

## **Arise! Awake!!\***

### **Reflections From Our Trip to Gujarat, Delhi, and Other State Capitals**

*(\* With apologies to Swami Vivekananda, whose spirited and unabashed defense of Hinduism from yesteryear is being wilfully distorted by some into a hate campaign against the minorities of India.)*

## **Foreword:**

We are a delegation of NRIs, representing various organizations from the U.S., who went to India on a non-partisan humanitarian mission, to see for ourselves the aftermath of the Gujarat carnage. We went there to listen, and to learn about what we can do to support initiatives for communal harmony. We met a wide cross section of civil society, including the victims of the unprecedented violence; NGOs who have been caring for them; and other citizen's groups, businessmen, religious leaders, politicians and the media.

As ruling party officials in Gujarat and New Delhi declined to meet with us, we could only meet with the opposition parties. We conveyed to them our views on the desperate humanitarian situation in Gujarat, and challenged them on how they would rule differently should they return to power. We presented our observations and recommendations in a memorandum to the President of India, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, at the *Rashtrapathi Bhavan* on September 12. We met the Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, Mr. Chandrababu Naidu, on September 23, and urged him to use his influence in New Delhi to bring some hope to those who are still being victimized in Gujarat.



**Children of Shahpur Camp #26**

Most of us are now back in the U.S. to share our experiences with others; to raise awareness in the NRI community about the dangers of continued silence about the break-down of the rule of law in Gujarat; and to raise funds for the rehabilitation of the victims. Some of us plan to spend more time in India to pursue individual actions in support of communal harmony and/or to work against the politics of hate.

We have prepared this write-up for our friends, and others who care about what is happening in India, to give them a sense of what we saw and heard. Our observations are based on notes and recollections by some of us, and do not necessarily represent the collective view of this diverse delegation. Where possible, we have included a Q & A format, representing the general thrust of our conversations with our hosts (not direct quotes).

## The Victims:

"Five crore Gujaratis have been affected by the violence," declared our leader in a press conference in Ahmedabad. Some of the journalists were incredulous--they were quite sure that he had his numbers wrong. He hastened to explain: "Yes, we think that every Gujarati--Muslim, Hindu, and Christian--is a victim today."



**Shri Poddar with Camp Residents**

We had heard of the severe strains that the economy of Gujarat was going through--especially in foreign direct investment, the hospitality sector, transportation, and small businesses. We had heard of increasing unemployment, especially among youth--for example, thousands of *Rabari* youth losing their jobs as a result of over a thousand Muslim-owned restaurants being burnt down. But more than all the economic losses, we could sense the fear in the air in cities like Ahmedabad and Vadodara, beneath a veneer of normalcy. People seemed genuinely baffled that the Muslim community, which had been demonized for so long, had kept its peace, in spite of the scale of brutality inflicted upon them. There was apprehension everywhere that this wasn't going to last long, especially in light of constant provocations by the likes of Modi, Singhal and Togadia. Some even speculated that the troika's inflammatory rhetoric was designed to elicit some sort of violent reaction from the victims, which could then be used to justify further violence.

They may have been right. The reaction came just a few days after we departed Gujarat...at *Akshardham*. Was the deplorable terrorist attack on the Swaminarayan temple the kind of response they were dreading? Are there more to come? Is the good sense that prevailed in Gujarat after *Akshardham* a harbinger of peace? Or is there a risk that continuing communal killings in places like Vadodara will be exploited once again by ruthless politicians?



**Women Who Bore the Brunt**

We had tried to seek our own answers to such troubling questions during our week of travel in Gujarat, during which we spoke to numerous victims and camp organizers to understand the ground reality. We visited Gulberg Society, Naroda Patiya, Juhapura and Sanklit Nagar, and several *chalis* and unofficial

camps in Ahmedabad. In the Panchmahals, we visited the Godhra relief camp, Kalol camp, the village of Boru, Halol camp, and the village of Dehrol.



**A Muslim Home in Ghasiram Chali**

These visits lead us to the unfortunate and inescapable conclusion that there is an officially sanctioned and orchestrated campaign in Gujarat to harass and punish the victims of the carnage, through every available means available to the state. The objective seems to be to drive them to desperation, force them to permanently forsake their land and homes, and perhaps even leave the state altogether. In many cases, Hindu neighbors are setting humiliating conditions, including dropping of criminal charges against the killers amongst them, before allowing their Muslim neighbors back. But there are also instances of Hindu neighbors welcoming back their former neighbors. (But for the interference and connivance by politicians and the police, we are sure that there would have been many more such healing initiatives by both communities.)

Here is a picture of what we termed in our memorandum to the President as the *'Third Carnage'* underway in Gujarat:

- Almost all the camps are officially closed, when many people still do not have a home to go to or feel safe enough to return. This is clearly designed to put pressure on the victims and their relatives, who are exhausting their own meager savings.
- Over 85,000 high school students are in a limbo after their exams were deliberately disrupted. Most can't afford private tuition. Many youth are reported to be absconding.
- In comparison to the Rs. 2,000-4,000 crores in estimated damages (10,000 homes and 18,000 properties) only Rs. 250 crores of aid is in the pipeline, including Rs. 150 crores from the PM's Relief Fund.
- On the average, victims have received less than 10% of their losses in compensation--and it's not unusual to see checks amounting to less than 1% of the reported loss (e.g. Rs. 500 and Rs. 2,000 for properties worth Rs. 1 lakh!)
- Of the death compensation of Rs. 1.5 lakhs, a significant portion is in Narmada Bonds! Also, there is no hope of compensation for the large number of missing persons, unless relatives can produce the equivalent of Rs. 4.5 lakhs in collateral (this is under review, we were told).
- The legal system is loaded with public prosecutors who are often acting more like defense attorneys for the accused murderers, and as prosecutors of their own clients. Some of them are also known to be office-bearers of VHP.
- Original FIRs have been doctored with, or superseded by cyclostyled 'omnibus' FIRs, which replace the names of the accused people with terms like 'unruly mobs,' ensuring that there will never be any prosecutions. (In one instance, our guide was personally at a police station with a victim to inquire about the status of her FIR. *"The accused is absconding,"* the police asserted, even as the accused man was seated right next to them!)

These grim statistics make the point loud and clear: **The elected government of Gujarat was happy to collude, encourage, or stand on the sidelines as mad men and women systematically destroyed human lives and property. But it WILL NOT take any responsibility to rebuild people's lives, shifting that impossible burden to already over-stretched NGOs and private citizens.**

In spite of these insurmountable odds, however, we were amazed at the fortitude of the people affected. For example, we found Muslim legal assistance groups to be more optimistic about prosecutions than other legal aid groups, who were quite sure that there would never be any convictions. (Q: Is this because the minority community doesn't have the luxury of being cynical?) Wherever possible, people in urban areas are trying their best to return to their homes and businesses, notwithstanding hostile neighbors. When asked why they don't leave the state to go to places like Bangalore or Hyderabad or Mumbai, victims in one camp responded unanimously: *"Why should we? This is where the jobs are."*



**Beneficiaries of EKTA/CAC/AIF Funds**

After a week of heart-wrenching visit to Gujarat, we left behind thousands of victims, Hindus and Muslims, carrying a few indelible impressions with us:

- Community leaders fighting an impossible battle on multiple fronts--relief supplies, compensation, housing, rebuilding businesses, legal remedies, etc., while worrying endlessly about their children's education, and the possibility of their turning to violence.
- People of Naroda Patiya, who point to the unscathed Hindu temple and Hindu Houses in their midst as symbols of communal amity that had existed, even as they live patiently on the streets for their modest homes to be rebuilt. (We were pained to hear that many of these people had to rush back to safe havens within hours of *Akshardham*, in anticipation of more violence which, mercifully, never came.)
- Muslim women, who would rather get on with their lives than pursue cases of indescribable violence against them (perhaps, to the consternation of women's groups).
- The man who keeps a vigil in front of the locked home of Kausar Bano, the pregnant woman whose stomach was cut open, and the fetus pulled out and torched. *"Aren't you going to visit the spot?"* he asks. We just don't have the energy.
- A Hindu volunteer in the Sanklit Nagar camp, who had to take off her *bindhi* for a few days so that she didn't scare the already traumatized children in the camp.
- Hindu villagers in Panchmahal, whose minds have been so poisoned that our attempt to dialogue with one Sarpanch leads to a not-so-veiled threat against our lives.
- Dalits and other poor Hindus, who may be slowly realizing that they too were manipulated by the politicians to turn against their neighbors and friends. (Some of them may have had the dubious distinction of being participants in the violence as well as its victims: When we toured Naroda Patiya, we could see that the mob hadn't been able to make distinctions between Dalit and Muslim homes, which often shared a common wall. Many of these homes are now being rebuilt by the Islami Relief Committee, with support from secular NGOs.)

- Middle class Hindus, who are facing the fear of violence every day, and may be beginning to understand the scale of brutality that had occurred right under their noses. (The recent apology from a section of the Jain community may be one such indicator.)
- Journalists who have been conditioned into believing that anyone who speaks up for a secular India is anti-Hindu, and found it hard to believe that we were ready and willing to meet with relatives of the Godhra train victims.

## The Media:

The verdict is near-unanimous: the Indian media had, by and large, done an exemplary job of covering the Gujarat violence and its aftermath--not just the ugly side, but also the humanitarian side, i.e. citizens from all communities reaching out to help one another. The exception to the rule, we had been told, was the Gujarati press, *Sandesh* and *Gujarat Samachar* in particular. We had very much wanted to meet with those editors, and we finally got a chance to do so...with *Gujarat Samachar*. (*Sandesh* refused to meet with us.) We also met with *Gujarat Today*, which caters primarily to the Muslim community, and had taken a lead role in relief work through its various charities. In Hyderabad, we got a chance to talk at length with the publishers of *The Siasat Daily*, the largest Urdu daily in the city, which has the reputation of being a progressive voice within the Muslim community. In addition, we were also able to hold press conferences in Ahmedabad, Vadodara, New Delhi and Hyderabad; and we were able to meet several veteran journalists in New Delhi.

Here are some impressions from these encounters:



**Najama Sultana Speaking to Reporters**

### Gujarat Samachar:

We are quite nervous as we are ushered into the publisher's office, after an on-again, off-again appointment. Shri Shreyans Shah and his brother Bahubali are immaculately dressed. The office smells of sweet incense and is decorated with Hindu icons. We nervously exchange pleasantries. Our leader is quick to state our purpose: *"We have read reports of incitement and mis-reporting by your paper in the days following Godhra. We are here to talk to you and find out the truth for ourselves."*

That opening remark elicits a barrage of comments from the duo:

*"What is the basis of your accusation? Where is your evidence? If we are anti-Muslim, would we dare step out of this office, which is in a Muslim-dominated area? We have always been critical of the establishment, including Modi. This is not a question of Hindu Vs Muslim, but a nexus between politicians and criminals. The central problem is our judiciary, which is anti-Hindu--Why do they need years to reach a verdict on Ram Janambhoomi? English papers are totally biased. They deliberately reported that Ahsan Jafri's daughter was raped. They print such lies and never retract them..."*

Before they go any further, we introduce them to Nishrin Hussain, daughter of ex-M.P. Ahsan Jafri, who has joined our delegation from Delaware. (Ahsan saab was brutally murdered by mobs in front of his home in Gulberg Society on February 28.) The Shahs are taken aback for a moment...but continue their tirade. Nishrin asks them what they had done to defend her father's work on communal harmony, instead of maligning him after his murder. (The Editor's Guild had reported that *Gujarat Samachar* had published an article after the Gulberg massacre implying that Ahsan Jafri 'deserved it.')

Shri Bahubali can't contain himself: *"Did your father ever write about Kashmir? What about Pakistani terrorism? What about the Pandits?"* Nishrin snaps back, *"Sir, my father was a Gujarati first and a patriot. He worked here in this state and wrote about his environs. Why should he carry any special burden to write about Kashmir?"*

The Shahs claim that they have written in the past in support of their 'friend' Jafri saab. They attack the Editor's Guild as biased, and claim that they have received a written apology from them. We get the feeling that they resent being clubbed with *Sandesh*, which had clearly broken all norms of decency in its reporting. (We understand that competition between the two papers is fierce, which could partly explain their race for sensationalism--throughout our conversation, they kept emphasizing their circulation figures.) We aren't quite prepared with original research in Gujarati to confront them with specifics of their provocative reporting, as we hadn't really expected to meet them! So we ask, *"If you are so sure about the nexus between politicians and criminals, then why didn't you publish those details [instead of blaming the minorities]?"* Their response: *"We can't publish such things without 100% proof!"*

As we continue our exchange, there is less tension in the air, and we seem to be getting across to each other at some level. They offer to print an article by Nishrin, unedited. They offer their library to us, should we choose to do our research and bring to their attention specifics of mis-reporting. We readily accept their offer. But do we have the bandwidth to follow up?

The discussion veers to America and their perception of our double standards: *"You allow America to destroy another country because of 9/11, and you complain about what happened in Gujarat?"* We assure them that most of us do not support American foreign policy in Asia. But, we point out, Bush had addressed the nation within days of the 9/11, flanked by Muslim Americans, to proclaim that we shouldn't equate Islam with terrorism: *"How come none of our leaders here did something similar to stop the carnage in Gujarat?"* Shri Shah is visibly angry at what he perceives as our staunch defence of President Bush.

We decide to take their leave while we are still 'ahead.' But, somehow, we get the feeling that both sides had come out of the meeting with a slight change in perception of each other. Nonetheless, a human gesture on their part to condole Nishrin for her tragic personal loss might have helped their cause with us much more. But that was never to come.

Even though we didn't get a chance to meet the editors of *Sandesh*, we got a chance to recall an article they had published sometime prior to Godhra, accusing Muslims of 'deceptively' naming their establishments with Hindu names. One of the reports we received in Ahmedabad contained a list of restaurants destroyed (a classic example of prior incitement by *Sandesh*). Our curiosity was aroused, and we read on: *Citycorner, Sanflower, Signor, Supreme, Central, Tasty, Way Wait, Appicurian, A-one, Kabir, Alpha, Lakeview, Topaz, Sarvoday*, etc. Some Hindu names!

### **Gujarat Today:**

*Gujarat Today* seems to be more than just a newspaper--it represents a proactive movement for education and health among the poor, especially Muslims. Their office is quite a contrast to that of *Gujarat Samachar*--just one big warehouse, with a modest office in the corner. Mr. Tirmizi, the Publisher, is very focussed on relief and rehabilitation efforts, in which they have been quite active from day one, through their holding charities, *Lok-Hit Prakashan Sarvajanic Trust, Shah-e-Alam and Al-Ameen Lok Hit Charitable Trust*. He also talks about their support for ongoing legal work on behalf

of the victims. As we narrate our *Gujarat Samachar* visit, he says with a smile: "They are my friends." We find that he is not in such a charitable mood when it comes to *Sandesh*.

The Editor's Guild report had acknowledged this paper's balanced and wide coverage of the Gujarat violence. After meeting the editorial staff, we too can sense their professionalism.

### **The Siasat Daily:**

We had called Mr. Jahid Ali Khan, publisher of *The Daily Siasat*, an Urdu paper in Hyderabad, barely 48 hours before our visit. So we are pleasantly surprised that he has arranged a private dinner, interviews with his reporters, and a well-attended public meeting at the *Siasat* offices. His entire household has become vegetarian for the evening, as he openly discusses a wide range of issues affecting the Muslim community, and its relation with the majority: dearth of enlightened leadership, education, women's role, cow slaughter, uniform civil code, police-citizen relations, etc. Nothing seems off limits. A strong proponent of the Urdu language, he chides the community for clinging to the notion that they should send their children only to Urdu medium schools, which according to him are ill-equipped, ill-maintained and ill-staffed. "We should be pragmatic," he says. "What's wrong in sending our children to Telugu medium schools and benefiting from it, with Urdu still as the second language?"



**A Public Meeting at *The Daily Siasat***

He is proud of the strong tradition of communal harmony in Hyderabad, and the role his paper plays in the community. Like everyone in Hyderabad, he is elated that the just concluded *Ganpathi Visarjan* celebrations had gone off without any violence, for the first time. But how? He tells us how some Muslim neighborhoods had welcomed the processions, and had even offered water to the Hindus; how the Hindus had invited the Iranian ambassador to officiate at one ceremony; and how the entire law and order *bandobast* for the day had been lead by the second man in command of the police--a Muslim!

Did all of these represent a change in mindset and tactics by the Hyderabadis to maintain harmony? Or did they represent good governance, something sadly missing in many states? Almost everyone we spoke to thinks that the two went hand-in-hand. And they applaud their CM for taking care of the needs of all the communities and for maintaining harmony, in spite of the pressures he must face from NDA and from local units of BJP.

Muslims here do empathize strongly with the minorities in Gujarat, and have been providing a lot of succor to the victims, both financial and emotional. *The Daily Siasat* alone had raised over Rs. 6 crores, we are told, which is being disbursed through *Jamiat-Ulama-i-Hind*. We get a chance to speak to many of these donors and supporters of *Siasat* at a public meeting. Among other themes, Najma, an NRI-SAHI delegate and a native of the city, talks eloquently about the need for her community to look inwards into issues of education and women. Satinath, another NRI-SAHI delegate, focuses on the coming Gujarat elections, and talks about why it is important for every state in India to send contingents to Gujarat to defeat communal politics.

Notwithstanding their strong feelings about Gujarat, many Hyderabad Muslims seem willing to 'forgive' Naidu for not making good on his threat to walk out of NDA. Why? In their scheme of things, retaining Naidu as their CM seems to be a very high priority.

### **Press Conferences:**

Many of us in the NRI-SAHI delegation are novices when it comes to the press corps, but we did all right in the four press conferences that we hosted. Attendance was quite good at all the venues, thanks to our coordinators, who had done a lot of groundwork in a very short time. We received extensive coverage in the print media, in English, Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu and Telugu. Nishrin and Shrikumarji were on *Star TV* with Rajdeep Sardesai. And *Aaaj Tak* featured the entire Delhi press conference.



**Aditi Desai at the Vadodara Press Conference**

Why so much interest in this 'not-so-high-powered' NRI delegation, seven months after Godhra? After all, we had brought no joint venture business proposals, no checks to be presented to politicians at public functions, and we did not represent any bilateral aid agencies or human rights organizations. The only plausible answer we could think of was that **this was the first time ever that an NRI delegation had come to India on a peace mission.**

For the most part, the press corps was very supportive. At times, the Delhi conference felt like a memorial service for Ahsan Jafri. But there were also many questions about the role of NRIs in funding right wing Hindu organizations in India. The conferences in Ahmedabad and Vadodara, however, were quite tension-filled. The questions were dominated by a few hard-liners, whose line of questioning, not surprisingly, went thus:

*Q: "Why are you coming seven months later? What about Godhra? Did you visit the Godhra victims? Where is the proof that Modi declined to meet with you? What about terrorism in Kashmir? Did you do anything for the pandits?"*

*A: "We condemn terrorism of all sorts, anywhere. In fact, we are ready to meet the relatives of the Godhra killings, but no one even had a list of the victims until just two weeks back. Some of us will be happy to return to Gujarat to meet them. As for Kashmir, yes, we have condemned terrorism there as well, but one must recognize that the Gujarat carnage was a clear case of state-supported terrorism, and the incitement is still going at the highest levels..."*

One reporter persists even after the end of the press conference: "Have you ever tried to enter Dariapur?" His view of Dariapur as a dangerous place (a mini-Pakistan as some call it) appears to be shared by many otherwise reasonable Ahmedabadis. So we pop the question later to several people. One of them refers us to a Washington Post investigative report, which is supposed to have debunked the myth of Dariapur. Others, some of whom are visibly orthodox Hindus, say that they walk around in Dariapur all the time and had never felt threatened in any way.

Perhaps the reality is somewhere in-between. Perhaps, communities like Dariapur are well prepared to defend themselves, which might explain why they were largely left alone in the carnage. (The planners seem to have mainly targeted areas where Muslims were a minority.) On the other hand, bad legends and paranoia have a way of taking hold in people's imaginations (like the demonization of Palestinian villages in the Jewish psyche). In our view, only vigorous efforts by civil society to promote a dialogue between the communities can possibly exorcise the 'ghost of Dariapur.'

### **Veteran Journalists and Jurists:**

We met several seasoned journalists and former judges during our visit with I.K. Gujral, former Prime Minister of India. There seems to be a genuine sense of alarm among many of them that we are at a critical crossroad in our nation's history: a choice between an explosive combination of fascism and religiosity OR a secular, if imperfect, democracy. *"If we lose Gujarat, that's the end of secular India,"* we heard some of them say. While agreeing with the feeling that the nation is indeed at a critical juncture, Mr. Gujral gently chided the 'all or nothing' viewpoint. He reiterated his abiding confidence in the good sense of the people of India and described how, after Gujarat, many Islamic groups had come forward to him with positions that would have hitherto been unthinkable. He also reminded everyone about how the people of India had surprised the world by defeating Indira Gandhi's rule.

*Q: What are veteran Indian journalists doing about the new wave of Internet journalism by apologists for the Sangh Parivar, who seem to have become darlings of the right wing NRIs--e.g. writers like Rajeev Srinivasan and Varsha Bhosle?*

*A: Rajeev who?*

Clearly, some of them are out of touch with the NRI Internet scene. Others agree that it is important to prevail upon portals like Rediff to present a wider spectrum of opinions.

### **Gulberg Society (Chamanpura):**

We end this narrative with our solemn pilgrimage to the Gulberg Society compound in Chamanpura, where ex-Congress M.P. Ahsan Jafri, and over 70 other men, women and children seeking shelter at his home, were brutally hacked or burned to death by a mob on February 28. (Over 10 women were gang raped and then burnt alive, according to eyewitnesses.) The so-called mob was lead by people whom the victims knew well--neighbors, friends, and political partisans of the neighborhood. Ahsan saab had made over 200 desperate phone calls for help to the police and to politicians in Gujarat and Delhi. But no help came to save the man who had worked all his life for communal harmony; only cruel comments at the other end of the phone such as, *"Is he still alive?"*

This is the first time Nishrin is setting foot in her grotesquely charred home. She takes off her shoes, for she knows not where her *abba* lies. As she tries to come to terms with tell-tale signs of indescribable brutality at her childhood home, and surveys the kitchen where her mom had cooked and fed them, we see traces of chemicals all over the walls and ceiling. We see the destruction wrought by their own propane cylinders, which the mob had systematically exploded. We are told that the compound was littered with hundreds of vials of mysterious chemicals, some of which have been sent to labs for analysis. There is also speculation that the 'mob' had used chemicals donated by other countries following the 2001 earthquake, to help 'melt' concrete and steel to reach survivors. How did they have access to such potent chemicals, which may have been used to 'melt' human beings? Are we seriously expected to believe that all this was the result of spontaneous popular rage?



**Entrance to the Jafri Home**

Nishrin takes us back to the open stairwell at the back of the house, which leads to the first floor. She points to the piles of bricks and stones still lying on the stairs: *"They were being stoned from the back to prevent them from going upstairs to relative safety."* Mrs. Jafri and many other neighbors were hiding in terror upstairs, but many others couldn't join them. Had they known what was in store for them downstairs, would they have minded a few bricks to save their own lives? We talk to Shareifbhai, Mr. Jafri's neighbor, who was among those fighting a losing battle with the surging mob outside, while his entire family was being hacked and burnt to death inside Jafri saab's house--wife and daughters and all.

Shareifbhai narrates the fate of and each and every resident of the compound to Nishrin--who made it, who didn't, who ran away, and so on. He points to the mound of earth in her backyard, where they had buried whatever remains they could find. Nishrin winces every so often, but keeps her composure. She is especially pained at the fate of her neighbor, Khan uncle, who had bravely stepped out of his home in the middle of the mayhem to put out a fire. They never saw him again. No body...no death certificate...hence frozen bank accounts...and no financial support whatsoever for the family. (Nishrin had just bought the family some cooking utensils and other household items.)



**Shareifbhai Narrating the Horror of Feb 28**

Tears swell up in Shareifbhai's eyes as he admits that this is the first time he is about to breakdown. Teesta tells us that he is getting ready to start rebuilding the homes in the compound, and is already restocking his adjoining electronics/furniture store, which had been destroyed by arsonists thrice in the last few years! What makes people Shareifbhai go on?

*Q: Why are you still clinging to this place?*

*A: xxxbhai and others, who lead the massacre, were my friends. They are now going around the neighborhood whispering that they really should have 'taken care' of people like me. What have I got to lose at this point, except my life? Isn't it more important that we carry on Ahsan saab's dream of proving that Hindus and Muslims can coexist?*

As we get ready to depart, someone opens the lid to the underground water tank in the middle of the courtyard. We peer in disbelief at remnants of humanity at the bottom of the clear water. The tank, we are told, was full of body parts on February 28th, before the mobs returned to torch the evidence. We are reluctant to draw the rest of the group's attention to this horrific scene.

Instead, we contemplate the charred skeleton of the Ashoka tree in front of Nishrin's home, a mute spectator to the massacres, now bearing a little sign with a verse from the *Quran*. But wait! We also see fresh green shoots emerging from the ground. A symbol of hope, perhaps, and Gujarat's capacity to overcome?

Earlier in the day, Nishrin had bombarded Shri Shankarsinh Vaghela with tough questions about the Congress party's inability to prevent the carnage in their own back yard, and to save her father. (There are reports that Congress party workers too were involved in the violence, which he doesn't deny.) He promises that he would go to Gulberg Society on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, Gandhi Jayanthi, to pay his homage to Ahsan Jafri: "*I will do that for my friend, even if...*" He doesn't quite say it, but we can sense the politician's antenna going up to the possibility of being labeled pro-Muslim.



We are glad to be here at Gulberg, with Nishrin, Shareifbhai, and other survivors of the carnage, to draw inspiration from their courage and strength to go on. **Together we must, and we shall, fight the monster in our midst.**

[P.S. We understand that Mr. Vaghela kept his promise to Nishrin. On October 2nd, Gandhi Jayanthi, he joined 300 other people at Gulberg Society to pay homage to Ahsan Jafri and all the other innocent men, women and children, who gave their lives for the future of our nation.]

*...Part 2 Coming Up: Our Meetings with NGOs, Politicians, and Religious Leaders.*