



Reconciliation in Gujarat

Priya Parker

Abstract

While there are many reports covering the Gujarat riots of 2002, much less is known of its aftermath. Have the citizens of Gujarat returned to a state of normalcy? What kind of compensation have victims of the riots received? Have there been efforts for reconciliation between the two communities? What scope is there for dialogue now? This paper gives a brief history of the Gujarat riots and Gujarat, describes aspects of the author's visits to the state in 2006, explores the relationship between justice and reconciliation, and lists some factors that continue to block reconciliation between the communities.

Author Profile

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Gujarat is the westernmost state in India, with a population over fifty million. It is famed for its enterprising and widely traveled people – well before the days of H-1 B visas, Gujaratis made up the largest share of India’s far-flung diaspora.

Sadly, in recent years, the state has become infamous for a different reason: “communal violence.” This is the Indian term for outbreaks of violence between followers of different religions – nowadays, and specifically in the case of Gujarat, it refers to violence between Hindus and Muslims. Gujarat, and particularly the capital city Ahmedabad and surrounding districts, suffered from terrible communal violence in 2002. Human rights groups estimate the loss of between 2,000- 2,500 lives (mostly Muslim) and an additional displacement of 140,000 people in the aftermath of the massacres.¹ As of January 2006, it was estimated that between 60% and 90% of the people affected were still unable to return to their homes.²

While there are many reports covering the pogrom³ of 2002, much less is known of its aftermath. Have the citizens of Gujarat returned to a state of normalcy? What kind of compensation have victims of the riots received? Have there been efforts for reconciliation between the two communities? What scope is there for dialogue now?

When I came to India in September 2005, I hoped to learn more about ethnic and religious conflict, and what approaches Indians were using to address such situations. I also hoped to apply here, aspects of what I had learned previously through my experience with Sustained Dialogue. Through the course of my work with the International Institute for Sustained Dialogue, Washington DC, I had become engaged with various communities and groups using Sustained Dialogue on campuses in the United States, the Middle East and in southern Africa. Through the limited exposure that I, as a practitioner, had to these various contexts, I had struggled with the same questions: *what factors need to exist in order to make a dialogue in this situation successful?*

1 <http://web.amnesty.org/report2003/Ind-summary-eng>

2 Interview with Harsh Mander, President, *Aman Biradari*, Gujarat, January 13, 2006.

3 The media, various scholars, activists and citizens use the terms “riots,” “pogrom,” and “genocide” to describe the events of Feb-March 2002 in Gujarat based on the number of people killed, and the disproportionate number of Muslims among them.

In the course of 2006, I had the opportunity to do some work in Gujarat. This paper gives a brief history of the Gujarat riots and Gujarat, describes aspects of my visits in 2006, briefly explores the relationship between reconciliation and justice, and lists some factors that are contributing to the blockage of reconciliation between the communities.

The 2002 Riots in Gujarat

On February 27, 2002, the Sabarmati Express, a train that was returning from Ayodhya⁴ carrying a number of Hindu activists of the VHP (*Vishwa Hindu Parishad*) party, was stopped in Godhra (a town on the train line to Ahmedabad) when it caught fire. Word immediately spread that the fire was deliberately set by an angry Muslim mob. What actually happened is still unclear,⁵ however, fifty-nine of the activists were killed in the fire. Riots immediately broke out in a number of cities and districts in the state of Gujarat. The Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, rather than condemning the riots, is famously quoted as saying, "to every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction" to justify the riots.⁶ The carnage "was explained by the Sangh Parivar as the retaliation by Hindu masses to avenge the Godhra killings."⁷

The riots and planned nature of the massacre (the mobs had tax records, neighborhood plans marking Muslim and Hindu-owned property, coordinated cell phones, and police that were given orders to allow the killings) shocked the nation. Some reports cite mobs of up to 10,000 people rioting, looting and burning people alive throughout the different districts. One of the most infamous cases occurred on the afternoon of Feb 28th, when forty-three people including a Muslim former Congress Member of Parliament Ahsan Jafri, after repeated phone calls for help, were burnt alive in Gulmarg Society in the Chamanpura-Asarwa area in Ahmedabad.⁸ Human rights groups estimate the death toll was between 2,000 and 2,500. Thousands of homes, businesses and places of worship were destroyed and "about 140,000 people fled their homes in the aftermath of the massacres and many remained homeless at the end of the year."⁹ "There were at least 100,000 women, children and men in the 103 relief camps in Ahmedabad. An estimated 50,000 people were in similar camps across the rest of the state of Gujarat."¹⁰

4 Ayodhya is an ancient city in India that has become a controversial site after Hindu activists, lead by the ruling political party at the time (the BJP), demolished a mosque built on the site in 1992 - which caused widespread riots throughout the country at that time. The activists claimed that the mosque had been built over the site of an earlier Hindu temple that was the birthplace of the Hindu god, Lord Ram.

5 Dionne Bunsha, "The Mystery of the Godhra Fire," *Frontline*, Volume 20, Issue 6 (March 15-28, 2003). See <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl2006/stories/20030328003203700.htm>.

6 <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2007/12/07/india17510.htm>.

7 Interview with Harsh Mander, January 13, 2006.

8 Manas Dasgupta, "140 killed as Gujarat bandh turns violent," *The Hindu* (March 1, 2002). See <http://www.hinduonnet.com/2002/03/01/stories/2002030103030100.htm>.

9 See <http://web.amnesty.org/report2003/ind-summary-eng>.

10 Antara Sen Dave, K Sekar, Subhashis Bhadra, G P Rajshekhar, K V Kishore Kumar, R Srinivasa Murthy in *Riots: Psychosocial Care for Individuals* (Bangalore: Books for Change, 2002).

Many people believed that Gujarat could only truly begin to heal when the administration in power at the time of the riots (the Modi government) was voted out. However, in the elections of December 2002, he and the BJP party were re-elected by a landslide by the 80% majority Hindu constituency. Gujarat is a case that many people point to as one in which the politics of hate and fear succeeded. "The communal polarization caused by the post-Godhra pogrom and the subsequent hate campaign led by Narendra Modi, and the virtual absence of a serious secular challenge, enabled the Hindu right to score a landslide victory in Gujarat."¹¹ "Shockingly, the BJP made its greatest gains in the riot-affected areas – it captured fifty of the sixty-seven riot-affected constituencies... with 126 of the 181 seats, improving on its previous score of 117 seats. Close to Godhra, in central Gujarat's Panchmahal, Dahod and rural Vadodara, where the worst carnage occurred, the BJP won all the seats." The journalist describes the hate tactics used up until the day of the election: "The BJP's campaign of hate stretched over ten months. People were overwhelmed with Godhra propaganda – posters, t-shirts, advertisements, banners, SMS messages and video clips. Gujaratis were not allowed to forget the burning of the train. Chief Minister Narendra Modi would talk about it at every public meeting, but would not mention the 1,000 lives lost in the Sangh's post-Godhra carnage. It was almost as if it did not happen."¹²

Narendra Modi was re-elected once again in 2007, winning by a wide margin, on a platform of economic development rather than explicit Hindu supremacy. Political scientist Yogendra Yadav noted, "[the] Modi victory was not necessarily a referendum on the violence in 2002. The BJP swept districts that were affected by the riots and those that were not, as well as rural and urban districts across the state."¹³

History of Gujarat

Gujarat, more than any other state in India, has suffered from numerous communal riots over the last half century. According to the National Sample Survey, "The city [Ahmedabad] has a history of terrible communal riots, in which the poor in general have suffered. The worst of all riots prior to the 2002 carnage in the city were the riots in 1969 which took an estimated 660 human lives, left 1084 person injured, rendered 27,750 Muslims homeless, who were pushed into refugee camps. Property worth Rs. 42.3 million at that time was ransacked and pillaged."¹⁴ Asgar Ali Engineer, Director of The Center for the Study of Society and Secularism explains: "The frequency with which communal holocausts have been taking place in India shows that there is something fundamentally wrong with our political system as well as our secular governance. The carnage in

¹¹ Dionne Bunsha, "Hindutva's Triumph," *Frontline* (January 3, 2003).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Somini Sengupta, "Hindu Radical is Re-elected in India," *New York Times* (December 4, 2007).
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/24/world/asia/24india.html>.

¹⁴ www.censusindia.net/results

Gujarat did not occur suddenly and simply in reaction to what happened in Godhra. The Sangh Parivar politically thrived only through hate politics, opposing everything that went in favor of minorities. Over the years it has created a mindset among the Hindus, who question not only the loyalty of minorities towards India, but also consider them fundamentalist and fanatical, and the Hindus as liberal and secular.”¹⁵

Scholars and intellectual leaders have attributed numerous reasons for the political sensitivity in Gujarat, including:

- a gradual and finally close to complete collapse of civil society;¹⁶
- the location of Gujarat as a border state with Pakistan and the suspicion of easy infiltration from Pakistan and its national intelligence “which continued to be exploited by the Jan Sangh, particularly by its leader Balraj Badok and then by the BJP;”¹⁷
- an extremely conservative and caste-conscious society;¹⁸
- a political system that has a history of identity-based politics, including the KHAM (Kshatriya- Harijan-Adivasi-Muslim combine) electoral phenomenon in 1980, in which the four lower caste and Muslim groups formed a coalition and, for the first time, threatened the political power of the upper castes; and,
- Non Resident Indians’ financing of the religious right parties such as the VHP.¹⁹

Notes from the Field

Because there are already numerous reports documenting the events of 2002,²⁰ I will only discuss a few aspects of my visits that help illustrate the larger context. Over the course of my visits to Gujarat, I visited about ten village communities in Ahmedabad and Sabarkantha districts, met with a number of NGO leaders, and conducted a few workshops with community workers interested in dialogue. I visited areas that saw the worst violence (such as Naroda Patia and Gulbarg), mixed communities that had managed to escape the violence and remain peaceful (such as Dioli) during the riots, and Muslim resettlement camps.

Villages that Remained Peaceful

15 Asghar Ali Engineer, "Gujarat riots in the light of the history of Communal Violence," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 50 (December 14, 2002), p.5047.

16 Tridip Suvrud, "No Room for Dialogue", *Economic and Political Weekly* (December 14, 2002), p.1011

17 Girish Patel, "Narendra Modi's One-Day Cricket: What and Why?", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 48 (November 30, 2002), p.4831.

18 Upendra Baxi, "The Second Gujarat Catastrophe," *Economic and Political Weekly* (August 24, 2002)

19 Asghar Ali Engineer, "Gujarat riots in the light of the history of Communal Violence," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 50 (December 14, 2002), p.5052.

20 See for example, <http://www.pucl.org/Topics/Religion-communalism/2002/gujarat-nhrc-submission.htm#Details>; <http://www.amnesty.ca/stoptheviolence/news/view.php?load=arcview&article=2187&c=Women+Reports>; <http://www.rediff.com/news/godhra.htm>.

The most heartening examples are those mixed villages and neighborhoods that resisted the violence and continue to actively maintain a peaceful community through peace committees, social events and the building of social capital (loose and informal networks of trust built between individuals and associations) through inter-religious schools and businesses.²¹ Meeting with some of the community leaders, we asked them what advice they had for the larger state in terms of maintaining peace. Some suggested starting with a model community where violence did not take place, and having them speak to other communities. Others suggested creating more social events between the communities, in which people simply sit together and eat. One community described a tradition of theirs: They collect money from everyone who can afford it to put together a fund for a joint community dinner once a year. There is a small team who plans the dinner and they call everyone and feed them. They also noted that their schools have a mixed Hindu-Muslim population. There are also some homegrown efforts including joint pre-schools such as *Arzoo*, started by concerned community members, which foster communal harmony and interaction between children of all communities and religions. The mission of *Arzoo* is to “work with riot-affected children and provide the necessary love and guidance to help them build a brighter future and to encourage them to work towards communal harmony.”²² Founded by a young woman named Sulekha Ali, the center runs classes for slum children in Behrampur, makes paper products which are for sale, and involves the children in community plays and dances.²³

Muslim Resettlement Camps

During the course of my stay, we visited a number of resettlement colonies. These resettlement camps have been built in Gujarat after the riots, largely by funds from overseas Muslim organizations. While providing much-needed emergency housing for the communities since the government is not providing adequate relief, these resettlement communities also inadvertently contribute to the widening separation of the two communities. As these resettlement colonies are built by Muslims for Muslims, the distance between Hindu and Muslim communities within Gujarat is increasing, both physically and psychologically. Because only Muslims live in the resettlement colonies, a new generation is growing up without ever having met a Hindu, and only hearing about the atrocities of 2002. Without relationships of their own with Hindu children (and vice versa), fears and perceptions increase among both communities. Studies have shown that the communities that are most riot-averse are those in which

21 See works by Robert Putnam and Ashutosh Varshney for more information on the impact of social capital in civil society.

22 *Arzoo* brochure.

23 See http://www.worldpeaceemerging.com/articles/publish/article_188.php.

there are strong personal and professional ties, or social capital, between Hindus and Muslims.²⁴ Instead, these resettlement colonies further ghettoize Muslims.

When asked if any resettlement camps had been built by Hindus for Muslim victims after the riots, people said that there were no such examples. Whether or not there were, it is important to note that the *perception* among many Muslims is that they are not being helped by the Hindu community. And even if there are efforts (as I expect there likely may be), they are perceived as “exceptions to the rule,” rather than a helpful Hindu community. The lack of access and interaction between the communities, specifically in the case of the Muslim resettlement areas, are continuing to deepen the wedge between the Hindu and Muslim communities in Gujarat.

NGOs Working in the Field

During the course of one of my visits, I met with a number of NGO leaders and civil society activists who have been living in Ahmedabad and working in this area for the last twenty years.²⁵ The Ahmedabad Women’s Action Group (AWAG) was founded in 1981 to boost women’s self-image, protest against demeaning images of women presented through the mass media, defend women’s human rights, seek justice and equality for women in courts of law, network to build and sustain campaigns on women’s issues, advocate policy change, law reforms and improvements in State’s systems, and raise women’s voices to support their survival.²⁶ Mrs. Ila Pathak, Director of AWAG, is creating a base of about fifty women from each community who have experienced these workshops and are interested in reconciling and rebuilding community. While she was hopeful about the progress in that specific slum community, and the ability for individuals to build relationships, she was much less optimistic about this spreading to the rest of the state.²⁷ Another NGO, *Sanchetana*, has been working in Ahmedabad since 1982. I met the Director of *Sanchetana*, Dr. Hanif Lakdawala, in his office in June, 2006 to learn more about the organization and to better understand his perspective on the current situation. *Sanchetana* started a project called The Institute for Initiative in Education in 1993 to address the problems of Muslims, both education-related and socioeconomic. Working with the community for over a decade, Dr. Lakdawala believes that one of the biggest problems in Gujarat is the poverty and lack of opportunities available to Muslims. *Sanchetana* also works with Dalits and the poor to improve their health and encourage peaceful coexistence. While he had been able to scale up his projects, setting up computer centers across much of the city, he was not

24 Ashutosh Varshney, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2002)

25 Because many of these NGOs are still actively working in the field, and some of them under immense amounts of pressure, I will leave out the names of individuals in certain cases.

26 AWAG brochure.

27 Interview with author, June, 2006.

optimistic about the situation between Hindus and Muslims getting better any time soon.²⁸

I also met Father Cedric Prakash, a Jesuit Priest who has been fighting for human rights (especially for minorities) for several years in Gujarat. In 2001, Father Prakash founded and *Prashant*, a Center for Human Rights, Justice and Peace based in Ahmedabad, an organization he is now the director of. He served as the Director of St. Xavier's Social Service Society from 1987-2001, and has also lived and worked in tribal areas in Gujarat. He is part of a thirteen-member group called "Citizens for Justice and Peace" which is responsible for the Concerned Citizen's Tribunal and a report "Crime against Humanity." When I met Father Prakash, he was in the midst of holding a press conference to publicize the contents of the recently published Gujarati government English language textbooks. He showed me the new textbooks which, besides being written in unintelligible English, represented Hitler and the Nazis in a positive light, with no mention of the Holocaust. The first chapter of the Class IX textbook titled "Present Currents of World History" states that "Hitler led the Germans towards ardent nationalism...In the thinking of Nazism, there is coordination of nationalism and socialism."²⁹ Conversations with Fr. Prakash reminded me of the complications of a system and the multiple ways in which it represents and reproduces itself. He was concerned about the things students are being taught in school. When a certain sector of society is in power, it can infiltrate a system in every sector.

I also met lawyers who have been engaged in social activism and minority rights. One man stood out for his descriptions of the reactions of his own family and neighbors to the work that he does. A Hindu himself, he has spoken out against the riots and helped Muslims in legal cases and said that he has been isolated by many of his friends and family.

The Relationship between Justice and Reconciliation

One of the main questions that I struggled with throughout both trips was the relationship between justice and reconciliation. While both are important, neither by themselves can be enough to heal and rebuild a system in the long run. Justice brings about an official message of the consequences of illegal actions. Reconciliation prevents those actions from happening again. A reconciliation effort should strengthen the capacity of communities to resist violence and protect one another.

Aman Biradari, an NGO in Ahmedabad, has been coordinating a project for the past two years to help victims obtain legal justice. As this NGO is exploring the relationship

28 Interview with author, June 2006.

29 Jumana Shah, "Gujarat textbooks hail Hitler," *Daily News and Analysis* (June 15, 2006)
<http://www.dnaindia.com/report.asp?NewsID=1035792>

between justice and reconciliation, it is useful to describe their approach, "The Nyay Agrah Project," to illustrate the realities of obtaining either in Gujarat.³⁰

The Nyay Agrah Project

The main focus of the Nyay Agrah project is to obtain legal justice for the victims of the 2002 Gujarat riots. The project asks the fundamental question: "Where do poor people get justice in India?" Though thousands of lives were lost, and crores of rupees of damage were suffered, little has been done to address these losses. The overall goals of this project are to restore legal equality, guarantee compensation, and to fight discrimination on all levels. Their approach is to address the court system by going through the proper mechanisms to obtain justice, which they believe will, in and of itself, highlight the inadequacies and injustices of the system. The project leaders have identified three main districts - Ahmedabad, Sabarkantha and Anand - on which to focus justice reclamation.

There are 200 courts in the surrounding seventeen districts of Ahmedabad. Cases before the courts can be divided into three categories:

- (1) Closed cases: About 2000 cases that were registered in 2002, but due to lack of evidence, the courts closed them;
- (2) Ongoing cases: Those cases that are still in court;
- (3) Acquittals: Those cases in which the defendant was found "not guilty", often due to witnesses refusing to testify.

The project has been focusing on the ongoing cases. However, in late January 2006, the Supreme Court ordered reopening of about 2000 cases, and this may change the approach of the project.

In discussing the process of justice and reconciliation after communal violence, *Aman Biradari* President, Harsh Mander, outlines four "mandatory stages" that any process of reconciliation must first go through:

- (1) Acknowledgement
- (2) Remorse
- (3) Reparation
- (4) Justice

The first of these involves a public acceptance that grave violence and discrimination actually took place: and the second, a public expression of collective regret for the violence and discrimination. He says that in Gujarat, neither of these has occurred, rather, there has been an active denial of the events, along with pride and a feeling that

³⁰ *Nyay* means "justice" and *agrah* means "struggle" or "movement."

“they deserved it.” Instead of reparation, Mander continues, the state refuses to provide support in any way, and there is an informal social and economic boycott of the Muslim community. Mander explains that the “net cumulative outcome is that 60-70% of the Muslim community have not been able to return home.” There is a strong feeling within the project that justice needs to occur before they give any thought to reconciliation. Mander believes that reconciliation is problematic because these processes often ask people to deny their own right to reclaim dignity, and that reconciliation means humiliation and surrender on the more powerless side. He explained, “we would rather have an open hatred that brings people to justice, rather than a fake bond of insincerity and niceness between two communities that are of unequal power and do not trust each other.”

People involved in the project recognize that even if they are successful in using the court system as a way to bring about justice for the Muslim victims, this will not improve relations between Muslims and Hindus. In fact, as many acknowledge, it will probably worsen relations. This is not to say that justice should be forsaken for the relationships; however, it is important to imbed processes of reconciliation as much as possible throughout the process.

Exploring Justice and Reconciliation: Other Efforts in Gujarat

From what I could ascertain, there do not seem to be any projects that are combining reconciliation efforts and legal justice simultaneously, though there are a number of groups that are working on one or the other. In terms of legal justice initiatives, there are some larger NGOs and lawyers such as Teesta Setalvad and Jareer Sheikah, who are focusing on the big cases and large-scale massacres, for example, the now famous Best Bakery case, to secure convictions in court. While these victories are fundamental to the justice process, unfortunately they still leave 90% of the affected population to cope as best they may.

In terms of reconciliation efforts, there are NGO-led efforts as well as local projects. After the riots, major international organizations such as Action Aid, Oxfam and the Ford Foundation funded projects that lead peace teams to focus on reconciliation processes. One of the projects set up groups of 100-200 people in every village, devoted to peace. They set up sports and cultural programs that would create safe spaces to bring Hindus and Muslims together. After two years, though the project itself won multiple national awards, funding and employment were reduced, and the project scope was cut back.

From what I could determine during my time in Ahmedabad, it has been difficult to develop a systematic process for reconciliation. Meanwhile, due to a number of factors, including the current social and economic situation, a growing number of isolated

resettlement initiatives and an increased physical and psychological distance between Hindus and Muslims, the communities are growing further apart.

Sustained Dialogue Workshop

During both visits, I conducted workshops with some of the community workers who were working towards legal justice in Gujarat.³¹ They were interested in learning more about reconciliation and the relationship between justice and reconciliation. The goals of the workshop were to: (1) Introduce dialogue as a concept, (2) Provide an overview of the uses and types of dialogue, (3) Foster thinking about how they could apply dialogue to their own work, and (4) Determine whether there is a will to move forward.

I found that the most effective method to explain dialogue is through stories of other groups in similar and different situations. Workshop participants mapped out the community and discussed their own experiences of living in Gujarat, their thoughts on dialogue and engaging with other communities, and current realities from their perspectives. Rather than going into detail about the workshop, I will focus here on the types of questions generated throughout the day from the participants. They described key challenges facing community members in the following terms:

- How do we identify and prepare leaders from within the community?
- How do we know whom to trust? Elders in the community? Police? Government?
- Once reconciliation does happen, then what surety do we have that the situation will not revert to the same?
- In villages where cases are going on and the accused also reside in the same village, on what grounds and how can we go about initiating the process of reconciliation?
- In addition to building a relationship with members of the other community, how do we maintain a relationship which is the basis for long-term reconciliation?
- When the problem affects so many people in a number of villages and cities, from where does one start? Should the efforts be centralized, and if so, how?

While the participants in the workshops were interested in dialogue as a concept, there were several points that emerged over the course of our conversations, which reinforced my perception that the situation, at least at that point, was not yet ripe for dialogue and reconciliation.

³¹ 'Sustained Dialogue' refers to a 5-stage process that focuses on transforming relationships between groups in conflict over time, and designing sustainable, implementable change processes. For more information see www.sustaineddialogue.org, www.sdcampusnetwork.org, and www.wiscomp.org/sd.htm

Structural Problems

Grave power imbalance

One concern brought up by the participants was the grave power imbalance between Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat. In order for two parties to engage in dialogue, there must be some sense of equality. Admittedly, power is a factor in every relationship. However, in situations in which one side has a disproportionate amount of power over another, dialogue is particularly difficult, for a number of reasons. First, a core principal of dialogue is that all parties must come willingly and of their own accord. While participants may be encouraged by others to attend a meeting, or they may come because they are curious, they cannot be forced or required to attend. However, in situations in which there is a drastic imbalance, the majority in power often does not have any incentive to engage in dialogue. People do so when they believe that the outcome they will obtain through dialogue will be better than if they do not engage. If an individual or a group is enjoying majority status, and the group is not in any way dependent on the group with which they are in conflict, there is usually no incentive to change the status quo.

In Gujarat, not only do Hindus enjoy a numerical majority (Hindus make up about 88% of the population, Muslims make up roughly 9%), but they also hold institutional power. The overwhelming majority of positions of power and influence in the state are held by Hindus, including government positions, the courts (both lawyers and judges), industry, and so on.³² One of the things we saw in the Muslim communities was that many of them tend to be self-employed. While self-employment in and of itself is not a bad thing (as can be seen by the growing rates and success of Self Help Groups across the country), we were told that Muslims are moving towards self-employment because they cannot find jobs elsewhere.

Dialogue can happen in cases of power imbalance, but to want to engage in the first place, the majority has to benefit from it as well. In some cases, the majority realizes they need the minority in order to function, and therefore they will engage. A good example would be in cases in which a minority in a community may contribute a large amount to the local economy, even if social relations are tense (one example often used is Korean store-keepers in African American neighborhoods in the US).³³

32 *The Justice Sachar Committee Report on the Social, Economic and Educational Status of the Muslim Community in India* (November 2006)

33 In the US, there have been a number of examples in which Korean immigrants move into low-income, primarily black neighbourhoods, and set up local shops and convenience stores. "The disparity between African-American and Korean-American business-ownership rates has been a source of tension between the two groups. Studies have shown that Korean businesses in black neighborhoods, where they are mostly located due to relatively low entry barriers, are seen as threats to African-Americans, who often have difficulties starting their own businesses. See "Korean Race Relations,"

<http://media.www.nyunews.com/media/storage/paper869/news/1999/02/16/UndefinedSection/Korean.Race.Relations-2391989.shtml>.

In the course of my visits, as well as during the workshop, the *perception* among the people with whom I met is that, broadly, Hindus in Gujarat are not interested in engaging in dialogue or reconciling with Muslims. In describing the situation, Mander says that there is little remorse shown, and in some cases, people even endorse the actions. He says that, possibly out of fear, people keep their shutters and windows closed in hopes of not getting involved.

Hindus whom I spoke to who were fighting for Muslims said their friends and families have isolated them and are angry with what they are doing.

Timing: Government under whom the violence took place is still in power

Gujarat is also a unique situation because, unlike so many other situations in which people are looking at reconciling communities after violence, the community that was in power during the violence is still in power. Not only is the government still in power, it was voted back into power with a larger majority. Modi's re-election in December 2002 was another indicator that even if voters didn't endorse the actions of the riots, they excused the government for any responsibility it might have had. Between March and December 2002, there was a sense of hope among certain communities that "the people will speak" and that the government will be voted out. Rather, the opposite happened. Districts that suffered the most violence voted in the highest numbers for the re-election of the ruling party.³⁴

At a conference I recently attended, regarding the likelihood for reconciliation in Gujarat, one participant pointed out that it is hard to reconcile with another community when there is no guarantee the violence won't occur again. In any reconciliation process, both perpetrators and victims should be involved. This is often only possible when the perpetrators are no longer in power, such as the fall of Apartheid in South Africa, or the Nazi regime in Germany, or even the end of the genocide in Rwanda. Again, with a government still in power, it is difficult to imagine individuals engaging in a process that might expose them and lead to their own loss of power in a community.

Withholding of Information

Another challenge to starting any type of reconciliation process in Gujarat has to do with the flow of information in the state. Those involved in the *Nyay Pathik* project have described the lack of information as one of their biggest challenges in obtaining legal

34 See http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/1958555.stm

justice. Often, the police and courts refuse to share data. When petitioned, the Supreme Court reiterated the right of any citizen to obtain information. However, according to those working in the field, it has still been very difficult to gather information regarding the riots or current realities. Even with the relevant information, they estimate that no formal complaint was ever recorded in 30-40% of the incidents.

Blocking justice

One of the biggest obstacles in Gujarat is the systematic obstruction of justice. While there have been a few famous cases that have caught national headlines, there have been very few cases of victims receiving compensation, or perpetrators being punished. In many cases, one formal complaint (FIR or First Incoming Report) was filed for an entire village, rather than for each individual.³⁵ This is problematic because if one part of the case is found “not guilty,” then the entire case is discarded. For example, if one FIR is filed for fifteen houses being attacked and burned, and twelve murders, and it is proven that only twelve houses were destroyed in that village, the entire case is then considered faulty, and no one receives compensation.

According to field workers in Gujarat, there is also considerable community pressure on Muslims to “compromise.” In situations in which Muslims were displaced after the riots and want to return home, the community only permits them to return if they agree to “compromise,” and not file any petition in court. According to Harsh Mander, conditions of compromise may also include rules regarding *namaz*, or call to prayer, and other aspects of Muslim life.

Reconciliation following violence requires the victims to feel a sense of justice, both for their general sense of belonging, and out of legal confirmation that such action will be punished. If victims from the riots do not see such rulings in courts, they will continue to live in fear. And on the other hand, if those who committed these crimes are not punished, the state sends a signal to them that their actions are condoned.

Physical/geographic separation

Another challenge to reconciliation is the physical separation of the communities. Besides the famous “border” in Ahmedabad that effectively separates the Muslim and Hindu neighborhoods, housing policies are even more explicit. There are signs in Ahmedabad that read “Hindus only” for apartment renting, and most housing is controlled by “housing societies” that collectively agree upon who and whom not to rent apartments to. In addition to the Muslim resettlement communities, the physical segregation of Muslims and Hindus in cities is also worrying. When relationships are

³⁵ FIRs are an important part of the justice system, because in order to file a case in the court, an FIR must first be lodged at a police station. The case is then based on the details of the FIR.

already tense, physical separation can increase and deepen the stereotypes and misperceptions of each community. As casual interactions decrease between these communities, fear and suspicion on both sides tend to increase.

Conclusion

When there are so many structural factors blocking relationships in Gujarat, it is hard to see small dialogue groups making a significant impact. While justice and reconciliation can be simultaneous goals, it will be difficult to achieve either in the current environment. Gujarat is obviously not the only state in India to have suffered communal violence. In his writings, Harsh Mander observes: "Given the enormity of the paramount ever-looming threats posed by a deliberately fostered communal divide and violence to the very survival of secular democracy in India, it is remarkable that there has been no systematic, sustained process of reconciliation and justice in communal relations in India."³⁶ He emphasizes: "we need to look at 2002 not as an event, but as part of a process." While there have been a number of individuals and groups, writers and activists, concerned about the aftermath of Gujarat, there has been no systematic approach towards healing or reconciliation. Until those in power, the government as well as the Hindu majority, don't take the lead, the situation is unlikely to improve.

³⁶ Harsh Mander, *Towards Healing: Seeking Paths for Justice and Reconciliation in Gujarat* (New Delhi, WISCOMP, 2008).