

**Testimony of Najid Hussain**  
**U.S. COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**  
**HEARING ON COMMUNAL VIOLENCE IN GUJARAT, INDIA AND THE**  
**U.S. RESPONSE**

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I have great admiration for Hinduism. Historically, Hinduism had been the most tolerant and peaceful faith. The practitioners of Hinduism were never aggressive or violent. It was Hinduism that gave the world leaders like Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi.

The violence in Gujarat was not because of Hinduism. It was a result of extremism. Extremism is a religion in itself. Converts to this faith include Hindus, Muslims, Christians and many others. But Gujarat arises when the elements of the extremist faith enter the government, or the government is controlled by the followers of extremism.

From all available accounts and from my own personal observations while in India in the aftermath of the killing of my father-in-law, the former Member of Parliament Ahsan Jafri, it is an unavoidable conclusion that the government of Gujarat did not just give a tacit approval to the perpetrators of the violence against Muslims, but connived in the pogrom. There are evidences that the police, the judiciary and the hospitals, all became a part of that operation in ethnic cleansing by Hindu extremists and Sangh Parivaries (BJP, VHP, RSS, Bajrang Dal) in Gujarat.

The carnage carried out in Gujarat in the aftermath of Godhra incident was pre-planned. The detailed and meticulous preparation of that operation, the availability of weapons, the list of houses and businesses to be targeted based on voters lists and ration card records, the availability of bottled water for the rioters, and mob leaders getting riot instructions and help on cell phones, suggest that Godhra was only a convenient excuse. These extremists were fully prepared and on standby to carry out the violence against Muslim men, women and children, and were only waiting for the opportunity. The incident in Godhra provided that excuse. If it wasn't Godhra, it would have been something else. Anything else. There have been times when these extremists have produced their own sparks. Not long ago an issue of using a video on cow slaughter was being discussed among the elements of Sangh Parivar. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's remark, "had there been no Godhra, there would have been no Gujarat", to say the least is naive if not an attempt in self-denial.

The oft-repeated claim of these Hindu extremist outfits justifying violence against innocent Muslims is that the Muslims are anti-nationalist and terrorists. My father-in-law served his country and its citizens, regardless of their ethnic background, race or religion, for 50 years with pride and distinction. His poems full of strong nationalism and his teachings constant with human values, dignity and communal tolerance are a testimony to his deep roots in the Indian culture and respect for all faiths. He was not a terrorist. He was not a fundamentalist. He was not an anti-national. He was in fact a

very patriotic and proud Indian who despite every opportunity to have left India and joined us in the United States, chose not to do that, just because he understood his duty to his country and its people. He was deliberately targeted by the extremists, with the backing of Gujarat Government, just because he was a Muslim.

During my last visit to India in March while Ahmedabad was still burning, I met a young man at Ahmedabad Railway Station with a child in one arm and a little bag in the other. He asked me if I needed my shoes polished. I did not, but said yes. He did not have the foot-rest or a stand on which I could rest my foot while he polished the shoes. So I just put one foot forward and he started to polish. All the time that he was polishing my shoes, the child did not let go of his arm and he did not force her either. He polished the shoes just with one hand holding the child in the other. I advised him that he should buy a little shoe stand that could help him polish better and with ease. With tears in his eyes, he said he lost that when the rioters burnt his house a week ago. His wife and the mother of the child was also burnt along with the house. The little child was traumatized. That was the reason she would not let go of his arm. He said he puts her down only when she is asleep.

That man was not a terrorist. That man was not a fundamentalist. That man was not an anti-national. That man had no time even to think about any of these activities. He was only an innocent, hard working and poor Muslim who had a hard time making a living and raising the family. But he was targeted just because he was a Muslim.

This is not to say that the targets of these extremists were only poor and illiterate Muslims. Hundreds of very successful Muslim homes and businesses have also been destroyed. The Bohra community, which is one of very successful business communities amongst Muslims, was particularly targeted in Rajkot and Ahmedabad where they had leadership in business. I have seen brochures distributed by Hindu radicals asking Hindus to boycott Muslim businesses, avoid Muslim partnerships, and eliminate Muslim hires, with warnings of dire consequences for those who don't. Several businesses with Muslim partnerships were destroyed. Hindu women having Muslim spouses were also tortured and killed. The agenda of these Hindu extremists has all the elements of fascist ideology, a failed ideology that continues to impress only those sick minds which have otherwise failed to make a difference in the world through progress, or through the strength of their principles.

Just as these Hindu extremists do not like successful and affluent Muslims, they also do not like moderate intellectual Muslims who want to bring about changes in their communities, educate the elements of their society to make them progressive and tolerant to be able to project a moderate, more modern and more compassionate face of Islam. The expressions of their Muslim counterparts helps them because they can continue stereotyping Muslims as fundamentalist and terrorists, helping others blame the community for the ills of the society and the country, providing them a justification to target Muslims in general through violence. These Hindu extremists targeted my father-in-law also because he was a moderate Muslim.

I have personally spoken to a couple of police commissioner friends in Gujarat about the Ahmedabad Police Commissioner Pandey's failure to protect Ahsan Jafri despite his promise in the morning of February 28. Commissioner Pandey had come to Gulberg Society and had assured my father-in-law that he would send the police force to protect

his house and the society. Then despite repeated calls from Mr. Jafri, the Gujarat Congress President Mr. Amarsingh Chaudhary, and the All India Congress President Ms. Sonia Gandhi, Commissioner Pandey did not send any police until the mob had left after massacring and burning Mr. Jafri and nearly 150 others, mostly women and children, who had come to his house seeking protection from the violent mob. The two commissioners told me that they had the orders from "above" to "lay low". Although they did not elaborate what is meant by "above" and "lay low", from the behavior of Commissioner Pandey, it is not difficult to know what they meant. The latest reports of the meeting on February 27, 2002, at the residence of Gujarat Chief Minister Mr. Narendra Modi, which was attended by several of his cabinet colleagues and top police officers, including Commissioner Pandey, is a testimony to that connivance and government culpability. Modi had asked them to cooperate with the VHP activists during the Gujarat Bandh declared for the next day and not stop them in their activities. In order to ensure that, two of his cabinet ministers, Bhatt and Jadeja, were sitting in the police control room on February 28, 2002, overlooking and directing the mob work.

Government estimates of those killed during this riot are about 900. Their estimate for the Gulberg Society was 18, which later was changed to 39 dead. After speaking to the survivors of the Gulberg Society, we know at least 89 of the society residents are killed. The survivors in our house, including my mother-in-law, said that there were several Muslims from outside the society who had come to Mr. Jafri's house in the morning of February 28 fearing violence. They suggest that the number of people killed in the Gulberg Society alone may be more than 200. I have also visited a few villages in the outskirts of Ahmedabad, where even after 10 days since the start of the violence, there were several dead, decaying and burnt bodies lying in the fields and open grounds. I have spoken to many of those 100,000 victims staying in crowded relief camps, everyone of whom has lost someone or has witnessed brutalizing, massacring and burning of someone. Little children have seen rape, torture, mutilation and burning of their family members and friends. There are few nights when I myself do not get nightmares about killing and burning of my family members by the extremists and don't wake up in cold sweat. My seven year old asks me "will they burn us if we go to India?" Such questions are troubling and there is no convincing answer that I can give him. However, the real tragedy is that I am not alone in this agony, this atrocity, this loss, this pain.

Someone has said, "We learn from history, that we do not learn anything from history". After the Nazi holocaust we said "Never Again." After Rwanda, we resolved no more Rwandas. After Bosnia, we pledged no more Bosnias. What are we going to do now? Are we going to settle for another pledge of "no more Gujarats" until next time? Or should we do something meaningful and pledge once for all that let the buck stop here?

The US is the largest economy in the world. Many extremists and terrorist groups around the world have their supporters raising funds for their operations in the US and Europe. There is a lot of U. S. and European money going to support extremism and violence against innocent people in Gujarat. It comes from the many friends of BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party), the ruling majority, as well as supporters of Sangh Parivar, a few amongst which are VHP America, Bajrang Dal, and Hindu Sewak Sangh, who are active in the USA and Europe. This should stop. Just as we have banned several Muslim fundamentalist organizations in the US and other countries and frozen their funds, we must ban these Hindu extremist organizations and freeze their funds and assets. That

action will go a long way in putting a stop to such carnage and protecting innocent lives in India.

Gujarat pogrom has killed thousands of innocent people and destroyed the lives of more than 100,000 others including women and children. Many of these victims now living in relief camps are given offers by the politicians and other perpetrators of the violence that if they did not press charges against the culprits and mob leaders, they can be allowed to return to their homes. Such offers are deplorable and undemocratic. It does not help build any confidence or a sense of security amongst the minorities. If they are made to accept this, they will be made to accept a second-class citizenship in their own country.

India is my country of origin and I am very proud of my heritage and culture. But that culture has fallen a hostage in the hands of extremists. Having given a free hand and a momentum to the religious extremists to carry out the carnage, the government is unable to control them now. Nearly three months since the rioting started, Gujarat continues to burn. Lives continue to be destroyed. The world community at large continues to watch without as much as providing a lip service in condemning the violence. Four days after the Gujarat riots began and three days after my father-in-law was brutalized and killed along with hundreds others, the US National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, during her tour of India to emphasize India's part in our war against terrorism said, "We believe that the Vajpayee government will do the right thing and we will encourage them to do the right thing". One wonders if obsessed with our own war against terrorism, we are neglecting, if not abandoning, our own ideology and pledge on freedom, liberty, democracy, human dignity, rights and justice. Pressed for the need to maintain coalition on our fight against Al Qaeda, will we also turn a blind eye to this government sponsored human tragedy in Gujarat, by accepting the rhetoric of Sangh Parivar that the Indian Muslims are all fundamentalists and terrorists? I hope not.

We need to stop this madness. We need to work without reservations to free those countries that are falling victims in the hands of inhumane followers of extremism. We need to bring the perpetrators of this crime against humanity in Gujarat, regardless of their religion- Hindus or Muslims, or status- police commissioners or cabinet ministers, to justice. We should ensure that they are brought to justice, or the justice is brought to them. In any case justice must be served. Thank you all for listening to us and for your efforts to keep the religious freedom and dignity of the humans alive.