

Incidents of Post-Godhra violence

Mehsana

The Tribunal recorded 64 oral and written statements from Mehsana. This district, too, saw two brutal massacres in the first bout of post-Godhra violence. One of them was at Sardarpura village, in *taluka* Vijaypur, where, in a single attack, 33 Muslims were electrocuted to death, 29 of them from one family. In the other case, 11 Muslims were hacked and burnt to death in Visnagar town, a *taluka* headquarter.

Visnagar

On February 28, 2002, 11 family members of two Khan brothers were hacked and some burnt thereafter, in one of the Hindu-predominant localities, Deepda Darwaza, in Visnagar town, Mehsana district, leaving just three survivors – Yusufbhai Khan, his nephew, Pathan Arif Khan Yakub Khan (13) and his niece, Noorjahan Yakub Khan (11). Those killed included five women, one man, and five children. One child was only 6-months-old. The two surviving children saw their family members being hacked and burnt with their own eyes.

With a deep sense of hurt and pain, Yusufbhai tells everyone that even till the last minute he had believed that the attackers were all neighbours and would not kill his family members. Engaged in wage labour or petty shop-keeping, the Khans lived in a small cluster of huts in Hindu-predominant Deepda Darwaza.

Witness Morad Khan (45), a trader from Deepda Darwaza said that in his *mohalla* there are over 800 Patel (Patidar) houses and some 20-25 Muslim houses. On February 28, at about 5-6 p.m. about 200 Patels of the *mohalla* got together. Their leaders were Lalitbhai Ladhambhai, Dahyabhai Madhabhai, Babubhai Purshottam Patel. Under their leadership, all the Muslim houses in the *mohalla* were looted and torched. What was far worse, 11 members of the witness' family were cut up and some were burnt thereafter. At the peace meeting held three days later, he pleaded for the remains of his deceased family members but they refused.

The attackers cut the dead bodies of some victims to pieces and stuffed them in gunny sacks that were dumped in the pond on Kada Road. The police later recovered the bodies. The attack started at around 2.30 p.m.; the police, who were called repeatedly, finally arrived only at 5 p.m. The trapped Muslim residents were rescued only after that. *The Times of India* reported on March 12 that with the retrieval of two bags filled with bones, a few skulls and remains from Malap Pond, where the sewage from Visnagar gets collected, the district police had traced the remains of all 11 persons reported missing from this area.

The witness had named 65 persons in his complaint but not one of them had been arrested till May. Later, eighteen persons were arrested and then released. "All of them are from my locality, not just from the village." Moreover, according to Yusufbhai, they were arrested in connection with smaller offences committed earlier. SP A Gehlot (now transferred) had sent the victims' remains for examination to the Central Forensic Science Laboratory. The accused include Daya Purushottam, Babubhai Purshottam Patel, Ramesh Daya Madhabar; the person accused of supplying arms to the killers is the BJP MLA, Prahladbhai Mohan Lal Patel Ghosa.

There were about 100 Muslim families living in all of Visnagar constituting a tiny percentage of the town's total population. Apart from the massacre of the 11 family members, elsewhere in the town, too, Muslims suffered substantial devastation and casualties. A violent Hindu mob of about 10-12,000 people attacked the various Muslim clusters on the afternoon of February 28. The attackers were armed with swords, *dharis* (sickles), sticks, acid, petrol, lighters and country-made bombs.

In another part of Visnagar town, Kaziwada, one Ashrafbhai was attacked with a sword. His sister Zainabbibi and neighbours Hanifbhai and Yunusbhai Mansuri took him in a handcart to the civil

hospital. Thereafter, Yunusbhai disappeared and has not been seen since. Zainabbibi, Hanifbhai and Ashrafbhai were taken to the third floor of the hospital and thrown down from there. While Hanifbhai and Ashrafbhai died, Zainabbibi, who was alive, was dragged up the stairs and thrown down again. Acid was then poured on the bodies, and they were also slashed with swords. Noor Jehan, a witness, was in the hospital when this happened. According to her, all the attackers were outsiders; there were 50-60 attackers who had entered the hospital and killed the three persons.

In another locality, Khada Darwaza, about 15-20 Muslim men and children were injured in an attack. As the mob approached this locality, about 100 women hid in a house, while the men tried to resist the attack by hurling back stones. The confrontation continued for about 2-3 hours.

According to the survivors, the local MLA, Prahladbhai Mohan Lal Patel Ghosa was the main instigator. He had organised several meetings in the town and had been heard announcing a reward of Rs. 5 lakh for every Muslim killed and guaranteeing that there would be no case or imprisonment.

Witness Imran Haniefbhai Behlim, a vegetable vendor in Visnagar, lost his father in the violence. Some persons from a mob killed his father, Haniefbhai Dawoodbhai Behlim, with a sword on February 28. "There were 15-20,000 people in the mob but I do not remember anyone's names." His father, who was taking someone for medical treatment, was killed just outside the hospital. The police did not give him any protection but fired at the family when they were taking the deceased for burial.

Several hundred Muslims from Visnagar who have fled to Sawala were too scared to go back. The 84 autorickshaws that they plied for a living are now idle as it is dangerous for the drivers to ply them. Students who attempted to go to school continued to be threatened by groups of 10-15 people. As late as early May, sporadic incidents of attacks on Muslims continued to take place. They recognise some of the attackers, all Patels. According to them, even Patel women participated in the attack, throwing stones on Muslims from the roof tops.