand, and skilful mobilisation of human, financial and material resources by the government and private entrepreneurs have contributed to Vadodara becoming one of India's foremost industrial centres.

The discovery of oil and gas in Ankleshwar and North Gujarat led to the industrial development of Gujarat in a big way. The Vadodara region is the largest beneficiary in the process of this industrialisation. Gujarat Refinery went into the first phase of production in 1965. The refinery, being a basic industry, made vital contributions on several fronts at the regional and national levels. In Vadodara, various large-scale industries such as Gujarat State Fertilisers and Chemicals (GSFC), Indian Petrochemicals Corporation Limited (IPCL) and Gujarat Alkalies and Chemicals Limited (GACL) have come up in the vicinity of Gujarat Refinery. Other large-scale public sector units

are the Heavy Water Project and Gujarat Industries Power Company Limited. In addition to these public sector enterprises, a number of other large-scale enterprises have come up in the private sector. The products of these industries have wide applications in various sectors of the Indian economy. The establishment of large industrial units in a region automatically brings into existence a number of smaller enterprises. Vadodara is no exception and the city and the surrounding areas normally hum with industrial activity.

Industrial growth in and around Vadodara has stagnated over the last decade. The proportion of industrial workers in the total workforce has declined from 34% to 30.77 % between 1971-1991. With the increasing pace of economic reforms in the 90s, more and more large units of public and private sectors are declaring VRS schemes, closures or lockouts. Employment opportunity has reduced in the organised sector and more and more people are turning to the informal sector for their livelihood or remain unemployed.

### **Industry and 'Development' in Vadodara**

Lop-sided industrialisation has led, paradoxically, to increase in unemployment. Vadodara like any city of its kind continues to attract a large number of unskilled job seekers and daily-wagers besides skilled and educated workforce. The former has led to the growth of slums where poor working class people live. The Government always thinks of GIDCs and industrial parks but never plans for housing of the workers. Four-lane expressways are being made in and around Vadodara but the people who have made these roads have to pay for travelling on them. Vadodara Municipal Corporation, or, for that matter the Government of Gujarat has no policy for housing of the poorer sections of its people. At present there are more than 336 slum pockets housing more than 50,500 families and making up nearly 2,27,000 (20%) of the total population of the city. There is, however, an uneven distribution of the slums. Naturally the old city area cannot afford any slums, as there is no patch available with already overcrowded dwellings. Slum population is as high as 10,541 in Sayajigunj and as low as 148 in the city area. The slum population is composed of 92% Hindus and 8% Muslims and Sikhs. The living conditions in these slums are a struggle where water, light and drainage facilities have to be routinely fought for. Demolitions are very much in vogue with no consideration for the people so displaced.

In fact a nexus of politicians, bureaucrats, bootleggers<sup>1</sup> and builders have increasingly come to dominate the city's affairs. Politicians, irrespective of party affiliations, have triggered riots in Vadodara in the past. Even the chaos and confusion caused by the current riots have been used by at least one politician to capture land for his personal gain. Such 'civic' acts are usually initiated by a demolition of poor people's dwellings, which have over time become 'prime land'. Poor Muslims have borne the brunt during the aftermath of the riots of 2002, especially during the recent months of April-June 2002.

A new phenomena which has recently been seen is the act of fencing of common property that was used by poor vendors of vegetables and other items of daily consumption. A well-known municipal councillor has initiated the recent spate of fencing in Vadodara, post-February 27, 2002. The builder-politician nexus hopes that the land so fenced will sooner or later be available to them for commercial exploitation. The BJP-dominated Vadodara Municipal Corporation (VMC) used police force to muffle dissent and terrorise those seeking this land for what it had been used before, in many cases since 10-30 years.

A city with claims to have a cultured conscience culture has no zoning facilities for vegetable vendors and small and marginal traders. Not even facilities for new green lungs for a city that has grown rapidly in population size. Its biggest and best park, Kamati Baug, was established 125 years ago. Major parts of northwestern Vadodara continue to suffer intermittently from gas pollution, choking the breath of many of its residents.

Vadodara thus offers a profile of a medium-sized fast developing city, with severe contradictions, even as it has a potential of growing into a 'tolerable' living space. But the recent developments of communal hatred pose a big question to this hope.

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<sup>1</sup> Despite so-called Prohibition Policy in force, any and every kind of liquor is available in Vadodara at several places. And liquor flows freely in the parties of politicians and industrial elite.

## **Vadodara Communal Violence: A Profile**

Communal and caste violence has acquired endemic proportions in Gujarat during the last three decades or so, involving escalating levels of brutality and destruction of lives and properties. The Ahmedabad-Vadodara-Godhra belt had for long been the special focus of this violence. We provide below a brief review of previous incidents of communal violence in Vadodara by way of background information to the violence witnessed in February-May 2002.

### **1. The Period 1961-71**

During 1961-71, 16 of the 17 districts in the State saw communal violence, recording some 685 incidents in urban areas and 114 in rural. Of the 685 incidents recorded for the decade, 578 occurred in 1969 alone, which proved to be the worst riots of the decade. Starting with Ahmedabad, the worst affected city, violence spread to several other places including Vadodara. The death toll in Ahmedabad itself stood at over a thousand, along with extensive destruction of properties belonging largely to Muslims. The description of just one instance of rioting in Ahmedabad serves to symbolize the malaise of inter-community relationships in the region:

"A gruesome episode in the afternoon (of September 20, 1969) brings out the depth of animosity against the Muslims. A young Muslim, enraged by the destruction of his property said he would take revenge. Upon this the crowd seized him, showered blows on him, and tried to force him to shout 'Jai Jagannath'. Staying firm, the youth refused even if that meant death. To this someone in the crowd responded that he might indeed be done away with. Wood from broken shops was collected, a pyre prepared in the middle of the road, petrol sprinkled on the pyre as well as on the youth, and he was set alight with ruthless efficiency. What is remarkable is that there was no resistance from any Hindu. The wails of the Muslim inhabitants of the area were drowned in the celebration of the incident by the Hindus."

Based on an eyewitness account, this episode (one among many others) foreshadows the horrid and chilling reality now writ large across Gujarat. Often referred to as a watershed, 1969 in many ways set the pattern for the violence that attended subsequent communal-caste conflagrations in Gujarat. For the first time in Vadodara, *planned riots* took place in 1969. Shops of Muslims were previously marked. A batch of 6-7 persons with tools and bars would break the locks of shops of Muslims, material taken and shops thereafter looted by a mob. A jewelry shop was also looted. A tomb opposite Amdavadi pole was gutted and afterwards a road was constructed overnight.

### **2. The Period 70s-80s**

The 70s and 80s saw growing incidence of caste and communal tension in Vadodara. Popular movements and agitations in the city (as in other parts of Gujarat) showed increasing proneness to turn communal as they progressed, eventually breaking out into communal rioting. This happened in 1974 with the Navnirman movement, which had begun as a secular protest against the government of Chimanbhai Patel, and became linked up with Jayaprakash Narayan's movement.

October-November 1978 saw prolonged rioting in Vadodara, affecting the localities of Wadi, Chaukhandi, Ahmedabadi Pole, Raopura road, and Pratapnagar. Several shops belonging to Muslims were burnt. One person was killed in firing. The riots lasted for over a month but remained largely confined to areas of the old-walled city.

### **3. Communal Tensions and Riots: 1981-82**

Communal tensions resurfaced in 1981 and persisted for over a year between September 1981- December 1982. The city went through several bouts of rioting interspersed with moments of uneasy calm.

The beginnings of these riots are traced to a gradual build of rivalries between groups aspiring to control the thriving illicit liquor trade, culminating in violent conflicts. Involved in this, on the one side, were the Bhois, traditionally a fishermen caste, with a burgeoning interest in the liquor trade. On the other, was a Muslim liquor mafia that had so far largely monopolized the liquor traffic and felt threatened by the upwardly mobile Bhois, who until recently were merely its subordinate partners in the trade. The groups enjoyed patronage of rival factions in the ruling Congress party. An ex-MLA and ex-Mayor of the city were known for their links with underworld

elements working the trade. Sections of the police had developed direct stakes in the revenues the trade yielded. The familiar shady nexus, comprising politician-police-criminal, was thus at work fomenting trouble. Prior to the outbreak of the riots, the local press carried frequent reports about these tensions and rivalries between the groups.

It was not long before what was evidently a conflict of interest took a violent communal turn. On September 11, 1981 a rumour had spread out from the Hindu dominated Ladwada area purporting desecration of a Ganesh idol by a Muslim child. Although an official inquiry had repudiated the rumour, the riot could not be prevented. Shops near Raopura were freely looted during curfew hours - barely a few yards away from the Shiyapura police chowky and the police camp near Jubilee Baugh, raising suspicions of police negligence if not complicity. On 18<sup>th</sup> September a Bohra couple was stabbed on Gendigate Road, in the vicinity of the police chowky of the area and the Mandvi police camp. More stabbing and killings took place the following day.

The local press, the *Sandesh* in particular, fielded reports that were tendentious and inflammatory. Its issue datelined October 30, 1982, for instance, carried photographs of supposedly 'lethal weapons' seized from Fatehpura, a Muslim locality. As even a cursory inspection would have confirmed, the weapons were unmistakably butchers' knives confiscated by the police from the Muslim khatkis (meat choppers) of the Fatehpura mutton market.

The prolonged tension and violence notwithstanding, disturbances did not spread beyond the 'traditional' zones of conflict thus far - Shiapura, Navapura, Yakutpura, and Baranpura.

Some 18 incidents of communal rioting were recorded in the city between September 1981 and December 1982. It was like a long continuous, low key battle for the affected residents. A varying repertoire of events and symbols had served as points of friction igniting riots. Thus, for instance, violence in October 1982 began with stoning of a tazia procession. Extensive burning and looting of houses and shops followed thereafter. Carnage in the Baranpura area was especially severe. The worst instance, however, seems to have occurred on 13 December 1982 which involved the participation of middle class youth in the violence, indicating a change in the composition of the rioters.

A memorandum that was submitted by some Muslims to the government contained the following complaints:

- a) The police acted with malice, firing indiscriminately on innocent Muslims near Ladwada on the night of 13<sup>th</sup> September. In particular the memorandum held the PSI on duty, Buch, guilty of opening fire that resulted in the death of a youth, without procuring necessary orders from his higher ups, the Collector and the DYSP, who were present at the spot.
- b) The communal elements were allowed a free run of the city during curfew hours - despite reports that they were carrying arms in their vehicles. Since most incidents of mob attacks against Muslims occurred during curfew, the memorandum suspected the police of connivance.

#### **4. Changing Patterns of Violence**

Till about the end of the 70s riots remained restricted largely within traditional bounds. They closely reflected the crisis of uneven urbanization, lumpenisation of sections of the population, and increasing crime rates. More specifically they tended to, initially at least, veer round the activities of the so-called 'anti social elements', the lattha (liquor) and sattha (gambling) syndicates, which were a familiar enough presence in places like Vadodara and Ahmedabad. These groups enjoyed political patronage and operated under police protection from their areas of concentration, typically located in the 'old-walled' city with its congested settlements of different communities bifurcated by narrow lanes. This was ground zero for fracas and communal flare-ups. The spill over generally did not extend beyond neighbouring areas and, despite general tension, large parts of the city were spared the violence.

The year 1982 saw riots on the occasion of *Tulsi Vivah*, Jaspal Singh was the then Commissioner of Police; and he attacked Muslim localities and property as a retaliation on the so-called attack on Bhagavan Narshingjee's Varghoda. Subsequently Jaspal Singh joined the BJP and hopped to many other parties after resigning from government service, following his suspension.

The 80s inaugurated a shift in this old pattern under the impact of deepening social conflicts, principally over the issue of reservation quotas for backward castes and communities and the reactive political mobilization of the upper castes deeply hostile to 'reservation' as an idea. Communal riots between Hindus and Muslims now began to follow in the heels of caste violence and indeed served the cynical purpose of diverting attention away from the growing cleavage of caste-Hindu society.

The trend first came into view with the communal disturbances of 1981-82. The latter had come as a sequel to an extended phase (some six months) of caste tensions and violence in the city over the issue of reservation in educational institutions and government services. Protest and agitations against this policy of the government had taken the form of large-scale mobilization of the upper castes. Government property was attacked - the burning of buses belonging to the State Roadways Transport Corporation, for one, was a common enough occurrence. But so was the intimidation of the lower-castes, dalits especially, who became the targets of mob fury. It was through such movements that growing numbers of the middle-class, especially youths, were drawn into rituals of collective hatred and violence against the presumed beneficiaries of reserved quotas. The anti reservation stir of 1985 in Gujarat and the communal riots that followed it, stabilized the trend.

### **5. The Anti-Reservation Stir and Communal Riots: 1985**

In the second half of February an agitation began against the state government's decision to implement a fresh reservation package for the backward castes and communities. The Congress was in power in the state with Madhavsinh Solanki as the Chief Minister. The basis of these reservations (abruptly announced in January 1985) was the recommendations of the Rane Commission, though the government had not yet released the Commission's report. And, even as it declared its intent to abide by the Commission's recommendations, it ignored the crucial recommendation regarding an income limit for reservations. With elections to the state assembly due in March, it was clear enough that the reservation policy was more of an electoral ploy than an attempt at 'social justice'.

The agitation against the policy surfaced about the middle of February with a section of students of engineering and medicine in Ahmedabad. Soon, however, it came to be spearheaded by the Vali Mandal, an all-Gujarat association of parents. Shankarbai Patel, a member of the Janata Party, and a man with a large following among teachers, led this body which also had the blessings of Chimanbhai Patel. For about a month the agitation remained a low-intensity affair - limited and sporadic calls for bandh and stoning/burning of government buses in Vadodara and other cities being its chief 'highlights'. In between the Congress had fought the state assembly elections, held on 5<sup>th</sup> March, and returned with a massive mandate. The populist measures had paid off.

The electoral strategy of the Congress was based on an alliance of Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis, and Muslims – KHAM. Formulated in the early 70s, KHAM reached out to a broad spectrum of the population creating a formidable social base for the party. It was in this context that the anti-reservation stir became a rallying point for the upper castes with the sections of Patels in the forefront. The political prominence the Kshatriyas (or Rajputs) acquired under Solanki's leadership had tended to alienate the economically powerful Patel lobby, provoking them into concerted action against the proponents of reservation quotas for backward castes. It was in the weeks following the election that the agitation gained momentum and became widespread. Meetings of the Vali Mandal came to be attended by huge numbers. Even smaller towns like Unjha or Anand reported large gatherings. The agitation now took on a virulent form. On March 18 1982, the 'mrthuya ghant,' literally the death knell, of the reservation policy was sounded in Ahmedabad. It had its disastrous side-effects in many towns and cities of Gujarat

The upper and lower castes were pitted against each other. In particular, unlike 1981-82, when Dalits were at the receiving end, this time they could retaliate. In Ahmedabad, for instance, an upper caste residential block was violently attacked by Dalits of the neighbouring slums. About the same time the escalating violence of the agitation took a communal turn. Muslims houses and shops became targets of loot and destruction. There are strong indications that this transformation rather than being spontaneous was an act of deliberation. People in affected areas of Ahmedabad (which led the way for Vadodara and other cities) firmly denied any build up of hostilities prior to the riots. More telling was the way in which the burning of shops was balanced out, arithmetically as it were, between the Hindus and Muslims in the initial stages. It took some time before rioting caught on its own. Retaliation and counter-retaliation sent waves of violence across cities, its virulence manifest

in the fact that for the first time stones and crowbars were giving way to guns, petrol bombs, and other explosives. This was 'progress' of a nasty kind. The caste war had dovetailed into a communal conflagration.

A striking new feature of the 1985 anti-reservation stir was the mobilization of upper caste women in support of their men folk. They stood like a buffer between the agitating mob and the police. Facing insults and brickbats, the police was effectively prevented by these women from taking any strong action against the mob. In April 1985, the police revolted, driving the malaise deeper. They now participated in the violence. They burnt down the office of *Gujarat Samachar* in Ahmedabad. They also tended to make common cause with miscreants and communal elements. It was under police supervision that 400 Muslim houses were set ablaze and reduced to ashes.

To take control of the difficult situation the army had to be called in. It soon found itself in the most trying circumstances. The VHP, hitherto hardly a force to be reckoned with so far, set afoot a vicious campaign charging the army with a pro-Muslim bias. Reason: its Commanding Officer happened to be a Muslim. The Muslims on the other hand suspected a pro-Hindu bias. In order to win civic confidence the army had to even take to a poster campaign!

Unlike 1981-82, in 1985 the lower castes were better organized and responded at times in tandem with sections of Muslims. The last phase of the agitation saw an Adivasi backlash. Huge rallies - in one instance 6000 strong - were organized in tribal areas sending "a chill down the spines of the upper castes." In Bhiloda, a tribal pocket in Sabarkanta district, armed young tribals went on a rampage. High caste Patels living in the neighbouring village of Takatunka were attacked and robbed. Within a few minutes 26 shops were devastated.

This was the time that the RSS and its affiliates entered the conflict. The year 1986 witnessed another phase of rioting. Triggered off by the Jagannath procession, these riots were a turning point in the growing conflict between communities. They provided these organisations a firm foothold in civil society and sufficient following to shape the politics of community relationships.

## **6. Dominance of Hindutva forces in the Politics and Social Life of Gujarat in 90s**

September 1990 on the occasion of Ganesh Visarjan, saw the worst ever riots in Vadodara in the walled city. Each and every shop belonging to Muslims in the walled city and Raopura were broken with the help of gas cutters, looted and burnt. The destruction took place in the presence of the police as well as thousands of people during the Ganesh Visarjan procession in broad daylight and in the presence of police. Elected leaders of BJP directed the well-planned attack on the property of Muslims on the main road. Jumma Masjid near Mandvi was also attacked. Police fired 80 rounds of bullets in a small Muslim area, Rajpurani Pole near Mandvi, to stop any Muslim who would come out on the road to save his/her property or to protect the Jumma Masjid. Nalin Bhat, then Minister in the State Government, personally stood and directed the firing by the police. Nalin Bhatt even made a blunt statement that "Muslims have no place in Hindustan. Either they go to Pakistan or Kabrastan." In the current riots many BJP leaders and marauding mobs made similar statements.

Advani's Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya was followed after this riot in Vadodara. Stray events of violence continued for months after this incident.

In 1992, incidents of communal tension that took place as aftermath of demolition of Babri Masjid. But the tension did not convert to large-scale violence as compared to 1990, and certainly as compared to the violence that erupted in Surat or Ahmedabad. A main reason for tension in Vadodara was the large batches of karsevaks going from Vadodara to Ayodhya.

During the year 1998, as part of anti-Christian violence by BJD, VHP, RSS, and BJP all over Gujarat, some incidents took place in Vadodara also. One of the major events was the attack on the five-day National Convention of Christians (Alpha Group). The gang led by Niraj Jain (VHP leader) and others allegedly belonging to VHP and Bajrang Dal, started threatening the participants to stop the convention and quit as 'they resorted to forcible conversions of Hindus to Christianity'. Police supported them. Several people were beaten and one got his hand fractured. The VHP men also attacked women delegates who were staying at the Women's Hostel in Fatehgunj at midnight.



## Violence of 2002

This narration reveals if anything that there is nothing much new in the current 2002 violence in Vadodara or for that matter in Gujarat. Targeting of Muslim shops, mosques, and to some extent homes, were attempted previously too. Even State sponsorship, after a fashion, was present in previous times. The difference this time was in the scale of events, the brutality, the viciousness, the *planned and organised* involvement of Ministers, police personnel and indeed of the whole government and the ruling party and its affiliates. Large scale burning of Muslim homes, mosques, big and small organised industry was also an unfortunate 'first'. Months after the initial violence, the Chief Minister, and indeed the Prime Minister with his dubious speeches, were unrelenting, unapologetic, and even proud that the violence took place the way it did. Several Commissions and fact-finding reports, including that of the NHRC, have had no effect. Shame and regret are unheard words in the ruling lexicon. To add insult to injury, is the official attempt to 'explain' the 'true' pattern of events in different States and to NRIs by sending official delegations and ministers.

The Government of Gujarat, after the NHRC's decision to hold its own inquiry, announced an one-man commission (and now a two-man commission) in which the affected people have no faith. Police has since been going around preventing affected victims from naming accused in the FIRs, and asking them to give affidavits to the Commission clearing the name of the police and the government. This clearly indicates the present government's motives in appointing the Commission.

The tragedy of the situation is that those affected by the violence have to go and seek justice and succour from the very perpetrators of these ghastly events.