

## CHAPTER 5

### WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

February 27 – May 10, 2002, Vadodara

#### Introduction

Fact-finding teams who visited various affected *bastis* and relief camps run by the *jamaats* in Vadodara have gathered a large number of testimonies and accounts of the violence from women. PUCL fact-finding teams focused, by and large, on discussions and interviews with Muslim women as they had borne the brunt of the violence. However, several discussions have been held with women from across various communities. Apart from interacting with and interviewing a wide cross-section of people affected by the violence, many discussions were also held with the police and the administration. The following account has been put together on the basis of detailed interviews with women as well as from direct observation of the prevailing situation.

The wide range of data collected by fact-finding teams reveal that the violence in Vadodara affected most women in some way or the other. Lives of minority women have of course changed drastically. However, women from all communities were also affected by the fear and terror promoted by the state and the police. Hindu women were caught in a fear psychosis about attacks by the 'other'. This largely stemmed from rumours that were being systematically spread by communal organisations in different areas, through various pamphlets and booklets, as well as rumour mongering by the local press.

Although the livelihoods of all poor, working-class women have been affected, the situation in Muslim households has been far more serious, with hunger being an acute problem because minority men were unable to go out to work fearing attacks. The deep sense of betrayal that women feel by neighbours and children 'who grew up in front of my eyes (in my *aangan*)' is seen across classes. Thus all women, regardless of caste, class and community, have been significantly affected by the ongoing violence that has systematically dislocated their everyday living.

There have been multiple effects on Hindu women. At one level, they have gained a new visibility in and access to the public sphere. This was evident in the "*Ram Dhun*" program of 15 March where they participated enthusiastically in celebrations in the many temples in the city in large numbers. Also noteworthy is the fact that they have taken active part in violence, in small though significant numbers. Area reports from Baranpura, Bajwa and Navayard, among others, reveal that women have been active members of the attacking mobs. Some prominent women leaders have also been named in affected persons' testimonies. On March 1 in Atladara, the Sarpanch Kantaben Sanabhai Vasava was one of the main persons in the mob. Kanchanben Barot, a BJP Councillor in the ESI Hospital area was seen to move around with a sword along with others in the mob. In Bajwa, Jayaben Thakkar was part of the attacking mob. Women have played a role in looting as well, as is evident in arrests made in Vadodara. These arrests were widely reported in newspapers in mid-March.

Importantly, they have taken the lead in mobilizing and organization of various activities. Several women's delegations which included members of the BJP and VHP made representations and complaints to the several investigating teams and commissions including NHRC and NCW. These new roles seem to have been played with increasing ease and social sanction.

At another level, women are undeniably an agency through which the ideology of hatred is being perpetuated. PUCL fact-finding teams report that the level of hate among the Hindu women was alarming. Although they started off sounding sympathetic ('*bahut bura hua*', etc as seen in the infamous Best Bakery case) very soon they defended the violence saying, "they had it coming", etc. Women are very much part of a systematic hate-the-Muslims campaign that has been in place for the last few years. They feel threatened by Muslims, economically and socially: "They have 4 wives and 20 children, they will overrun us, they don't use contraception, etc. They are taking away all our business, we are becoming poor." PUCL teams have pointed out the manner in which the line between hating Muslims to condoning their killing and encouraging it has been crossed, at least partly on account of the fear psychosis that centres around the notion of the 'dangerous Other.' The insecurity of Hindu women is, in many ways, a product of Hindutva ideology that sets them up as vulnerable to sexual attack by Muslim men. These perceptions are irrational and have no sound basis; nevertheless their experience of fear is clearly real.

Concerns over safety and security have reshaped their daily lives even as they participate in the creation of such an environment. Affluent Hindu women routinely stayed up all night with the men in middle/upper class housing societies for fear of Muslim attacks, albeit in traditional gender roles, providing tea and snacks at regular intervals to the local vigilante men. Others, who have not gone along with the dominant outlook, have been threatened/abused for helping Muslims or even professing secular ideology.

Dalit women have, more or less, allied with the upper castes during the violence. This has been seen in areas like Baranpura, Navidharti, Navayard and Fatehpura. This has resulted in the Hinduization of Dalit women on a scale never before witnessed in Vadodara. Dalit women, frequently working class, have been badly hit by the post-Godhra violence. Continuous curfew as well as the atmosphere of fear has resulted in acute economic distress. Many women who worked as daily wagers or domestic help could not reach their places of work, and many have lost employment. Loss of earnings has resulted in a rising incidence of impoverishment and hunger. PUCI teams observed greater anxieties among Dalit women regarding life and property as compared to upper caste women at least partly because Dalit *bastis* lie almost always alongside Muslim *bastis*. In Kagda Chawl, a Hindu woman who is a head loader in the wholesale vegetable market, and lives amidst Muslim families recounted, how during combing operations the police barged into her home too. Because she is on good terms with the Muslim youth (and probably helped shelter them) the police call her a traitor. Further, longstanding alliances forged by Dalit and Muslim women on the basis of shared socio-economic concerns, as also neighbourhood spaces, seem to have broken down. The women of Jhanda Chowk of Kisanwadi as well as the women of Baranpura articulated this very clearly. Bhanuben Parmar, a resident of Fatehpura recounted in her testimony before the Citizens' Tribunal how she is still very concerned about her Muslim neighbours and friends, but is forced to keep herself aloof from them. All Hindu women in her *basti* feel that the police will punish them if they maintain their earlier close relationships with their Muslims friends. Nevertheless, some women have shown great personal bravery in order to safeguard life and property of their Muslim neighbours. In Kisanwadi Hussaini Chowk, Maharashtrian women stated that they had been salvaging the belongings of their Muslim neighbours and storing them till the Muslim families could return home. Dalit *bastis*, have also been more prone to "combing operations" conducted by the police, and many women have been beaten and injured by the police, though the scale bears no comparison with that of Muslim women.

The position of minority households is not comparable to that of any other group. With their life and property under systematic attack, contending with unresponsive, indeed, biased police and administrative personnel, women of minority households have been facing a grim situation. Hunger is an acute problem as neither women nor men are in a position to go out to work (as of April 1, 2002. The situation by June 1, 2002 has improved somewhat.) Hundreds of families have been displaced and rehabilitation is a distant possibility. The social tensions of living in unsafe times is exacerbated by the deep sense of betrayal experienced by the women especially when they have suffered attacks by neighbours and children who 'grew up in front of our eyes'.

## KEY EMERGING ISSUES

From the testimonies and personal accounts of the women, several persistent themes emerged. Because the patterns and nature of violence changed during the three phases, the experiences of women and what they articulated as their issues also differed over the three phases. In the first phase of violence between Feb. 28 and March 8, for instance, women recalled their pain and terror as they left their homes and saw them being looted and burnt. Many women were separated from their husbands and expressed their anxieties about their husbands' whereabouts. In the second phase following March 15 what stood out more was their suffering at the hands of the police. In fact after the first phase, most testimonies centered around the police atrocities on women during the combing operations.

### Police Atrocities

Women have consistently complained about police brutality during "combing operations." We have documented instances where discriminatory 'combing' has taken place, where police forces have selectively combed areas and *bastis* of the minority community alone. This arbitrary combing has taken place despite the fact that it was the minority community that was under attack. Some of their excesses are listed below.

- Pulling women from their homes, sometimes dragging them by the hair.
- Abusing, using curse words with religio-sexual connotations.
- Beating women, including old, widowed women; sometimes so severely that medical treatment was required.

- Hitting pregnant women on their stomachs with butts of guns.
- Violating the right to practice religion by bursting into homes during prayer timings and treating the Quran Sharif with disrespect.

Various women in oral and written complaints to the Commissioner of Police have identified many police personnel involved in these atrocities, but no FIRs have been registered, nor has any action been initiated. (Ref: Neema Kuwawala's testimony on Baranpura, testimonies and accounts from Rain Basera, from Wadi Tai Wada, etc.) Table 5.1 shows that women from almost 15 *bastis* suffered police atrocities.

### **Anger at the Role Played by the State Machinery, Especially the Police**

Women were very angry about police bias during the violence. Many of the women were witnesses to police inability and sometimes unwillingness to protect them. The brutal actions of the police during “combing operations” affected many women. The testimony of Kaushal Bano Mansuri of Bawamanpura on the “combing operations” speaks for itself: “I was putting my child to sleep at 9 pm on March 23. Suddenly I found lots of policemen in my house. They did not find our men at home. They started giving us *gaalis*. Put 2 *dandas* on me, one on my hand, the other on my stomach, and then they saw I was pregnant [9 months] and hit me in the thigh. They were all saying Kanani, Kanani [DCP of the area]. They were his staff. Only today I have started moving around [since I was so badly injured]. I had to go the hospital. I went into the *dargah* and hid there. I told them I was *pet se*. They still said ‘We have to hit her.’ My *saas* [mother-in-law] also said that I am pregnant. They said, ‘We have to kill it before that happens.’”

Above all, women ask for safety and justice. Naseem Bano, a social worker of Rafai Mohalla, told PUCL members that she had told the Commissioner of Police, “‘You have to protect us. If we take *kanoon* [law] into our own hands we become *gunahgaar* [criminals], if we do not, we die (there is no protection).’ I told him ‘You cannot be *ek tarfa* [partisan]. You should catch them and you should catch us [do not be selective/one-sided in whom you arrest].’”

### **Humiliation and Sense of Violation, Personal as Well as Collective, at the Explicit Religio-Sexual Overtones of the Mob and Police Behaviour**

The effect of verbal abuse on women was stark, and members of the fact-finding teams believe that this arena of violence against women is, perhaps underrated. Humiliation, as a result of verbal abuse, rankled for long and carried almost as much weight as physical abuse. In almost all testimonies, women remembered abuse and slogan shouting very vividly. The account of Zahira Sheikh of Best Bakery, Dabhoi Road makes this clear: “The whole night we were on the terrace, and the mob kept pelting stones at us, abusing us and trying to make us come down. They kept trying to put a ladder from behind the house to reach us, but the walls were too hot [since the house was burning]. The whole night, the mob surrounded the house and kept abusing us (*ma-behen ki gaali*).” Women at Rain Basera could not even bring themselves to repeat the abusive language of the police. Abuse involving sexual relations with Allah humiliated them the most. It is also significant that women from Machchipith area [separated from Rain Basera slum by a road] felt as humiliated by the experience of women from Rain Basera, despite belonging to a different socio-economic section. Women from Kagda Chahal expressed that sexual *gaalis* by the police almost amounted to verbal rape.

Mehrunissa of Kasamala Kabristan said that the police gave such bad *gaalis* ‘*jo hamare mardon ne bhi kabhi hame na di hon*’. It was not just the verbal abuses that angered the women. Rehana Pathan, a recently widowed woman in Kagda Chawl recalled with horror how the policemen barged into her *pardah* while she was in *iddat*. They showed no respect for her grief or for their religious practice of not seeing a man's face for 3 months after the husband's demise.

Women of Kagda Chawl and Imran Chambers described their sadness at how on the evening of Moharram, the combing of the police rudely upset their feast and other religious celebrations, ‘my son could not even eat the food that I had made for him!’

### **Outrage at Insults to Quran and Demolition/Damage to Various *Masjids/Dargahs***

Many women recounted damage done to mosques/*dargahs* in their area. They were also knowledgeable about damage done to other mosques/*dargahs*, of which they spoke as much with sadness as with indignation. Sajida

Bano of Baranpura said, “We recently spent a lot of money on our *masjid* – it has been destroyed entirely. They found bombs in the *masjid* which didn’t burst.”

A woman from Badri Mohalla almost cried as she recounted how the police had torn up her Quran and thrown it into some water during the combing operations. ‘How would you feel if they did this to your Gita?’ she said. The women of Kisanwadi showed the PUCL fact-finding team burnt pages of the Quran lying around in a blasted *masjid*.

**Table 5.1: Role of Police and Women**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Area</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Names of accused</b>	<b>Remarks</b>
March 1	<b>Kareli Baug</b>	Attacks on minorities. Combing operations in which police abused women, beat up women including an old woman on the head. Women afraid to complain to police officers		
March 1	<b>Madar Mohalla</b>	Women injured in police firing (Hazrabibi: tear gas shell injuries on neck and hands. Deewan Sameena: injured on ear lobe by shell, hospitalised for 13 days, medication for more than 3 weeks. In trauma for many weeks.)		
Feb. 28- Mar 22	<b>Baranpura</b>	On Feb. 28, attacks started in their area. Looting of homes, shops and burning of <i>masjid</i> , property owned by it, and private homes. Attacks continued even later as people went to do <i>panchnamas</i> and inspect their properties.	Sajida Bano identified the following as setting fire to her house: Ishwar Machhi, Soni Bhooria, Dr Thakore Patel and Vimal Thakur.  Following attacked her brother:  Vijay, Akhtar and Deepak Soni	Complaints made by Sajida Bano and others. No action taken.
March 15	<b>Rain Basera</b>	Policemen let loose coarsest abuses, with explicit sexual and religious connotations. Many women injured in police operations including pregnant women. (-Sabiraben Ahmedbhai Shaikh, aged 45, was beaten so badly that her left arm was swollen and bruised  -Faridabanu Bachchubhai Shaikh, aged 30, Hajirabibi Gulamhussain Dhobi, aged 32, and Hamidabibi Ahmedkhan Pathan were kicked on the legs. Hajirabibi was also kicked on the chest and Faridabanu in the pubic region.		

		-Mehrunnissa, aged 18, was threatened with a sword (apparently confiscated), the point of the sword touching her abdomen.)		
March 17	<b>Bahar Colony</b>	<i>Lathi</i> charge on women. Several women with serious bruises including older women.		Complaint to CP on March 18, 2002.
March 17	<b>Borsali Apts, Alishan Complex</b>	<i>Lathi</i> charge and verbal abuses on women. Seven women seriously injured including a pregnant woman		<b>Ditto</b> Meeting with Piyush Patel, ACP on March 18. Submission to NHRC on March 22 and NCW on April 12.
March 18 8.30 pm	<b>Roshan Nagar, Tulsiwadi</b>	Attacks on houses, shops in Tulsiwadi and Sajaynagar.  Combing operations abuses by police. Injured by the police: Ameenaben (60), Bismilaben (35), Rehana Younus (15), Rukshana Pathan, (pregnant) Khushboo a 3 ½ year- old child and many others. About 20 very young boys taken away	Ex-mayor Umakant-bhai Kanubhai Panwala, Narendra Pandya s/o Parvati, Rajubhai Kuberbhai, Suresh Sharma STD walla of Tulsiwadi, burnt houses in Sanjay nagar shopping centre. Also Hillayyabe ex-corporator of Ward No 5, was active in these attacks.	Submission made to NHRC.  Women not willing to complain Police Commissioner because 'his men who are supposed to be there for our <i>hifaasat</i> did this to us.'
March 2	<b>Wadi Tai Wada</b>	A group of men and women try to meet George Fernandes as he goes through the area. Some women roughed up by police, hit on thighs and legs. Abusive language used by the police		A complaint letter sent to CP on March 3 by SAHIYAR.
March 15 10 PM	ditto	Saiyyad Photo Studio burnt down.  Combing operations 14 women injured ( Hamida's arm fractured in 3 places, 6 month old baby stepped on by a policeman, Zarina who had delivered a month earlier roughed up) Women abused verbally	Saiyyad Masood's family named Sandip Bhonse, Mukesh D. Sirsagar, Hitesh R. Dhomse, and Bharatesh Desai of the RSS. PI Kanani and his men named in combing operations	Letter to CP April 22 by PUCL- Vadodara and Shanti Abhiyan member.
April 26- 29	ditto	Repeated visits by police, abusing women with filthy		Letter to CP by PUCL - Vadodara and Shanti

		language, threatening with sexual violence, physical abuse of disabled and young women		Abhiyan on April 28.
April 30 1.30 am	ditto	Incident of 2 young men being killed by police firing, their wives are very poor with little social support.		
March 25	<b>Bawaman-pura, Kagda Chaal and Imran Chambers</b>	Attacks from Bhoiwada and Bhaucharwad.  Combing verbal and physical abuse in their homes. Women complained that the police men were drunk. Old women beaten up badly that their old surgical incisions started giving trouble. Pregnant women beaten.	Kanani named by many persons. At Imran Chambers PI Katara was on duty. Jayanti and Satya from Bhaucharwad named as attackers of a girl in Imran Chambers	Letter to CP dated April 28, 2002
April 27	<b>Raja Rani Talav</b>	Attack on <i>mohalla</i> from both sides; police delayed action despite repeated requests from women and information in advance by PUCL. Women injured by police. At least 2 pregnant women injured in police abuse.		
April 28	<b>Badri Mohalla</b>	Vadi, and Hussaini Chakla in Badri Mohalla were attacked with the active connivance of the police. Instead of apprehending the attackers the police forcibly entered the homes of the victims, assaulted women and indiscriminately arrested men. In an attack on the same locality the previous night Sakina Badruddin was seriously injured and was in need of medical help. .		Letter to CP April 28
April 27	<b>Genda falia, Hathikhana</b>	Police in plainclothes, about 25 of them, came and attacked homes at around 1 pm. Several women were roughed up, two of the women were shot and had to be taken to a hospital, a pregnant woman was kicked on the stomach.	Raju "Kaliya" Patil and his D staff men.	
May 2	<b>Sabina Park</b>	Stone pelting incident from Kisanwadi – instead of curbing the miscreants of Kisanwadi, police <i>lathi</i> charged old citizens and women of Sabina Park. A	PSI Parmar of Pani Gate	Complaint to CP on May 3, 2002.  Action taken by CP.

		pregnant woman was hit on her stomach and the back. Police were drunk.		
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### **Insecurity Regarding Life and Property and Fear of Future**

Overarching fear has become a part and parcel of life for women. Every woman we met displayed a fear of the future - for herself, her family and her community. Although fear and insecurity has permeated society at large, women contend with additional fears about sexual assault and abuse as well as with fear for safety of family members, particularly children. Insecurity is far more apparent at relief camps and when women have themselves experienced or witnessed violence.

All women reiterated their fears for a future where even a basic guarantee to life and property could not be taken for granted. Even women who had not suffered personal loss felt caught in the violence, merely by virtue of belonging to the minority community. PUCL team reports from Qureshi Jamaat Khana Relief Camp: "The women were concerned about their future. They could not see beyond the camp. 'How long will we stay here?' 'How long will they feed us?' they kept asking.

### **Hunger, Economic Distress and Loss of Livelihood**

Curfew in most of the Muslim dominated localities has meant that daily wage work, petty business and self-employed work has come to a standstill. Hamida of Taiwada whose wrist was broken in three places as a result of police *lathis* on her stated that her work of making kites was at a standstill. Both men and women have been unable to work and earn. Lack of mobility and fear of attack on life and property has made venturing out a risky proposition for the minority community, and many could not access necessities like milk and food grain even when they had the means. Long-term prospects are equally grim -- the well-planned attack on the livelihood resources of Muslims, whether large industry/business or the humblest *larri*, has rendered economic rehabilitation a daunting task. This has been aggravated by the VHP-BD call for economic boycott of Muslims. It is in this context that productive economic activity of Muslim women takes on a new urgency. We have reports of Muslim women, hitherto employed in home and small-scale industries, not being taken back to work, post-violence. Sadduben Ashrafbhai who worked as plasterer in Baroda Tiles factory in Manjusar was fired on Feb. 28 with ten other Muslim workers of the company. Noorjehan Ismailbhai Ghanchi of Makarpura stated 'On Feb. 28, the *bandh* was announced. I was told to come back after 15-20 days when things cool down. When curfew opened, I went and signed and was told by Santoshbhai, the Supervisor, to come back later. I was at Tandalja Aashiana Camp for a month. On April 24, when I went back Santoshbhai told me we have cancelled your card.' Many erstwhile employers of these women feel threatened by the current call for a blanket economic boycott of Muslims given by the Hindu right wing organisations. The shrinking avenues for employment faced by the women take on added significance in the face of the present recession coupled with systematic destruction of livelihood assets of the community as a whole during the March 2002 violence.

### **Uncertainty about Life after Relief-camps**

Many worried about future livelihood options; firstly, because rehabilitation does not seem to be forthcoming and secondly, because they lacked the confidence that their businesses would be safe after being rebuilt from scratch. Women in relief camps are particularly vulnerable. As Meherunnisa Fakirbhai Mohammed of Panwad, at Tandalja Relief Camp said, "We finally landed up in Tandelja Camp. Here they give us meals in the daytime and in the evening. But, how long this will continue? Now we don't want to go back to the same place."

PUCL team members noted similar sentiments after a visit to Qureshi Jamaat Khana: 'They want us to help them to be rehabilitated together in a separate Muslim locality. *'Ek jathe mein mar jave* (It is better to die once and for all)' is more acceptable than going back to Kisanwadi!"

The amounts received, as compensation for their losses has become a big issue with many women. Their losses are upto a few lakh of rupees and all that they have received is a few thousands. Justifiably they are indignant. A few women in the Qureshi Jamaat Khana stated that they had refused their cheques of Rs. 10,000 –

their loss of property and personal effects was around Rs. 12 lakhs. Other women said that they had accepted their meagre cheques because beggars can't be choosers, but they had registered their protest.

### **Concern for Children's Well-Being and Education**

Women consistently showed concern for the effect the violence was having on their children's lives. On one hand, they were worried about the effects of uncertainty and dislocation on children as well as about the psychological fallout on children who witnessed violence and experienced arrest. Raeesa Shaikh of Tulsiwadi said poignantly, "We have brought up our sons with such care, taught them never to harm anyone, to be peace-loving. Now they have taken away these young ones. If they turn into *aatankwadis* [terrorists, as a result of this experience in the jail] we'll be left with nothing."

On the other hand, they were deeply distressed at the way their children's education was affected. Women at Tandalja Relief Camp, for example, specifically asked for volunteers to teach the 250-odd children in the Camp. Nevertheless, in view of the prevailing situation, many parents of girl students taking the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> class examinations were unwilling to let them give their papers. Women feel that the insecurity felt by the Muslim community as a whole would also have ramifications not just on education, but even on the individual liberty of their children, especially daughters in the long run.

### **Concern for Relatives and Friends, Particularly Earning Members who have been Arrested and Others who are Missing**

There is a high level of apprehension with regard to friends and relatives who have gone missing, particularly in relief camps. Many inmates of the camps reached the place upon fleeing for their lives. Consequently, there was a great deal of anxiety regarding people left behind, especially since it was almost impossible to acquire reliable information about affected areas.

Women were also deeply distraught regarding men folk arrested in often arbitrary "combing operations" of the police. Their vulnerability, individually and as a community, both physically and economically, amplified their fear for their men folk, particularly since they had themselves observed the partisan attitude of the police. The PUCL team reports: "The women [from Tulsiwadi] were extremely upset saying that the police were supposed to do their *hifaasat* (protection), and instead they had sorely abused them, as well as destroyed their sense of dignity. All the women stated how their boys and men were the breadwinners. With them away, the families had not eaten for 4 days. The women repeatedly pleaded: 'Give back our children. That is all we want. We will not eat until our boys and men are released.'"

Concern for relatives and friends cut across community lines. Bihari women from Navadih, Ranjuben and others, are wives of migrant workers in GIDC Makarpura. During a fact finding visit to Indira Nagar, Tarsali, these women gathered around the PUCL team members asking for help to find the whereabouts of their husbands. Nandi Prasad and Virendra Prasad among others were taken away from their homes on the afternoon of March 17 as they were taking their Sunday afternoon nap. More than a week later the women had no information and were having to cope with their anxieties about their husbands as well as look after their tiny children all alone.

### **Betrayal of Trust**

Muslim women have been traumatized by multiple betrayals. Corrosion of trust is most apparent in women who have been directly affected by the violence and arson. At one level, women acutely feel betrayed by people in their neighbourhood. Women felt upset that longstanding intimate relations did not count for anything during the violence. As Sajida Bano of Baranpura said, "We had good relations with our neighbours, we used to visit each other at festivals and on other occasions. We would invite them. *Amara thi moon fervi lidu chhe* [now they have turned their faces away from us]."

Witness to the fact that neighbours, with whom they have lived all their lives, participated in and sometimes led the attack on their community and the looting of property has undermined their belief in a common humanity. As Mehrunissa of Kasamala Kabristan put it, "Who is a friend and who is a foe? *Insaan par se vishvas hi uth gaya hai.*" The communalisation of neighbourhood spaces has also hit women very hard. They live in constant anxiety that children or livestock will cross the "border." They are sometimes unable to access civic amenities such as medical facilities, water etc., which lie on the "other" side. Tragically, suspicion has entered relationships that have lasted for decades, and it is very doubtful if the common cause that women have forged across communities can be rebuilt.



At another level, women feel deeply let down by state institutions, particularly the police. The partisan attitude of the police, "police *ektarfi*," has dismayed them. Apart from suffering excesses at the hands of the police, many women have seen police indifferent and inactive, sometimes even colluding with mobs attacking them, conducting arbitrary combing operations in their localities, even though *their* localities were the ones under attack. They have watched innocent family members, old men, underage boys arrested while perpetrators of violence roamed free despite being named in FIRs. Women have lost faith in the fairness of almost all government institutions, and the ruling party, including the Chief Minister is held responsible for the current crisis in their lives. At the present moment, women feel secure only in the midst of their own community. There is a fear that this would lead to ghettoization of the community.

### **Reiteration of Loyalty to Gujarat and India**

Women interviewed by the PUCL compulsively sought to prove their loyalty to India. They recounted with anguish, the sloganeering which branded them traitors, and which told them to leave India for Pakistan. They kept asking where they could go. A woman from Badri Mohalla in her testimony to the Citizens' Tribunal said, 'We are born here, we will die here. This is our home. Where will we go?'

### **Leadership**

Many women have taken the lead in protecting themselves and their families. Key decisions regarding safety of the family, including determining places to hide, length of time of concealment, flight, its mode and direction, etc. have often been made by women. The situation has also forced women to collectivise, for example, on March 2, women braved curfew restrictions to try and meet the Defence Minister, George Fernandes to apprise him of shortage of food, milk and other basic amenities. Women have also got together to protest police atrocities against themselves and the arrests of underage sons, as in Bahar Colony, Ajwa Road. They have led initiatives to meet the Commissioner of Police and register FIRs. For example, women of Aalishan Apartments, Ajwa Road faxed a complaint to the Commissioner of Police regarding police atrocities and requested the Commissioner to help them get medical check-up on 17<sup>th</sup> March though no action was taken at least till 1<sup>st</sup> April 2002.

Despite enormous pressures, women have protected their neighbours, menfolk and others in vulnerable and sensitive areas of the city. In Kasamala Kabristan, Muslim women looked after their Hindu neighbours and provided them food during the curfew days. Women have also been organising relief for those in camps or sheltering with families. Among others, Sherbanoo, Jahanara Rangrez, Sajida Bano of Baranpura, Najma Sheikh, Raeesa Shaikh of Tulsiwadi, Lakshmiben Pillai of Kishanwadi and Sonia Bhoi of Raln Basera have responded with tremendous courage and against great personal odds to protect their neighbours and their families. Middle and upper class Bohra women came out, probably for the first time, in the daily *satyagrah* programme (April 30 to May 4) to protest against combing in Mughalwada.

During curfew, women have had to play dual roles. Since curfew was often lifted for women alone, many women managed important work outside the home in addition to their household chores. Irrespective of the tension between the two communities, some women of both communities took grave risks to save lives. Many women helped each other out in terms of everyday necessities.

### **DEMANDS**

Relief and rehabilitation of women affected by violence has not been addressed by the State in any sustained way. It is significant that Relief Camps were being run by community-based organizations, and had only minimal state support. Interim relief announced by the Government has reached only a few. Several measures need to be taken to remedy the prevailing situation, both in the short term and in the long term.

Economic rehabilitation needs to be undertaken on an urgent footing. It is imperative that economic rehabilitation should not be equated to interim relief alone. Although interim relief is crucial in the short term, the State has to address concerns about long-term employment opportunities for women.

The Compensation and Relief package announced by the Government of Gujarat hardly reflects the concerns of affected women. While the monetary and material compensation and rehabilitation announced by the government is important (though extremely inadequate), it neither addresses women's daily livelihood concerns

nor the issues of how betrayal of trust and sense of extreme insecurity can be compensated. The issues of social rehabilitation have been totally ignored by the State and Central governments till now.

Women's demands are as follows.

- Women want justice. They want the goons who threatened their security and violated their spaces (bodily, religious, social) and whom they have named, to be arrested and punished. Action should also be taken against the police officers and constables who misbehaved with women.
- Women want security, security of residence as well as psychological security of a life free from harassment, for themselves, their men folk and their children.
- Women want just compensation, a package of relief and rehabilitation measures that is realistic and compensates them adequately for all their losses.