

EXCERPTS

RIGHTS AND WRONGS

Ordeal by Fire in the Killing Fields of Gujarat

Editors Guild Fact Finding Mission Report

by

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The Fuse is Lit

Sheela Bhatt posted an interview with K.K.Shastri, the 96-year old President of the Gujarat unit of the VHP, on the rediff.com portal. This makes chilling reading. According to Mr Shastri, the list of Muslim-owned shops was prepared on the morning of February 28. It was done as “we were terribly angry (over Godhra). Lust and anger are blind”. “Hindutva was attacked. This is... a tremendous outburst that will be difficult to roll back”. Further, “we can’t condemn it because they are our boys”. Shastri added, “The VHP has formed a panel of 50 lawyers to help release the arrested people accused of rioting and looting. None of these lawyers will charge any fees because they believe in the RSS ideology”.

Mr Shastri is said to have denied making these remarks. The two VHP Joint General Secretaries, Mr Jaydeep Patel and Dr Kaushik Mehta, whom we met at the VHP office in Ahmedabad, also contradicted the report, making out that Mr Shastri was old and hard of hearing. They rejected the theory that Muslim premises were targeted. Sheela Bhatt has the tape. The text of the rediff.com story as reproduced by “Mainstream”, Delhi, is at Annexure 3. The tenor of the April issue of “Vishwa Hindu Samachar” published by Rashtra Chetna Prakashan and edited by Mr K.K.Shastri lends credence to what he told rediff.com. A two-page article therein praises “Chhote Sardar” for his handling of Godhra and its aftermath.

Many media persons experienced the anger of Hindutva forces. So did the Guild team. One of its members was closeted with some print and TV journalists at Ahmedabad’s Circuit House on April 1, when there was a loud commotion. A group of six or eight VHP storm troopers burst into his room shouting and gesticulating, jostling those present, vehemently accusing them of hatching a dark conspiracy behind closed

doors. A Gujarat Information Directorate official sought to intervene and said that discussions were in progress with a representative of the Editors Guild. The mob thereupon turned on the latter vociferously demanding to know whether he was Hindu or Muslim. He replied that that was irrelevant, said he was a “Hindustani”, gave his name and asked the intruders to introduce themselves and state their purpose. They refused to identify themselves, shouting “hum Hindu hai”, each insisting in turn that this was his name. It was explained that the Guild Team was in Gujarat to inquire into the media scene and wished to meet everybody and hear all sides of the story. It was going to Gandhinagar the following day to meet with ministers and officials. This evoked the derisive retort that they, the intruders, were the “ministers” we should hear. They were then invited to sit down coolly and relate their version of events.

The group slowly simmered down. Its spokesmen charged the English media and national TV channels, with defaming the majority community with one-sided and totally biased coverage. “They only listen to Muslims and ignore Hindus”. They do not focus on Muslim rioters and damage to Hindu property. Hindus who escaped from the Godhra inferno and admitted to hospital in Ahmedabad and Hindu refugees in the Prem Darwaza and other relief camps had not been interviewed. Aaj Tak invited the harshest rebuke, especially for its prompt coverage of the first few hours. The demand was that this channel should be shut down and its “licence” revoked. Aaj Tak was probably first on the air with live footage of the rioting. The Times of India and Indian Express, both of which have Ahmedabad editions, were also singled out for mention.

The VHP vigilantes left after about 30-40 minutes to cries of Jai Sri Ram and the two ringleaders did finally give their names and calling cards. They expressed regret for any offence caused but insisted we should meet the VHP leaders and provided the mobile telephone number of Mr Jayant Patel, Joint General Secretary, who was at that time travelling in Kutch. By now a small posse of policemen had arrived and as the Guild Team went to the Prem Darwaza and Shah Alam relief camps, a DCP awaited us with a message from the Police Commissioner seeking to know if we wished to lodge any complaint or sought police protection. We declined both offers.

Mr Jaydeep Patel was contacted that evening and the Team did meet him and Dr Kaushik Mehta, the other VHP Joint General Secretary, a couple of days later. On our narrating the incident, they said that the VHP was so popular that all sorts of people went about using its name. Earlier, in mentioning this same incident to the Chief Minister, we said this little episode had told us more than anything else about the mindset behind the riots. We expressed surprise that “partners” of his Government should behave in this manner. Mr Modi agitatedly denied such partnership.

Sandesh: “Something happened”

Asked about the killing of Ehsan Jafri, a former M.P and several others by fire in Gulberg colony despite desperate calls for help over several hours, Mr Patel said that Mr Jafri had a “bad record”. (Many others told us later that on the contrary Ehsan Jafri was a poet and much respected figure who worked for the masses and preferred to live in a cosmopolitan

residential area rather than in a Muslim ghetto. Justice Akbar Divecha's flat was vandalised in Ahmedabad and the residence of Prof J.S. Bandukwala, who teaches physics at M.S. Baroda University and is a votary of communal harmony, was similarly ravaged.

The Gujarat Samachar story

An article in the Samachar had implied that Ehsan Jafri, who was brutally slain, "got what he deserved". Queried on this, Mr Bahubali Shah said he stood by what the paper had written.

Both Shahs said there was inadequate official information during the first weeks of the riots.

Other Gujarati paper

Sambhav's CMD, Mr Kiran Vadodaaria, avoided publishing pictures of corpses.

The Kutch Mitra ran a statement by a prominent Moulvi on its front page for several days condemning Godhra and expressing regret over what had happened. The Saurashtra Samachar, Bhavnagar, of March 2 carried a special supplement devoted to religious harmony.

Meeting with Narendra Modi

The Old Secretariat is a protected area. Yet the Gujarat State Wakf Board, located just below the Directorate of Information, and the Gujarat Minorities Finance and Development Corporation housed in the Block opposite, both Government offices, were attacked and torched by a mob during office hours on February 28. Staff in all the Directorates ran for cover. The Old Secretariat was closed; later, curfew was imposed in Gandhinagar. No arrests had been made until April 2, the day of our visit. Records pertaining to dargahs, mosques, madrassas and kabristans were lost in the fire.

We told Mr Modi of our mission and asked for his assessment of the media's role in the ongoing crisis in Gujarat. He was coy; it was too early for him to say anything about the media as CM, he said. But if Narendra Modi were asked that question, that would be a long story. Coaxed to say something more, he said the media, especially TV, was very powerful. None in the media had appealed for peace. Yes, maybe editorials had appeared, but ordinary people did not read editorials. He himself had gone on the air and repeatedly called for peace. (In his address over Doordarshan on February 28, Mr Modi referred to Godhra and went to state: "Gujarat shall not tolerate any such incident. The culprits will get full punishment for their sins. Not only this, we will set an example that nobody, not even in his dreams thinks of committing a heinous crime like this". In a separate Doordarshan soundbyte he is reported as stating: "If raising issues relating to justice or injustice adds fuel to the fire, we will have to observe restraint and invoke peace". Ambiguous words these. Annexure 4AA).

Responding to queries regarding various statements attributed to him by the media, Mr Modi denied citing Newton's law. Nor had he spoken of "action-reaction"; he had wanted neither the action (at Godhra) nor the subsequent reaction. When we cited footage in Zee to the contrary (Annexure 4A),

The Chief Minister justified the presence of two Ministers in the Gandhinagar and Ahmedabad Police Control Rooms. This was standard practice in Gujarat, even during the earthquake last year; moreover, the control room was a convenient place from which to interact with the public. (Later we were to hear of reports of a Minister's son sitting in the police control room in Godhra. When we queried this with official interlocutors, we were informed that no action could be taken unless an FIR was filed. None had dared do so).

The Chief Minister had little to say about the killing of Ehsan Jafri and the attack on the two Justices of the Gujarat High Court, apart from pleading an inadequacy of forces to control large mobs roving across far flung areas of the city. He denied saying that "private firing" by Jafri had enraged the mob. Words had been put in his mouth as he had merely referred to a newspaper report that said this is what had happened.

Mr Modi had no explanation for the widespread destruction of Muslim dargahs and shrines and how it was that in at least one case the rubble had been cleared and a tarred road built over the site. The Team pointed out that the usual complaint was that damaged roads and pavements were never repaired for months on end and that tarring a road is a major operation that calls for organisation, mechanical equipment and efforts beyond the capability of stray hoodlums. The CM pleaded lack of knowledge but did say that he had ordered the removal of makeshift Hindu shrines and idols installed in some of them. He then went on to ask if it was helpful for TV to have shown a decapitated Hanuman idol at a desecrated Hindu shrine at Anjar in Kutch that very morning (April 2).

However, on visiting the shell of the burnt out carriage No. S-6 at Godhra station (with a Railway escort) on April 3, we were surprised to see this prime exhibit standing in the yard unguarded and stray people entering it at will. Anyone could remove or plant anything in the carriage, tampering with whatever evidence it has to offer with none being any the wiser.

The Story as told through Gujarat Government Press Notes

The phraseology most often used for the Godhra incident was "inhuman genocide", "inhuman carnage" or "massacre" while the subsequent riots were invariably described as "disturbances", and occasionally as "violent disturbances/incidents". The Chief Minister visited Godhra on the evening of February 27 itself and the Press Note issued thereafter described the torching of the Sabarmati Express as a "pre-planned inhuman collective violent act of terrorism".

There were a couple of press notes on community amity. A release dated March 2 quoted the Chief Minister as denying newspaper reports of people having been burnt alive in Pandarwada village in Panchmahal. We were later to learn that this was one of the worst instances of rural violence. (This has been documented by Communalism Combat, Mumbai and figures in its Report “Genocide, Gujarat 2002”, March-April issue, No. 77-78).

Criticism of the “Secular Media”

Sections of the media have been criticised for directly or indirectly linking the Godhra incident to Ayodhya. Vir Sanghvi, Editor of the Hindustan Times had this to say: “The sub-text to all secular commentary is the same: the kar sevaks had it coming to them. Basically, they condemn the crime; but blame the victims”. (Annexure 8) Others, like Jaya Jaitley, the Samanta leader, argued in the Indian Express that “there is a whole mass of feelings out there that these people (Opposition/intellectuals) are missing and will continue to miss if they remain comfortably secluded in their make-believe worlds”. Her conclusion: “If Godhra had been adequately condemned, perhaps the retaliation would have been more easily contained. If the intellectuals and the so-called secular Opposition leave it to the fundamentalists, violence is all we will get. Whether we like it or not, they were the only ones who reflected the anger against Godhra, when both secular media and politicians had failed”. (Annexure 9).

Not only is the logic flawed, but Godhra was roundly condemned by all. Leaders of 11 prominent national Muslim organisations denounced “the barbaric and brutal violence in Godhra” on February 28. (Muslim India, April 2002). The Prime Minister and Leaders of the Opposition were signatories to a joint appeal to maintain peace and communal harmony the following day.

Hotline, a Gujarati weekly published from Surat, carried a long piece in its edition of April 6 by its editor, Vikram Vakil, under the heading “English media exposed”. He cites and comments on 10 examples of “indulgence in gossip” citing the Times of India, Indian Express, Outlook and Star TV. Particular mention is made of reports on the burning of the Sabarmati Express in Godhra on February 27 and on a Times story (March 19) of 150 persons being burnt alive and thrown into a disused well. Hotline says this was just a rumour and was denied by the police. (See summary translation at Annexure 10). This is precisely what the Times had said too. (See Annexure 11, P 13).

The Other Side of the Fence

TV and Radio networks

Star TV (NDTV) carried some graphic footage and interviews in the thick of the riots – in Ahmedabad and along the Vadodara-Godhra highway where a number of industrial establishments and trucks were burnt. There were strong critics of its coverage, including what was termed as the arrogant and hectoring tone of its correspondent while interviewing a tired Ahmedabad police commissioner at the end of a long day and its

insistence that the Army's deployment was unduly delayed. Rajdeep Sardesai, NDTV's Political Editor, responded to this criticism in a subsequent newspaper article. Star also carried an extremely moving interview with Professor J.S Bandukwala in Vadodara, a man whose secular ethos continues to burn bright even after going through a terrible ordeal.

There is little doubt that some of the television coverage unmasked the State Government. It hit back by banning Star on March 2 for several hours. In an interview to "Outlook" (March 18, 2002), Mr Narendra Modi was asked why he had sought to muzzle the press. His response was that "There was no ban on the media. Asked about this, Star News commented that it met Mr Modi at a press conference and requested him to lift what it termed an unfair ban. The Chief Minister complied. It must also be added that Mr Modi was given opportunity on the channel to air his point of view on events in Gujarat by prior arrangement before the ban.

Local Electronic/Cable Networks

Cable Networks are subject to rules framed under the Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act, 1995. Operators have to seek registration by an authorised officer who may be a district magistrate, sub-divisional magistrate or police commissioner within his/her area of jurisdiction. The Rules prescribe a code for programmes and advertisements. No programme may be carried which offends good taste or decency, attacks religious communities, incites violence, contains false and suggestive innuendoes and half-truths, or is unsuitable for unrestricted public exhibition. Any authorised officer may prohibit certain transmissions infringing the code or otherwise if expedient to do so in the public interest. Penalties include fines and seizure of equipment.

Pamphlets and Handbills

A pernicious piece of hate propaganda, officially disseminated by the VHP, calls for the economic boycott of Muslims. This was admitted to the Indian Express by Mr Chinubhai Patel, the Parishad's Gujarat treasurer. (See Annexure 18).

PUCL/Shanti Abhiyan has summarised the content of several other pamphlets (See Annexure 12, P 30-31).

Equally significant is a widely distributed publication entitled "Godhra and After" produced by the Vishva Samvad Kendra, Gujarat, and given to us at the VHP office in Ahmedabad. It lists "facts" that give "several reasons to believe that this (Godhra carnage) was a pre-planned conspiracy". Travellers of a particular religion were asked to get down at the previous station, namely, Dahod; patients of a particular community were discharged from the Godhra civil hospital a day before February 27 and not a single case from that same community was registered that day; and no student or teacher of a particular community was present in Godhra's schools on February 27. From this it is surmised that not only was the torching of S-6 a pre-planned attack but there was forewarning of something untoward likely to happen that fateful day.

The Guild Team checked these “facts” with district officials, the Railway authorities and local journalists. There was no corroboration whatsoever.

Attacks on the Media

Barkha Dutt of NDTV reported of vigilantes armed with swords surrounding her car on a Gujarat highway screaming “what’s your religion?” Hindu, she replied, “privately cringing for my cameraperson, Ajmal Jami”. (Outlook, March 25).

Indian Express photographers were targeted and its chief reporter, Janlyala Srinivas, threatened. Its Rajkot man, Parish Joshi was mobbed and his camera damaged while photographing a shop being set on fire. In Ahmedabad, its photographer’s flash-gun was damaged though this could have been by accident when the police was trying to control crowds. In Surat, the Express cameraman along with a colleague from Sandesh and another media person were attacked by a Muslim mob. Kerosene had been poured on them but a passing RPF posse was fortunately able to rescue them in time.

Bhargav Parikh, the news coordinator of Zee News and Tejas Gondalia, his cameraman were beaten up and had their camera smashed in Ahmedabad. The Times of India’s Sudhir Vyas was beaten by the police in Rajkot. NDTV crew had to cry Jai Sri Ram before their vehicles were allowed to move.

Sonal Kellog of Asian Age and a local reporter of another paper were barred from entering part of Surat’s walled city where they had gone to interview a woman who had been attacked. They were themselves beaten and were unable to file a complaint with the police. (Hindu, April 9, 2002).

The Resident Editor of the Indian Express, Mr Virendra Kumar told us that the office van used for dropping night staff home was routinely and repeatedly searched by prowling mobs armed with swords and pipes looking for Muslims. Identity papers had to be shown. All this during curfew hours. A Muslim member of the staff sometimes slept at the office. Another, finding his house surrounded by a mob, phoned the office which in turn alerted the police. Mr Kumar himself received a stream of hate mail accusing the Express of being anti-Hindu. The tenor of what seemed like an orchestrated campaign was, “You have no right to live in India and write like this”.

Recommendations

Disagreements about facts and interpretation are best addressed by the right of reply, with appropriate expressions of regret, corrections and clarifications where necessary. The Express, for example, carried a story on April 9 about the distribution of swords and trishuls under the heading “VHP hand in Gujarat’s weapons of violence”. The VHP Joint General Secretaries, Dr Kaushik Mehta and Mr Jaideep Patel sent a denial. This was published by the paper together with a rebuttal by the Express correspondent who basically stood by his story. (IE, April 24, 2002).

We concur with the NHRC's recommendation that "provocative statements made by persons to the electronic or print media should be examined and acted upon, and the burden of proof shifted to such persons to explain or contradict their statements". Charlatans of every brand must know that they cannot misuse the media with impunity and get away with it.

Two major negatives

It helps raise sorely needed money for relief and rehabilitation or to meet the emergency in question. More than that, it provides opportunity for thousands and millions of other citizens to reach out to the victims or those in distress in a gesture of fraternal solidarity and sympathy and to mobilise support. Newspapers have often vied with one another to lead the field.

This time there was not a single appeal from any quarter, anywhere in or for Gujarat, some small local groups excepted. The silence was deafening. On being queried about their strange reticence on this occasion, newspaper editors and others gave the same reply. On further consideration it was felt that few contributions might be forthcoming and if this did indeed happen, that would send out a wrong message.

Not all will agree. The relief camps in Gujarat, all basically privately run with no more than rations being supplied by the government, need funds. The media has covered the distress but has unfortunately found itself unable or unwilling to help reach out.

We recommend that that the Guild issues an appeal for a Fund for Gujarat through its members.

ANNEXURE 4A

Zee TV Interview with Chief Minister Mr Narendra Modi in Gandhinagar on March 1 2002, by Sudhir Choudhury

The Correspondent begins by asking Mr Modi about the Chamanpura massacre in which the former Congress MP, Ehsan Jafri was killed along with at least others. The Chief Minister referred to reports that Jafri had first fired at the violent mob which infuriated the crowd further. It stormed the Housing Society and set it on fire. He refers to Jafri's firing as "action" and the massacre that followed as "reaction".

His exact quote is: "Kriya pratikriya ki chain chal rahi hai. Hum chahate hain ki na kriya ho aur na pratikriya".

When asked about the widespread violence in Gujarat post-Godhra, he says quote;

“Godhra main jo parson hua, jahan par chalees (40) mahilaon aur bacchon ko zinda jala diya, is main desh main aur videsh main sadma pahuchna swabhavik tha. Godhra ke is ilake ke logon ki crimnal tendencies rahi hain. In logon ne pahele mahila teachers ka khoon kiya. Aur ab yeh jaghanya apraadh kiya hai jiski pratikria ho rahi hai”.

Hon'ble Chief Minister's Statement

The morning of the 26th February came with very hateful sight of the giant faced mass violence.

The Innocent citizens who were traveling in the Sabarmati Express, were lively-burnt, including 38 women and the children totally 58 travelers, in the compartment near Godhra railway Station.

Yesterday, we all were trying to know the news of the incident in the assembly. The budget, having been completed, I reached Godhra. The human dead bodies, which were turned in to ashes, were telling the sad story of the black (hateful) deeds of terrorism

While the population of the whole Gujarat is full of the grief for the mass-violence of the innocent travelers, the highest institutions like the legislative assembly, representing the people in the democracy and Gujarat Government participates the people who are full of grief.

The State Government , taking seriously this cruel and inhuman offence of the mass violence, is firm to take symbolic strict steps and to punish in such a way that such an incident may not repeat in the future,

Every one would have a silent permission to give solace to the unfortunate innocent milks, and to stay by them in this moment of the misery.

Press Release

Date: 2nd March, 2002

The Chief Minister said that there is no truth in the report appearing in newspapers about the incident of some people having been burnt alive in Pandarwada-village in Panchmahal. This report is quite baseless and no one has been burnt alive in this village. Nine persons belonging to the two communities have been killed in this village in the violent between people of the two communities. Shri Modi added that In fact the sarpanch of the village and several families of the village have provided an example of communal brotherhood and goodwill by giving shelter to some families of minority.

1.2 GUJARAT SAMACHAR, Baroda Edition

28th February 2002 to 28th March 2002.

Reports

Main report 6" page I on 28th March: 3-4 young girls have been kidnapped.

The source of information is not mentioned. Again on page 10 there is a report of the VHP Kaushik Patel saying that 10 girls have been kidnapped. The reporter has not cross-checked he information either with the IGP or Railway police. The report does not give names of any of the girls or any other details. One more report on page 2 gives details of an eye witness Hetalben, when the train reached Baroda. She said, "young girls from Amaraiwadi travelling with us are lost."

Main report says that 4 bogies of the train were torched The report says that incident was preplanned, based on information given by a railway employee. Names or other identity of the source

On 2nd March there is a report that Sandesh carried a bogus newsitem.

There is no news from shelter camps nor are there any interviews with victims.

On 6th March the last page carries a report with the headline: THE PLAN WAS TO TORCH THE WHOLE TRAIN, NW NST ONE BOGEY. In yet another box item on last page a report states that 'a mob was ready for the second attack.' The source of the information is not mentioned. It seems that the story is based on a conversation with some Railway Police Force jawans. The way these reports have been presented is instigative. This is the day when the top story on last page is about how gradually the situation is returning to normalcy.

1. THE BODIES OF TWO HINDU GIRLS WHO WERE ABDUCTED FROM SABARMATI EXPRESS FOUND NEAR KALOL IN A BAD CONDITION.

The report says the girls were raped and then cut up, sprayed with petrol and the bodies were burnt. There is also talk about the body of a third girl having been found: There is a limit to barbarity'

Analysis: This report is mischievous in the extreme because of its explosive content and because there no attempt to verify this, no sources have been quoted. This report was later denounced as false by Gujarat Samachar, another Gujarati daily.

Conclusion

When Muslims were at fault names were taken, perpetrators were clearly identified. When Muslims were the victims of murderers, arsonists, looters, etc. then it has not been clearly stated who attacked whom. No sources have been quoted for headlines, even when they have simply been lifted from speeches by VHP leaders. Headlines are also misleading, and often followed up by reports that do not substantiate headlines. Photographs are meant to incite communal anger, fear and terror amongst people. The anti-minority stand is obvious in the slant in news reporting. Editorials and newsitems often written in a way that implicitly and explicitly justifies carnage after the Godhra incident.

A Brief Note on Electronic Media in Baroda

A. Local TV Channels

On March 14 a group of PUCL representatives told the Police Commissioner that TV Channels need to be warned. We tried to obtain copies of the offensive tapes before the NHRC visit, were not given those. The Police Commissioner gave a notice to the local channels, they were also off the air for two days but then were back again and going about their work with a vengeance. In the last week of March, owners of two TV channels were arrested, VNM and News Plus, when in fact the other channels, J TV and Deep were far more inflammatory.

Given below are some samples of the inflammatory stance of the channels.

Date	Name of Channel	Content
Feb. 27, 2002	VNM Channel	Ajay Dave's (VHP) statement that we will retaliate with violence and create history (in relation to Godhra incident)
From Feb. 27 for more than a week	J TV	Kept repeating images of the Godhra incident many times a day, thereby attempting to create feelings of outrage among Hindus.

March 15, 2002	Siti Cable	Common man on the street said how Hindus want Ram Mandir. We are beginning an andolan today which we will stop after we achieve our goals
March 15, 2002	Deep Channel	Showed rally after shila daan 3 local leaders Deepak Kharchikar (Shiv Sena), Niraj Jain (Bajrang Dal), Ajay Dave (VHP) gave speeches and interviews at the Machhipeeth naka. These contained anti-Muslim sentiments. 'Muslims will have to live the way we want otherwise we will pull them out of their houses and kill them'.
March 16, 2002	VNM or News Plus In Cable	Ajay Joshi 'we will be training Hindu youth to be ladayak (warriors, aggressive???)'
March 29, 2002	VNM or News Cable	Mayor said 'like Hirankashap destroyed evil, we will also destroy deshdrohis'.

B. Samples of fan mail at www.narendramodi.org

The CM of Gujarat is proud of being email and internet savvy and he has often let it be known that he has a website. Given below are some samples from his website aimed at cynical self-promotion. If there is any need for "proof" of his anti-Muslim, and therefore unconstitutional attitudes they are here at this site. Legal action against Modi as well as the site hosts seems to be in order.

1. Dear modi ji, you are like a god to us. Thank you for saving Hindus but you are not doing enough we will not be satisfied until you send your sena out to Muslim countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan to rape Muslim women kill and burn Muslims thank you rakesh kumar trivedi raktri74@hotmail.com
2. Sir, I fail to find words to express gratitude to you for the way Hindus have been protected in this state despite all the criticisms all over the country you have endeared yourself to all the gujaratis the whole state is solidly behind you hats off to "Asli Mard"!!! p.j. desai ricky071@rediffmail.com
3. "Lots of thanks for all that you have done to us. We (Hindus) were a victim of Islamic violence since long."