

cover story

The Displaced and Dispossessed Survivors of Mass Violence in Gujarat

A Report on Relief Colonies

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Introduction

Following the Gujarat carnage of 2002, two surveys were conducted to highlight the unbearable living conditions of a section of disenfranchised citizens of Gujarat. Men, women and children were not only made homeless but were forced to permanently leave their ancestral land where their families had lived for generations. "Hamein to bewatan kar diya (we have been stripped of our country)," commented one brave survivor.

Despite the passage of more than seven years, the Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi has yet to apologise to Muslims in particular and to all Indians for making a mockery of the fundamental principles and values of equality, secularism, justice and democracy. As an unrepentant state government continues to subvert and destroy justice and all norms of civilized and humane governance, there is little wonder that the wounds of the survivors refuse to heal.

As a climate of fear and hostility, as well as economic and social boycott continue to prevail in many parts of Gujarat, thousands of survivors continue to languish without hope, security, homes and livelihoods. The government still refuses to reach out with resources and support to enable people to rebuild their lives.

The aim of the two surveys in 2006 and 2008¹ was to:

- Gather facts and figures to document the existence of the internal refugees
- Prepare the ground for legal intervention on behalf of the displaced victim survivors living in colonies whose very existence was being denied
- Verify facts and figures provided by the Gujarat government on its responsibilities to the displaced citizens of Gujarat.

The surveys were conducted in 81 relief colonies across Gujarat in 2006 and then across 106 relief colonies in 2008 using the tool of radical action based research survey. This involved visiting all the colonies and holding focus group discussions with the residents.

Defining a colony:

In this study the term *relief colonies* refers to the places where the displaced and dispossessed had come and "settled" as they were expected to be there for years. Efforts were made to find colonies that were not on the list and include them in the survey.

Who set up the colonies?²

One of the most damaging findings confirmed by the study is that not a single colony was established by the state government. Chief Minister Narendra Modi, when questioned on why his government did not establish relief colonies, is reported to have replied, "Why should I? I do not want to set up baby-producing factories."³ The government did not even provide the land for the establishment of any colony.

All the 81 colonies were established by various Muslim organisations, ranging from conservative groups like the Jamiat Islami and Gujarat Sarvajanik, and more centrist religious organisations like Jamiat Ulema Hind, to a heterogeneous range of small and local Muslim organisations, and in at least one case by funders with known proximity to the mafia. The land was mostly purchased from Muslim land owners at commercial rates, and colonies built in the vicinity of other Muslim settlements. In only six relief colonies there were instances of collaborations of the Muslim organisations with secular groups⁴ in resourcing the establishment of these colonies.


This underlines a grave abdication not just by the state, but also by international and national humanitarian organisations which were by contrast very active in relief and rehabilitation efforts in the Gujarat earthquake of 2001 and the tsunami of 2004, but chose to turn away from the suffering of the survivors of the carnage because this intervention was seen as politically risky due to open and partisan state hostility to the survivors on purely sectarian grounds of their faith.

¹ The second survey in 2008 was made possible with financial support from Svaraj. A detailed report will be placed shortly on the websites of Aman Biradari and Svaraj. This article summarises some of its basic findings.

² This section is reproduced from the report of 2006 survey with the permission of the author, Harsh Mander.

³ Reported in Asian Age, September 16, 2002. The text as reported here was "What should we do? Run relief camps for them? Do we want to open baby producing centres? We are five and we will have 25 off springs, "Ame Paanch amara Pachchis." Incidentally, there has been no known official denial or clarification to this widely quoted remark.

⁴ Like Jan Vikas and Action Aid India.

Services	Government of Gujarat(GoG) claim	2008 Study findings
No of colonies	86	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 103 colonies identified (85 from GoG list, 18 not in the list) • 55 colonies in urban and 48 in rural areas • 4649 households in total
Education and nutritional facilities : Integrated Child Development Scheme	85 colonies have the facility of I.C.D.S. centres fully functional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 21 colonies had an anganwadi centre in the colony • Remaining 79 colonies - the anganwadi centres were away from the centre - distance ranging from less than 1 km to more than 1 km away
Mid-Day Meal Scheme	MDM facilities available to all the 86 colonies within a distance of between 0.5 to 2 kms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 89 colonies reported children attending government schools and getting mid day meal in the school • Of these in 85 schools a hot cooked meal is served • In 2 colonies the people reported that Muslim children are discriminated against in the serving of the mid day meal
PDS : Issuance of the Antodaya Cards	86 colonies have P.D.S. shop facilities within a distance of 3 kms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 colonies had a PDS shop within the colony, 88 had access to a ration shop within 3 km distance • Under the Antodaya Anna Yojana each family is eligible to receive 35 kgs of grain each month (16 kg rice and 19 kg wheat) • In 11 colonies people said that they were given less than 16kg of rice each month • In 38 colonies people reported being given less than 25 kg. wheat each month • Most of the colonies now receive wheat flour instead of wheat <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o In every colony there are complaints regarding the quality of the wheat flour o The wheat flour cannot be stored and if stored, within a few days they are infested with insects o The people have urged stoppage of supply of this wheat flour
		
Basic Amenities	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 46 colonies have access to drainage and sewerage facilities • 67 colonies have access to clean drinking water sources • 97 colonies have access to a regular supply of water
National Maternity Benefit Scheme/ Janani Suraksha Yojana	Affidavit does not mention any details of benefits Given to pregnant mothers in the relief colonies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness and coverage of scheme is very low • People in only about 24 colonies knew about it and said pregnant women in the colony have received benefit • 139 women who are eligible for this scheme, but have not benefited from it
NREGA	110 of the affected families falling under rural areas of the NREGA districts (Bharuch, Panchmahals and Sabarkantha), applied for and were issued job cards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Majority of the poor were employed as daily wage earners – in tea stalls, shops, construction work, wood work, factories, etc. • Often even after traveling about 4-5 km on an average per day, many end up not getting any work at times
Old age and widow pensions	217 elderly people were found residing in these colonies of which 52 eligible persons have been sanctioned old age pensions. 314 widows were found living in the relief colonies. 83 widows, who were eligible have been sanctioned the pension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 26 colonies people said that all old people in the colony receive old age pensions • In 37 colonies people said that all widows are getting pensions • In four colonies there were people who were getting pensions before 2002 but these had stopped after they moved to the relief colonies • In six colonies only, there were beneficiary of the National Family Benefit Scheme • 113 eligible persons are yet to receive the old age pension from all the colonies • 104 widows who are eligible from all the colonies have yet to receive the pension

The statutory National Commission for Minorities (NCM) in its report based on its field visits from 13 to 17 October, 2006, observes that "...the State Government has not been involved in constructing houses for the violence affected, thus leaving the rehabilitation process to private organizations..."

The insecurity of residents living in the colonies is further aggravated by the fact that with the exception of one colony, none of the residents have been given title deeds or long term leases to their allotted homes. This means that they can be evicted at will by the managers of the colonies. This is a reality, especially in the case of single women. In Ekta Nagar, Ahmedabad four widows were evicted arbitrarily because the managers and some male residents alleged that they were engaging in sex work in order to survive. It was only a dogged battle by the widows and support by external secular organisations that enabled their belated restoration

In addition, a letter from the Commissioners in March 2007 to the Supreme Court recommended that contempt of court notices be issued to the Chief Secretary and other officials of the government of Gujarat for misrepresenting facts and furnishing incomplete and inaccurate information to the Commissioners appointed by the Supreme Court.

In August 2007, the government of Gujarat, in the face of the evidence provided, acknowledged the presence of displaced people in 86 relief colonies. And in doing so became accountable for services and goods to the residents under the Indian Law and Constitution.

The government made various claims in respect of the services and provisions already in operation in the colonies. The second survey revealed the facts behind this claim. The table gives details.

The first survey discovered the existence of colonies that were unknown. Around 30,000 internally displaced people were still too frightened to return to their homes, and were living in appalling conditions of deprivation and denial.

It is a credit to our democratic constitution and legal justice system that the findings of the survey could be used to hold the government accountable and when faced with potential contempt of court proceedings, the Gujarat state suddenly acknowledged the existence of not one but 86 relief colonies and furnished details of various services and facilities available to the residents of these colonies.

The second survey shows that the claims of the Gujarat Government on many fronts are not matched by the facts and figures on the ground. The survey did however force the government to make a start towards providing some basic facilities to citizens rendered homeless and destitute by the unprecedented storm of horrific violence that permanently changed their physical and emotional landscapes.

There is evidence of major non-compliance on nearly all directions issued by the Supreme Court Commissioners. Given that the Gujarat government was able to react very efficiently, proactively and humanely to the earthquake disaster, its reluctance and lack of proactive efforts to assist the Muslim Gujaratis devastated by 2002, a human created disaster, demonstrates its heartlessness and indifference to those it has constructed as the aliens living within. Therefore it is not surprising that poor Muslims in Gujarat are feeling

The Supreme Court Commissioners directions to the government of Gujarat, June 2007 include immediate steps to be taken to ensure state accountability for the food and livelihood rights of its citizens who remain internally displaced nearly five years after the 2002 communal carnage:

All families who continue to live in relief colonies must be given Antyodaya cards, as internally displaced persons, who lost all their belongings, face fear and economic boycott, and are too afraid to return to their original homes.

Primary schools with mid day meals should be opened in all 81 relief colonies immediately, and in any case not before the next financial year. The location of the school should be such that it is accessible not only to the residents of the camp, but to the surround host communities, to promote integration.

All 81 colonies should have fully functioning ICDS centres with the entire contingent of nutrition and health services.

PDS shops should be opened in all colonies where these are not available within a distance of three kilometres.

There should be a drive within three months to ensure that all eligible persons for NOAPS and widows pensions receive these.

Job cards under NREGA should be issued in all NREGA districts to all residents of relief colonies who are desirous of these.

that 2002 was not just about a sudden physical loss of their possessions but also a beginning of the process of effectively stripping them of their citizenship on the basis of their religion. It was about making them feel as if they do not belong to the country where they have lived for generations...to return to the testimony of the courageous survivor "Hamein bewatan kar diya".

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