

**Threatened Existence: A Feminist Analysis of the Genocide in Gujarat**  
**Report by the International Initiative for Justice (IIJ)**  
**December 2003**

**Chapter 5**  
**The Violence Continues**

The State continues to be complicit in the on-going violence against the Muslim community in Gujarat. The violence has extended far beyond the duration of the pogrom and has had an impact well beyond the lives of the tens of thousands who were directly affected. The IIJ team, which visited Gujarat over nine months after the worst violence, found that the violence was continuing in different and frightening forms, with long term physical, psychological, economic, and social consequences for all members of the Muslim community and particularly for women.

This chapter illustrates that not only were Muslims the victims of a vicious, politically motivated attack in February-March 2002, but that they continue to be so even today. As a result of the systematic and continuing campaign of violence directed against them, members of the Muslim community who agreed to meet the IIJ team were anxious and scared. It is a tribute to their courage that they came forward despite well founded fears that testifying might leave them more vulnerable to attack.

We are afraid to speak, what if it has repercussions? (Naseem, woman survivor, PV1 village, Panchmahals).

I came because you have promised us that our names will not be revealed. (Razia, woman survivor, PV1 village, Panchmahals).

In this environment of deep-rooted fear and complete destitution, people need justice and security to rebuild their lives and sense of self. Based on the testimonies of survivors, this chapter will show that even nine months after the worst violence Muslims have little possibility of doing either, by looking at:

- Fear - generated both by threat of violence and actual attacks
- Displacement and non-rehabilitation
- Continuing economic violence including an economic boycott of Muslims
- Long term impact on Muslim women including the impact on their physical, reproductive and psycho-social health
- Long term impact on children

## **5.1 Living With Fear**

### ***5.1.1 Fear of Physical Attack***

Fear is today the dominant emotion in the lives of Gujarati Muslims. They tread quietly and try to keep a low profile because even small altercations with members of the majority

community can easily become serious. They tolerate ceaseless insults, threats, and taunts without responding to them because verbal abuse has the danger of becoming physical at any time. There is no provision for security. The fear surrounding the community is palpable, preventing any kind of normalcy and scarring all aspects of life—livelihood, mobility, access to housing and education. The situation is particularly bad for those who live in Hindu dominated neighbourhoods.

People tell us, “Earlier we killed you in the daytime, now we will kill you at night.” (Zoya, woman survivor, AA1 area, Ahmedabad).

Can you give us security? We want to be able to go about freely to collect water or anything else. (Women survivors, PV10 village, Panchmahals).

They are threatening us saying that your daughters have grown up so don’t let them out of the house now. What happened to us happened, but how can we see this happening to our young unmarried daughters. They will also have problems at marriage. (Woman survivor, BV9, Anand)

We are still scared of attacks so one person sleeps while the other stays awake. (Rahman, male survivor, BV14, Anand).

The children are scared even now. Even during the Ganesh festival – every event means that (Muslim) families have to move to safer places. (Ruksana, PV10 village, Dahod).

### ***5.1.2 Fear of Sexual Violence***

For women the fear of physical violence is heightened by fear of sexual attacks. Having been subjected to sexual violence themselves, having seen other women from the community being violated, or knowing the extent to which sexual crimes were committed, has engendered a psychological threat perception among all women from the community. This fear has been compounded by the overtly sexualized public discourse of the Hindu Right.

BJP supporters celebrated their election victory by ‘informing’ women: “Now this is our government. We will make this whole area Hindu. All mothers of Muslims are fucked.” (Nahida, AA32 area, Ahmedabad). These threats have also been acted upon. On-going sexual violence includes threats, insults, obscene gestures and actual attack. Violence is not only directed against adult women but also against their daughters. Mothers are warned on the street to keep their daughters inside to prevent them from being raped.

Today we have come here to meet you and I had to take my daughter with me because I am too scared to leave her there. We are constantly haunted by the fear of what if something happen to them? (Ruksana, PV10 village, Dahod).

Nobody has asked for forgiveness or shown regret. We cannot say anything. Rapists stop women in the street to humiliate them: “Didn’t we have her, haven’t we done this or that to her?” We don’t speak about this at home, because then our men will get very agitated. (Woman survivor, BV9, Anand)

### ***5.1.3 Fear of the Police***

In addition to the violence inflicted by sections of civil society, violence and intimidation by the police forces also continues. During recent combing operations in Ahmedabad, the police systematically harassed and arrested members of the Muslim community under the guise of restoring peace. On April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2002 alone, Muslim homes in 11 different locations in Ahmedabad city were attacked by the police late in the night. Just days before the IJ panel was constituted, an incident of police violence was reported from Ahmedabad on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 2002. Incidents of police violence continue to come in even at the time of writing of this report.

Police complicity in the sexual abuse of women during the February-March 2002 pogrom has been a cause of continuing fear and intimidation. For the police are not merely members of an amorphous civil society—they are the visible hands of the State—with the responsibility to protect and the power to prosecute. And when these powers are used as weapons to violate the bodily integrity of women, victims are truly left with no recourse.

Not only was the police complicit in the sexual abuse used to intimidate the entire community then – it continues to be so even today. Several victims recounted the terror they feel when the police make use of explicit sexual innuendos, verbal sexual abuse and physical molestation to threaten them. Some women fear that complaints about the abuse would result in the arrest and prosecution of their men-folk under false charges.

On 21<sup>st</sup> April at the time of the Friday *namaz* (prayer) the police got into our house. They tore my clothes and asked me where the men were. They beat me up with a stick... Then they came again at 2.a.m. when my daughter was studying. They said, “Why does she have to study, soon we will make her a prostitute.” (Zeenat, woman survivor, AA32 area, Ahmedabad).

Renana from BV42 area in Baroda faced police violence just the night before she testified to the IJ team (i.e. on 16<sup>th</sup> December, 2002). She said,

They came last night saying, “send these sister-fuckers to Pakistan.” The police have the same pattern every time. They first break the electricity meter so the lights are out, then they break the bulbs, and then attack the houses. They did this in five-six houses last night. Now the women are too scared to confront them so they shut the doors. Often the policemen break the doors and come in. They say things like, “Pull the strings of the Muslims’ pajamas, shove guns in their anus.” Some of us had filed complaints about this police abuse. About 15 days ago some people came to our homes and tried to get us to sign something, saying that the signature would prevent the attacks from happening again. One woman could not read so she showed the paper to someone else. It said, “Women here have not been attacked and they are withdrawing the complaint’. We all refused to sign.

#### **5.1.4 Fear in the Ghetto**

Displaced Muslims today live, for the most part, in ghettoised clusters, for there is a perception that vulnerability is greater when one is physically isolated and conversely that there is some strength in numbers and increased perception of vulnerability if one is

physically isolated. As many survivors emphasized, most people try to settle in more secure places with a predominantly Muslim population. Those who are unable to do so feel continually at risk:

We feel safer here, because our relatives are here. We can trust Hindus, they come and talk to us, but that seems to be superficial. We cannot have the same kind of trust as before. (Razia, a displaced woman, PV1 village, Panchmahals).

About 10,000 people attacked us. And once they have attacked us, how can we trust them after what they have done? My brother-in-law was killed and my son who is the father of 5 children was slashed with swords... We are surrounded by Hindu areas so who knows when they will come again? (Bibijan, a widow, PV30 village, Panchmahals).

Ghettoised living means living in a permanent pressure cooker situation in which collective fear is the dominant emotion, and where even a small altercation with any member of the majority community is seen as a collective threat to physical security. Individual fear and trauma merges with the collective fear and trauma. It becomes larger and is re-lived everyday. The lack of security, obstruction of justice by the state, continued threat perception, and the pressure of ghettoised living, has meant that women who were initially willing to talk about sexual assault are no longer ready to do so. So even where the silences around sexual violence were broken they have now been re-imposed.

\*\*\*\*\*

It is against this backdrop of pervasive fear about sexual violence against women in particular, and about violence of all forms against members of the community, that concerns about rehabilitation, housing, and economic violence must be understood

## **5.2 Displacement And Rehabilitation**

Tayabba and Gulabi who worked in the AA3 area camp spoke of the attacks there:

After one month there was attack on AA3 Area. AA34 and AA33 area camps were attacked. Police did not bother about it. There was no security provided by police. Only when Prime Minister came to visit then for his security there was police.

Although the camps were not safe and secure places for most people, when the government started forcibly closing the last of the relief camps in July 2002, the displaced survivors had no place to go. Houses were burned and property was destroyed. Most of all “home” was a dangerous place, for the accused were still roaming free and issuing threats to victims.

In villages around PV20 taluka for example, 90 Muslim-owned shops were burnt, 572 homes were destroyed, and 130 people killed (over 70 in a single incident). The main accused has just won the elections. (Farhaan, relief camp organizer, PV20 taluka, Panchmahals).

Till the time of writing of this report many Muslims are still unable to return to their homes. Indeed, without a sense of security it is virtually impossible for survivors to go back to places where they witnessed friends and relatives being slaughtered and burned alive.

A 20 year-old widow, Nagma, from PV30 village in Panchmahals district who has witnessed the brutal murder of her husband stated, “I can’t go back to the village

because I am really afraid of being there...and the things I have seen, you won't be able to even see."

Often neighbours will not allow victims to return. Countless testimonies highlight the depth of hatred that the survivors continue to face:

They say, "We do not want Muslims, we do not want people with beards and caps at all in our place." Earlier it was only the village elders who would say these things, but now everybody threatens us. (Razia, woman survivor, PV1 village, Panchmahals).

We are safe over here. We cannot go back to AA2. I had gone only twice and can never go back again. Hindus are threatening and intimidating now. I was staying there for the last twenty years. (Hamida, woman survivor, AA2 area, now living in AA9, Ahmedabad).

In BV14 the Muslim community is under pressure to compromise if they want to be rehabilitated in their village. So far there is no compromise and the Muslims are still resisting. But as a result the Muslims have been forbidden to enter the village, operate businesses, or seek a means of livelihood within the village. Most families from this village are currently living in BV37 and BV38. Four to five families are living on the outskirts of BV14. Only three people have returned to BV14. They are the ones who have not filed any pogrom related cases. (Harish, paralegal worker, BO1, Anand).

### ***5.2.1 Compromised Return***

Those who have managed to return to their homes have done so under conditions of economic boycott and "compromise." There are many "compromise" villages and neighbourhoods in Gujarat today. Essentially "compromise" refers to an entire set of conditions under which displaced Muslims are being allowed to re-enter their original villages and neighbourhoods, without overt threat of physical harm. The most important "compromise" condition is of course, the withdrawal of legal cases against Hindus. But there is also an agreement that Muslims will live not as free citizens exercising their cultural and religious rights, but as second-class citizens according to terms determined by the Hindus. In some cases, this means cultural conditions such as lowering the volume of the *azaan* from the Mosque. In other cases it means the closure of all neighbourhood beef shops (beef here means buffalo meat, since cow slaughter is banned in Gujarat and many other states of India). For poor Muslims this means a complete change of customary diet since mutton (goat meat) is generally too expensive. These "compromise" agreements are both verbal and in many cases written. But even after having compromised there is no guarantee that the Muslims will be left free to live life as they did before.

In Jhalod in Dahod district, the following conditions were put forth before the community as early as 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2002 when the violence was at its peak:<sup>1</sup>

1. No Muslim boy should come out of the house after 10 pm.
2. No *azaan* to be recited on the microphone in the *Masjid*.
3. Close Muslim student hostels.
4. Close slaughter houses on the highway.

---

<sup>1</sup> Forum Against Oppression of Women and Aawaaz-E-Niswaan, Genocide in Rural Gujarat: The Experience of Dahod District (Bombay: May 2002).

5. When Hindu bands cross the *Masjid* (mosque) they will not stop playing.
6. No Muslim children should stand and watch a Hindu *barat* (wedding procession).

According to Urmila and Prakash, both Hindus from BV41 area in Baroda, who saved several Muslim families in their neighbourhood during the pogrom:

An entire new language has been created in Gujarat. The new word is “compro.” Muslims will be allowed to come back only once they do “compro”— take back their complaints. Very few people have come back to this area. Out of 150 houses, people from about 20 have returned. Others have tried to go back, but Bajrang Dal cadres go there and don’t let them. Yesterday the few people who have returned came to our house again because they were afraid. At 1am last night the BJP [election] victory procession came to our area. Now with the BJP government coming back to power there is no question of the Muslims returning to their homes. They will not dare.

In BV5 and BV6, the Muslims have agreed to compromise in order to live there. The basic condition is that they drop all charges and discontinue court proceedings. The Muslim community has no choice but to agree because they are entirely dependent on the village for their livelihood and survival. In BV9 there has been a written compromise on stamp paper in the presence of senior district administration officials including the Collector, DSP [District Superintendent of Police], DDO [District Development Officer], TDO [Tribal Development Officer], and *mamlatdaar*. Nearly the entire Muslim community has signed this paper, with just a few exceptions. Now the “compromised” families are living in the village and doing their business. (Harish, paralegal worker, BO1 organization, Anand).

Kazi from BV17 in Anand district testified that most of the 32 pogrom affected families in his village have gone back except for five or six families who have filed complaints. But even those who have been allowed back are not living like they did before. Although they have not been directly forbidden from returning to the village, they are being told they are not welcome indirectly. The shops they used to rent are not being leased to them again and there is constant tension that something will happen again.

In some cases, the Muslims who refuse to “compromise” and give up their fight for justice, have been pressured to do so by filing false counter-cases against them.

Suleman from BV13 village in Anand district had a kerosene depot that was damaged during the pogrom due to which he suffered huge financial losses. Naturally he filed a case. Now the Patels have filed a counter-case against him. The charges are that he broke the boundary of a temple and destroyed or stole the idols in it. He is now under pressure to withdraw his case against those who damaged the depot. He will gain nothing in terms of financial compensation by dropping the case, but he might just save his life. However Suleman is still persevering. He continues to deal with the case against him, and has not withdrawn his own. He is waiting anxiously for the outcome. In the meantime, his family has moved into the nearby town because their village BV13 is right next to BV15, a very rich and notorious town dominated by Patels. The accused are threatening him that they will make the people of BV15 finish him off.

In some cases individual District Collectors, *mamlatdaars*, and other district administration officials claim to have “helped” or “facilitated” people’s return to their villages. Testimonies before the IIJ team, however, found that this “help” consisted largely of negotiating ‘compromises’ discussed above. In a few cases the ‘help’ seemed to consist of little beyond verbal assurances of safety and the attempt to hold village meetings.

The *mamlatdaar* called a meeting to get the Muslims back to their village. But the Hindus did not come—and they do not want us to go back, they do not want Muslims. They are not allowing the meeting to go on. There is pressure from the local authority but there is hatred too. (Razia, PV1 village, Panchmahals).

They do not allow the local Hindu community to come for the inter-community meetings. The VHP stops them. The Bajrang Dal pressurises local people. They threaten them that if they talk to us, then they will be killed too. (Munni, PV5 village, Panchmahals).

These half-hearted attempts at finding a ‘mediated’ solution to communal violence are meaningless because in village after village, the objective and basic conditions for survival—food, shelter and protection from attack—do not exist and have not been provided for.

### ***5.2.2 No Alternative Housing, No Alternative Livelihoods***

But while the State has been unable to secure the safe return of survivors to their homes, it has also completely failed to either build or provide alternative housing. Affected families have been left with few options. Some have moved in with surviving family members. Others stay in rented accommodation. But with an economic boycott preventing Muslims from securing a regular income, their tenancy is constantly under threat,

When we first came, we were all 28 of us in one of our relatives’ house. (Razia, woman survivor, PV1 village, Panchmahals).

They have to stay in rented houses. They do not have the money for the rent. The owners can’t keep them without getting rent for more than 4 months and he wants them out. So they keep moving. And of course children’s education is affected. (Yasmin describing what her neighbours from PV2 are going through in PV3).

Some victims resort to what most abandoned refugees do the world over - collecting old sheets of plastic, adding a little mud and calling it home,

“We built a little hut for ourselves.” (Yasmin, woman survivor, PV2 village, Panchmahals).

Some Muslim migrant labourers have gone back to their respective states. Those with the means to pay for their forced re-location have left for the Southern States, and to Hyderabad city in particular. But many Muslims are still homeless. None of these large numbers of internal refugees have been economically rehabilitated—they have no jobs or no businesses in their new location—and in the current atmosphere of economic boycott, they have little hope of finding any viable work. Their small compensation amounts can only look after daily needs and rent for a short period of time. Once this compensation money runs out, they are looking at complete destitution and starvation of entire families.

We are stuck in an alien land, away from our *vatan* (*motherland*), our home... no home, no land, no work, no security, no hope. (Tabu, young widow, PV26 village, Panchmahals).

Effective housing rehabilitation would have required large-scale re-construction of burnt and damaged homes in the survivors' original place of residence and alternative housing in new locations for those unable to return. In neither case has the government stepped forward. It has not even provided survivors with resources so that they can initiate their own re-building efforts. The few re-building efforts that the IIJ team saw evidence of were undertaken entirely by NGOs and local leaders within the affected community. In PV5, for example, out of 49 Muslim families in the village, only seven remain. The rest who have been living in makeshift shelters in PV39 needed permanent shelters. Community leaders approached two Muslim NGOs to build houses. PO7 gave money for the land and PO8 has now given money for construction.

So acute is the continuing perception of being under threat that even NGOs and community leaders are wary of constructing new houses for fear that they may get damaged again. As Akhtar, a camp organizer from Panchmahals district, told the panel:

In PV30, for example, 140 houses have to be re-built. PO1 has affected a "compromise" undertaking from the Muslims that they will not pursue cases against Hindus. This will reduce the threat of future damage to these houses, and only then will the houses be built. The Muslims have agreed to these terms. Evidence of the continuing sense of fear also comes from the fact that one NGO (PO9 from Hyderabad), which has constructed and repaired many houses in Dahod district, has also got each house insured against future damage.

In some cases, the government instead of housing displaced people has used the pogrom as an excuse to acquire land.

In PV15 for example, 7 houses were built on government land – not an uncommon occurrence in India. Now after the destruction of these homes, the government has started building a shopping centre in their place. (Akhtar, camp organizer, Panchmahals).

When we came back to live here in BV45, after a month, we got a notice for demolition of our houses. Before we could do anything about it, another notice was sent. Politicians want to throw us out. We went to BO14 and they are fighting the case. Now that the BJP has come back, we are sure that we will get more notices. So we want help from you to deal with this. This land was earlier a graveyard and the trust sold it to us. There is a nexus between the land developers and politicians and the ideology of ethnic cleansing. This is happening at other places as well. (Murad, BV45, area in the outskirts of Baroda).

In addition to those who have been permanently displaced, a large number of Muslim families have now been compelled to maintain two shelters. Many are living in a permanent state of insecurity, where constant threats (verbal and physical) and periodic incidents of violence (like the burning of houses and business establishments) make it impossible for them to risk staying in their villages at night. So they live in the relative safety of Muslim majority areas in nearby towns, and return to their village during the day to keep an eye on the land, assets and property that may have survived the pogrom. In a situation where livelihoods have been destroyed, the pressure of constant travel and the burden of maintaining two shelters is crippling.



### 5.3 Continuing Economic Violence

#### 5.3.1 *Economic Boycott of Muslims*

Even before February 2002, leaflets calling for an economic boycott of the Muslim community were being widely circulated. One such leaflet says the following:

The only solution is financial boycott. Anti-national elements that are using the money they earn with our cooperation to weaken us. They buy arms and molest our sisters and daughters. The answer to these elements lies in Financial Non-Cooperation Movement. Come! Let us resolve:

- (1) I will not buy any thing from any Muslim shopkeeper.
- (2) I will not sell my goods to these elements.
- (3) Neither use these traitors' hotels or their garages.
- (4) I will give my car to Hindus' garages only. From a needle to gold, do not buy anything made by a Muslim nor sell anything made by us to them.
- (5) Boycott movies casting Muslim heroes-heroines. Banish films of traitorous producers.
- (6) Never work in Muslims' offices and do not employ Muslims.

Such a stringent economic boycott will suffocate those elements and break their backs. Then it will be difficult for them to live in any corner of the country. Friends, start this boycott from today so that no Muslim will have the guts to lift his head before us and live. Have you read this newsletter? Then make 10 copies and distribute it amongst our brethren. He who does not follow this newsletter and does not distribute it to others—may he be cursed by Hanuman and Ramchandra. Jai Shree Ram!

— A true Hindu patriot.<sup>2</sup>

The Muslim community is today facing an aggressive campaign of economic violence designed to strangle them. The IIJ team saw overwhelming evidence of this at all levels, whether people owned, a business or a petty trade, or worked for wages. Livelihoods and the very survival of Muslims are at stake and the state of “normalcy” pronounced by the government is a patent lie.

The pogrom in February-March 2002 had not only targeted Muslim lives and homes, but Muslim-owned businesses, business establishments and all means of livelihood. The IIJ team found evidence that the economic violence unleashed then was continuing nine months

---

<sup>2</sup> Communalism Combat 77-78 (2002).

later. Hindutva forces have managed to sustain a systematic economic boycott against the Muslim community in all the affected areas of Gujarat, aimed at depriving survivors of their means of livelihood.

The boycott is enforced through threats of retaliation against non-Muslims attempting to resist the diktat. It is being practiced not simply by individual employers, businessmen, workers and consumers but is part of a larger campaign by sections of Hindu civil society to terrorize Muslims with the full backing of the state. This strangulation is taking place in many different forms and arenas – most effectively in places where Muslims are few in numbers.

#### *5.3.1.1 The rural boycott*

For the Muslims in rural areas who own some lands, a vital means of economic rehabilitation is to return to their villages, take control of this land and begin cultivation. But in case after case they have been denied the right to return. Even in villages where they have been allowed to return under the humiliating “compromise” conditions discussed earlier, the IIJ team heard many instances of Muslims still being terrorized. Many were unable to cultivate their lands, were denied the right to use common canals or bore wells for irrigation, or were simply forced to leave their land fallow in the face of threats of physical violence.

My son is now driving an auto rickshaw on rent. The other villagers are not allowing people to do farming. They are cutting their electricity and do not give them water. If a Hindu talks to us they threaten to boycott them as well. The Patels told us yesterday that we should pack our things because they are going to throw us out in any case. This village has a woman *Sarpanch* (leader) but she doesn't support us in any way. She cannot talk to us, she is a Dalit and is not allowed a voice. (A Muslim woman from BV44 village, Baroda).

In many cases lands owned by Muslims have simply been taken over by Hindus for agricultural cultivation or grazing. Many of the new sharecropping arrangements are also being communally determined, such that Muslims who have land are being economically coerced to give it out to a Hindu resident of the village. Ultimately the Muslim owner may have to settle for the distress sale of the land, which could have been very valuable. The IIJ panel heard many Muslims testify that they would like to sell their lands and leave.

For the landless, the situation remains extremely grim whether they have been allowed to return or not. Agricultural labourers who have returned are not being employed to work on lands. Those who cannot return for fear of physical harm to themselves and their families, generally find themselves the last to be hired as casual labour on construction sites or as *coolies* (porters) in their new place of residence.

We never get work on the farms anymore. Hindus don't come to Muslims for work. No Hindu will employ poor Muslims. Right now, labourers from a neighbouring village are filling the gap of labourers. (Munni, PV5 village, Panchmahals).

#### *5.3.1.2 The urban boycott*

Muslims working in schools, factories, small industry and business establishments – some of them for decades—are also being denied work. The IIJ team heard numerous examples of textile factory workers, construction workers, steel furniture workers, mechanics, and teachers who were fired after years of service as part of the economic boycott. In each case,

the excuses differ but the end result is the same. The few Hindus who have tried to stand by their Muslim colleagues have met a similar fate.

Basheer from AA4 area in Ahmedabad was a teacher at the English Medium Public School for the last 7 years. From March 15<sup>th</sup> onwards, he first received memos alleging that his qualification was not enough and later that he had taken away some school property, etc. After 11 hearings, he got a dismissal notice. He was the only Muslim teacher in pre-school and the only other Muslim, a woman who was not holding a permanent job, was verbally asked to leave.

Raza from area AA41 in Ahmedabad was working in the State transport corporation as a mechanic. In the days during and immediately following the pogrom he could not go to work. He lives far from his place of work and was scared of travelling through Hindu dominated areas. He asked for two months leave, but was given only one month. But he found himself unable to attend until five months after the pogrom. His bosses told him to resign verbally, saying he was absent far too frequently. He had brought with him his duty record to show that he had never absent from work before the pogrom took place, but it did not matter.

Babar worked at a furniture firm in Ahmedabad. Unable to go to work because of the violence, when he did go after three months, he was dismissed. The establishment is owned by a Hindu. Babar was the only Muslim. He had worked with them since the age of 14. He had even called them on March 13<sup>th</sup>, 2002 and asked if he should re-join, but was told not to come because he was Muslim. The pogrom itself had not damaged his house or property but today he finds himself jobless, surviving on loans, unable to support his five children and unable even to pay the school fees to educate of the two children who are in school.

Shakeel had worked for 10 years in an export textile factory in Ahmedabad as a packager. He came to work 15 days after the worst violence and was not allowed to enter the factory. Finally he was taken in by the police because the factory owner filed a complaint saying that Shakeel was threatening them by entering the factory by force. So far Shakeel has refused to sign on a letter of resignation. He has also tried to get another job but there are none available. He has even lodged a complaint against the factory owner through the Workers Union, but so far nothing has come of it.

Siraj had worked in a chemical factory in Ahmedabad on the machines for 10 years. Returning to work three months after the pogrom, he was asked to leave. He was the only Muslim in the factory, but he had good relations with some Hindu *Thakurs* (upper caste) there. He was even living in a *Thakur* neighbourhood. A *Thakur* colleague tried to defend Siraj to the owner, saying, "He has been operating six machines single-handedly, doing the work of one and half men". The owner then sacked the *Thakur*, for simply standing by Siraj, as well.

Alam used to work in another chemical factory in Ahmedabad. He even managed to make it to work during the worst of the pogrom. But later heard rumours that

Muslims were not being allowed to work. Gradually the factory started employing new workers, and one by one the Muslim workers were asked to leave. One day in the month of June, he too was fired. They asked him to leave and come and meet the owner at around 12 noon that day. Days passed and everyday he was given a new reason for why the owner could not meet him. He now recalls the leaflets he saw circulating during the pogrom, asking people not to allow Muslim back into their villages and neighbourhoods. And he is angry. "We used to work like slaves and never raise our voice or even sit down in front of the owner," he says. He has lodged a complaint with the Labour Commission. But so far, there is no response.

In both rural and urban areas Muslims are also being forced to discontinue their traditional trades.

In PV25, the *Naiks* (an *Adivasi* community) used to collect minor forest produce and sell it to Muslim traders. But PM17 the local MLA belonging to the Hindu community intervened. Leaflets on the economic boycott of Muslims were spread and the *Adivasis* were forced to take pledges. One *Adivasi*, who tried to sell forest produce to a Muslim, had his entire collection for the day thrown away by PM17. Now there are no Muslim traders to buy the minor forest produce and the *Adivasis* are also going hungry. (Laila, PO12 organization, PV12 village, Dahod).

Those engaged in petty trades like tailoring, plying taxis and those with small independently owned businesses like grocery shops and kiosks have also been seriously affected. They are simply being prevented from resuming control of their businesses, under threat of physical harm.

Razaq's family tried to return to his village BV14 in Anand district with two other neighboring families. But they were not allowed to enter and were forced to live in the fields on the outskirts of the village. None of them have been allowed to engage in any business either. The Patels have told them bluntly that they must shut their shops. They did attempt to re-open their shop but the Hindus threw everything away and told them to first withdraw all the legal cases. Now Razaq's family survives by selling vegetables on the outskirts of the village.

A Muslim woman from BV44 testified to the fact that she had three teashops that were burned and she suffered losses to the tune of Rs.85,000. Now she goes to different villages as a daily wage labourer because she does not get work in her own village.

Even if the Muslims brave it out (which few have done), their shops and trades are not being patronized by the majority community, which spells economic decimation. Other methods of squeezing independent business ventures are also being vigorously implemented. Denial of access to credit is one certain way to cripple petty traders, especially those trying to restart trades that were destroyed. No one is willing to give Muslims the small capital in the form of seed money that is needed to purchase goods and re-enter the trading cycle. Many Muslim traders have also found that they are no longer considered "safe" trading partners by Hindu creditors and that the two-way credit system by which most petty trades operate is not open to them. Muslim traders have also found that those who owed them money before the pogrom are defaulting. Shop owners find that even though their shops were totally destroyed, the government refuses to give them loans. They are being asked to prove that

those shops existed. This is impossible to do since the shops were completely gutted and nothing remains of them.

### **5.3.2 The communal economic incentive**

The flip side of the economic decimation of Muslims is the economic benefit being derived by Hindu residents of the same villages and neighbourhoods, many of whom participated in the attacks on Muslims in the pogrom. Communal violence and politics is being given a continuous economic incentive, far surpassing the one-time gain derived from the looting which took place during February-March 2002.

The IIJ team heard many testimonies of the ways in which the forcible exit of Muslims is being accompanied by a take-over of their occupations and businesses by Hindus. This phenomenon can be seen in transport businesses, cassette shops, petty vending on hand carts and other small businesses.

PV5 is en route to an important local pilgrimage centre. Pilgrim trade is the lifeblood of the village. Once many of the small kiosks dotting the place were owned and run by Muslims. It was lucrative business. That, along with plying pilgrims to and fro in jeep-taxis, was a source of livelihood for almost 90 per cent of the people in the village. After the pogrom, Muslims have found their traditional places for setting up kiosks usurped by Hindu kiosk owners during their absence. They (Hindus) categorically refuse to vacate. Mumtaz from PV5 village in Panchmahals district testified:

They do not allow us to keep our handcarts. They come in large crowds of 50 to 100 people and they stop us at the door if we prepare to leave the house. The crowd is mostly men but women also join. And those women once even beat me up 2-3 months ago (September-October 2003). I went to the police but the policeman told me to go home, that 'nothing will come of your Muslim complaints.

Mumtaz and Munni from the same village PV5 say:

They don't let us do any business here. They tell us to go back. And our men who still have some jeeps intact, they are not allowed to take their jeeps into the area.

### **5.3.3 Loss of livelihood, Loss of Hope**

The continuing economic squeeze upon the Muslim community has led not only to the loss of livelihood but also to loss of hope and a debilitating desperation.

Casual labour is the only option left. Loading trucks, that is the only work available. Construction workers are not being taken back by the contractors. Now the *Hindutva* of these employers has emerged so they are not employing any Muslim. So for the most part, people are not getting anything. They are just standing and waiting in the hope that a contractor will pick them up. (Devan, social worker, PO12 organization, Panchmahals).

The displaced women of PV1, PV2, PV4, PV5, PV6, and PV39 told the IIJ team, that today they do just about anything to make a living: casual labour, driving rented

rickshaws, or taking a handcart around town. Anything. But while they once managed to get 40 *maunds* of maize, now they survive on just five or ten *maunds*.

Ghettoisation thus takes place at various levels and has meant the shrinking of all kinds of spaces. It not only determines the areas in which people can live, but also affects the overall economic situation of the community as its logic dictates where jobs can be taken and what kinds of jobs are available. In the case of trades, it means relying on an already impoverished community with less buying power which leads to a cycle of further deprivation for the community as a whole. This also means a shrinking of the sense of belonging, security and dignity.

The situation is summed up aptly in the words of a social worker, Banu, working with BO7 organization in PV39 village in Panchmahals district:

The biggest damage the violence has caused is that the community has been stripped of dignity and self-esteem, reduced to utter helplessness. The people of PV5 were very well off. And now they keep asking us, “What will you give us, what have you brought?”

## **5.4 Continuing Violence & Its Impact On Women...**

### ***5.4.1 Mental Health Consequences***

Chapter 4 of this report has examined the nature of the February-March 2002 pogrom in Gujarat, and the futile attempts of its victims to get justice from the State. Nine long months later, justice is still as elusive. The post-pogrom period, continuing till the time of writing of this report, has been marked not simply by a failure of the State to act, but by a pro-active and systematic obstruction of any attempts to secure investigation and seek legal redress. The failure of national legal remedies to prosecute perpetrators of the pogrom and secure justice is examined in detail in chapter 6.

All that the victims have to show today are the scars of continuing mental trauma.

#### ***5.4.1.1 Silencing of Pain:***

For women who were either directly violated or whose family members were killed, raped or mutilated, the denial of redress and the lack of public acknowledgement of the violence has exacerbated the trauma. In many cases, women have been forced into silence about rape/sexual violence because that is the price their community has agreed to pay in order to be allowed back into their homes, villages and neighbourhoods. This is part of the “compromise” conditions discussed earlier, where Muslims have been forced to negotiate “peace” with their Hindu neighbours. The price that Muslim women have had to pay for this negotiated and unequal peace is total silence about the sexual violence, and the agreement that no legal charges will be pressed against members of the Hindu community. This silencing takes place, as we discussed earlier, in addition to other ways in which voices are stifled before the strength to speak is even gathered. The following testimony by Taslima from AO3 organization is an indicator of the number of women who suffered.

I have interviewed more than 100 women, 55 of whom were gang raped. There are many more that I know but have not recorded their testimonies as the community did not want me to talk to them because many were unmarried. Some were married too. I had to go to each village six or seven times before they could start talking about sexual assault. Each woman you speak to would tell you another eight to ten cases who were gang raped in front of her. So the number of gang rapes goes much higher. There are indeed many cases.

The situation has been particularly vicious for young, unmarried girls who were sexually brutalised, for proclaiming the sexual violence they suffered makes it more difficult for them to be married. The forced marriage of young girls is but one of the tragic consequence of this situation. Some mothers reported to social workers that they had been compelled to send their daughters away or marry them off in a hurry, often at a very young age, to men they knew to be unsuitable, lest word of their “shame” got around.

So while some married women have in some cases spoken about their violation to members of their own community, in the case of unmarried girls the silence has been absolute. The widespread ‘silence’ also suggests a gross under-reporting of cases of sexual crimes, even to social workers and volunteers.

#### *5.4.1.2 Trauma*

Silence has meant that women across the board have repressed their pain with immense consequences for their mental health. There has been no acknowledgement of the need to provide treatment for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a known consequence of such situations, and a serious public health concern. Camp volunteers, untrained in providing specialised psychiatric care, could only provide basic human emotional support. A social worker remarks that, overall, “Suicidal feelings are on the rise among the displaced,” (Devan, PO12, Panchmahals). A psychiatrist also reports having come across “many women who are mentally disturbed” while an activist says she “personally witnessed the case of a woman who could not sleep for months.” (Taslina, AO3 organization, Delhi, presently working in Gujarat) Many women and young girls exhibit signs of severe mental stress disorders, veering between depression and anger, and are often unable to do even basic household tasks.

“I have seen so much that I can’t forget it” (Safia, another woman who witnessed mob attacking – rapes, bodies burnt from AA1 area, Ahmedabad).

“My niece said last night that [16<sup>th</sup> December 2003] why don’t they kill us all once and for all?” (Sameena, BV43 area, B08 organization, Baroda).

“It’s been ten months but I can’t forget it. I just feel like crying all the time.” (Tabu, who witnessed the rape of her sister-in-law and niece, and saw their bodies being thrown into a well, PV26 village, Panchmahals).

### ***5.4.2 Economic Destitution and the Burden on Women***

#### *5.4.2.1 Creation of Female Headed Households:*

Many women lost the only family breadwinner, and are today destitute. Many have never worked outside the home before, have no marketable skills, no job experience, and fear the outside world. Economic destitution has made them entirely dependent either on charity from community patriarchs or on the goodwill of NGOs. On several occasions, women burst into tears in front of their children while explaining to the IIJ team that they had no way to feed them the next day (women from PV10). In most cases economic destitution is coupled with the scars of violence, trauma of displacement and re-location, and the sole burden of managing children and a household. This is compounded by the fact that they face an uncertain future.

According to Bibijan from PV30 village in Panchmahals district, out of 800 to 900 Muslims in her village only 30-35 families have managed to return, but even they are still living in tents. The 9-12 from the village widows are refusing to go back because their husbands were killed right there. The fear is too great. “10,000 people attacked us. How can we trust them after that?” she says. She lives in a widow home and says, “I am living here out of desperation. At least I get 2 meals a day.”

Nagma’s husband was killed. They used to own a vegetable stall in their village (PV30 in Panchmahals district). She now lives in PV20 and says, “Here, in PV20, there is only a large wholesale vegetable market, so a small stall is not feasible. Setting up a grocery store is too risky because people might take things on credit that I may not be able to recover. And I can’t go back to the village because of fear.” At the moment she is living off the compensation money with one child in rented accommodation.

#### *5.4.2.2 New roles and Burden of survival:*

Many women have been forced to flee their homes and live in new alien situations where their traditional support systems – family, neighbourhood, extended kin networks – do not exist. Here they find themselves coping not only with trauma and loneliness, but also struggling with unfamiliar surroundings and the new demands of daily living. Even where they have returned to their original homes their neighbours have changed beyond recognition. Hostility is a daily visitor. The combination of threats, actual incidents of violence and internalised fear pressure daily lives tremendously. Women described to the IIJ team how these factors add a burden to already difficult material and psychological conditions:

The taps in our houses had been broken but when we came back they would not even let us fill water from their houses. We see that they are wearing and using things looted from our house during the pogrom but we cannot say or do anything. People who had given us shelter also do not recognize us. They keep making fun of us. When my daughter heard rumours that there might be trouble during the declaration of election results, she got hysterical and started screaming that she did not want to live here. Instead of helping her or asking us to stay the women and children from the neighbourhood were laughing at us.

If Muslim women are washing clothes they have to move over when the Hindu women come. If Hindu women are there first they won’t make way. All we want is



to live in peace and earn a living. They have so much money. Why can't they just leave us alone. (Women survivors from BV9).

This is the fourth generation of Muslims to live here. But now, we have to live with great courage. They don't let us fill water, or give electricity – anything.” (Munni, PV5 village, Panchmahals).

We cannot go to the bazaar– no woman can. They stripped us naked and made us walk and beat us all in the open market all the way to the police station. (Ruksana, PV10 village, Dahod).

The economic boycott has also affected Muslim women as consumers. Many women told the IJJ team that they are forced to travel long distances to get basic supplies as Hindu shopkeepers in their area would not sell anything to them. The IJJ team in Ahmedabad met some women in the AA2 area visit. These women were from a group of 45 widows from AA1 and AA7 area who were settled in AA2. The women said that it took them the whole day, every day, to collect food against their ration cards. The cards can only be used in designated ration shops in the original residential areas from where the women have now been displaced, and they are is a long distance away from the current houses assigned to them by the PO1.

These women are also entirely dependent on others in the community to help them with the daunting procedural requirements for getting relief and compensation and for managing bank accounts – tasks that many have never had to handle before.

According to Salma, a relief camp organizers in Panchmahals district, many of the women are not educated and often unaware of their rights. The day after their money was deposited in the bank it would vanish–withdrawn by a brother-in-law or some other family member who claimed that the money was not safe with women or that the woman would remarry and leave the children to be raised by them. Salma has now recovered money from some men, and opened bank accounts for the women as sole signatories.

The risk of male family members being attacked or rounded up by the police on their return to the village has forced some women to take on several new roles. In such situations older women take on the role of checking on land and property or facing the police during “combing operations” in the neighbourhood where it is reported that Muslim men and boys are routinely and indiscriminately picked up. Women are also seeking means of subsistence, as noted by Dewan from PO12 organization in Panchmahals, “Earlier, Muslim women would not go out – now they are going to work because the men don't get any work anymore”.

### ***5.4.3 Impact on physical health***

#### ***5.4.3.1 Reproductive and Sexual Health:***

The physical impact of sexual violence experienced by Muslim women of Gujarat continues till today. Even now, the survivors of sexual violence have little access to counselling and information related to their sexual and reproductive health and rights. Little attention paid to

issues related to pregnancy, abortion and sexually transmitted infections as a consequence of sexual violence. In the days following the carnage there were no services that acknowledged women's specific health needs. In the relief camps, the lack of privacy prevented women from seeking treatment for many of the gynaecological problems that they were suffering from. Many women had to give birth in the camps, assisted largely by local volunteers, without the requisite facilities, expertise or environment. Women at the camps, as well as those in curfew-bound areas, were not in a position to seek specialised health services at all.

According to a fact-finding report by the Medico Friends Circle,<sup>3</sup> made available to the IJ team, several cases of polymenorrhea (shortened menstrual cycles), dysmenorrhoea (painful menses) and menstrual irregularity were encountered among women in the camps. The onset of these problems seemed to be related to the violence women had experienced and the attendant psychological and physical stress. Several women also reported chronic vaginal discharge (vaginal infections). Yet so long after the worst violence, the IJ team found no evidence of medical help being made available to women to help them deal with the long-term effects of their problems.

#### *5.4.3.2 Impact of Impoverishment on Nutrition and Health of Women:*

In a situation where livelihood options for the entire community have been almost entirely destroyed, providing adequate nutrition for the family has been an issue of serious concern for the women survivors. The premature closure of relief camps and the lack of employment have forced many violence-affected families into a food crisis. Though the Gujarat government issued relief ration cards to the riot affected several women survivors reported that the allocated amounts were grossly inadequate. For those displaced, these cards were of little value help as the rations had to be collected from the original ration shop in the neighbourhoods to which they were unable to return. Reports by women activists mention that women have cut back on their daily diets, sometimes eating only one meal a day. This is hardly surprising as it is well established that even under "normal" circumstances in India, women in the family eat the least in terms of quantity and nutritious value. In a crisis situation they are bound to be the worst affected with serious long-term health consequences.

#### **5.4.4 Impact on Life Choices**

Given that the entire Muslim community in Gujarat is experiencing an acute sense of vulnerability, and a loss of dignity and "honour," women of the community are bearing the brunt of the social response. Since community honour is seen to repose in the women and they have been attacked so brutally, there is now a heightened protectiveness towards women and girls within.

The threat perception to young Muslim girls has led to a spate of early marriages. Young girls considered at highest risk of future sexual attacks were hurriedly married off by their parents while they were still in relief camps. According to estimates by social workers there were at least 150 panic marriages in the relief camp in the town of Godhra, and 180 marriages in *Shah-e-Alam*, the largest relief camp in Ahmedabad.

---

<sup>3</sup> Medico Friends Circle, Gujarat Carnage and the Health Services: A Public Health Disaster (May 2002).

For the same reason, young Muslim girls also find their mobility restricted. Public space is no longer seen as a safe space for them and they are not allowed to “hang around” with friends in the neighbourhood or on street corners. In many cases the fear of sexual assault has made parents pull their young daughters out of schools; their life choices compromised forever. In many cases of course, the girls themselves are too scared by what they have seen and heard to want to go to school.

#### *5.4.4.1 Resurgence of traditional identity markers and roles:*

Generally communities under threat cling to their religious/cultural traditions and identities in times of crisis, which invariably leads to stricter definitions of social rules for women. Similarly, in Gujarat, male community leaders are increasingly insisting that women should fit into their narrow definition of what a “good Muslim woman” should be. This is also due to the strong presence of Muslim ‘charitable’ groups during the post-pogrom period. Given that the Indian state abdicated its responsibility in terms of relief and rehabilitation, most of the work was undertaken by Muslim organizations. Taslima, an activist from AO3 organization of New Delhi, who works in Gujarat remarked, “Very few secular groups and NGOs were working and most of the relief work was done by Muslim groups; it is very unfortunate that the community had to look after itself.” Muslim charitable groups take this opportunity to disseminate and promote their own definitions of gender norms and relations. The fact that they address citizens’ needs in a very concrete way gives legitimacy both to their presence and their discourse.

As a result, more women are being encouraged to don the veil. On the one hand, it is simply seen as safer to be hidden behind the veil. In villages and neighbourhoods where Muslim women are forced to live within shouting distance of their attackers, many find it easier to live behind the veil so their identity is concealed and they are spared the pointed insults, the taunts and the recollection of the trauma and humiliation of the attack. On the other hand, the veil is also being adopted as a cultural symbol of the Muslim community. Since women were attacked precisely because of their identity as Muslims, the symbols and traditional gender roles associated with that identity are being revived and protected by the entire community.

For example, in a school of about 100 pupils where 40 girls pursue their studies, the veil is compulsory, a fact which is not at all questioned by Mona, an activist from AO4 organization from Ahmedabad: “Muslim girls have to wear headscarves. The girls were not used to it. First, they threw it out. But by now they are wearing it – they are also happy to wear it since they look very pretty.” There is also a kind of “guilty” revival of religiosity. According to Haleema, a lawyer working with an organization PO14: “There is first denial – women go to *Maulanas* (religious leaders) to try and believe that their missing husbands are still alive. Or, they suffer from guilt that this happened to them because we were not good enough Muslims.”

Other examples illustrate the resurgence of ‘traditional’ gender roles even for women who can be considered “outsiders.” Muslim women activists and social workers from outside Gujarat, who have visited regularly since the violence are welcomed for the help they offer,

but nevertheless criticized for not wearing the veil or not being accompanied by a male mentor.

## **5.5 Long Term Impact On Children**

### ***5.5.1 Children traumatized***

Scores of children experienced and witnessed the most horrific scenes of physical and sexual violence during the pogrom. The testimonies placed before the IIJ team made it evident that little professional help was ever made available to them. Nine months later, children continue to be in varying states of trauma, the full extent of which one will perhaps never know. The children will bear these scars for a lifetime. The little counselling that is being done is done on a group basis and there is still no individual counselling available. Many displaced children who stayed in camps, may not have seen violence themselves but they have heard about it and their lives have changed because of it. Friends were lost, children who grew up together were separated into different relief camps and now find themselves living in different locations. The children need to build new relationships to restore faith in themselves and in others, but they are suspicious now of strangers and do not trust easily. The “us” and “them” divide has left a deep, perhaps immutable, imprint on their minds.

A boy from the AA2 area came back to his house and fell unconscious and started stuttering. No one knows what he had gone through. He was taken to hospital. After few days his father had gone to fetch medicines for him and got killed by a VHP/Bajrang Dal mob. The boy's situation worsened, since he thought he was responsible for his father's death. He became violent, used to beat up his sister and also used to hurt himself. If asked he said, “If I don't hurt myself, some one else will do it to me, so how does it matter.” Now the counsellor has started treating him. He is better but not the same. (Mona, trauma counsellor, AO4 organization, Ahmedabad).

Babu, a Muslim boy from AA1 area in Ahmedabad witnessed the rape of his sister. He is 13 year old and extremely violent.

We have been doing a lot of work with children who were in camps. In our work we have noticed that when children saw the colours red and yellow they could not tolerate it. They would start getting agitated and traumatized. (Gulnaz, a social worker who worked in the relief camps, Baroda).

Children from AA1 area came from a middle class background. They had never experienced anything like this fear or deprivation. These children were used to drinking milk, and now they had nothing. All they wanted was to go home. There was nothing to eat. We started a therapy exercise with them. They had to tear paper, soak the paper in bucket of water and throw it at a wall. This was to help them get the tension and anger out. Invariably when we asked them to draw anything, they drew burning houses. (Sarah, a woman activist and her colleague Aamir, organization AO7, Ahmedabad).

### ***5.5.2 Denial of access to schooling through terror***

Mona, who has been working with AO4 organization in AA2 area for several months, testified to the IIJ panel about some of the changes in the pattern of education, which she has noted. According to her, many children have stopped going to school. Those who were attending private English medium schools find them unaffordable now. If the resources are

stretched, and a choice has to be made, parents would rather spend their money on educating boys rather than girls. In some cases, children who were in school are now working to earn money. After all they have experienced they see further study as an entirely futile exercise. If the schools happen to be located in Hindu dominated areas, then the children cannot attend at all. The school management has also played its part in pushing children out, by sending letters to Muslim parents saying that they send their children to the school at their own risk.

Our children go to school, but they are scared. Other children abuse, harass and threaten them. My elder daughter does not go to school even now, she is too scared. (Ruksana, village PV10, Dahod).

Tabu, a young widow from PV26 in Panchmahals district with 5 children to raise, tells of the obstruction she faces, “Four of my kids are school going but where I am now staying in PV20, they are not giving admission to my children. They say I should get permission from their previous school in PV26. And over there they tell me, “The other school is no good, send your children here.” But how can I ever send them back there after all that happened?

In case of girls, people are scared to send them out of the houses even to school. Parents have read about what has happened to women in other places, so they will not send girls out or far for studies. There is the constant fear of sexual assault that bothers parents. They are also getting the girls married early at a young age. Their education has been stopped and parents are eager to have them married because they’re scared of what might happen to them. Girls were getting married in the camps, though I don’t understand how this will help save them from sexual assault because marriage did not prevent rapes, we know it happened to all women. (Samira, school teacher and activist, BO8 organization, Baroda).

In some cases, girls who were sexually violated have to go to school with the knowledge that others know their “shame.” In the absence of a supportive school environment, this can be paralysing for young Muslim girls. Some girls have dropped out of school because they know what happened to so many others and are scared of suffering the same.

## **5.6 Attack on supporters**

Activists, social workers and concerned citizens who have tried to help the Muslim community have themselves come under threat and harassment from *Hindutva* forces. Several testimonies highlighted the risks faced by social workers, especially women, both Muslim and non-Muslim:

Many women [social workers] have faced attacks, on the charge that they are linked to NGOs which are foreign funded or to Christian organizations, accused of being interested only in conversions. Physical threat was given to us: the VHP president and BJP president of the *taluka* [block] said that they will burn our office and that the same thing that happened to Muslim women can happen to you. (Laila, PO12 organization, working in PV12 village, Dahod).

There has been an attempt within the Muslim community to move from being victims to becoming survivors. For Muslim women in particular, the destruction of traditional systems

of support has forced them into collective modes of action. Many women were active in helping victims and organizing relief in the 103 refugee camps across Gujarat. Some women left their homes for the very first time in their lives in order to do so. Education too has become a matter of concern for the entire community. Many community leaders see education as a weapon with which to arm themselves against future attacks:

The only way we can transform the situation is to have mass programmes of education or other such programmes.... I agree that it is our weakness that women are not educated. Our women did not know how to resist the violence. We are trying to educate our women....Our women have not seen colleges, or cities. They did not have the wherewithal to deal with sexual assault. When the women fled, they did not know what to take with them and what to leave behind. (Fardeen, relief camp organizer, PV10, Panchmahals).

Girls here are not educated, it is not that we do not have brains. If the girls had been educated, they could have protected themselves in the recent violence. So we thought that we have to try to change things, so that they are better equipped to deal with these kinds of situations. We decided we would bring our girls out, educate them. There was objection [from the community]. They said, "Why should girls go out and work?" But we said that education would only help the girls. And we set up a *madrassa* (school). (Nafisa, social worker, BO16, Panchmahals).

But today these active Muslims are extremely vulnerable to intimidation by the State. The draconian POTA law has indeed been used against precisely those Muslims who were seen as playing public leadership role in the process of community recovery. Many have been jailed and others, particularly Muslim women, are now too terrified to play a visible community role.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

The IIJ team which visited parts of Gujarat in December 2002, nine months after the pogrom, found overwhelming evidence of new and continuing forms of violence against the Muslim minority. They are unable to resume anything resembling a normal life, unable to ensure basic survival and to make free choices in the pursuit of happiness and well being for themselves and their families. The future holds dread.

The fundamental and Constitutional rights of Muslims as citizens of India—economic rights, social rights, cultural rights, religious rights, equality before law—have been violated with the full collusion of the Hindu right-wing government. Even for the most heinous crimes of mass murder and rape, in which both the right to life and the right to bodily integrity are violated, legal options have yielded no results.

This is particularly alarming for what it portends for Indian democracy and the Constitution, which guarantees special protection for the rights of minorities, who are viewed as vulnerable due to their fewer numbers. In the absence of this protection, what we are seeing is fascist majoritarianism in the guise of democracy whose target, in the first instance, is the Muslim community. So far, there is nothing to suggest that this genocidal project will stop on its own. The situation in Gujarat, therefore, calls for urgent action on the part of all sections of society, within and outside India. The international community at the level of the State, inter-governmental and non-State organizations must condemn the advance of this

genocidal project in India and pressurize the Government of India to restore human rights and protect the rights of minorities. There is an urgent need to declare a genocidal alert.