

2002

Riots in Gujarat

“ Would Mahatma Gandhi have been safe in his own state? ”

■ By Rakesh Sharma

Imagine Gujarat in March 2002. What if the bloodthirsty mobs in Vadodara had found Irfan Pathan or Zaheer Khan? What if Mohammed Kaif lived in Naroda Patiya, Ahmedabad? Would there be a resurgent Team India now? Or what if Sania Mirza's home was Gulbarg Society, where ex-*MP* Ehsan Jafri was not just killed, but according to eyewitnesses “even his body could not be found”? What if Ustad Bismillah Khan was a resident of the posh Paldi, home to the ransacked Delite Apartments? Would his shehnai have been silenced forever? What if ...

“We don't want the Muslims to shift to Pakistan. They can live here like our brothers, but like younger brothers. They must learn to respect us, as there are 800 million of us and only 150 million of them.” This was Ghan-shyam Joshi of the Pavagad VHP, who gave out his solution during one of the many conversations I had with him while shooting for my film, *Final Solution*, which analysed the Gujarat riots. Somehow his words were more chilling than the speeches of Uma Bharati and Sadhvi Rithambara in 1990-91, and years later by surgeon-turned-demagogue Praveen Togadia.

At the Don Bosco school, Ahmedabad, over 350 Muslim children were asked to leave. Their teacher claimed, “They weren't good students, just interested in somehow finishing school,” thus dismissing all those who had told me the day before about becoming a

doctor or teacher. At the “National School” inside a ghettoised part of the city, seven-year-old Shahrukh Khan had different ideas. “I'll study and join the police. Then I'd be able to help people during riots,” he said. Little did he realise that in Narendra Modi's Gujarat, you were likely to get a punishment posting if you discharged your constitutional obligations of trying to curb the slaughter of innocents.

Much of the Gujarat violence was

reported trouble along the train route a few days before the Godhra incident. Intelligence agencies had echoed these concerns. Yet, the government failed to bolster security for the train. Reinforced RPF presence in the train and on platforms would have helped save the kar sevaks who died and prevented the manhandling of Siddiq Bakar, a tea vendor, and 16-year-old Sophiya at the Godhra platform, the two incidents that triggered stone-pelting at Signal Falia.

SHAILESH RAVAL

Said Professor J.S. Bandukwala, whose home was destroyed by the very people who invited him to deliver the Savarkar Memorial lecture in February 2002: “Gandhi was an accident that happened to Gujarat.” It set me thinking. Would Bapu have embraced Modi as the “cho-*tey* Sardar Patel”? Could he have imagined that the gates of his Sabarmati ashram would be shut to those who sought shelter during the carnage?

What would he have thought of his Congress, of some of its members equally complicit in the violence? Would he himself have been safe in his state?

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh created history by apologising to the nation for the anti-Sikh carnage in Parliament. But do you see Modi and L.K. Advani apologising for the genocide? Is Gujarat 2002 a turning point? Can politics of hate be the basis for the creation of a harmonious society and a robust democracy? You decide.

(The writer is a documentary filmmaker.)



FIRED UP: Mobs ran amok in Gujarat justified in the name of the 59 people who died inside coach S-6 of the Sabarmati Express. But the late Jyotiben's family, husband Bharat Panchal and daughter Shefali, did not want revenge to be taken in their name. Dr Girish-chandra Rawal, retired government servant, who lost his wife, told me that Godhra should not have been used during the polls. He then asked, “Railways is a government body. Wasn't it their duty to protect the passengers?” Yes sir, more so because the media had