

AT THE RECEIVING END
Women's Experiences of Violence in Vadodara

People's Union for Civil Liberties, Vadodara
and
Vadodara Shanti Abhiyan

May 31, 2002

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AN APPEAL

The PUCL - Vadodara and Shanti Abhiyan has designated SAHAJ to receive donations on behalf of the front. Till May 31, 2002, more than ten lakh rupees have been received and spent. Mailing address for donations: SAHAJ, 1 Tejas Apts, 53 Haribhakti Colony, Baroda 39007, India. Ph: 91 265 340223. Email: chinu@wilnetonline.net, shanti_pucl@yahoo.com

About PUCL Vadodara and Vadodara Shanti Abhiyan

PUCL (People's Union for Civil Liberties) and Shanti Abhiyan are two major forums active in Vadodara for more than a decade. Several progressive organisations and individuals have participated in these forums over the years. During the 1992 riots, people from Sarvoday groups, women's organisations, trade unions, environmental groups, NGOs working in community health and development, concerned academicians and progressive individuals working for peace and harmony decided to work under one banner, which was subsequently named Shanti Abhiyan. Similarly, activists working for human rights from many of the above mentioned organisations came together under the banner of PUCL. Over the years the PUCL undertook several fact-finding missions during communal violence, atrocities on Dalits, women, slum dwellers and environmental issues, published fact finding reports and filed public interest litigation on issues of human rights violation. PUCL members also organised programmes to create awareness about human rights among society. There are many common organisations and individuals working in both the forums.

PUCL - Shanti Abhiyan have undertaken a range of activities and about 100 volunteers have contributed at various point of time for different activities from end February to May 2002 These activities can be broadly classified as follows:

1. Organising peace committees
2. Organising awareness and protest programmes
3. Pressurising and liaison with Police and administration to save human life and property.
4. Undertaking fact-finding and analysis of the situation
5. Representation of the voices of victims, analysis of ground level situation and organising representation to various commissions.
6. Working for relief and rehabilitation
7. Satyagrah against injustice and Police atrocities

These activities were in response to the situations and events that occurred each day. The activities emerged and were not always the result of very serious or long drawn out planning. Co-ordination processes and mechanisms were also informal, and often not to the satisfaction of many. Despite these limitations we were able to establish a presence in Vadodara both among the administration and among the affected citizens.

Some women's organisations and women activists are an intrinsic part of the PUCL Vadodara - Shanti Abhiyan. Several minority women have also emerged as activists in the process of the three months since Feb. 27 and joined the forum. The informal women's cell of PUCL-Shanti Abhiyan has been active in fact finding among affected women, and acting as a pressure group on women's issues. We have been continually drawing attention of the Police Commissioner and the Collector on the trials and tribulations that women have been going through. Women's rights' activists have also been organising groups of affected women to

depose before the various commissions. Specifically, we have organised women's depositions for the NHRC, NCW, Editors' Guild, Concerned Citizens' Tribunal and the National Women's Group. We have also organised signature campaigns and sent letters to the Prime Minister and the President of India. Public events like the International Women's

Day celebrations on March 8 and the Vadodara Ekta Diwas on May 13 were also initiated by the 'women's cell' of PUCL- Shanti Abhiyan. These events were not restricted to women, men and women from all communities joined in large numbers to express solidarity against the genocide and its effects on women of Vadodara.

During the second and third phases of violence from 15th March onwards, the Police played a prominent, if unsavoury, role in terrorising Muslim residents of localities through partisan and brutal combing operations and arrests. Women, in particular, were subject to extreme forms of harassment by the Police in their own homes. In many cases this occurred when men had fled their homes out of fear of Police repression. Police remained mute spectators to the stone throwing and abuses hurled by the mobs instigating violence. In addition the Police forcibly entered Muslim homes, destroying property and assaulting and arresting innocent men, beating women (not even sparing pregnant women), issuing sexual and communal threats in abusive language, and vandalising their houses. When no action was taken by the Police Commissioner to stop this atrocities, the PUCL - Shanti Abhiyan decided to stage a satyagrah against this Police inaction and brutality. From 30th April to 3rd May 2002 every day, groups of at least 25 Muslim men and an equal number of women took out silent peace marches and courted arrest. The most important positive impact of the satyagrah was that many Muslim women came out on the streets for the first time. Being part of a collective public action reduced their feelings of helplessness and frustration to some extent and increased their confidence.

Women's activists worked closely with relief camp organisers to provide relief material like food, clothes, footwear, etc. at various points of time to people living in camps and other shelters. At one point because of the continuous curfew, daily wagers not directly affected by the violence were also suffering from hunger. Distribution of rations for such affected families of all communities in the Panigate, Karelibaug and Tandalja areas was organised by PUCL-Shanti Abhiyan. *Laris*, sewing machines, other means of livelihood as well as amounts for small working capital and some basic household items are also being provided as people are trying to restart their lives. The forum is also helping affected people get their compensation and other dues from government. Activists have been helping file FIRs and the writing of complaints to the Police and the Collector and other authorities.

PUCL-Shanti Abhiyan women activists were also part of peacekeeping efforts, discussions and dialogues with women of both communities. We recognise that several majority women are pawns in the hands of fundamentalist Hindutva forces and are as vulnerable as minority women. Although our agenda has emerged in the context of minority women, we realise that our work has to encompass the campaigns of fear and hatred that are being systematically promoted by the Hindutva forces.

This report contains women's experiences of the genocide in Vadodara. We include in the document a few testimonies of affected women as well our petitions and letters to the Prime Minister and President of India.

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 and persuasions. 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. All women, regardless of caste, class and community, have been significantly affected by the ongoing violence that has systematically dislocated their everyday living.

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. PUCL 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 [Dy. CP 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 Machchpith 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 *purdah* 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

<i>Date</i>	<i>Area</i>	<i>Details</i>	<i>Names of accused</i>	<i>Remarks</i>
March 1	Kareli Baug	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	Madar Mohalla	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	Baranpura	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	Rain Basera	<p>Policemen let loose coarsest abuses, with explicit sexual and religious connotations. Many women injured in police operations including pregnant women.</p> <p>(-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.</p> <p>-Mehrunnissa, aged 18, was threatened with a sword (apparently confiscated), the point of the sword touching her abdomen.)</p>		
March 17	Bahar Colony	<p><i>Lathi</i> charge on women. Several women with serious bruises including older women.</p>		Complaint to CP on March 18, 2002.
March 17	Borsali Apts, Alishan Complex	<p><i>Lathi</i> charge and verbal abuses on women. Seven women seriously injured including a pregnant woman</p>		<p>Ditto</p> <p>Meeting with Piyush Patel, ACP on March 18. Submission to NHRC on March 22 and NCW on April 12.</p>
March 18 8.30 pm	Roshan Nagar, Tulsiwadi	<p>Attacks on houses, shops in Tulsiwadi and Sajaynagar.</p>	<p>Ex-mayor Umakant-bhai Kanubhai Panwala, Narendra Pandya s/o Parvati, Rajubhai</p>	

		Combing operations abuses by police. Injured by the police: Ameenaben (60), Bismilalben (35), Rehana Younus (15), Rukshana Pathan, (pregnant) Khushboo a 3 ½ year- old child and many others. About 20 very young boys taken away	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	Wadi Tai Wada	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 Shanti Abhiyan member.
April 26-29	ditto	Repeated visits by police, abusing women with filthy language, threatening with sexual violence, physical abuse of disabled and young women		Letter to CP by PUCL Shanti 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	Bawaman-pura, Kagda Chaal and Imran Chambers	<p>Attacks from Bhoiwada and Bhaucharwad.</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Kanani named by many persons. At Imran Chambers PI Katara was on duty.</p> <p>Jayanti and Satya from Bhaucharwad named as attackers of a girl in Imran Chambers</p>	Letter to CP dated April 28, 2002
April 27	Raja Rani Talav	<p>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.</p>		
April 28	Badri Mohalla	<p>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. .</p>		Letter to CP April 28
April 30	Suleimaini Chawl	<p>Police forcibly entered houses. Police abused children and women. Police abused in very filthy language. Police were all drunk. (Wahida hit with a <i>lathi</i> on her hand and Shameem later. Police</p>	<p>Among the police who beat women was a PI from Panigate police station and one Harish, who was not in uniform. Also one Omne, not in uniform.</p>	

		asking “for your men”. On being told by the women that they did not know, police threatened to rape us and sexually violate the women. They kicked 4-year-old boy Aftab and pointed a gun at him. At that point four of the women tried to protect the boy. They beat the women mercilessly with <i>lathis</i> and rifle butts. Due to the beating Shahnaz Bano, 25 delivered prematurely.)		
Aprl 27	Genda falia, Hathi-khana	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	Sabina Park	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 pregnant woman was hit on her stomach and the back. Police were drunk.	PSI Parmar of Pani Gate	Complaint to CP on May 3, 2002. Action taken by CP.

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 10th and 12th 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 17th March though no action was taken at least till 1st 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 RaIn 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 curfew 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.

Our Recommendations

For restoration of trust among affected Muslims, and the few affected Hindus, the State has to demonstrate willingness and ability to protect life and security of ordinary citizens, and render swift justice. For this the following three steps are essential:

1. *A special court of enquiry, on the lines of a war crimes tribunal, by sitting judges of the Supreme Court. This court of enquiry should, within a time bound period, investigate the crimes against humanity committed on minorities and should have the power to punish. Specifically, take action against persons, including police, identified by the affected people. Set up special courts to try*

crimes against women on a day-to-day basis, with procedures sensitive to the traumatized victims of violence.

2. *A special committee to be instituted to investigate the negative and dysfunctional role of the Police, the other arms of the Executive and the media.*
3. *Stop the use of PASA and selective use of other legal sections.*
4. *Provide for a one-window system for all administrative formalities including that for relief and rehabilitation.*
5. *Institute systems that ensure transparency and right to information including those for arrests, relief and rehabilitation measures.*

In addition the following short term and long term measures are desirable:

In the Short Term

- State support for Relief Camps with full protection ensured to those living there till adequate rehabilitation packages are organized.
- Adequate and nutritious food should be made available to women and children, particularly lactating and pregnant women.
- Adequate sanitation facilities, which allow for privacy and hygiene, particularly during menstruation, should be provided in camps.
- Comprehensive health care including counseling for trauma should be provided on a regular basis.
- Surveys and *panchnamas* to be rapidly and properly conducted to ensure timely disbursement of interim and other relief.
- Interim and other relief should be handed over to women and men of a family jointly.
- Issue ration cards and other identity cards to those who have lost such documents with immediate effect.
- Issue of educational documents/certificates to those who have lost such documents with immediate effect. Full protection to be provided to those who wish to return to their homes, and legal/ownership documentation to be expedited in cases where they have been destroyed.
- Mass promotion of children who have not been able to take annual and Board examinations to prevent the loss of an academic year.
- Facilitation of process of school transfer to those displaced by the violence. And specifically admissions for students in schools without loss of year and without insisting on formal transfer certificates.

- Job opportunities for women and men to be encouraged by creating a pool of information for those on daily wages as well as provision of interest free small loans for those wishing to set up *laris, paan* shops or any other small business.
- Disburse soft loans for the reestablishment of medium and large industries/business through one window mechanism.
- Arrest and take action against those guilty of violence including both, the policemen guilty of such behavior themselves and those guilty of dereliction of duty.
- Restore and repair places of worship damaged and destroyed during the violence in consultation with the community concerned.
- Examination of video footage telecast by local TV channels as well as police videos to identify and prosecute those found guilty of making provocative speeches/statements.

In the Long Term

- Provision of alternative housing to those who are not in a position to return to their old homes. Formation of *mohalla* committees to rebuild trust in mixed neighbourhoods.
- Steps to ensure education and employment opportunities for women of the minority community.
- Disseminate accurate information about the Muslim community including comparative socio-economic indices, statistics on bigamy etc. in an easily understandable form.
- Disseminate information on the history of interdependence between communities including in textbooks.
- Ensure the recruitment of a non-partisan, gender-sensitive police force and bureaucracy by building gender sensitivity and impartiality indicators into the selection process and following it up with periodic training programs.
- Ensure stringent punishment for those police and administrative personnel who engage in communal/gender insensitive actions.

SOME TESTIMONIES

These are some testimonies that we gathered in the course of the last two and a half months. There are many more. These testimonies were selected to give an idea of the events and their effects on people, over different phases of the disturbances.

1. **Zubeidabibi Chandmian Shiekh** (Hathikhana, Genda Faliya, Baroda) I am a married woman, age 45 years.

On 27/04/2002, Saturday, between 1.00 to 2.00 pm, D staff people had knocked on our doors and we had got frightened. As there was a delay in opening the door, it was broken down. My husband and I and our children were having lunch. As soon as they came they put their guns to my chest. My children got frightened. The children were also threatened with the guns. Raju Kaliya and his D Staff men several beat my brother-in-law, Rehmanmian Azammian Sheikh. After beating him inside the house, he was also taken to the street and again beaten and was abused verbally, using extremely dirty words. Women and children were also hit with the butts of their guns. We were dumbfounded. We had not even thought in our dreams that the D staff personnel sent for our security would perpetrate such inhuman treatment upon us. Wrongful and inhuman treatment has been meted out to us and to others in our *mohalla*. This has stunned our community. Therefore we request you, sir, to take necessary legal action and take strong steps.

2. **Mumtazbibi Yasinmian Sheikh** (Hathikhana Genda Faliya, Baroda) Age 50 years. I am married.

On 27/4/02 Saturday between 1-2 pm “D staff” persons had come with sticks, shouting abusive words. We had sat down for lunch. Shouting that the police had come, we fled to our upper room and there we were having lunch. The door downstairs was only closed. They barged into the house, opened the fridge, took two pouches of milk meant for my ailing grand daughter, the fruit kept for juice was also eaten. They drank from the water bottles and threw out the bottles. Not seeing us there, the staff personnel left. They stoned the apartment above ours. We were already troubled with our grand daughter’s illness, on top of that the D Staff wrongfully treated us. My daughter-in-law who is pregnant was told, “Don’t talk or else you will be shot down”. Thus they have wrongfully threatened and harassed women and children. We wish to request you to take legal action and strong measures against Raju Kaliyo and his staff.

3. **Afsanabanu Noor Mohamad Malek** (Mahavat Falia, Hathikhana, Baroda) I used to live in Mahvat Falia. I am 20 years old, married and expecting a child.

On Saturday, 27th April at around 2.00 pm, in the afternoon, the police from D- staff barged into the house, used bad language and slapped me on the face. They use *lathis* to beat me up. I asked them not to beat me up as I had not done anything and was innocent. I told them I was pregnant. They did not respond to my pleas. They broke open the safe and robbed my anklets. They asked me where the revolver was. I replied that I had no revolver. But they carried on beating me till I was near unconscious.

4. **Salmabibi Abid Sheikh** (Hathikhana Gendafaliya, Vadodara) My age is approximately 38 years. I am married.

On Saturday, 27/04/2002, between 1.00 pm and 2.00 pm, persons of the ‘D Staff ‘ – it was Raju and his staff – came hurling *lathis*. We got scared and closed our doors. These people did not even knock our doors. They started shouting, “Break their doors”. When they started to break my door, I called “saab, wait, I am opening the door”. So saying I opened the door. There was a chain on the door of the toilet, seeing which they felt that someone was hiding inside. They put the rifle on my throat and said that if they found anyone inside, they would shoot me. They struck me twice with *lathis*. They put the rifles on my children and threatened them – “Shut up or we will kill you”. My small children got so frightened that they developed a temperature. These were Raju Kaliyo and his staff. They hurled abusive language on us women and children. They perpetrated atrocities on us. It is our humble request that legal steps be taken against the D staff people.

5. **Rehana Junaid Mansuri**, 20 years. (9 months pregnant). Suleimani Chawl, Ajwa Road.

On 1.5.02, Wednesday night when police entered our area from a distance we shut our doors in fear and sat inside our house. Then policemen came in drunk and barged on our doors. When the guns were being barged on the door, I got up to open the doors and the police's gun's backside hit me on my chest. They also hit on my thighs, under my knees. There are bruises on my chest. It is five days since my delivery. After the delivery, there is bleeding from my breasts instead of milk. Even now it has not stopped coming.

6. Noorjahanben Ismailbhai Ghanchi (GIDC, Makarpura)

Since 2.12.2000, I have been working in Kiran More Helmet Factory, No. 504 GIDC Makarpura. There were 8 women working in my department – mazgaar or assembly department. All others were Hindu. 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, Supervisor said come back later. I was at Tandalja Aashiana Camp for a month. On April 24, Santoshbhai told me we have cancelled your card. I have not been back since. The seth's name is Sameerbhai.

I was getting Rs. 850/- pm and an incentive/bonus of Rs. 100/- if I was present for a full month.

My sewing machine, a source of supplementary income was burnt down with all my other belongings. I have no source of income now. We received Rs. 3000/- from Narmada Bhavan. My complaint was of Rs. 85,000, they noted down Rs. 20,000 and gave us only Rs. 3000/-.

7. Sabinabano Magboolhusain (Panigate – Raja Rani Talav.)

On Saturday, 27.4.02, there was an attack on our area. They came from Bhoiwada and Bawchawad. They entered my house from behind and put acid bottles and 'Kakdas'. I have three daughters. They looted all the dowry that had been kept for my daughter. I do not know the people who came.

Police fired from Panigate. The bullet hit my goat, instead of me and it died. Kept the goat's body for three days. Could not go to bury it and finally threw in the lake. The backside of the house is completely burnt. Front is OK. When I went to protest about my goat, the policeman beat me on my legs and my face. There is swelling now also.

I work in households and run my house on that income. My husband works in Sardar Estate in a spectacle glass factory which also has been burnt and so he is without work.

Now we are staying in Charottar Jamatkhana.

8. Kaushal Bano Mansuri (Kagda Chawl, Bawamanpura) She is 9 months pregnant

On Muharram at 7.30pm from Bhoite wada the stoning started. In Bahucharwad people started running in panic. Police arrived from the police chowki which was nearby. They didn't go to Bhoite wada. They came here. They came here to look for the men whom they thought that the women were protecting. They entered into houses, looked under the beds, pulled out the women, beat them with their *lathis* and *dandas*. They gave vulgar *gaalis*. Out of the 6, 4 were drunk. Kanani of DCP was there. Nandu, a PI from Bahucharwad was also there.

This is a very poor area. Most of the people here are vegetable vendors and others are daily wage earners.

I was putting my child to sleep at 9.00 pm on March 23rd. Suddenly, I found lots of policemen in my house. They didn't find our men at home and started giving us *ghalis*. Hit me with *Dandas*. They hit me on my hand, on my stomach and when they saw I was pregnant, they hit me in my *jung*. Only today I have started moving out. They were all saying Kanani, Kanani. They were all his staff. I went into the *dargah* and hid there. I told them that I was *pet-se*. They still say that they haven't hit me. My *saas* also said that I was pregnant. They said, 'we have to kill it before it happens'.

9. **Ferozabibi Abdul Sattar Mansuri** (Chamboosa Baba Dargah Tekra, Raja Rani Talav) 45 years

Bhois came and attacked us on April 28 at 6.30 p.m.. I was at home with my daughters. Policemen, around 10, came in. They smashed my door, broke it open, entered inside. They hit me and my daughters on the knees with a stick. One of my daughters, Tahirabano is 4 months pregnant, they hit her in the stomach with the rifle. Nazima, my other daughter was also hit on the knees. She cried out in pain. They were in the house for 15-20 minutes. We told them, 'Go where the attacks are taking place'. They said, 'Why, do you want to go throw stones?' They wrecked the Dargah and the meter and electric wires with their rifles' butts. They said, 'Let them (the Bhois) do whatever they are doing. We will deal with you.' They used extremely abusive words. I went to register my complaint at the Panigate Police Station but they refused to register it.

10. **Neema Ahmed Gulam Kuvawala** (Resident of Baranpur)

On Feb. 28 when all these attacks were happening, the mobs were shouting "*Hai re miyan, hai, hai*" and throwing stones. They would throw stones but stop when the police came and then start all over again. These were people from our area itself. We called out to some boys and told them to stop or we would inform the police. They came and told us "do not give all our names. We will tell you whom to name. We will not do anything to you because you are like family to us. If you want you can come and stay at our house". We were assured and so just sat inside the house and even did not bother all through the night.

The next morning we called out to a vegetable vendor, because we had nothing at home, but these people did not allow him to come to our house, warned him against coming to our house. We have a police point right next to our house. That day was a Friday (March 1) when we have our *namaaz* in the afternoon. While the *namaaz* was going on, the mob went to burn a bakery near our house. The police told us of this. According to the police when they tried to stop them, they were also attacked and in fact some of them got injured also. After this the police were thrown out from there. Then the mob entered the bakery with acid, petrol, truck tires and torches and set the whole place on fire.

Next to our house is a coal depot. In the evening the mob with people from the area and outside, came back. They wanted to burn the depot. Our house has one older part at the back and a newer part in the front. It is made with tin sheets and is very strong and unbreakable from the front. The only way to enter it was from the back through the coal depot next to our house. They came from the back through the house belonging to Chandrakant Patni and threw petrol and acid bottles inside the coal depot. The old part of our house, which is made of wood is very old. We have reconstructed the front part of the house and had left the old remain as it is.

When they lit the depot, it caught fire because of the acid and the petrol and the wood present there. When we went to put off the fire, they threw stones at us and did not allow us to go near it. They were also verbally abusing us all the time thus making it very difficult to do anything. As a result both the coal depot

and the house caught fire and got completely burnt. Now we are left with nothing. We had everything, TV, fridge, computer. Now we have nothing.

The people in the mob gave threats to my father that they would kill him. They said that, "You did not leave when the police came to take you, now you sit and watch your house burn and then we shall kill you." My father said that, "I am anyway totally finished. What is left for me to live? You can kill me."

We were requesting the police and the fire brigade to save us from getting burnt. But they did not help. After the *namaj* I had been calling the fire station all the time but nobody came. They used to switch off the phone after every minute. The person who was at the fire station was Prafulbhai who we kept speaking to. So the fire brigade never came in there. Later one person from there told us that the P.I. from Wadi police station was not letting them enter. We left that place after 9:30 pm on March 1 but till then no one came. When we went to that area on the next Friday (on March 8 when the curfew was lifted), the fire was still burning. We called the fire brigade and then two vans came and put it off. The next Friday when we went again, we saw that the place where we kept our mattresses in the house was also still burning. So we called the fire station again.

There was a police point near our house since the 1969 riots and one of the SRP persons there on that day was S. K. Pandey. The PIs who came from Wadi police station, tried to fire in the air and burst tear gas bombs to disperse the mob. But finally at 9:30 pm, they gave us police protection and brought us to Madar gate.

Our house and shops have, however, been totally looted and gutted. There were three rounds of attack. We have a cycle shop, two dress material shops. All of these had their shutters broken, their materials looted and then burnt down. We are a large joint family and have had a lot of material losses. None of us have been hurt. My mother and father both have burnt hair but there is no other injury.

My brother was, however, threatened to be killed. On the day there was a Gujarat *bandh*, my brother was going for his afternoon *namaj* when he saw three of his friends – Vijay, Akhtar and Deepak Soni talking amongst themselves that they would finish him when he came back. Vijay was standing with weapons and Deepak was also there. We heard this and four of us were also waiting to watch out and call out to my brother. Two of us were at the window and two downstairs. But my brother only came with the police and so they could not do anything. **All three of them were friends of my brother and all had been part of a function on January 26 on communal harmony!**

11. **Wahida** (Wadi Tai Wada) Wife of Abid Ibrahimbhai Delawala deceased in police firing on the night of April 29-30 in Tai Wada.

Wahida, age 19 years, occupation housewife, permanent resident of Taiwada. I live here with my husband and one year old daughter Simran. My husband worked as a skilled labourer in a steel cupboard factory.

On 29/4/02 at about 10 p.m. my husband left the house after dinner and joined some other men on Hanifa apa's '*otla*' (verandah) who were keeping vigil as our area is continuously threatened by the neighbouring Hindu locality near the Neelkanth Mahadev Mandir. He asked me to go and sleep in my *nani*'s house along with the baby as I was alone. At about 1.30 a.m. some people came to call me saying that my husband was shot. By the police. I rushed to the spot with my father. I saw that my husband was shot in the head. The police who had shot my husband had fled from the spot. There was a large crowd where my husband was lying. Close to him Noor bhai was also shot and some people were standing around him as well. When I reached there my husband was crying out for water. However within a few minutes two jeeps of police

(DCB) arrived on the scene and asked the crowd to disperse or else they would shoot us. I pleaded with them to allow me to give water to my husband but they pushed us aside with rifle butts. Then they burst tear gas shells near the two people who were shot. The police said “*patti gayu*” (Its all over) and began dragging the bodies as if they were dead dogs. Then someone offered a handcart and they took the bodies away. When I inquired from people near Hanifa apa’s house as to what had happened they told me that the men were seated in the darkness. Some policemen stealthily crept towards them from the side of the *masjid* and shouted run or we will shoot. My husband was shot as he was running. Some people recognised one Shri Parmar PSI in the shooting party.

After the post mortem the bodies were returned to us but none of the other possessions on their person were handed over. Abid had the keys of the factory where he was working and the scooter keys of his employer’s scooter. He also had a lot of money on his person as he kept all our savings in his pocket for fear we might have to run away any time. I don’t know exactly how much money he had but he would give me Rs. 20 everyday to buy milk for the baby and for household expenses. At present I don’t have a single penny. My sisters help me but this cannot continue as they are very poor. My family is also very poor. My parents in law are dead. We were a nuclear family. I often worry how will I pay the electricity bills, for gas etc. Will I ever get back my savings and my husband’s clothes? How will I support myself and my one year old baby.

12. Zubeda (Wadi Tai Wada) wife of Noorbhai Yaroobhai Carvani (deceased in the incident described above)

(age 35 years, Occupation domestic servant. Permanent resident of Taiwada)

I live here with my husband and four children Jabir age 15, Farheen age 13, Akil age 10, mentally handicapped, and Julubia age 8. And my husband’s extended family. My husband was self-employed. He was an automobile mechanic

On 29/4/02 only women were in the house. The men have been staying out due to fear as the police have raided our house before. At about 1.00 a.m. we heard that Abid had been shot. A few minutes later I got news that my husband has also been killed. I rushed to the spot with my sister. He was shot below the ear. I felt very dizzy when I saw him so some women took me away. There were police around my husband’s body. They were preventing us from going near. They were abusing the women in very filthy language. Meherunissa, my sister was pleading with the police but the police pushed her saying “if you try to go close we will shoot you” and he fired one shot which hit the wall of Noorbhai Pulaowala. My son Jabir contacted the local municipal corporator Mr. Bafati but even he could not help us. They dragged away my husband’s body from the legs, they had no respect for a dead human being.

13. Badrunissa Ismailbhai, (Suleimani Chawl)

On 30/4/02. at about 9.30 p.m. a *sutli* bomb was thrown in the lane behind my house. My neighbour Idris, a 17 year old boy picked up the bomb and tried to throw it away from the houses but it burst in his hands and his entire palm was blown off. We informed the police. The police accused us of trying to throw the bomb and under that pretext began combing operations. That day they arrested 22 boys. Four of them were released because their exams were going on. They also began search operations, forcibly entering homes, vandalising property, breaking glasses, electricity meters, abusing and assaulting women particularly in houses

where they could not find the men. They brutally beat up the boys as they arrested them and continued to assault them even in the jeep. Our boys were screaming like lambs being taken to the slaughter.

14. **Shahnaz Banoo**, (Suleimani Chawl) age 25 years.

I have come to my mother's house for my delivery. I have brought along my four small children. On 30/4/02 the police forcibly entered my house. The children and four women, Wahida, Nasreen Banoo, Shameem Banoo and myself were in the house. The police abused us in very filthy language and hit Wahida with a *lathi* on her hand and Shameem later asking for our men. We said we did not know. They threatened to rape us and sexually violate us. They kicked my 4-year-old son Aftab and pointed a gun towards him. At that point all four of tried to protect the boy. They beat us mercilessly with *lathis* and rifle butts. Due to the beating I delivered prematurely. Our hands and legs are still swollen. (they show their injuries). We do not know if we have fractures, we could not get medical assistance for fear of being assaulted by the police again We have been managing with household remedies. The police kept saying that we will kill you then your men will be forced to come out. Among the police who beat us were a PI from Panigate police station and one Harish, who was not in uniform. The police were all drunk. When one of the *sahebs* told them 'its enough now, just stop' they replied 'you go ahead, we are doing our job.'

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April 3, 2002

To,

The Honourable Prime Minister of India

Dear Prime Ministerji,

On the occasion of your visit to Gujarat, we take this opportunity of conveying to you our deep sense of anguish and anger at the way the state administration and the police have failed us in the aftermath of the Godhra incident. It would be more accurate to say, in fact, that the police have further victimised us.

The post-Godhra carnage has affected most of us women living in Vadodara in some way or the other. Lives of minority women have changed drastically. However, women from all communities are also affected by the reign of fear and the terror promoted by the state and the police. The Hindu women are caught in a fear psychosis that the 'other' will attack. A lot of this has to do with the rumours that are being systematically spread through various pamphlets and booklets. Livelihoods of all poor, working class women have been affected. The situation in the minority households is far more serious, and hunger has become an acute problem because the minority men too cannot go out to work. The deep sense of betrayal that women feel by neighbours and children 'who grew up in front of my eyes (or in my *aangan*)' is seen across classes.

Our experience is that the police has done selective and discriminatory 'combing'. While mobs have been attacking our localities and stoning our houses from definite directions, the police forces have not deigned to comb those areas and *bastis*. They have instead barged into our homes, defying all norms of decency, looking for weapons and our men. They have pulled us out of our homes, sometimes dragging us by our hair, they have abused us verbally and physically and given us *gaalis*, they have hit us and beaten us, sometimes so severely that many of us are left with broken limbs. Many pregnant women have been hit on their stomachs with butts of guns. Many old, widowed women have been similarly severely abused. Verbal abuse by the police having both sexual and religious connotations has deeply offended our dignity. They have violated our right to practice our religion by bursting in during our prayer timings and treating our Koran Sharif with disrespect. Our young underage boys have been picked up during these so-called combing operations and have been kept illegally in the jail for 8 to 10 days. Many of them have been beaten in the jail.

Several of us have complained to the police, identifying the perpetrators of these atrocities. So far no action has been taken. Many of us are scared to identify the persons who have inflicted psychological and physical violence on us. Our fear is that we will become the targets of further violence. We thought that the police is there for our protection, but our experience has proved otherwise.

Those of us living in camps and sheltering with relatives are terrified at the thought of returning home. The state government has so far not taken any action to ensure our safety if we decide to return to our homes. Our right to livelihood is obstructed because the administration has not been able to restore conditions in which we can ply our small businesses and trades. Many of us who are out of the camps are hungry because we haven't been able to go out and earn our food. Our children are distracted and fearful. With the schools closed they have nothing to keep them occupied. We fear to let them go out and play, lest the policemen from the neighbourhood police *chowky* decide their activities are anti-social. In short, Prime Ministerji, we have become prisoners in our own homes and are reduced to feeling apologetic about our very existence.

With the failure of the state government to act on our behalf, we had pinned our hopes on the NHRC. We are happy that Justice Verma and the other members of the team understood our plight. Now we hear that the state government has moved to reject the NHRC report. In this situation we wish to convey to you that we depend on you to take just action. We expect you to mete out justice. Our demands are as follows:

- Remove biased police and state personnel
- Take strict action against those whom we identify as perpetrators of violence on us
- Ensure a swift return to normalcy in the state.
- Ensure security of life and livelihood

We look forward to your positive action to ensure the above.

In anticipation,

Women from Baroda

Tulsiwadi, Bawamanpura, Wadi Tai Wada, Roshannagar, Bahaar Colony, Machhipeeth, Alishaan Apartments, Baranpura

Supported by:

Women's organisations

SHISHU MILAP, SAHIYAR, OLAKH, Maya Valecha, Jehanara Rangrez, Bina Srinivasan, Nandini Manjrekar, Deeptha Achar, Renu Khanna

People's Union for Civil Liberties, Baroda and Shanti Abhiyan

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To

May 13, 2002

The President of India,
Rashtrapati Bhavan,
New Delhi.

Dear Honourable President,

As we gather together on the occasion of Baroda Ekta Diwas, we, the men and women of Baroda wish to bring several current issues to your notice. The happenings in Gujarat since Feb. 27, 2002 have affected the women of Baroda grievously. We would like your high and honourable office to take cognizance of these happenings and initiate the needed corrective measures. The genocide unleashed by the state authorities has gone on long enough and is destroying the entire fabric of our society.

We want to point out that the post-Godhra carnage has affected most women living in Vadodara in some way or the other. Lives of minority women have changed drastically. They have lost their homes, their social support systems, and their livelihoods. And women from all communities are affected by the reign of hatred, fear and the terror promoted by the state and the police.

The police have done selective and discriminatory 'combing'. While mobs have been attacking localities and stoning houses from definite directions, the police forces have not deigned to comb those areas and *bastis*. Policemen have instead barged into homes of minority women, defying all norms of decency, looking for weapons and their men. They have pulled women out of their homes, sometimes dragging them by their hair. It is surprising that in these sort of combing operations, no women police were present at all. The abuses, verbal and physical, cannot be described. The policemen, many of them drunk have uttered filthy *gaalis*, they have hit and beaten women, sometimes so severely that many have been left with broken limbs. Many pregnant women have been hit on their stomachs with butts of guns. Many old, widowed women have been similarly severely abused. Verbal abuse by the police, having both sexual and religious connotations has deeply offended our dignity. They have violated citizens' right to practice their religion by bursting in during prayer timings and treating their prayer books with disrespect. Young underage boys have been picked up during these so-called combing operations and have been kept illegally in the jail for 8 to 10 days. Many of them have been beaten in the jail.

The combing operations too have affected majority women similarly. Several poor migrant men workers have been picked up from within their homes and illegally detained just to fulfil the numbers game. Their wives have been left to fend for themselves and their children without any information or explanation.

Several of us have complained to the police, identifying the perpetrators of these atrocities. So far no action has been taken. Many of us are scared to identify the persons who have inflicted psychological and physical

violence on us. Our fear is that we will become the targets of further violence. We thought that the police is there for our protection, but our experience has proved otherwise.

Those of us living in camps and sheltering with relatives are terrified at the thought of returning home. The state government is promoting 'compromises' to ensure our safety if we decide to return to our homes. These compromises are unacceptable to many of us because they add on to the heap of injustices that we have already endured. Our right to livelihood is obstructed because the administration has not been able to restore conditions in which we can ply our small businesses and trades. Many of us who are out of the camps are hungry because we haven't been able to go out and earn our food. Our children are distracted and fearful. With the schools closed they have nothing to keep them occupied. We fear to let them go out and play, lest the policemen from the neighbourhood police *chowky* decide their activities are anti-social.

Although conditions to return home are unsafe, we keep hearing that we must go back as the camps need to be closed. The relief and rehabilitation measures being provided by the state government are grossly unjust. We are receiving pittance as compensation for the lifetime of earning and meager belongings that we had so painfully put together.

While we would like law and order to be immediately restored in our state, we do not want any further violation of human rights and repressive action against women. We fear that this will happen with KPS Gill's presence in Gujarat.

In this situation we wish to convey to you that we expect you to take just action. We expect you to mete out justice. Our demands are as follows:

- Remove biased police and state personnel
- Take strict action against those whom we identify as perpetrators of violence on us
- Ensure a swift return to normalcy in the state.
- Ensure security of life and livelihood
- Ensure relief and rehabilitation packages that are just.
- Ensure that the situation remains under control through the month of June

We look forward to your positive action to ensure the above.

In anticipation,

Olakh, Sahiyar, Shishu Milap, SAHAJ, WSRC and other individuals and organisations that are part of the PUCL and Shanti Abhiyan of Baroda.

Copy to,

Chief Minister of Gujarat, Prime Minister of India, National Human Rights Commission, National Commission for Women