

**August 28, 2002. Yahoo(Reuters). Thomas Kutty Abraham.**

**Gujarat riot-hit Muslims see little hope of justice**

KHEDIAD, India (Reuters) - Arjuben Ayub Sindhi lay among a pile of hacked bodies, feigning death for nearly an hour before a police patrol team rescued her from a group of armed slogan-shouting Hindu zealots.

The 20-year-old woman, who now lives in a relief camp along with 250 Muslims who survived India's worst religious bloodshed in February and March, is still traumatised. A deep wound on her shoulder has not healed.

Sindhi says the knowledge that those involved in the March 2 killing of 67 people from her village, including her relatives, hurts her more than the still bandaged aching wound.

"It has been six months and no one has been arrested. Will we ever get justice?" she asks, covering her face with her sari.

Sindhi, who lost six relatives in the riots, is not alone.

Hundreds of Muslims in the riot-hit western state of Gujarat are anguished over the delay in punishing people who went on a killing spree after a suspected Muslim mob set a train afire, burning alive 59 Hindus late in February.

A sense of hopelessness and denial of justice weighs heavily on Muslims in Gujarat, where hundreds still live in relief camps.

Officials say around 1,000 people were killed and hundreds of homes and businesses owned by Muslims gutted during the riots. Non-government groups put the number of dead around 2,500.

While some arrests have been made in some highly publicised cases of mass killing in Ahmedabad, Gujarat's largest city, and over the burning of the train, victims say no visible progress has been made in punishing the guilty in most cases.

An interior ministry official said police had filed more than 4,000 first information reports and arrested hundreds in cases where evidence was available. A first information report is the first step to laying formal charges.

Salimbhai Sindhi, the head of Khediad, a village dotted with lush maize fields, filed several complaints and met officials to get 67 of his villagers certified dead.

"They (authorities) have declared only 11 of them dead, when a total of 67 were killed," he told Reuters.

**BURNT BODIES**

Authorities have refused to certify the deaths of the other 56 for lack of witnesses or evidence.

"We cannot declare someone dead under the law without some kind of physical evidence or a direct eyewitness account," the interior ministry official said.

The villagers, mostly farmers, were waylaid by a Hindu mob of around 2,000 and burnt alive in their vehicle as they tried to flee another mob that burnt their houses.

"How could we come up with physical evidence when the bodies of the victims were burnt for three days continuously? Nothing was left, not even the bones," the village head said.

"We were on the run to save our lives. Forget about going back to collect evidence," added Shamsuddin Jamu Miya, one of 17 Muslims who escaped.

Survivors of the ambush have named some people but said the accused are still free.

Police officials say every attempt was made to register the complaints of victims and arrest the accused.

"It's not correct to say the accused are roaming free. We have charged 800 people in Panchmahals alone with rioting and murder," Superintendent of Police Narasimha Komar said.

Relief officials and legal experts say lack of witnesses and apprehension among Muslims that fundamentalist Hindu groups could take revenge if they spoke out against the attackers were likely to lead to a majority of the accused being acquitted.

They said Hindus charged with murder, arson and looting had been acquitted in four cases for want of witnesses and evidence.

"In many cases, the eyewitnesses are going back on their testimony. So the trend of acquittal will continue," said Manoj Agarwal, the district collector of Panchmahals.

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Non-government groups, providing legal aid to victims, say conviction rates in riot cases would be low as most first information reports name groups as attackers and not individuals.

### **July 1, 2003. New York Times. David Rohde. Muslims Recant, and Hindus Are Acquitted in Riot Trial**

VADODARA, India, June 30 — It seemed the moment of vindication had finally arrived for Zahira Sheikh.

Last month Ms. Sheikh, a 20-year-old Indian Muslim, took the witness stand in the trial of 21 Hindu neighbors whom her family accused of burning 11 Muslims and 3 Hindu workers alive in their family bakery.

The victims included her older sister, three women, twin 4-year-old girls, two babies and her uncle, who was hacked to death. The killings were among the most gruesome in the anti-Muslim riots last year in Gujarat State, which killed about 1,000 people, a vast majority of whom were Muslims.

In the year since, the young woman with pigtails and a primary school education has emerged as the public face of the victims in this industrial city of 1.5 million in western India.

Vowing not to marry until the perpetrators were punished, Ms. Sheikh tearfully told journalists and human rights investigators how jeering Hindus, enraged by the killing of 59 Hindus in another part of the state, had surrounded the family business, Best Bakery, and set it on fire. She and her mother, brother, grandmother and sister-in-law made it to the roof and survived.

But when her day in court finally came, Ms. Sheikh said none of her neighbors had been involved, according to a lawyer present. She has since disappeared.

"She said, 'These are the people who saved me,' " said Muhammad Hanif Sheikh, a Muslim lawyer who watched the proceedings in dismay. "She helped the accused."

Over the next several days, the relatives who survived with her took the stand and also exonerated the defendants. By the end of the trial, 24 of the 73 witnesses had recanted. On Friday a judge, citing a lack of evidence and shoddy police work, acquitted the 21 defendants and set them free.

The verdict has drawn nationwide attention and has prompted local Muslim leaders and human rights groups to accuse Hindu nationalists of sabotaging efforts to prosecute Hindus involved in the riots. They say Ms. Sheikh and her family were threatened, bribed or both.

Local Muslims said the faith of India's 140 million Muslims in the country's commitment to equal justice was again being tested in Gujarat. The state's Hindu nationalist rulers and the police were accused of standing by as Muslims were killed during the riots. Now they are being accused of generating a climate of fear and skewing the judicial process.

Hindu nationalists, who were overwhelmingly re-elected to office here early this year, denied the charges and said the scale of the attacks on Muslims had been exaggerated. The state's population is more than 80 percent Hindu. They said they had played no role in Ms. Sheikh's case.

Madhu Shrivastav, a Hindu nationalist who, some witnesses said, accompanied Ms. Sheikh to court, said he had never met her.

"I don't know who she is," said Mr. Shrivastav, a burly, bearded man. "I never talked to Zahira."

In a report issued today in New York, Human Rights Watch said that 16 months after the riots, no defendant had been convicted. Muslims are being prosecuted under India's strict antiterrorism laws, the group said, while no Hindus are.

The police are downgrading charges against Hindu defendants, filing false charges to cover up their own role in the violence, deleting the names of the accused and failing to pursue rape cases, Human rights Watch said.

Raghuvir Pandya, the state prosecutor in Ms. Sheikh's case, has been widely criticized for failing to aggressively cross-examine the witnesses who recanted. The lawyer said public prosecutors could not push witnesses too hard.

"If you put some hardness on the witnesses," he said. "they could complain to the government."

Iqbal Ahmed Ansari, a local Muslim businessman who aided Ms. Sheikh's family before she disappeared, called for the intervention of the federal government, which is also controlled by Hindu nationalists from the Bharatiya Janata Party. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee leads the largest nationalist party but is generally seen as more moderate.

Where Ms. Sheikh is and why she changed her story remain a mystery. Indian journalists are hunting for her across India. One theory has it that Mr. Shrivastav has hidden her in Bombay. He called those reports "rubbish." Another involves her getting married and moving to New Delhi.

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Hindu neighbors said they remembered Ms. Sheikh as a friendly woman whose father had died of a heart attack a month before the riots.

Piyush Patel, one of the police officials who arrived after the fire, said Ms. Sheikh had been weeping. Her mother, who was more composed, identified nine of their Hindu neighbors as part of the mob. The police did not arrive at the scene until 12 hours after the fire.

"She used to be very angry when she would narrate the story," Mr. Ansari said. "She used to be very emotional."

In the months after the attack, Ms. Sheikh seemed to come into her own, he said. Giving interviews and testifying before various commissions, her girlish face became a symbol of the horror of the riots.

Her family also began to benefit financially, Muslim leaders said. Receiving aid from Muslim charity groups, as well as payments from the state and national governments, they lived in various donated homes.

But the houses Mr. Ansari described all sounded smaller than the living quarters that were part of the spacious three-story family bakery. The charred building lies in ruins today, but it appeared to have been one of the finest homes in a lower-middle-class neighborhood filled with nearly all Hindu families.

Today, looters have torn out every window, door and electrical cable, and a family of pigs has bedded down on the first floor. On the second story, the partly melted legs of a girl's plastic doll lie on the floor.

A half-mile from the scorched bakery, Mahender Jadhav, one of the freed defendants, sat in his house today and hailed the verdict. He said Ms. Sheikh was now finally telling the truth.

"What can I say? These people came from outside," said Mr. Jadhav, 26, who owns a scooter repair shop. "I was at home. I don't know."

### **July 3, 2003. Los Angeles Times. Editorial. Fairness on Trial in India.**

It was bad enough that India's Gujarat state government did nothing to stop last year's riots in which Hindus killed more than 1,000 Muslims. It was worse that state rulers refused to let federal police investigate or to move the trials of those accused in the killings to a state where justice might be done. The result of the first trial stemming from the riots was as predictable as it was despicable: Twenty-one people accused of arson in a bakery fire that burned alive 11 Muslims and three Hindus were acquitted after prosecution witnesses changed their testimony.

Religious confrontations have plagued India for centuries, although the nation prides itself on being a secular state. More than 80% of India's billion people are Hindu; about 12% are Muslim. In February 2002, Muslims in Gujarat set fire to a train carrying Hindus back from Ayodhya, a disputed religious site. Hindus retaliated by massacring Muslims. Police were late to show up and when they finally arrived did little to protect Muslims.

Nor was Narendra Modi, the state's chief minister, any help. He later campaigned for reelection as a promoter of "Hindu-ness" and protector of Hindus against neighboring Pakistan, where Muslims predominate.

The main characteristic of the bakery arson trial was changed testimony. The organization Human Rights Watch said Hindus warned Muslim witnesses that they would be allowed to return to their homes only if they recanted. The judge who delivered the acquittals last week said the police work had been shoddy. Also, prosecutors made little effort to get witnesses to stick to their original identifications and narratives, and they failed to emphasize why witnesses backed down. India's coalition government should move the remaining trials and protect witnesses. The coalition's biggest faction is the Bharatiya Janata Party, which counts Modi as a member and benefits from support from Hindu fundamentalists. Eleven years ago, Hindus tore down a mosque in Ayodhya, which they say is the birthplace of the god Ram. That touched off riots across the country. Activists are still trying to win permission to build a Hindu temple on the site.

Deputy Prime Minister Lal Krishna Advani said last month in an interview at The Times that the Gujarat riots were an "aberration" and "indefensible." He is a mainstay of the BJP and a favorite of Hindu fundamentalists. Advani should take the lead in pushing for fair trials for those accused of causing last year's riots. He also should keep the Ayodhya controversy from inflaming India again, by telling BJP members to forget building a temple or by insisting that if a temple is built, Muslims be given a new mosque nearby. The BJP also must not use the riots and Ayodhya as lures for Hindu votes when elections are held.

### **July 13, 2003. Indian Express (India). Manoj Mitta and Rohit Bhan. Getting away with murder: Biased Bakery**

In Godhra case, cops extra careful in recording statements; witnesses have POTA protection. Not for Zaheera Sheikh

New Delhi, Vadodara, July 12: If Zaheera Sheikh and her mother Sehrunissa were Godhra victims, their story would have been different. Very different, for if you compare the way the Narendra Modi Government has gone about getting justice for the Godhra attack, it would seem the Best Bakery carnage happened on another planet altogether.

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The discrepancy is most evident in one, the recording of witness statements and two, protection of witnesses. It was because the police did not do their job in these two areas that the Best Bakery case collapsed leading to all the 21 accused being set free.

More evidence of police inaction came last week when widow of the bakery owner Sehrunissa Sheikh told The Sunday Express that she lied in court "trembling with fear" when she retracted her accusatory statements. The very next day, her daughter, another key witness, surfaced in Mumbai to say the same thing—both demanded a re-trial.

"Even if the trial goes on for years, there will still be convictions," says Godhra investigating officer Noel Parmar. His is no empty boast, it's based on the extra-careful way in which police have handled the case so far.

Consider the following:

- In Godhra, the police used Section 164 CrPC to get the depositions of at least six witnesses and accused. Under this, statements were recorded before a judicial magistrate. Such statements are presumed to have been made "truthfully and voluntarily."

So these six will be under pressure to stick by their judicially recorded positions. If any of them retracts during the trial—which has just begun—they have to explain why.

In sharp contrast, in the Best Bakery case, police did not record a single statement under Section 164, whether of an accused or of a witness. Says lawyer Girish Patel: "If police had used Section 164 during investigation, the judge would have taken a serious view of witnesses turning hostile during trial."

- The most obvious evidence of the police's seriousness in the Godhra case is the use of POTA. The burning of Coach S 6 of Sabarmati Express carrying kar sevaks by a mob of Muslims was first booked under POTA (then an Ordinance).

Police did not do this while booking riot cases against Hindus. When The Indian Express pointed out this discrimination, the Modi Government withdrew POTA from Godhra case—only to bring it back this February.

- Because Godhra is under POTA, key witnesses will get the extraordinary protection POTA provides.
- Section 30 of POTA empowers the court to record evidence "in-camera" and "take measures as it deems fit for keeping identity and address of such witness secret." It can avoid their names and addresses "in its orders or judgment or in any records accessible to public."

Thus, protection of witnesses is built into a POTA case. Little wonder that police refuse to disclose "crucial witnesses" on whose testimony they seek to build their case. In the Best Bakery case, local BJP MLA Madhu Shrivastava was a permanent fixture in court when Zaheera and her mother had to testify. They complain of how he and his cousin, a Congress councillor, intimidated them. Had they got POTA protection, these two would have deposed in-camera without fear or favour.

Milind Ghatwai

Vadodara, July 12: She's a mother and she's also an orphan. She's terrified, she's been disowned by friends and family, she's changed her name, she's worried if she's inviting trouble by telling her story. Then she rests her hand on the head of her 17-month-old son to swear that she's "telling you the truth."

"No one came to me to ask me what I saw...I would have told the police everything," she says.

She's Kailashben Vasava, a witness to the Best Bakery carnage—in which 14 people, three of them Hindus, were hacked or burned alive—but her story goes far beyond that. It transcends the communal divide—and some believe may have even prompted the attack on the bakery.

For, she is a Hindu. She lives with Zaheera Sheikh's brother Nafitullah alias Guddu and from whom she has a baby boy who was born just a fortnight before the massacre.

It was a relationship disapproved of by the Sheikhs, with Nafitullah's mother Sehrunissa disowning him as a "nikamma" (good-for-nothing). His sister Saahira, who now lives in Ekta Nagar, says their father had even sent Nafitullah to their UP village for six months to end the relationship, but in vain.

Orphaned when young, she ended her first marriage and was staying alone when her affair with Nafitullah — married and with a child — began. Neither the neighbours nor the Sheikh family were in favour of this relationship that led to the birth of a son. They named the boy Chand, ignoring the taunts of neighbours. "I always lived separately, for Zaheera and Sehrunissa never allowed me to enter the bakery," says Kailashben who has given herself a second name, Heena.

She has a one-room house, about 100 metres from the bakery. "I saw everything from my house, how they were made to climb down the ladder," she describes how the mob asked those on the terrace to come down, separated

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men and women, tied the men's hands, attacked them and "misbehaved" with the women. "Sabko berahmi se mar diya, apne teen Hindu ko bhi mar diya," (they killed them mercilessly, three Hindus were also killed).

"If the police had not arrived, they would have killed the rest also," she says. Her version matches that of Zaheera's. "No one came to me when I was in Dabhoi," she says. "I would have told the police everything."

She describes how men from the neighbourhood ran and hid in the fields when police arrived about 10:30 am on March 2. They later fled to Dabhoi, she said.

"The police were busy looking at the bodies when the culprits fled in front of their eyes," she said. She also alleged that people in Hanuman Tekri, where the bakery stood, had whisked her away the day after the massacre so that she wouldn't tell the police anything.

She said Nafitullah had taken a severe blow to his head but survived the mob. Members of the Sheikh family say he lost his "mental balance" after the massacre.

"Guddu often loses his temper now and threatens to assault people in the neighbourhood," Kailashben says.

Since Sehrunissa and Zaheera's statement that they had lied in court because they were afraid, Guddu hasn't come back to Heena. He's said to be in Mumbai, where the Sheikh family has taken refuge. "I am sure he must be with Zaheera and her mother," Kailashbehn said. In the Muslim neighbourhood of Mehboobpura, near Navapura in Vadodara, she is now Heena, concealing her Hindu identity.

She and Nafitullah, who used to work in the bakery but is unemployed now, have been living here for the past one month and a half.

She had lived in her Dabhoi with her sister for a year. Then, asked to fend for herself, she returned to Hanuman Tekri. Three months back, she was driven out of her home: women in the area kept taunting her and said she was responsible for the accused in the massacre case being in jail.

The logic was the Sheikh family was attacked because the elder son had an affair with a Hindu girl. She has nowhere to go. Nafitullah's sister Saahira says: "We won't let her stay with us. If Nafitullah comes back alone we may accept him, but if he comes back with Kailashben, we will turn him away."

Disowned by the Sheikhs and her Hindu neighbours, Kailashbehn is unsure about the future but certain that she has to go back to Hanuman Tekri.

### **September 25, 2003. Times of India (India).**

#### **Keep off rape victim: Supreme Court to Gujarat cops**

NEW DELHI: The Supreme Court on Thursday directed authorities in Gujarat to "keep off" from a woman who was allegedly raped by a mob during last year's sectarian violence after she complained of harassment by the state police.

A bench comprising Judges S Rajendra Babu and A R Lakshmanan directed Gujarat's Crime Branch of the Criminal Investigation Department "to keep off from" Bilkis Yakub Rasool till the court decided on her petition seeking a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation into the rape case.

Rasool filed an application on Thursday alleging the state police had started harassing her for approaching the apex court.

She said she had received threatening calls from various people, asking her to withdraw her petition.

As a result Rasool, her husband and child had to leave Gujarat with the help of a social service organisation.

The judges observed this was a serious matter and asked the state police to keep off from her.

Rasool was one of the women allegedly raped by a mob on February 28, 2002, a day after a train was torched in Godhra town, killing 59 people and sparking sectarian violence across Gujarat.

The Gujarat police closed the rape case despite a medical report confirming the crime.

Reacting to Rasool's petition, filed at the instance of the National Human Rights Commission, the Supreme Court had earlier issued notice to the Gujarat government, seeking its response to the allegation that the police had closed the matter without proper investigation.

Meanwhile, the same bench directed the listing of a petition filed by dancer Mallika Sarabhai and others seeking compensation for families of victims of last year's violence before the bench headed by Chief Justice V N Khare that is hearing what is known as the Best Bakery case.

This case relates to one of the worst massacres during the sectarian violence at the Best Bakery in Vadodara, in which 14 people were killed.

**October 17, 2004. New York Times. Amy Waldman.  
Indian Muslims' Hope Is One Good Policewoman**

KALOL, India - So indecent was his younger brother's death that Idris Yusuf Ghodawala never imagined the indignity that was to follow.

On March 1, 2002, as Hindu-Muslim riots convulsed the state of Gujarat, a Hindu mob armed with shiny new swords set upon Imran Ghodawala, an 18-year-old Muslim, dragged him into the Rabbani mosque and burned him to death. Idris, hiding on a balcony next door, saw the attack and then the smoke billowing from the mosque.

When Idris Ghodawala went to the police to claim Imran's remains, he said the top local police officer, a Hindu named R. J. Patil, told him there were no remains to claim. Mr. Patil had burned them, knowing full well that Muslims, unlike Hindus, bury their dead.

The sacrilege still makes Mr. Ghodawala, 31, weep.

"We are Muslims, and they burned our body," he said.

Mr. Patil's action appears to have been part of a broader effort to conceal evidence and thwart prosecutions after the riots in Gujarat state, which left at least 1,100 Muslims dead and up to 600 missing. Mr. Ghodawala could name four members of the mob that killed his brother, two of whom he had played cricket with as a child. But he said Mr. Patil refused to let him name names, or even file a complaint. So Mr. Ghodawala's case essentially disappeared, as did thousands of others stemming from the riots.

In a state controlled by Hindu nationalists, the police either refused to register the names of the accused or simply summarily closed cases; prosecutors did not oppose bail for suspects, and judges delivered acquittals in cases where dozens of people died.

Only a small number of Hindus have been convicted for any action in the riots, although the Supreme Court has now intervened to force more than 2,000 cases that had been closed to be re-examined and at least two retried.

What happened in this area was typical except in one respect. Late last year, Neeraja Gotru Rao, a policewoman of uncommon courage, arrived here after being sent by the state police to reinvestigate the cases. Her work led to the arrests of about 30 suspects, including the personal assistant to a state government minister. It also led to the arrest of Mr. Patil on suspicion of destroying evidence by burning the remains of Imran Ghodawala and at least 12 other Muslims.

The fate of these two police officers, whose interpretation of duty so diverged, will test more than whether justice will be done in the riots, which were set off by the immolation on Feb. 27, 2002, of 59 Hindus in a train carriage. It may also determine whether Muslims here can once again believe in the impartiality of the Indian state.

On a recent afternoon, the corpulent Mr. Patil was found not in jail, but sipping tea in his pajamas in the local government hospital. The minister's personal assistant and another well-connected accused person - all three ostensibly under arrest - were with him. Pleading illness, they were seeking bail from the comfort of the hospital.

Ms. Rao, meanwhile, was back in Ahmedabad, having been ordered by the Gujarat state police to wrap up her unfinished work. She is not granting interviews, but victims and their advocates say the order is another effort to thwart prosecutions.

"She was removed because she was doing good work," Mr. Ghodawala said. "And because she said she would try to find out who were the superior officers who gave the orders. Now I don't think anybody will take up this case." The director general of the Gujarat police says Ms. Rao, who is Hindu, was taking too long with her work, and that her investigation was finished.

The rioting lasted for weeks, but was most ferocious in the first few days. Sixty-eight Muslims died in this area, many of them from Delol, a village nearby.

Muslims died in the village and the surrounding fields, where Yaqub Adam, a tailor, saw his father, mother, uncle, cousin, nephew and two other relatives killed.

"Their only work in those days was to find the Muslims, kill them and burn them," Mr. Adam, 40, said.

Eleven more Muslims died next to the Ambika Society housing colony, when the truck in which they were trying to flee ran straight into a Hindu mob.

"Nobody came to save us," said Medina Yaqub Sheikh, who said she saw her husband hacked by a sword, then set on fire. One young woman said she was raped by five men.

More Muslims died at Derol station, and 17 more fleeing rioters at the Goma River. Two small boys were reportedly thrown on a fire, then when they crawled off, thrown on again. In Kalol, where about one-fourth of the 20,000

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residents are Muslim, 165 Muslim properties and vehicles were looted and burned. One Muslim man, injured in the police firing, was burned to death in the hospital compound. Imran Ghodawala was burned to death in the mosque.

If each killing had its horrific particularity, the aftermath was strikingly similar. Victims and witnesses went to the local police station, controlled by Mr. Patil, to register complaints and claim their dead.

Survivors said Mr. Patil refused to let them file complaints, saying he would write what needed to be written. In the end, he wrote a single complaint bunching all the killings together and not listing the suspects whom witnesses had named. Survivors of the Ambika Society massacre said he told them that he had burned the remains of their loved ones.

When Mr. Ghodawala sought a certificate proving his brother's death so his family could get compensation from the state, he said the police told him that if he named names his family would get no money.

He would see his brother's killers in town, but was powerless, he said, tears flowing again. "If we chase them we cannot live here, we cannot work here," he said. "We do not have anybody to help."

That changed when Ms. Rao arrived at the end of last year. The state police had dispatched her to investigate the killings and rape at the Ambika Society after pressure from human rights and women's groups and the Supreme Court.

She set up shop in a separate room at the Kalol police station, and victims began coming to see her. They found a woman, about 35, in a police uniform, with short hair, small glasses, a strong build and a soft voice.

She listened with compassion, and spoke with affection. Medina Yaqub Sheikh is illiterate, but as she recounted how her husband died, she knew it mattered that Ms. Rao took notes.

"Earlier when we used to talk to the police they never used to write," Ms. Sheikh said.

As word spread about Ms. Rao, more victims began visiting her. Idris Ghodawala told her of his brother's killing. She visited the scene, photographing the spot, still preserved in the mosque, where his brother had burned.

"She used to encourage us: 'Don't be afraid of anybody,' " Mr. Ghodawala said.

Yaqub Adam told her of his family's deaths. "No one knew about this case because it was never reported," he said. "Because of R. J. Patil, nothing came on the surface."

Ms. Rao worked as late as midnight and avoided talking to witnesses in front of the local police, bringing her own staff to write affidavits.

"She wanted that whatever injustice happened to us, at the end of the day we should get justice," said the young woman who had been gang-raped.

Local Hindus looked on her less favorably. "Neeraja Rao used to call people and they would be sitting all day in her office," huffed Tushat Patel, a town official. "She was very tough."

By the time she was taken off the investigation, 22 Delol men had been arrested. So had at least three of the four men Idris Ghodawala had named in his brother's killing, although they are free on bail.

One of them, Ajay Soni, a lecturer and member of the Association of National Volunteers, India's most powerful Hindu nationalist organization, called the charge fabricated. "This is all political," he said. "The minority cannot rule this country. This will not go any further."

Mr. Patil denied any wrongdoing as well. "All the senior officers knew what was the situation at the time," he said from his hospital bed.

For now, whether he was a renegade or following orders from superiors will remain unanswered since Ms. Rao is no longer here to pursue it.

Not a single Muslim has returned to live in Delol. Instead, they live in a ready-made ghetto, a colony built for them on the edge of Kalol by an Islamic relief organization. The houses are filled with widows and absence.

The young woman who said she was raped said she also lost her father, brother and husband - every male member of her household. She said she is still too fearful to go to town on her own, where her rapists wander free on bail.

She and the other victims want Ms. Rao back. "We had complete confidence in her, and we were getting justice through her," said Ms. Sheikh. "Now we are not sure."

In trusting Ms. Rao, the victims went out on a limb. Now, they say, it has been snapped beneath them.

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Idris Ghodawala said he again sees no hope for justice, and he feels more threatened than ever. When he crosses paths with those who were arrested in the killing of his brother, he said, "It is I who try to hide, not them."