



## Religions and Development Research Programme

# Seeking justice and rebuilding lives in the aftermath of Hindu-Muslim violence in Ahmedabad and Mumbai, India

Hindu-Muslim violence occurred in the Indian cities of Mumbai in 1993 and Ahmedabad in 2002. The violence lasted longer and harmed more people in the latter than the former. To end it, bring perpetrators to justice and enable the victims to rebuild their lives, it is vital that both the roots and triggers of violence and what happens in the aftermath are better understood. In India, most analysis has focused on the violent episodes themselves, and little attention has been given to how victims cope with their tragedies over the longer term. This study aimed to develop a better understanding of the immediate and longer term aftermath of inter-religious violence. It focused on the roles of the state and Muslim religious organizations in conflict resolution, assisting those affected and rebuilding social relations.

It found that anti-Muslim violence is driven by a Hindu nationalist agenda. Its extent and impact depend on whether the state aids and abets the perpetrators or assists the victims, as well as the social, economic and political characteristics of the Muslim community in a city. In both cities, Muslims are mainly poorly paid casual labourers or work in the informal sector: in the aftermath of the violence most were able to resume similar livelihoods, although some were impoverished. However, they do not believe that they have secured the compensation or justice to which as citizens they are entitled. In Mumbai, the state and prosperous Muslims assisted in relief and rehabilitation, but in Ahmedabad Muslim victims relied on Islamic faith-based organizations for both immediate assistance and relocation when unable to return to their neighbourhoods. The violence

and a continued feeling of insecurity have resulted in increased residential segregation in both cities, but fundamentalist Islam appears to have made few inroads and Muslims pursue educational strategies for their children that will enable them to access better livelihoods in the future.

The study draws on research undertaken by Professor Dipankar Gupta (Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi) in Gujarat at the time of the violence in 2002 and a follow-up qualitative study in 2008/9 based on secondary sources, and semi-structured interviews with 70 Muslim victims, as well as activists, government officials, politicians and others. The findings were discussed at a stakeholder workshop in Ahmedabad in December 2009, and the policy implications reflect those discussions.

The duration and extent of the 2002 violence in Gujarat, including Ahmedabad, were much greater than in Delhi in 1993, and Muslims were much less able to cope in the short term and recover in the longer term, so most attention has been given to Ahmedabad, using the case of Mumbai for comparative purposes.

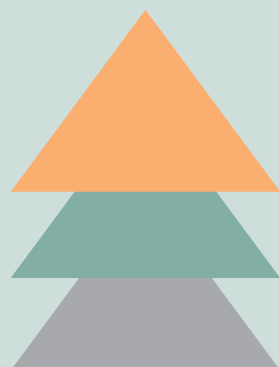
### Key findings

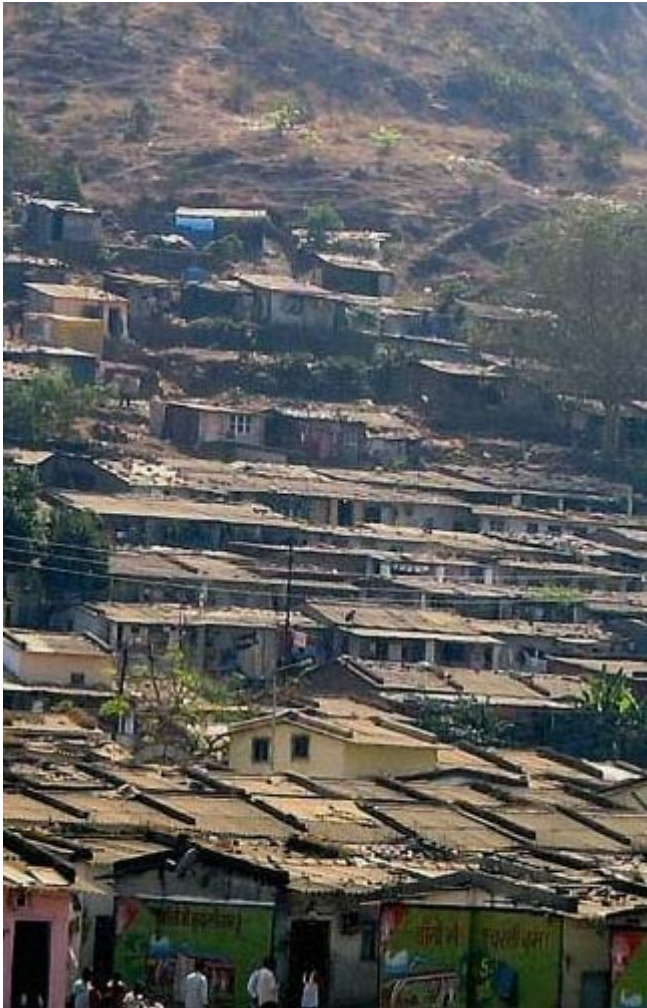
In both cities, as in India as a whole, Muslims are in a minority. They are not indigenous to the states of Gujarat or Maharashtra, although many have lived in Ahmedabad or Mumbai all their lives. Most, if not all, are disadvantaged with respect to educational and earning opportunities. Anti-Muslim violence is driven not by 'religious' differences

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To prevent future inter-religious violence and ensure long term improvements to the lives of minority religious groups in India:

- The citizenship rights of all must be recognized and protected by the law and the courts, and the perpetrators of past violence brought to justice.
- The government and security forces must operate in line with the national constitution, be held to account through the democratic political process, and police and legal reforms instituted.
- Government organizations and security forces can play a positive role in establishing mechanisms that improve communication between different religious groups and can be activated when necessary.
- In order to reduce Muslims' economic disadvantages, their access to public and formal private sector jobs must be improved, in particular through better access to educational opportunities.
- Increased residential segregation cannot be prevented, but government must ensure that housing areas are provided with basic services and social facilities so that they do not worsen the economic disadvantage of Muslims or the social divide between religious communities.





Low income housing in Mumbra, Mumbai

or economic motivations, but by a Hindu nationalist agenda – riots happen in some places and not others because they are deliberately engineered for political purposes. The larger scale and more long lasting effects of the anti-Muslim violence in Ahmedabad can be attributed to the backing provided to anti-Muslim sentiments and the violence itself by the government of the State of Gujarat, then and now under the control of the Hindu nationalist party, the Bharatiya Janata Party. In contrast, in Mumbai the Maharashtra State government and security forces did their best to end the violence, supported by secular citizens, upright officials and concerned politicians. For example, Mohalla Committees were established in sensitive neighbourhoods to improve rapport between the police, residents and government agencies.

***Without political support violent attacks on minorities are hard to indulge in and even more difficult to sustain.***

Over time, some kind of peace is established, victims find a home or return to their earlier homes, children begin going to school again, and members of affected households resume their attempts to earn an income. Bit by bit, the riot victims pick up the pieces of their lives, but this is a long and arduous process. It is no longer possible to return to the lives and social relationships that were 'normal' prior to the violence: the new lives and relationships between neighbours, workers and businesspeople, and communities may be more or less

different from the old, but gradually they become established; they become a 'new normal'.

The needs of Muslim victims of inter-religious violence in the two cities are similar: their first priority is safety, followed by the need for shelter, the need to resume earning, and the desire that their children can start attending school again. They hope to obtain adequate government compensation, that their attackers are brought to justice, and that they can realize their rights as citizens. The prospect of improved wellbeing seems a distant dream in the absence of supportive government policies, but Muslim families nevertheless strive to give their children a better chance by the educational choices they make.

***Muslim victims of inter-religious violence want the perpetrators to be brought to justice. Until this happens, forgiveness and reconciliation are difficult to imagine, and their trust in the state is unlikely to be restored.***

Although victims have similar priorities as they try to rebuild their lives, the strategies open to them differ depending on the context, which reflects the different social histories of the two cities. In particular, Mumbai's history of trade unionism, secular activism, economic diversification and greater prosperity is reflected not just in city politics and the composition of its elites, but has also led to the emergence of a Muslim bourgeoisie. This contrasts with Ahmedabad's dependence on a declining textile industry, the lack of strong civic leaders and the absence of a self-confident Muslim elite.

- The Muslim community in Ahmedabad is mostly poor, and so the political and economic support provided to victims in Mumbai by affluent Muslim businesspeople was rarely available to them. Generally employed as artisans or labourers in the informal sector, once the violence had died down, most Muslims were able to access the same or similar occupations, with similar low incomes, although often in a different part of the city, especially in Ahmedabad. In some households, women (especially those newly widowed) had to start working to supplement family incomes. Some but not all of those with businesses were able to raise the funds to repair or replace lost property, stock and equipment.



Mosque built in Ramola, Ahmedabad by Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Hind

- Muslims seek education for their children that will best provide them with access to work opportunities. They choose schools, the medium of education and the content of education with this in mind. English medium education is generally too costly, so in Ahmedabad this is predominantly Gujarati medium education in schools run by government or Muslim organizations, while in Mumbai the larger size and greater self-confidence of the Muslim community means that they feel less need to become fluent in Marathi and many seek Urdu medium education in government or private schools for their children.
- In Ahmedabad, State government connivance in the violence and its neglect of victims, as well as the absence of a sizable and prosperous Muslim business community, meant that Muslim victims had to rely on short-term relief and assistance from Muslim religious organizations (and a few secular non-government organizations). Organizations such as the Jamaat-i-Islami sponsored Islamic Relief Committee, the Jamiat-i-Ulema-i-Hind's Gujarat Sarvajanik Relief Committee (GSRC) and the Tablighi Jamaat set up relief camps, helped victims repair their homes and assisted those who felt unable to return to their original neighbourhoods to relocate to resettlement colonies. In Mumbai, in contrast, where the assistance of such organizations was not needed, they are seen by local Muslims as purely religious bodies devoted to teaching and propagating Islam.
- In the longer term in both cities, the violence has led to increased segregation of residential areas along religious lines, as Muslims have sought security in Muslim-dominated areas. In Mumbai, Muslims are able to choose between staying or moving within their original areas of residence, or relocating to new mixed income suburban areas with services and facilities, the largest of which is Mumbra, about an hour and a half by train from Mumbai Central. In Ahmedabad, in contrast, the residential areas newly established by Islamic organizations are often in remote locations with poor quality housing units and inadequate services. Although this has made it more difficult for victims to find work or restart their businesses, many felt that they had no other choice.
- Those organizations that aimed to recruit Muslims to a radical Islamist agenda by providing relief and resettlement areas in Ahmedabad do not seem to have made much progress: while their beneficiaries appreciate the assistance provided, they also voice criticisms of the organizations on issues such as how individuals' compensation was used, the provision of civic amenities in the resettlement areas they administer, and the mode of worship they advocate.
- The inadequate levels of government compensation and the difficulty of obtaining it, together with the failure of the state to bring the perpetrators of the violence to justice remain lingering sores, hindering the restoration of victims' trust in the state to safeguard their rights as citizens. Muslim victims of violence want justice – until this is secured, forgiveness and reconciliation are difficult.



Middle income housing in Mumbra, Mumbai  
(photo by D Gupta)

## The resettlement colonies of Ahmedabad

In areas such as Citizen Nagar, Yes Complex or Faizal Park, established by the Islamic Relief Committee, occupants contributed their government compensation in return for single room dwellings with shared toilets and bathrooms, and a communal water supply. Residents cannot rent out their units or transfer their occupancy, and are not given ownership rights. Citizen Nagar sits at the foot of the main municipal refuse tip, where residents are affected by polluted water, a foul stench and flying pieces of garbage. In Ramola, established by the GSRC, residents complained that they see no benefits from the international donations received (except for an elaborate mosque and meeting hall) and accused the Maulana in charge of keeping units empty in order to sell them. However, respondents in these areas did not complain that the assistance provided was subject to religious conditions. In contrast, responses showed that many find the conservative orthodoxy of the Tablighi Jamaat irksome. In Yes Colony, for example, a resident said "The Tablighis are interested in what happens under the ground (when we are buried) and above the ground (where God is), but not on the ground where we live and spend our lives"

## Conclusions and policy implications

The immediate priority for victims of inter-religious violence is safety. Most manage to re-start their lives and livelihoods, either in their original area of residence or in Muslim-dominated areas elsewhere in the city. Few seem to be attracted to fundamentalist Islam, but they are very conscious of their disadvantaged economic position and hope for better lives for their children. In practice, variations in the economic and political context constrain the choices available to them. Many were even further disadvantaged and impoverished by the violence they suffered, many live in fear of further outbreaks of violence and few are able to improve the wellbeing and prosperity of their families.

**While the Muslim victims of violence have re-established their lives and livelihoods, they are acutely aware that the toofan (ethnic carnage, literally hurricane) can happen again.**

To prevent future inter-religious violence and ensure long term improvements to the lives of minority religious groups:

- The main priority is for the citizenship rights of all to be recognized and protected by the law and the courts, and for the perpetrators of past violence to be brought to justice.
- The government and security forces must operate in line with the national constitution. Their accountability can ultimately only be secured through the democratic political process, although police and legal reforms are also needed.

- Government organizations and the security forces can play a positive role in establishing mechanisms (such as neighbourhood committees) that improve communication between different religious groups and can be activated when necessary.
- In order to reduce the economic disadvantages that Muslims experience, their access to public and formal private sector jobs must be improved, in particular through better access to educational opportunities.
- The creation of segregated residential areas cannot be prevented, but appropriate policy responses are needed to prevent them resulting in even greater economic marginalization of Muslims and worsening the social divide between religious communities. In particular, basic environmental services and social facilities must be provided, especially in low income areas.



Primary school for Muslim girls in Arsh Nagar, Ahmedabad  
(photo by D Gupta)

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### Further information

The findings of this research were first published in Gupta, Dipankar (2010) *Elusive Peace: Seeking a 'New Normal' in Post-Conflict Ahmedabad and Mumbai*, Birmingham: Religions and Development Working Paper 44 [www.rad.bham.ac.uk](http://www.rad.bham.ac.uk).

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