

Introduction

This is a report on the ways in which children and the young have been affected by the carnage unleashed in Gujarat since February 27th 2002. It also addresses the systematic build up to the genocide, as well as the possible long term outcome of the cumulative impact . An autonomous citizens' team of three women from Calcutta carried out this assessment from May 3rd to May 11th 2002, across both urban and rural areas of Gujarat.

Two unprecedented aspects of the atrocities perpetuated during the Gujarat carnage have been the gruesome targeting of women and the fact that children too have been attacked brutally as never before in the history of India. They too have been subject to rape, mutilation, murder and burning¹, and to witnessing the same being done unto their family members, friends and neighbours. Minority children and youth have also been arrested on a large scale, and tortured in custody, right across Gujarat in the aftermath of the Godhra train incident. In addition to this there have been widespread problems regarding the ideological nature of text books and test papers, examinations and re-examinations. Now the prospects of access to education for large numbers of minority children too seem bleak. While there have been many substantial reports, including those of the PUCL and Citizens' Initiative centering specifically on the targeting of women, there was a critical need for focussed investigation into how children and the young have been affected.

Even as this report is being prepared, many have returned to their homes, some willingly, but most under duress. The remaining camps too will be shut down in the near future and Gujarat will probably return to an apparent state of normalcy. Yet, thousands of children have been scarred for life, and if their trauma, rage, incomprehension, and need for security and education are swept under the carpet and not addressed, such repression will inevitably result in massive eruptions of violence in the coming years. This report has been written, and recommendations made, keeping in mind the specific ways in which these recent events are likely to shape the lives of the next generation of adults and the entire social fabric of Gujarat.

The objective of this study was to assess the immediate and long term impact of

- the trauma the children have been subject to
- the arrests and custodial torture of minority children and youth
- the effect of the continuing violence on the education of students
- the implications of the large scale displacements for them
- children's perceptions of the role played by the state and the political parties, like the Bajrang Dal and the VHP, in the genocide
- the changes in children's perceptions of the other community and the role of both neighbours and "outsiders" from the other community
- the resources available (or lack thereof) for orphans and children of families now headed by women as a result of the carnage
- the role of the state departments, ministers and government in tackling the large scale and devastating impact of this violence on children's lives.

¹ Often with petrol poured down their throats so that they burn faster.

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by an independent team of citizens, July 2002 Supported by Citizens' Initiative, Ahmedabad,

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This team visited 10 camps in both urban and rural areas. Nine were minority² camps, namely Shah-e-Alam, Daryakhan, Rang Avadoot Juhapara, in Ahmedabad; the Iqbal High School camp (now transferred to Satpul) in Godhra town; Hallol, Kalol and Boru village in the Panchmahal district; and Nutan Nagar and Sureli in Anand district. One was a majority community camp, in Shahpur, Ahmedabad. This approximates the ratio of the minority camps to the majority community camps, with members of the minority community comprising more than 90% of the victims in the state. We spoke primarily with individual children and youngsters in the camps. We also talked to camp organizers, relatives, activists, teachers and lawyers,, the general nature and extent of the violence unleashed in each area, the physical and psychological condition of the children when they first arrived, the games they played in the early days, the problems regarding education, examinations and arrests of students, and alternatives being considered for rehabilitation, specially in the case of communities that were too scared to go back to their original homes. The team sought to record the steps the government had taken (other than providing food, nutrition and immunization services), to ameliorate the condition of children affected by the violence, and accordingly met personnel in government departments, and the education minister Anandibehn Patel. Government threats to shut down the camps continued as did the violence and the curfews, throughout the period that this team conducted the interviews.

There were times when we could not bear to continue our conversations with children. Some were tiny adults who seemed to have learnt the importance of narrating to the world the terrible horrors they had witnessed. They would talk to us stoically, then suddenly bury head in arm, when it came to the rape of a mother or an aunt. Others would break down howling when reminded of a beloved cat that had been brained by a hostile neighbour or a buffalo that had disappeared. Every minority camp also had at least one or two who sat with head drooping into neck after giving us his/her name and that of the only surviving parent or grandparent. We did not get the testimonies of these children directly from them – at such times we turned to a volunteer with whom the child had shared his/her experiences, or an adult who had been with the child through the horrors. In such circumstances coming across a furious child, or a child with fear in her eyes, was

² In this report this term refers to the single largest minority community in India.

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a relief. There have been more than 50,000³ affected children in camps alone in Gujarat since February 28th, 2002.

³ The official estimate, procured from the office of the ICDS (Integrated Child Development Service in Gandhinagar) states that as of 4th April, 2002, there were 1,11,167 people living in camps across the state, of whom 42,103 were children, 20,005 girls and 22,097 boys. The unofficial estimate of the total population in the camps was approximately two lakhs. In each camp approximately one third of the members are under 18 years of age.

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