

# **Hindu Right, Communal Riots and Demolitions: Emerging Pattern of Communal Riots in India**

## **Fact-Finding Report of Himmatnagar and Khambhat Riots in Gujarat**

### **Introduction:**

On 10<sup>th</sup> April, communal riots broke out in different parts of India including West Bengal, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand and Gujarat on the occasion of Ram Navami. The occasion saw Hindu right wing organizations organize processions in these states. In the state of Gujarat, organizations including Ram Sena, Antar Rashtriya Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad organized “Shobha Yatra” processions in Khambhat situated in Anand district in Central Gujarat and Himmatnagar situated in Sabarkantha district in North Gujarat on 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2022. It was reported in the media that the Hindu and Muslim communities clashed during the processions and Muslims indulged in stone pelting in which several people including police personnel were injured. One person, 57-year-old Kanhaiya Lal Rana, lost his life in Khambhat. Shops and vehicles were set ablaze during the riots and stones were thrown. The police had to resort to lathicharge and lobbying of tear gas shells for bringing the situation under control.

It is alleged by the police that the residents in Chhapariya/ Ashrafnagar locality dominated by Muslims threw stones on the two processions that took place in Himmatnagar. In Khambhat too, it is alleged that Muslims pelted stones on the procession. In Khambhat, the local administration ordered bulldozers to raze down the properties of those accused of stone pelting during the communal riots which took place in the minority dominated area of Shakarpur. The media reports quoted the police alleging “*that the violence in Khambhat was a 'pre-planned conspiracy' hatched by a 'sleeper module' to achieve dominance of the minority community in the town* (Times of India , 2022)”. Consequently, the police arrested 11 persons for their alleged role in the violence. According to some news reports, the number of arrested in Khambhat has reached 40.

Anand Collector M Y Daxini commenting on the demolitions said, “*We have issued orders to remove all illegal encroachments. Miscreants had used the bushes and thick vegetation to attack the procession. The encroachments are being removed from government land based on government records. These are those encroachments which had come up on government land and against which*

*notices were already issued in the past.”* He said carts and stalls are also being removed to free government land.

Against this backdrop of communal riots and violence, a fact-finding team consisting of Neha Dabhade, Deputy Director at Centre for Study of Society and Secularism and Hozefa Ujjaini, social activist and Director of Buniyaad visited Khambhat and Himmatnagar from 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2022.

### **Methodology:**

The team met in Khambhat Additional Commissioner of Police, Abhishek Gupta, Sarpanch of Shakarpur, Dinesh Balun, some of the Muslim residents of Shakarpur whose stalls were demolished by the local administration and some Muslim residents who were arrested in the case. The team also met Jayveer Joshi, leader of Ram Sena and member of BJP Yuva Morcha regional committee in Khambhat. The team met one prominent journalist and head of an educational institute who actively follows the local politics. However, they requested anonymity and thus their identity will not be divulged. In Himmatnagar, the team met residents of Ashrafnagar, Rafique Qureshi, resident of Hasanagar and accused in Hasannagar violence, Chagan Vanjara along with other neighbours from Vanjaravas, members from Devipujak community living in Hasannagar and Kanak Jhala, leader of the Antar Rashtriya Hindu Parishad. The team gathered relevant material like copies of FIR, photographs and videos, posters from social media related to the incidents etc.

### **Socio- political Context of Gujarat:**

Gujarat is a state situated in Western India. The state has a volatile history of communal violence. Ironically, this is the state where Mahatma Gandhi was born who fought relentlessly throughout his life for Hindu Muslim unity and communal harmony. That notwithstanding, post-independence, Gujarat witnessed major riots starting with the riot in 1969. The 1960s was very turbulent for the Gujarat society and many factors were attributed to this turbulence. Gujarat and Ahmedabad in particular had flourishing textile mills which attracted migrants from all parts of the country, leading to increasing population in the city. The latter half of 1960s witnessed large scale unemployment as the mills started moving out of Ahmedabad. The Hindu Dalits particularly felt threatened since the Muslim community consisted of expert weavers. These economic dynamics and growing insecurity manifested in smaller clashes throughout in 1960s. However, in September- October 1969, during the celebration of *Urs* of Sufi Saint Bukhari Saheb Chilla, cows

of the Hindu sadhus injured some Muslims and consequently triggered clashes in Ahmedabad. Many people lost their lives and property worth multiple crores were damaged- most loss suffered by Muslims. The most gruesome epitome of the riot was the burning alive of a Muslim youth by a Hindu mob who insisted that the Muslim chant "*Jai Jagannath*". The Congress, then ruling party led by Chief Minister Hitendra Desai appointed the Reddy Commission to investigate the riots. The Reddy Commission report pointed towards the involvement of Hindu nationalist organizations including RSS, Hindu Mahasabha and Jan Sangh. This riot was instrumental in starting polarization and ghettoization of Muslims in Ahmedabad.

The 1981 anti- reservation agitation, a reaction to the KHAM policy adopted by the ruling Congress at the time, was re-channelised into a major communal conflagration, in a shrewd bid to check the sharp polarisation taking place among Hindus along caste lines. But apart from the upper castes, KHAM outraged Patels, the intermediate caste with real economic muscle and immense political clout. The Patidars (Patels) took upon themselves the task of dismantling KHAM. The Madhav Singh Solanki government created a "Backward Classes Commission", which in 1983 recommended that proportion of government jobs that were reserved for people from "backward" groups be increased from 10% to 28%, and that their caste identity be removed as a criterion for accessing this quota. The upper castes organized protests throughout the State. Their agitation soon turned violent and assumed the form of communal riots alongside caste-based violence. The army had to be called upon after the police had failed to check the violence and by some accounts was even partial towards the Hindus leading to massive damage to Muslim property.

In September 1990, LK Advani launched his Somnath to Ayodhya Rath Yatra leaving a nationwide trail of violence in its wake. In 1990 itself, there was major violence in Gujarat because of Advani's Rath Yatra. In September 1990, on the occasion of Ganesh Visarjan, Vadodara saw the worst- ever riots in Vadodara. Shops belonging to Muslims in the city and Raopura were broken open with the aid of gas cutters, looted and burnt. During the Ganesh Visarjan procession, the destruction took place in broad daylight, in the presence of the police. The Jumma Masjid near Mandvi was also attacked. It was soon after this riot in Vadodara that Advani's rath yatra began. Stray incidents of violence continued for months after this incident.

The turbulence and violence that shook many parts of India following the Babri masjid demolition by Kar Sevaks also manifested in Surat in the form of communal riots. The otherwise peaceful city

of Surat with history of communal harmony witnessed many deaths of Muslims during the riots, women were raped and properties owned by Muslims worth crores of rupees were looted or destroyed. The Hindu right wing groups including Bajrang Dal, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Shiv Sena and BJP were instrumental in planning and perpetrating violence. The Muslims were mercilessly targeted and the violence further polarized the communities along religious line given the distrust and rumors that were deliberately spread.

However, the worse riot that witnessed by Gujarat or perhaps by India was the communal riots in 2002. The burning of a train in Godra carrying Kar Sevaks was used as a pretext to attack Muslims in Ahmedabad and surrounding areas. While helpless Muslims were burnt alive as in the case of Best Bakery or women raped and mutilated like in the case of Kausar Bano where her unborn fetus was ripped out of her womb and perched atop a trishul. This pogrom was well planned by Hindu right wing outfits and the state was criticized for not taking action to prevent or control the riots. The police’s deliberate inaction for three days allowed the targeting of Muslims and hundreds of Muslims were unapologetically slaughtered in their own houses and roads. This riot generated unprecedented polarization and hatred against Muslims leading to ghettoization.

Post 2002 riots, after which the BJP won the state elections comfortably, the BJP has been dominant politically. The BJP has not then lost any state election since. Largely, the regime has claimed that Gujarat has witnessed no riots since 2002. However, this is only a carefully constructed narrative.

<b>Total Incidents of Communal Riots in Gujarat NCRB data (Year 2014 – 2020)</b>								
<b>Sr. No</b>	<b>Name of the State</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>Gujarat</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>23</b>

Low scale sub radar communal riots have been taking place in Gujarat as indicated above based on National Crime Record Bureau data. But given the low intensity of violence and not an eye-catching number of casualties, the national media hasn’t focused on them substantially. These sub radar riots have kept communal tensions simmering and silently but certainly created an anti-Muslim atmosphere marked by distrust and resentment towards the Muslims. One of the forms

taken by this politics of hatred is of mob lynching of Muslims. Muslims are lynched on mere suspicion or owing to their religious identity.

For instance, in October, 2021, 17-year-old Umar and 16-year-old Khizar were reportedly abused, kicked and smashed by the mob in front of a large crowd. Both were students of a local madrassa in Paldi area of Ahmedabad targeted due to their skullcaps and kurta pyjama. In 2018, in two incidents Muslims were attacked by cow vigilante. On Bakri Eid, in Ahmedabad, Fakir Mohammad aged 50 was attacked by cow vigilantes at Adalaj Zundal circle while he was ferrying live stock in his pick-up vehicle allegedly without a valid permit. He was carrying buffaloes. In the brutal attack, his leg and hand were fractured. He was admitted in the hospital after eight hours of the attack. In another incident in 2018, the cow vigilantes attacked Zaheer Qureshi (22) cleaner and Mustafa Sipahi (40) truck driver while they were transporting buffaloes. Zaheer survived the injuries of stabbing after prolonged medical treatment in the civil hospital. Mustafa, fled the spot to save his life. In yet another incident, Awesh Shaikh's family had bought a buffalo calf for sacrifice on Eid-ul- Azha. On 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2020 the calf escaped and ran into the Hindu neighbourhood. When Awesh (22) and his father went looking for the calf, they were brutally attacked by a mob near Narol- Sarkhej highway in Ahmedabad. Awesh's father hid in the bushes to save his life. His both legs and hands were fractured. Awesh too ran and fled into a Muslim dominated area where the mob gave up the chase. Awesh suffered a fractured hand and head injury. The police made this case out to be that of a minor quarrel.

One of the more insidious and institutionalized form of discrimination against Muslims and women is yet another narrative based on lack of evidence and data, that of 'Love jihad'. It is vehemently argued by Hindu right wing groups that Muslim men are "luring" Hindu women as part of a conspiracy to marry them and convert them into Islam. The state has legitimized this propaganda by passing the Gujarat Freedom of Religion Amendment Act 2021. This Act creates obstacles in inter-faith marriages and aims to criminalize Muslims who marry or conduct marriages between Hindu women and Muslim men. Its noteworthy that the before passing of the legislation, the law makers could not substantiate or support this legislation with any statistics or figures of the number of women "lured" by Muslim men for conversion in Islam. This law weaponizes the police to criminalize Muslim men as was the case in Vadodara. In this particular case, a Dalit woman who married a Muslim man, Sameer, out of her own will fully knowing his religious identity went to

the police station to register a case of domestic violence. However, the police twisted the case to make it appear as a case of 'love jihad' and arrested Sameer. Appalled by the manipulation of the police, Sameer's wife in an affidavit in the court clarified that the police have falsely accused Sameer and that she had married him out of her own will and she had not converted before or after marriage. Similarly, any instance of inter-faith marriage is used as a pretext by the Hindu right wing organizations to pressurize the parents of the Hindu woman to pursue legal charges against the Muslim men and also mobilize Hindus on a large scale in protests. In 2019, a boy from Muslim community and Hindu girl eloped from the Kadi taluka of Mehsana District. The case of this inter religious romantic relationship was projected as Love Jihad, leading to communal tension. Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Rashtirya Chintak Samiti of Kadi including Bajrang Dal call for *Jan Aakrosh* Bike Rally for justice for Hindu girl who is victim of "Love Jihad". The call was made on social media to save the Hindu girl from Love Jihad. In another instance, a Muslim boy and Hindu girl got married in Idar in 2019 and left the village. They went to Mumbai. This was projected as Love Jihad by the Hindu supremacist organizations. The Antarrashtirya Hindu Parishad, Bajrang dal and other organizations went to the family of Muslim boy and warned them. This was highlighted as 'Love Jihad' in the social media and main stream local media. The photos of the couple were circulated on social media and the girl was projected as victim of 'Love Jihad'. Later on, the girl was handed over to her family. She was caught by the police at Ahmedabad railway station when the couple returned back due to an economic dispute.

Another issue used to polarize the Gujarat society along religious lines has been the reclaiming of mosques/ dargahs as Hindu temples. In 2019, right-wing Hindu groups began to spread the fake narrative that Dholka's Tanka Masjid, which dates back to 1361, had earlier been a temple. Right-wing groups attempted to vandalise the mosque. Though timely intervention by civil society groups and police provided protection to the site, the historical monument was also targeted through a Twitter account under the hashtag '*Reclaim temples*', which claimed that the Tanka Masjid of Dholka was a Hindu temple. Meanwhile, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad claimed that the site had earlier been Bhima's kitchen and the Pandavas' school. Similarly, the Roza Rozi dargah in Mehmedabad has been claimed as a temple of Khodayar goddess. On 13<sup>th</sup> October 2021, during the Navratri festival on the day of Maha Ashtami, a group of Hindus entered the Roza Rozi Dargah, claiming that it had originally been a Hindu temple. The group placed a picture of a Hindu deity inside the dargah and worshipped it as loud music played in the background. They also

sprinkled *sindoor* inside the shrine and on the dargah's outer structure, lit a diya and performed Hindu prayers. The Hindu right wing groups have been able to whip up hysteria and emotions against the Muslims with his issue.

The region of Sabarkanta and Himmatnagar has witnessed communal conflicts in the past. Himmatnagar in Sabarkantha district has witnessed communal tensions in the past including in 2002. According to the Census data of 2011, Himmatnagar had total population of 81,137 and Taluka had total population of 3,25,699. The BJP has been successful electorally from Himmatnagar Assembly Constituency. In 2012, Rajendra Singh Chavda won from this constituency from the Congress Party (It is worth noting that Ranjitsinh Chavda- father of Rajendrasinh Chavda, was BJP MLA from 1995 until 2007 when the BJP gave the candidature to Praful Patel. Owing to this, Rajendrasinh Chavda joined the Congress Party in 2012). Later, in 2014, Rajendrasinh Chavda crossed over to the BJP and won with 2562 votes. In 2017, he won with a margin of 1712 votes. In both the elections, BJP won by slim margins. Himmatnagar falls under the Sakarkantha Constituency and since 2004 BJP has been mostly electorally successful in the region. Currently, Deepsingh Shankarsinh Rathod is the MP from the constituency.

Khambhat too has emerged as a communal hotbed in the recent times. As per the Population Census 2011, there are total 19,765 families residing in the Khambhat city. The total population of Khambhat is 99,164.

## Religion-wise Population - Khambhat

As per the Census 2011, the total Hindu population in Khambhat is 72,270 which is 72.88% of the total population. Also the total Muslim population in Khambhat is 23,670 which is 23.87% of the total population. Below is religion-wise population of Khambhat as per Census 2011.

Religion	Total		Male	Female
Hindu	72,270	(72.88%)	37,551	34,719
Muslim	23,670	(23.87%)	11,988	11,682
Christian	471	(0.47%)	227	244
Sikh	69	(0.07%)	40	29
Buddhist	38	(0.04%)	22	16
Jain	2,477	(2.5%)	1,257	1,220
Other Religion	18	(0.02%)	12	6
No Religion Specified	151	(0.15%)	81	70

Khambhat city is situated in Anand district of Gujarat state. Historically it was an important trading centre but its harbour gradually silted up. In recent times, Khambhat has emerged as a hotbed of communal tensions. The population consists of Chunara, Macchi, Raval amongst Hindus and Muslims. Interestingly, there is a strong economic interdependence in Khambhat between the Hindus and Muslims. Kite making and agate stone cutting/polishing and exports are major industries and sources of livelihood in Khambhat apart from fishing. Notwithstanding this interdependence, it has become one of the hotbeds of communal conflicts in Gujarat. Major communal riots took place in Khambhat in 2002, 2016, 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2022.

In 2016, a minor accident where a Muslim tempo driver collided with a bike ridden by a person from the Raval community in Peeth Bazar was given a communal turn. Stone pelting and torching of places of worships and shops, mostly belonging to the Muslims followed. In 2019, riots took place in teen Darwaza in Khambhat over a social media post which triggered arguments about the compensation to be given to the martyrs in the Pulawama terror attack. In 2020, riots erupted on 23<sup>rd</sup> February in which at least 60 houses were torched. Akbarpur locality was the epicenter of this

riot. The targeted violence against Muslims continued for three days. The riot in February was preceded by tensions arising from the unidentified persons looting around 25 to 30 households of Hindus in the Hindu dominated privileged locality of Bhavsarwad. The Muslims suffered heavy losses in terms of the looting and burning down of their property on a large scale. The riot followed by a rally organized by the Hindu Jagran Manch to protest the looting in Bhavsarwad and religious slogans by former MLA Sanjay Patel and Pinakin Brahmhatta, both prominent BJP leaders from the region. Khambhat has been a communal cauldron in the past few years.

Khambhat has been the stronghold of BJP since 1990. Mayur Raval was elected MLA in 2017 and before that Sanjay Patel was the MLA- both from BJP. According to the interactions of the fact-finding team, Mayur Raval is perceived as more neutral than Sanjay Patel. There is political infighting and this is one of the causes of communal conflicts. There is an attempt to portray Mayur Raval in a poor light and to portray him as too weak to be able to control riots.

### **Findings:**

1. In Himmatnagar, the fact-finding team interacted with Muslim residents of Ashrafnagar locality. They told the team that Ram Navami is celebrated every year for the past for nearly 28 years. However, procession was always scheduled at 4pm in the previous years. The organizers were always the local Hindu residents. But this time, there were two processions. The first one was organized by the Antar Rashtriya Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal and the second one was organized by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. None of the processions saw participation of local Hindus in large numbers unlike previous years. The first one started at around 1pm from the Ram temple near Ashrafnagar. The procession had around 1200 to 1500 participants. Since it was approaching namaz time, some Muslim youth were standing near the mosque. The tractors had DJ sets on them with blaring music. When the procession came near the mosque, the participants in the procession started shouting slogans- "*Hindustan mein rehana hoga toh jai shri ram Kehana hoga*". Thus, scuffle broke out between some of the Muslim youth and participants of the rally.

According to some of the witnesses who requested to be anonymous, the tractors in the procession were full of stones and arms. Stone pelting ensued. The participants of the procession were armed with swords according to Kanak Jhala himself who is the leader of

the Antar Rashtriya Hindu Parishad. The participants of the procession burnt 18 stalls and two houses belonging to Muslims. Police were present and accompanying the procession. They didn't do anything to stop the violence. In fact the police didn't let the fire brigade come to douse the fire where Muslim properties were burnt.



*Figure 1. Muslim boy injured in violence in Ashrafnagar*

One Muslim boy was injured in this violence outside his house in Ashrafnagar when a stone hit his head leading to severe injury to his head which couldn't be treated in a local hospital. He was taken to the Ahmedabad Civil hospital and treated by a neurosurgeon. He was unconscious for a couple of weeks. He hadn't participated in violence but had stepped

out of his house to check why there was commotion.

2. The adverse impact of this violence and tensions was witnessed in another location of Hasan nagar in Himmatnagar where clashes took place between Muslims and Vanjara community of Vanjaravas (adjacent localities). In Hasannagar, the government has allotted houses to low-income groups under the Awaas Yojana or housing scheme in 2011. While earlier the Vanjaras were staying together in one area by themselves, under the Awaas housing they are compelled to live together since the buildings have mixed owners from all communities- Muslims, Vanjaras, Devipujaks etc. Often there are tensions in the locality on small issues- not communal in nature. The Vanjaras have been demanding from the Corporation that separate area to be allocated to them and segregate them from the Muslim households.

According to Rafique Qureshi, a resident of Hasannagar and Muslim leader, on 10<sup>th</sup> April, a couple of Vanjara residents of Hasannagar including Chagan Vanjara who had attended the Ram Navami procession in Ashrafnagar came back to Hasannagar and started abusing and beating up Muslims in the locality. Qureshi explained that he called the police to stop the violence. But the police instead of stopping the Vanjara residents, lobbied tear gas on

the Muslims. Some of the Muslims were arrested by the Police and taken away. They were dropped back in the evening.

According to Vanjara residents of Vanjaravas, Muslims attacked their houses on 11<sup>th</sup> April. Two Vanjara houses were looted. Chagan Rupa bhai Banjara said he immediately called the police and police responded promptly. They came and brought the situation under control. However, the Vanjara community alleged that the Muslims threw petrol bombs on the Vanjara households at around 10pm and there was a standoff. One dargah too was burnt. The police was called again. According to the Qureshi, the police lobbied tear gas on the innocent Muslim residents and their houses.



Figure 2. Police brutally beaten up Muslim women

The police brutally beat up Muslim women on their thighs and chest.

The police also beat up one Mr Zakirbhai Shabir Memon, 50 years old Muslim cancer patient who is a Bangi (one who gives the call for Azaan) in the mosque.

They dragged him out of his house while the other residents especially women protested. Mr. Bangi's son, 23 years old son, Gulam Sarvar who has 50 percent vision was also beaten up and arrested. The police also arrested other innocent Muslim residents including a doctor. Dr. Altaf Gulabnabi Menon is a 36 years old gynecologist and walking on Aman Park Hasan nagar road at night unaware of the riots. He reached his house and the police barged into his house and beat him up and arrested him. They were together detained for four days by the police and told in the hospital to not tell the judge about their injuries from police beating. They also shared with the fact-finding team that they were publically shamed by the police in the court premises where they were brought tied with ropes and ridiculed while the Hindu accused were discreetly taken to the judge.

3. In Khambhat similarly, the procession was organized by the Ram Sena and started at 3.30pm from the Ram temple at Shakarpur village. When the procession came near the mosque which is close to the Ram temple, the participants of the processions started raising slogans like “Jai Shri Ram”, “Jai ranchod miya Chor”, “Topi valo ko bulvayenge, Dadi walo ko bulvayenge Jai shri ram jai shri ram”. Some Muslim youth

was standing to witness the procession and some were standing outside their stalls. Stone pelting followed some exchange of words. One Kanhaiya Rana, 57 year old man died during this procession. He was in an inebriated state and he was hit by a stone on his head.

The properties belonging to Muslims were attacked by the participants of the procession. The Muslim residents of Shakarpur believe that this riot was pre-planned. According to Babu bhai Abdul Kadar Malik from Shahpur locality of Shakarpur, the Sarpanch and other Hindu outfits had organized rickshaws with loudspeakers days before the procession to mobilize the Hindus in the village for the Ram Navami procession. During the procession, the participants started entering the narrow by-lanes of the locality dominated by Muslim households. The participants were carrying '*dangs*'- thick wooden rods with saffron flags tied to them. Malik explained that when the procession reached near the mosque, two Muslim youth were pulled into the mob and beaten. Muslims as retaliation pelted stones. Babu Bhai Malik was arbitrarily arrested by the police from this area as is the case with many others. He spent 2 months in prison.

The team was told by witnesses that when the procession came near the mosque there was some arguments between the participants of the procession and Razzak, the main accused. Razzak and a couple of them went with the police. This created fear and tensions and stones were pelted first by the Muslims. Dinesh Balun, Sarpanch of Shakarpur in his FIR has named 61 Muslims along with their full names as responsible for the violence. It is incredible that any human being can identify or remembers 61 names in a mob along with their full names! This hints at the deliberate attempt to implicate Muslims.

#### Demolitions in Khambhat:

The team spoke to the owners of one of the '*galas*' or stalls that were demolished by the Municipal Corporation after the riots. They didn't wish to be identified and thus their names are not revealed. They said that their '*gala*' sold grocery and pan masala. Three other '*galas*' along with theirs were demolished by Municipal Corporation. They said this riot was planned and this is the first time Ram Navami procession was organized in Shakarpur on this scale. Rath Yatra is more common in the region. They linked the violence to the

aggressive attitude of the Sarpanch- Dinesh Balun who is partial towards Hindus. They pointed out that Jitubhai who was the Sarpanch before Dinesh was from the Dalit community and worked impartially and in fact had very good relations with Muslims in Shakarpur. They both were arrested by the police and slapped with charges of rioting and murder. They were given bail after 2 months and asked to live outside Khambhat for a month. They lived in Petlad for a month in a rented house which they rented for INR 2500.

4. *Losses suffered in Communal Riots:*

The following table depicts the losses suffered in Himmatnagar.

Religious community	Residence	Commercial Property	Religious Places	Vehicles	Death
Muslims	2	3 vehicle Showrooms, 1 cold drink shop, 1 mobile shop, 1 non veg eatery stall, 1 peanuts shop, 6 tea stalls, 4 autorickshaw/ car garages, 1 welding gas cabin, 1 iron workshop, 1 scrap shop,	4 dargahs 1 Mosque	2 loading Rickshaws, 3 cars, 2 auto rickshaws, 1 demo vehicle	0

		2 cycle repairing cabin, 1 eggs shop, 1 eatery stall			
Hindus	1	1 shop, 1 stall	-	1 jeep, 5 bikes	0

In Himmatnagar, apart from the losses mentioned above, 2 police vehicles were damaged and four police personnel got injured.

In Khambhat, four stalls belonging to Muslims were demolished in Shakapur. In Tower chowk, 4 shoe shops belonging to Muslims were damaged. One shop of Hindu was damaged by mistaken since it was assumed that it belonged to a Muslim.

5. *Political one-upmanship in Khambhat:*

Khambhat has emerged as a hotbed of communal conflicts. The smallest triggers including children from different communities quarrelling can lead to communal riots. The fact-finding team tried to understand why these conflicts took place in the past few years including the riots in April 2022. The team found that one of the precipitating factors in Khambhat contributing to communal riots is the factionalism within the ruling party and how it is manifesting itself even at the level of local self-governance bodies. According to a prominent journalist in Khambhat who didn't wish to be named, said that this riot and brewing communal tensions in Khambhat can be attributed to the political dynamics in the region. Mayur Raval who is currently the MLA from Khambhat is perceived as cordial towards Muslims and as more neutral than Sanjay Patel, his predecessor. Raval doesn't openly take sides or instigates hatred or violence against Muslims. Sanjay Patel is well known for his more hardliner stand against the Muslims. There is an apparent political rivalry between Sanjay Patel and Mayur Raval. Mayur Raval was offered the BJP candidature for MLA in 2017 instead of Sanjay Patel.

It appears that Sanjay Patel is influential and through his network of political patronage, emboldened Hindu right-wing organizations and Dinesh Balun to act against Muslims and foment violence. Dinesh Balun openly supported Sanjay Patel and believed that the region requires a “strong” leader like him to control communal violence. These riots are engineered and instigated by Hindu right organizations under political patronage with the aim to assert Hindu domination and also construct a narrative that a “weak” MLA being “soft” on Muslims is ineffective in controlling riots and Muslim fundamentalism in Khambhat. There is a deliberate attempt through these riots and engineering other communal conflicts to send this message to the Hindu electorate.

This politics and factionalism has penetrated into the grassroots politics and riots are used to settle political scores. The same above-mentioned journalist also explained how Razzak, the main accused in the riots has been close to Jitubhai, the previous Sarpanch and didn't support Dinesh Balun, the current Sarpanch. Thus Dinesh Balun, in the FIR filed by him has named Razzak as the ‘mastermind’ of the riots. According to the journalist, the Muslims named in the FIR are innocent and not involved in the riots. Some of the Muslim names are routinely implicated in false charges.

*6. Impact of inter-community relations:*

In Shakarpur in Khambhat, residents of Shahpur have said that so far Muslims and Hindus lived in harmony. They went to marriages and funerals together. In fact, a couple of months before this riot, both communities had participated in the Urs procession and dined together. The society here has been closely knit. Initially though some Hindus believed that Muslims are responsible for the riots and opposed the Ram Navami festival and Muslims attacked the procession, now most of them understand that this is all a result of politics of hatred. But now there is some degree of distrust between both the communities. Though the members of both the communities acknowledge and greet each other, there are some ill feelings. The ill feelings are also owing to large number of arrests made from Shakarpur village which compelled the Muslim community to live in the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty. Also one diary refused to sell any products to the Muslims for a month. This also created some bitterness.

There is very little interaction between the Hindu and Muslim communities in Shakarpur. When the four stalls were operational on the road, the Hindus too came to buy their products and this was an opportunity for interaction. But now after these stalls were demolished, the owners are compelled to operate from their houses where small number of people comes to buy- none of them Hindus. Thus, spaces of interaction have gone. Interaction is possible now only in market places in the city. However, due to the strong and organic inter-dependence between Hindus and Muslims in the kite making and agate stone industry, interaction between them is inevitable.

In Himmatnagar, Muslim residents of Ashrafnagar said that they have been living amicably with their Hindu neighbours. The Hindu neighbours are not supporting or justifying the violence against Muslims. The Hindus have not held the Muslims responsible and realize that the riots were a result of politics. The two communities are doing business again and interacting every day in market places.

In Hasan nagar, the relationship between the Muslims and Vanjaras from Vanjaravas has hit a new low. The Vanjaras vehemently have expressed their desire to not live in the vicinity with the Muslims. The stereotypes against the Muslims are widely prevalent and very vehemently expressed by the residents of the Vanjaravas. Chagan Vanjara and his neighbours, Dushyant and Badu believe that Muslims are supported by their wives to marry multiple women. They believe that Muslims in India are getting funds from Islamic countries and thus they nurture separatist tendencies. They build schools and Madrassas to teach the children fundamentalism and so the Muslim children don't socially interact with other children.

### **Role of the state:**

#### *i. Permission to processions:*

Ram Navami processions and Shobha Yatra processions have taken place in different parts of the country in the recent past with the tragic result of violence and targeting of Muslims. The police could have anticipated this violence and not given permission to processions organized by Hindu right wing organizations. The posters and invitations of the Antar Rashtriya Hindu Parishad and Ram Sena indicated that they are mobilizing on a large scale. The posters and videos also mentioned creating Hindu Rashtra by having such processions demonstrating pride. Kanak Jhala

told the fact-finding team member that though the police hadn't given permission for carrying arms in the procession, they verbally told him that he can carry arms at his own responsibility. This indicates that the police were aware that the participants of the procession were armed and planning to wreck violence. Yet the police did nothing in Himmatnagar. In fact, in Himmatnagar after the first procession turned violent, the police still allowed the second procession to take place! This indicates that the police were not serious about preventing violence which could be so easily anticipated. The processions were not organized by Ram temples or residents from that locality.

*ii. Failure to stop violence and act in a partial manner during riots:*

The narratives from Ashrafnagar and Hasannagar in Himmatnagar and Shakarpur in Khambhat are unanimous in pointing out the partial role played by the police during the riots. The police in Khambhat and Ashrafnagar in Himmatnagar were present during the procession but did little to protect the Muslims. The police in fact were accompanying the procession in the Ashrafnagar and seem standing with the participants and hurling stones into Muslim locality. In Ashrafnagar Muslim owned shops, stalls, vehicles and houses were torched and looted by the mob from the procession but the police didn't act against the mob to protect these properties. The Muslims urged the police to help but the police merely stood as spectators. The police didn't let the fire brigade come to douse the fire in the Muslim owned properties. In Hasannagar, the police arbitrarily in one sided action beat up Muslim residents including women and senior citizens. Chagan Vanjara along with other Vanjara residents proudly pronounced that police have also been supportive towards them and responded promptly to keep the Muslims in check. In Khambhat too, the police couldn't protect the Muslims from a massive procession.

*iii. Refusing to file FIRs of Muslims:*

In Himmatnagar, the division A and B of Ashrafnagar police station have filed FIRs where only the Muslim have been named for rioting. In fact it says that Muslims had gathered with common intent to attack the procession and riot. However, though stone pelting took place from both the sides, the procession was armed and the properties of Muslims alone were torched, the FIRs mentioned fewer Hindu names than Muslim names. The police refused to file the FIRs of the Muslims who suffered damages. They were told to give applications and that all the complaints

will be clubbed under one FIR. Subsequently, with the help of Muslim organizations, the Muslim complainants have filed writ petitions in the High Court to allow them to file separate FIRs.

In Khambhat too, the police filed the FIR of Dinesh Balun, the Sarpanch of Shakarpur blaming the Muslims of rioting. The Muslims were also slapped with section 307 due to the death of Kanhaiya Lal Rana. The other FIR was filed by Razzak, one of the accused and arrested. Initially, the police refused to file FIR of the Muslims. The FIR of Razzak merely mentions a mob of 1000 unidentified persons and identified four accused, making it vague.

*iv. No impartial probe:*

The police after the riots have arbitrarily arrested Muslims who were either bystanders or happened to go near the procession to protect their properties. Some were standing even to welcome the procession. In Shakarpur in Khambhat, the police arbitrarily arrested 12 Muslims from Shahpur and this led to such an extent of fear that Muslim men fled their houses expecting arrests and only women were left alone to fend for the family for couples of months. In Hasannagar the police rounded up 16 Muslims. In Ashrafnagar, in total more than 50 Muslims were arrested.

*v. No evaluation of Muslim property:*

The residents of Ashrafnagar told the team that the police conducted ‘panchnama’ of the properties that were torched and looted but nobody came for evaluation of the damage and property. One showroom of ‘Royal Building Materials’ owned by a Muslim was burnt and his damage is worth 2 crores. However, the evaluation was pegged at only 22 lakhs. No owner has got compensation.



*Figure 3 Place after the demolition of Muslim owned stall by the Municipal Corporation filled with garbage and mud in Shakarpur in Khambhat*

*vi. Demolition of Stalls:*

The Municipal Corporation has used the pretext of riots and stone pelting to demolish the Muslim owned stalls. There was no notice served to the owners of the four stalls in Shakarpur or due process followed. Similarly, in Khambhat city, the establishments on the government land existed for many years. But selectively only the ones owned by Muslims were demolished without any due process. Not only did the Corporation demolish

these stalls but filled the land with garbage and fill so that the stalls can't be erected again. The place where the stalls were torched by the mob in Ashrafnagar in Himmatnagar is also filled up with garbage and landfill by the Corporation. The state is targeting the Muslims and their livelihoods in the form of collective punishment as is happening elsewhere in the country.

### **Role of the Hindu right wing organizations:**

There is a strong presence of Hindu right-wing organizations in Khambhat and Himmatnagar. In the last few years, the Ram Sena is visible in Khambhat and Antar Rashtriya Vishwa Hindu Parishad, formed by Pravin Togadiya after breaking away from Vishwa Hindu Parishad has been active in Himmatnagar. The leaders of the two organizations, Jayveer Joshi from Ram Sena and Kanak Jhala from Antar Rashtriya Hindu Parishad had applied and got permission for the processions in Khambhat and Himmatnagar respectively. The team interacted with both to understand their activities and strategies in the region to mobilize the Hindus and also their role in the communal riots.

### **Ram Sena in Khambhat:**

The social media content of Ram Sena and its leader Jayveer Joshi was very insightful in understanding the ideology and outreach strategies of the organization. Some of the videos on social media openly incite hatred. One video claim that making the enemy's head bleed is synonymous with being Hindu. The sword is referred to as a queen and violence is glorified. The enemy is depicted with the images of Muslim men wearing traditional clothes and women wearing hijab. The imagery of Bharat Mata and Lord Ram with weapons is prominent. It is interesting that there is also an image of the Taj Mahal in the video which has saffron flags on its minarets, a Shiv idol on the front and it is named *Tejo-Mahalay*. In another poster on social media, the Hindus are exhorted to get



Figure 4. a Picture from the instagram video of Ram Sena



Figure 5. Poster by Hindutvawadi organization Ram Sena

organized and act against the Muslims. The video cautions that the ‘Mulle’ (Muslims) that came to India from Bangladesh in 1971 are compelling Hindus to leave West Bengal. If Hindus don’t show courage and stand up to this injustice, the Muslims will compel all the Hindus to leave India. This points towards that how hysteria and insecurity is created amongst the Hindus by depicting Muslims as ‘foreigners, and trying to take over India.

Ram Sena is an organization that is very active in Khambhat for the past few years. The fact-finding team member interviewed Jayveer Joshi, the leader of Ram Sena. Jayveer Joshi’s house where the interview took place offered an interesting imagery. There were saffron flags atop the terrace and pasted everywhere in the veranda. The living room had huge life size pictures of Ram, Sita and Hanuman. One wall was adorned by the picture of Bharat Mata holding a saffron flag. Another wall carried the pictures of K.B Hegdewar, founder of RSS and other deities. A big DJ sound set too was kept in one of the corners. While Jayveer Joshi himself was very calm, his mother was agitated with the presence fact finding team’s member and demanded to see her identification.

According to Jayveer Joshi, the cause of communal tensions and riots in Khambhat can be attributed to the change in the political scenario in the country. He said, *“The Muslims can’t digest that this government has abolished article 370, the Ram Mandir is built and Kashmir Files is popular. That’s why to show their anger they are indulging in this violence”*. When asked what happened in the Ram Navami Yatra on 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2022, he replied that they had organized the procession from the Ram Mandir as per tradition. However, when the procession reached the dargah (just opposite the temple), stones was pelted by the Muslims in Shakarpur.

He claims that the Muslims pose a threat to the Hindus due to their increase in number in Khambhat and also rise of fundamentalism in the community. “Foreign hand” is responsible for this rise in fundamentalism according to him. He alleged that Muslim organizations are getting finances from foreign countries to get organized here and unleash violence. In the specific context of Khambhat he said, *“You must have heard of Maulana Saad, who was singlehandedly responsible for spreading Covid in India by organizing the Tablighi meeting in Delhi. He is supporting Muslim organizations in Khambhat. Similarly, M.G Gujarati who runs an organization in Anand is giving more than just financial support to anti-social elements in the Muslim community in Khambhat. Membad Yusuf Kanhya from Jambusar is playing the same role.”*

In fact he believes that the Muslim community is being strengthened and that's a cause of concern. And Hindus have to organize themselves under one big umbrella of 'Hindu identity'. He was asked how this monolith identity can be forged given the caste divisions and identities. To this Joshi retorted that caste system doesn't exist in India. According to him, Ambedkar also wanted a Hindu Rashtra. He cautioned, *"When reaching out to Hindus, we should consciously not speak about caste differences or divisions especially the issues related to reservations."*

Then how does Ram Sena reach out to the Hindu youth? Joshi replies, *"We organize shakhas every day at everywhere. These have akhadas where training in martial arts is provided and physical training is focused on. We have daily one hour recitation of Hanuman Chalisa to imbibe the spirit of Hinduism. Sundarkand recitation is also an important activity to carry out with youth. These inspire them. The Tiranga yatras on 15<sup>th</sup> August and 26<sup>th</sup> January as well as the Mashal yatras after which we have speakers address the procession have also been popular."* The social media content points to the array of activities taken up by Ram Sena. The activities indicate celebrations of icons like Birsa Munda, Subhash Chandra Bose, Mahaveer, Laal Bahadur Shastri, Deendayal Upadhyaya, Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Shivaji, Jija Mata and Ravidas. The organization opposes celebration of Christmas and Bakri Eid. Ram Sena also has vans for cows.

When asked how the Ram Sena mobilizes the youth for their programmes, Joshi said, *"we go door to door to speak to the families and invite them. We then continuously organize 10 camps with different activities and meetings to mobilize the youth. We discuss contemporary issues in the meetings. This helps the people understand that attending these meetings are important. We have youth across the caste identities attending all the programmes and come out on the streets fearlessly"*.

Dinesh Balu Sarpanch of Shakarpur:

Dinesh Balun was one of the strong advocates of demolition of the Muslim stalls in Shakarpur. He was very reluctant to interact with the fact-finding team. However, he met the team at his house. When asked why he wanted the stalls to be demolished, he explained that the stalls caused a traffic jam and thus everyone in the village demanded that they should be demolished. He maintained that the village has been by and large peaceful. He said, *"this was the first such incident of violence. The Muslims pelted stones on the procession. But we have always allowed them to observe their*

*festivals. The taziya processions also are always peaceful. In fact in 2021 when there were prohibitory orders in place to take out the taziya procession, the Muslims still forcefully organized it. The police was tensed that the Hindus in retaliation will want to organize a similar procession and asked us. But we told the police that we don't want to organize any retaliatory procession."*

When asked if these riots have had an adverse impact on the social relations between the Hindus and Muslims in the village, he insisted that the situation is peaceful and everyone in the village lives in harmony. He said people have gone back to their livelihoods and there is economic interdependence amongst the people in the village. He explained, *"there are five percent mischief makers in the village which are anti-social elements. Rest of the Muslims has lived in peace. In fact they have been ashamed and contrite and unable to meet me in the eye. They are sorry and say so."*

Asked what can avoid future conflicts like this one, he replied, *"One requires a strong leader. Mayur Raval is not active on the ground to understand the issues. He doesn't attend the planning meetings before the processions. Sanjay Patel was more active and he could resolve issues between the communities. We need leaders like him."*

Kanak Jhala:

Kanak Jhala is a leader of the Antar Rashtriya Hindu Parishad in Himmatnagar. He had organized and obtained the permission for the first procession that took place in Ashrafnagar locality in Himmatnagar. He met the member of the fact-finding team in his electrical shop selling CCTV

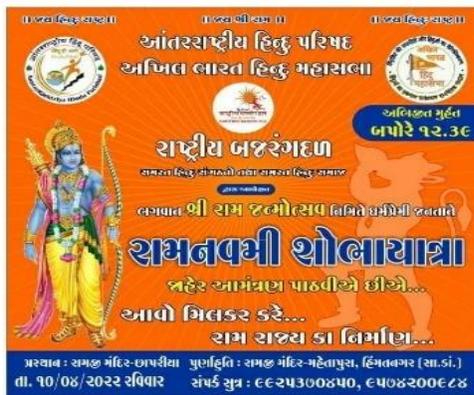


Figure 6. Poster by Antar rashtriya Hindu Parishad, Akhil Bhartiya Hindu Mahaasabha and Rashtriya Bajrang Dal

cameras and monitors. Kanak Jhala was in prison for a month and a half for accusations of violence. *"The procession of the Ram Navami Yatra was organized and around 5000 youth had gathered for the yatra starting from the Ram temple. It was around 1pm. Some of us were on tractors. I saw some Muslim youth going towards the Mosque. I got suspicious why the Muslim youth were going into the mosque since namaz time is 2.30pm. I knew them that they were upto no good. Half the procession had already passed when the stone pelting started from the*

*Muslims. My guards protected me but others suffered injuries. The Muslims had pre-planned this attack. They are not tolerant towards our manifestations of religion. We let their processions of Moharram and Taziya go peacefully. Then why should they not allow us the Ram Navami procession?"*, he said presenting his chronology of events on 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2022.

When probed, what has changed in Himmatnagar over the years for this incident to take place, Jhala replied," *I would blame the state for this violence. The Muslims are small in number. They don't have the strength to unleash such violence. The administration is corrupt where they are supporting the Muslims. We are in power now. There is no need to pander to the Muslims even for votes. Their votes are inconsequential. Still we are not given a free hand to deal with them. Hindu rashtra wont materialize with words alone. There has to be action to back it up. The Muslim maulavis gave the Police inspector 7 lakhs so that they don't hit the Muslim accused. File cases but don't hit. Leaders like me who work fearlessly are arrested and hounded by the police when I'm working for the cause of Hindus"*.

Jhala was asked that though the first procession had already caused damaged and unleashed violence, then why the second procession was organized. Here he hinted at the competitive nature of relationship amongst the different Hindu right wing organizations. He said that Hindus in the first procession had already suffered but they had to pay a heavy price again in the second procession due to the ego of the organizers of the second procession. There was no need of the second procession. He went on to say that VHP and Bajrang Dal are active in Himmatnagar while RSS is not very active. Not appearing happy with the RSS, Jhala questioned how Mohan Bhagwat claims that Muslims and Hindus have the same DNA. RSS he believes is taking a softer stance on Muslims. He laments that though they are compromising with the aim of Hindu Rashtra they still continue to get massive financial support from Hindus across the country.

Jhala gave another example of how he perceives that the State is pandering to the Muslims. He said that the Waqf Board in Gujarat is very strong. While the priests in Hindu temples get no salary from the state and temples are not built liberally, the Maulavis get INR 19000 per month from the taxpayers' money. He alleged that with this money the Waqf is gaining power. The Waqf board is claiming large expanse of lands for their use and the administration gives in to such demands of land. He alleged that the administration demolishes Hindu temples for civil works but leave the dargahs untouched. He cited the case of a dargah near the temple which was illegal and in the way

of the railway line. While a temple which was in the way of the railway was razed down, the dargah he claimed is being renovated. He pointed out that he had also in his facebook post in 2017 cautioned the state that Muslims are encroaching on government land and claiming them. However, he laments no action was taken. Instead, he is harassed for his vigil.

It is important to understand here that the Wafq board in a way symbolizes the medium to protect the heritage of the Muslims in terms of monuments and lands for burial etc. The waqf is still an institution which represents some cultural autonomy for the Muslims. Kanak Jhala and other Hindu right-wing organizations are thus targeting the waqf which symbolically embodies the freedom of religion.

The wafq board according to Jhala doesn't stop at appropriating land. It also contributes to the "conspiracy of love jihad". Jhala alleges that the Maulavis "*catch the Phatichar Muslim boys who are good looking and give them a motorcycle, new clothes and INR 500 every day to lure Hindu girls.*" He points out that love jihad is a menace in Gujarat and Himmatnagar. Explaining the extent of this "problem", he said, "*in the last three years I have brought back 22 Hindu girls from the houses of the Muslims. That's the power I yield and terror I have amongst the Muslims. They don't dare to question me. Mein bina rok thok se kaam karta hoon. Maine mere team ke ladko ko bhi kaha hai ki unse dharna nahi hai. Unko uda do. Baki mein Betha hua hoon yaha aapka aur apke ghar ka dekhne keliye*". He explained that they reach out to the parents of the Hindu girls and help them file cases against the Muslim boys. He also admitted that in some cases, the parents are not willing to file cases or pursue the matter legally but he and his outfit convinces them to file the cases. He believes that only might and violence can subdue the Muslims. He in fact said that the politicians should also have such teams like his outfit which will truly work for Hindu Rashtra without fear of law and soft side for the Muslims.

So how does Antar Rashtriya Hindu Parishad reach out to people? Jhala quipped that there is a need to firstly tell all Hindus that they are Hindus irrespectively of their caste identities. He said, "*We are Rajputs. My grandfather had told me that we are the Raja (king) and the others are the Praja (subjects). So we have to help everyone and give a patient hearing to everyone. That's why I go to the houses of the Dalits and eat with them. The RSS doesn't do that. That's why I have support from all the castes*". When asked about their outreach he pointed out that mobilizing youth from Hindu middle class and upper classes. He explained that they have their careers and their

families don't want them to be involved in any dangerous activities which may have legal implications. They might come for some rare programmes but they will not associate themselves with the organization. That's why the outreach programmes aim at going to the grassroots and in the villages. The youth from the villages participate in large numbers in the processions.

He explained that the most important thing to do is to cultivate trust in the people. That's why during Covid lockdown, he and his organization was giving food to over 2000 people irrespective of their castes every day. His volunteers were relentlessly working to provide masks and sanitizers. They also organize blood donation camps everywhere. In medical emergencies or times of marriages, the organization provides monetary help if needed. That's why the people feel that they should participate in the programs organized by the organization. Before any procession, the grassroot level workers mobilize going door to door in all villages of the Tehsil. Jhala and his team volunteers go in numerous jeeps to these villages and organize meetings to convince the people and youth to join the processions. Approximately 10 continuously weeks are dedicated for mobilization.

Apart from door-to-door intense campaigning, the organization organizes camps for arms training and self-defense. Every Saturday there is recitation of the Hanuman Chalisa. They also distribute copies of the Bhagvad Gita. Women are also trained in arms training. There are meetings to discuss contemporary issues. The organization discussed with the people the importance of celebrating Ram Navami. They were enthusiastic, more so because the due to Covid for the last two years there were no processions, according to Jhala. He believed people took pride in having such a big procession.

### **Main Conclusions of the team:**

1. *Ram Navami and the Shobha Yatra were used as tools to instigate the Muslim community and assertion of Hindu domination*

The Hindu right wing organizations are emboldened with the patronage of those enjoying political power. The dominant ideology and prevailing atmosphere of majoritarianism is also acting as a cue to unleash violence. The state is giving permission to such processions knowing well that these processions have the potential to turn violent and in fact deliberately the participants in these processions chant derogatory slogans to instigate the

Hindus against the Muslims and to humiliate and provoke the Muslims. The Hindu right wing organizations deliberately plan these processions to pass the Muslim dominated areas and humiliate them. These processions are armed and have massive mobilization of Hindu youth. When stone pelting takes place, the police blame it on the Muslims and hold them responsible for the riots. The stone pelting during the riots are then used as a pretext to demolish the Muslim properties without adherence to due process or law. This seems to be the trend in different parts of the country. This very trend also manifested itself in the riots in Khambhat and Himmatnagar.

2. *Rivalry amongst right wing organizations:*

The rivalry between the Antar Rashtriya Hindu Parishad and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad in Himmatnagar was instrumental in having the second procession even after the first procession had caused violence. The second procession was forcefully implemented. There is a very visible sense of competition between Hindu right wing groups for domination, visibility and reach out. Though at some point of time, they emerged with the support of RSS in some way, they may not necessarily share the same objectives or strategies for outreach with RSS. The organizations including Antar Rashtriya Hindu Parishad, Ram Sena and the VHP have been competing for space and domination in Himmatnagar and Khambhat. Their outlook towards Muslims is more radical and hardliner than the RSS. It is important to understand the nuances in their ideology and objectives. It is also interesting to analyze if the RSS has complete control over these outfits. They are allowed to some extent to act independently and much beyond the objectives of RSS.

These outfits have been able to reach out and politically mobilize a cross section of society. Their strategies include popularizing the symbols of Ram and Hanuman and invoking pride through these symbols and promoting aggressive nationalism. The Ram Sena also uses symbols and icons from the Adivasi or Dalit communities to reach out to these groups. Ram Sena doesn't question caste hierarchy or promote rights of Adivasis. They want to reach out to these groups to bring them under one umbrella and forging one grand 'Hindu' identity.

It is worth noting that the Hindu right is able to mobilize cross section of society and especially the Dalits and Vanjaras who are a de-notified tribe. With different outreach

strategies, the Hindu right is successful to mobilizing them and ensuring their participation in communal violence. Though the leadership of these organizations remains largely with upper castes, OBCs and Dalits are used as foot soldiers to perpetrate violence. This is significantly taking the focus away from caste-based discrimination and rights of the Adivasis given as protection in the Constitution.

3. *The political infighting and network of patronage has contributed to communal riots in Khambhat*

The political equation and rivalry between current MLA of Khambhat of Mayur Raval and ex MLA Sanjay Patel is fueling communal tensions in Khambhat. The Sarpanch of Shakarpur, Dinesh Balun favors Sanjay Patel and has deepened the crisis with his anti-Muslim stand. The police as well as journalists who are following political developments in Khambhat that there is a concerted effort to make Mayur Raval seem ineffective in controlling riots and thus these riots are orchestrated. Dinesh Balun too has named Razzak out of spite since Razzak was supportive of the previous Dalit Sarpanch. There is a complex system of patronage in place which is allowing Hindu right wing organizations like Ram Sena to Khambhat on boil. In fact communal tensions are used as a medium at all levels-grassroots like panchayat to level to state level to settle political scores.

4. *The state and its institutions have played a partial role during the riots*

The state is partial and not playing a neutral role in prevention of riots, controlling or protecting the innocent during the riots. The Muslims are fearlessly humiliated and attacked in the presence of the police. The police are complicit in the violence where they are seen attacking Muslims and Muslim households in the videos procured from Himmatnagar. The police are seen standing with the participants of the procession. The police have arrested mostly Muslims and refused to write the FIRs filed by the Muslims.

5. *State used stone pelting as a pretext to demolish properties of the Muslims in Khambhat*

The state is using stone pelting as a pretext to subdue and marginalize the Muslims completely in Khambhat. The properties of Muslims in Shakarpur belonged to poor Muslims with hand to mouth existence. They have been running their small stalls for

decades. Their family members were not involved in riots and the administration arbitrarily without legal basis has demolished their stalls. In Khambhat City, the establishments of Muslims were selectively demolished without due process- serving of notice or hearing etc.

6. *Riots are increasingly used as weapons to economically marginalize the Muslims*

It is evident that targeted violence in the form of riots are not just causing Muslims physical insecurity but are increasingly used by the state to economically marginalize them. Demolishing places of livelihoods without compensation is shattering the very delicate hand to mouth existence of the Muslims who are largely small vendors. Additionally by dumping landfill and garbage on the place where demolitions took place or where the properties were torched during riots, the administration is making it difficult for the Muslims to rebuild their livelihoods. They are forced to sell products from home which is causing tremendous losses.

7. *These riots and stereotypical narratives against the Muslims are polarizing the society*

The narratives constructed and promoted by the ruling party and Hindu right wing organizations against Muslims based on falsehood and propaganda are spreading in the consciousness of common citizens. These narratives are leading to myths and strengthening of stereotypes against Muslims. The distrust and resentment it is creating is fostering tensions making the lived reality of co-existence difficult. The narratives that Muslim community is getting funds from Islamic countries to spread fundamentalism or engineer riots are fast gaining ground at the grassroots. Abhishek Gupta though clearly stated that police investigation hasn't found any credibility in this allegation, nonetheless this theory has become popular with the common man. Similarly, myths that Muslim population is increasing and will overtake Hindu population and towards this end, Muslims are marrying four wives are also widely prevalent though census data debunks these myths. These myths are polarizing the communities along religious lines.

**Recommendations:**

1. The riots should be probed impartially by a judicial commission.

2. The police personnel who were complicit with the Hindu right wing organizations in attacking the Muslims or refusing to help should face disciplinary and legal action
3. The leaders of the right-wing organization who are active in instigating violence and making hate speeches or spreading hatred through social media should be brought to justice
4. Demolition of property should not be used as a collective punishment for stone pelting. This is emerging as a disturbing trend which doesn't follow due process or have basis in any law and at any rate is disproportionate in its punishment. The Supreme Court should pass a stay on such actions and bring to justice the administrative authorities where demolitions under the pretext of stone pelting during riots were carried out to target the Muslims.
5. The Muslims whose properties were torched during the riots and demolished by the Municipal corporation should get appropriate compensation
6. Permission for religious processions should be given after due diligence and those responsible for using violence in these should be duly punished
7. The civil society organizations should working with Dalits and Adivasis should take note of the mobilization of these groups by the Hindu right wing. There is a need to understand the politics and stand of the Hindu right wing vis- a-vis the rights of these groups or how they are used in this politics of hatred as foot soldiers. There has to be discussion and awareness about this politics amongst these communities.