

# Gujarat pogrom completes ten years: Glimpses from the past --- and present

As Gujarat and the nation marks ten years of the horrific violence in Godhra and later across the state, and Modi completes his carefully-calibrated Sadbhavna mission in a bid to erase the 2002 blot, he finds the courts closing in on him and his government. Our senior correspondent **Abdul Hafiz Lakhani** unplugs the episode.

On February 27, 2002, Gujarat changed for the worse. The S6 coach of the Sabarmati Express caught fire at Godhra, killing 59 people, mostly kar sevaks returning from Ayodhya. The communal riots that followed affected at least 16 of the state's 25 districts and claimed over 1,000 lives, mostly Muslims. Many were rendered homeless.

The commissions that probed the Godhra incident have arrived at different conclusions. While the U.C. Banerjee Commission, appointed by the Centre, said the fire in the S6 coach was accidental, the state-appointed Justice (retd) G.T. Nanavati and Justice (retd) Akshay Mehta Commission, in its part I report, said the carnage was pre-planned.

The violence created a gulf between Hindus and Muslims that, even a decade later, is yet to be bridged. Compensations can hardly undo the damage. Even today, families fear to return to their original villages. Widows continue to struggle to earn their livelihood. Rape victims are still counselled for trauma. The families of the convicted cry foul. Businesses struggle to survive.

## Gulberg society

The name is embedded in collective memory as a symbol of the Gujarat riots and, to many, of the administrative complicity behind it. In Gulberg Society, the past is never far even as those looking at the future have learnt to make peace with it.

The empty shells of its 29 bungalows and 10 apartments now serve as godowns for neighbouring Muslim bakers, who supply their wares to Hindu shopkeepers next door. The smell of these bakeries and shahi dawats once filled the society, a Muslim-dominated area that came up in 1965 in the predominantly Hindu Chamanpura.

Targeted during the riots, they had all left. The owners of all eight bakeries are now back with their shops, though they stay 7 km away in Muslim-dominated Rakhial. Shamsul Haq Ansari's Robin Bakery, adjoining Gulberg Society, was looted and torched.

He suffered losses of lakhs and claims not to have received any compensation. He chose to return and rebuild from his savings, and said not only has his business taken off again but that he is doing better than before. Ansari's customers are all Hindus, including local provision stores, as there is no Muslim habitation around. For him or other bakers in the area, that hasn't been a problem so far. Mubarak Ansari, owner of Mubarak Bakery, said there was some tension immediately after the riots. "But with time, things have improved. My entire business depends on local Hindus and they support me wholeheartedly." However, none of them lives in the area. Haseemuddin, working with Ashiana Bakery, said the owners as well as the workers live in Rakhial which has been the case since they migrated from Bijnore. He cited "cultural and social reasons" for this.



As such, they did not lose any near ones during the Chamanpura riots. Those who did have chosen not to continue in Gulberg Society, except Kasam Mansuri, 62, who lost 12 members. After his sons relocated, Mansuri stayed back and makes a living selling mattresses outside the society. "This is my society, where will I go?" he said.

Looking at the garbage dumped outside Gulberg Society, the Hindus, on the other hand, feel it is time to break free from the past, if only to bring Gujarat's famed development to the area. Said Bhavanlal Jain, a moneylender whose customers are mostly Muslims: "The Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation has been neglecting the locality since they do not want legal complications of property, etc." The Citizens for Justice and Peace has come up with the idea of turning the society into a "holocaust museum".

To people like Saed Khan, who moved to the Muslim-dominated Juhapura, that is better than selling the houses to strangers. "It would be like selling the graves of your beloved." While Mansuri gets angry at times that the survivors of Gulberg moved away and set up a new life, Khan said: "Gas cylinders were busted in homes; when these caught fire, they threw acid bulbs on people hiding. Women were pulled out and raped in public. No one wants to go back there."

The bakers are the only remnants of a life that was. The mosque that was destroyed now holds five prayers a day for them. On Fridays, it also draws a number of Muslims working in nearby areas. As days such as these become routine, Afroz Ansari, a salesman working with J-K Bakery, is hopeful. "The riots," he said, "were an aberration."

## Naroda Patiya

A young boy gets down at the last stop of the Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS) on the RTO-Naroda route and says, "Where is this Naroda Patiya, the riot

spot, actually located?" Nobody knew Naroda Patiya till 2002.

Muslims who survived the biggest post-Godhra massacre are now called Patiyawala, a term they own up with pride. They lost their loved ones but their lives have since seen a sea of change, with the BRTS running right outside their homes and the surrounding development making their own abodes high on the demand list.

Inside the narrow bylanes of Naroda Patiya, life runs at a fast pace, and it's tough.

As children rush out of a school in the afternoon, a woman walks past tugging at a toddler, his bag dragging on the road. "There is no water at home. The cooking and cleaning is yet to be done. The drainage choked up this morning," she tells the accompanying woman. Her friend nods in agreement. "Nasirbhai scolded my son for not doing his maths homework. He was busy helping me clear drains since yesterday," she says.

Nasir Khan Pathan, principal of a small school 'Ikra' inside Patiya, has been teaching maths and science to children for the last 20 years. He claims he saw it all, including eight rapes, during the riots.

Most of the Muslims settled in Naroda Gam and Patiya came from poor families in Karnataka and Konkan belt of Maharashtra 40 years ago. The magnet was textile-rich Ahmedabad. When the mills shut down, they joined other factories making tools, auto parts, chemicals, etc.

After the 2002 riots, they lost that too. They say factories dominated by Hindus closed their doors on them.

For the Muslims in Patiya, which housed around 5,000 Muslims in 10 major settlements of Husainnagar, Jawaharnagar, Masjid ki Chali, Kehmchand ki Chali, Panditji ki Chali and others, life was always all about earning their daily bread.

Farooq Qureshi, Nasir's next door neighbour, says, "If one sees carefully, nothing has really changed. Earlier, we used to toil to earn our daily wages to manage two meals. After the riots, we are toiling much harder to streamline our small businesses that face threat from the majority community."

After the loss of factory jobs, the men from the Muslim community took to cart pulling, driving autos and cabs and setting up small pan shops, tea stalls and local phone booths. Now, the fight is to keep them humming.

Life is not easy. Though some of the riot victims have got relief in the form of small bright-coloured houses built for them, it's a daily struggle for two square meals.

Zannatibi Sheikh, an old and feeble fruit vendor, shows her cash box and says, "I start in the morning and this is all I have earned, Rs 100. It has been the case for 10 years. Our businesses dropped and

## Ostracisation after the carnage

The 2002 riots that took a heavy toll on Muslims of Naroda Patia served as a double whammy for the community: they not only lost life and property, they also faced discrimination in terms of employment in the neighbourhood. After the riots, many had to migrate to other nearby areas as they could not get jobs in their own area.

For example, Munvaar Saiyyad, a resident of Naroda Patia, had to migrate to Vatva because he failed to get work in his own area. Kamaal Hussain and few of his friends joined hands to start their own drawstring making unit after they remained jobless for years.

If residents of Naroda Patia are to be believed, no Muslim is accepted in the nearby area for any work. From the locality of around 1,000 households, almost 200 families have migrated in last few years, while many others are looking for opportunities. The remaining are either self-employed or they travel to

other parts of the city for work. And many as 300 families had migrated out of the area till 2007.

Before 2002 riots, the Muslims from the area easily got work in small factories, undergarment units, tailoring units, garages and even as domestic helps. But after the riots, the percentage of Muslims working in these units has drastically gone down. Most of the skilled labour force in Naroda, Kubernagar, Patia, Saijpur, Krishnanagar and Nayannagar were Muslims till 2002.

There are many families who have sold their houses, while others have given their houses on rent and themselves are living in rented houses elsewhere. "My landlord, Munvaar, is living in a rented house in Vatva. He has given his house on rent to me," said Muiuddin, a resident of Naroda-Patia. According to a rough estimate, at least 300 such families have given their houses on rent and shifted to other areas.

Local resident Nazir Pathan told that many people

have started their own workshops. He said there is no problem of communal tension but nearby units are not allowing Muslims to work.

"People are either rickshaw drivers or run small eateries, where most of their customers are Muslims," another resident said. They interact a little with non-Muslims of the area. "We are still struggling for our acceptance in the area," said Kamaal Hussain. Hussain, who lives behind Noorani Masjid, struggles a lot to get work to his unit. Recollecting the riot ghost, Hussain says: "Drawstring worth Rs4 lakh was burnt along with my house. I somehow managed to escape with my family." When he returned to his place after a few months, Hussain initially tried to do some labour work but later he managed to start a drawstring manufacturing unit in partnership. Most of the people have shifted to Narol, Vatva and Juhapura. Those who managed to get some financial help shifted to Dariapur and Kalupur.

women were the worst sufferers empty kitchens, several children to fend for, no money for school uniforms and books."

Zannatbibi, who lost her young son in the 2002 riots, points to a nearby madrasa and says, "The children who come to study here often come to my shop to eat potato balls. I sell them for only one rupee. I feel as if Mushtaq (her dead son) has come home hungry."

The madrasa is now closed most of the times. The aged Maulana, Abdul Rauf Khan, comes every day to teach but there are not enough children.

He says, "There was a time when 10-12 batches of children used to come to recite the Quran. I loved reading it out to them. Now, only 10 children come to madrasa, that too after much convincing. Parents fear the madrasa would be the first to be targeted if things go bad again."

Mariambi, who runs a chicken shop near the madrasa, says, "This home is the only piece of property we have. We had requested the relief committee to rebuild our houses at the same place. For us, the struggle for basic needs is more important than the incidents of the past."

Both Mariambi and Zannatbibi are widows living in Patiya with their children.

Pesh Imam Abdul Salam Shamshuddin Sheikh, the custodian of Noorani Masjid across the road since 1984, says, "The mosque was empty. I had gone to a home for Daur (reading of the holy Quran). This was the best time for the attackers to start. They began with breaking the minaret of the mosque. They blasted gas cylinders inside. Not a single corner was left."

Noorani Masjid has been since restored and painted and it now bears no mark of the February 28 violence. Amina Behlim's sons moved out of Ahmedabad after riots but she still lives there at Masjid ki Chali. She is stronger than the rest. She was a security guard at a printing press in Chiloda, but was sacked for sheltering for five years a girl who was raped during the riots.

She says, "She (the victim) stayed in Jawaharnagar alone after her parents kicked her out for not 'adjusting' with her alcoholic husband. I was hiding on a terrace and saw her being raped by 11 men. She ran out of the house naked to save herself."

**Naroda gam**

A young boy gets down at the last stop of the Bus Rapid Transit System (BRTS) on the RTO-Naroda route and says, "Where is this Naroda Patiya, the riot spot, actually located?" Nobody knew Naroda Patiya till 2002.

Muslims who survived the biggest post-Godhra massacre are now called Patiyawala, a term they own up with pride. They lost their loved ones but their lives has since seen a sea of change, with the BRTS running right outside their homes and the surrounding development making their own abodes high on the demand list.

Inside the narrow bylanes of Naroda Patiya, life runs at a fast pace, and it's tough.

As children rush out of a school in the afternoon, a woman walks past tugging at a toddler, his bag dragging on the road. "There is no water at home. The cooking and cleaning is yet to be done. The drainage choked up this morning," she tells the accompanying woman. Her friend nods in agreement. "Nasirbhai scolded my son for not doing his maths homework. He was busy helping me clear drains since yesterday," she says.

Nasir Khan Pathan, principal of a small school 'Ikra' inside Patiya, has been teaching maths and science to children for the last 20 years. He claims he saw it all, including eight rapes, during the riots.

Most of the Muslims settled in Naroda Gam and Patiya came from poor families in Karnataka and Konkan belt of Maharashtra 40 years ago. The magnet was textile-rich Ahmedabad. When the mills shut down, they joined other factories making tools, auto parts, chemicals, etc.

After the 2002 riots, they lost that too. They say factories dominated by Hindus closed their doors on them.

For the Muslims in Patiya, which housed around 5,000 Muslims in 10 major settlements of Husainnagar, Jawaharnagar, Masjid ki Chali, Kehmchand ki Chali, Panditji ki Chali and others, life was always all about earning their daily bread.

Farooq Qureshi, Nasir's next door neighbour, says, "If one sees carefully, nothing has really changed. Earlier, we used to toil to earn our daily wages to manage two meals. After the riots, we are toiling much harder to streamline our small businesses that face threat from the majority community."

After the loss of factory jobs, the men from the Muslim community took to cart pulling, driving autos and cabs and setting up small pan shops, tea stalls and local phone booths. Now, the fight is to keep them humming.

Life is not easy. Though some of the riot victims have got relief in the form of small bright-coloured houses built for them, it's a daily struggle for two square meals.

Zannatbibi Sheikh, an old and feeble fruit vendor, shows her cash box and says, "I start in the morning and this is all I have earned, Rs 100. It has been the case for 10 years. Our businesses dropped and women were the worst sufferers empty kitchens, several children to fend for, no money for school uniforms and books."

Zannatbibi, who lost her young son in the 2002 riots, points to a nearby madrasa and says, "The children who come to study here often come to my shop to eat potato balls. I sell them for only one rupee. I feel as if Mushtaq (her dead son) has come home hungry."

The madrasa is now closed most of the times. The aged Maulana, Abdul Rauf Khan, comes every day to teach but there are not enough children.

He says, "There was a time when 10-12 batches of children used to come to recite the Quran. I loved reading it out to them. Now, only 10 children come to madrasa, that too after much convincing. Parents fear the madrasa would be the first to be targeted if things go bad again."

Mariambi, who runs a chicken shop near the madrasa, says, "This home is the only piece of property we have. We had requested the relief committee to rebuild our houses at the same place. For us, the struggle for basic needs is more important than the incidents of the past."

Both Mariambi and Zannatbibi are widows living in Patiya with their children.

Pesh Imam Abdul Salam Shamshuddin Sheikh, the custodian of Noorani Masjid across the road since 1984, says, "The mosque was empty. I had gone to a home for Daur (reading of the holy Quran). This was the best time for the attackers to start. They began with breaking the minaret of the mosque. They blasted gas cylinders inside. Not a single corner was left."

Noorani Masjid has been since restored and painted

## The stories of Bilkis Bano and Zahira Sheikh



If there is one woman who has given hope of justice to all post-Godhra riotvictims, it is Bilkis Bano Patel. Ten years after she was raped and left by rioters assuming she was dead, she is one of the very few victims who have got justice after a long and painful battle. Zahira Sheikh tried to turn the Best bakery case on its head by saying she saw nothing, but Bilkis refused to give up till the end.

Justice, she may have got, but the victory has many shades of grey. Sitting in her home in Vadodara, surrounded by her husband and children, she feels the punishment should have been harsher for those who raped her and tried to kill her. "If eleven people can get the death penalty for burning the S-6 coach of the Sabarmati Express in Godhra, at least three of four people accused in my case could have been hanged as well," she says.

In all, 12 people were convicted in the Bilkis Bano case in 2008. Of these 11 got life terms and one constable got a three-year jail term. A police inspector and two doctors were acquitted. Bilkis was barely 19 when her world collapsed in front of her own eyes in 2002. Today, she says her long battle for justice would not have been possible if her husband and inlaws had not supported her. She shifted with her husband and four children to Vadodara from

Randhikpur a couple of years ago.

Her husband Yaqub says that there was pressure from all around. People even tried to bribe him to force Bilkis into changing her testimony. "We could have become rich with the bribes, but you lose dignity in the process," he says. "We have the case of Zahira before us. Besides our system, she is also equally responsible for shielding the accused in the case." Bilkis and her family had tried to escape rampaging mobs by fleeing their home in Randhikpur in the tribal district of Dahod on March 3, 2002. But they were surrounded by 30 people near Pannivella village. Bilkis saw 14 of her family members being murdered, including her two-year-old daughter Sahela. Three in the mob - Naresh Kumar, Jaswant Nai and Govind Nai - raped her and left her unconscious, assuming she was dead. She gained consciousness a couple of hours later, managed to reach Limkheda police station and survived. As it happened in many cases then, the police did not record what she said.

Despite her identifying 12 people involved in the massacre, the cops accused only a faceless mob in the FIR. The court closed the case stating there was no evidence on March 25, 2003. Undeterred, Bilkis approached the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), and with its intervention, the Supreme Court directed CBI to probe the case. The trial took place in Mumbai, and nine people were punished including the constables who tried to subvert the investigation.

Social activist Gagan Sethi who extended legal support to Bilkis's family, believes the victim's security and privacy is most important in the criminal justice system. Though Bilkis was given Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) protection by the Centre, mere physical security was not enough, he feels. "We had to take extra care for her protection. Even today, the family is fighting the trauma. We went to Mumbai on 65 occasions, but nobody still knows where Bilkis stays," Sethi says.

Like Bilkis Bano, Zahira Sheikh too was 19 when she witnessed 14 of her loved ones being murdered at

the Best Bakery on March 1, 2002. Like Bilkis, she even vowed to fight for justice and ensure that the rioters are punished.

But unlike Bilkis, she refused to identify the offenders in a sessions court in Vadodara the next year and all accused were let off. The Gujarat high court too upheld the acquittal. However, like Bilkis, her case was retried outside Gujarat in Mumbai and the accused were convicted.

Life has been tough for Zahira in the last decade, as she has fallen off the radar and prefers anonymity. All those who supported her over the years, now want nothing to do with her. This includes the Muslim community in Vadodara who see her as a traitor.

Her kin in Uttar Pradesh, from where her family had migrated, too don't want to help her. Before the retrial in Mumbai started in 2004-5, Zahira had blamed the BJP MLA from Waghodia Madhu Srivastav for her flip-flop.

The Supreme Court ordered for a fresh trial outside Gujarat on her statement. However, it was then revealed that she had been allegedly bought over by powerful people. Zahira sprang another surprise by accusing social activist Teesta Setalvad of coercion and illegal detention.

Teesta had provide her family legal assistance. Amid the controversy, the trial took place and Zahira remained silent even during the retrial. However, her family members supported the prosecution's case and nine of the accused were sentenced to life imprisonment. Eight others were acquitted for lack of evidence

Zahira became the only riot victim to be sentenced to jail for one year for perjury. After spending a year's imprisonment in Mumbai and Nasik jails, Zahira did not return to the bakery on Hanuman Tekri in Vadodara.

Setalwad says, "It is personally disturbing for me. It was a long and tough fight, and she did a turn around. She was a victim won over. She was just a pawn in a much bigger game. It was not Zahira, but those powerful people using her in order to damage the cause of securing justice in the 2002 riot cases."

## Godhra train burning: some facts and figures

Number of deaths 59; number of accused 94; convicted 31; acquitted 63 Gujarat riots Number of deaths: More than 2,000, including killings at Best Bakery, Sardarpura, Gulberg Society, Naroda Patiya and Naroda Gam More than 4,500 houses destroyed, 18,500 damaged Loss of property of Muslims pegged at approximately 0600 crore and that of Hindus at approximately 040 crore (based on former IPS officer R.B. Sreekumar's affidavit before the Justice Nanavati inquiry commission) Special Investigation Team headed by former CBI director R.K. Raghavan re-investigating 10 major cases, including the



Godhra carnage Not a single FIR against Chief Minister Narendra Modi Best Bakery killings: number of deaths 14; convicted 9; acquitted 8 Sardarpura killings: number of deaths 33; number of accused 73; convicted 31; acquitted 42 Gulberg Society killings: number of deaths 69; number of accused 67; number of accused out on bail 57; case has reached final stage in the trial court Naroda Patiya massacre: number of deaths 95; number of accused 60; number of accused out on bail 49; case is in the trial court Naroda Gam killings: number of deaths 11; number of accused 83; majority out on bail, case in trial court.

and it now bears no mark of the February 28 violence.

Amina Behlim's sons moved out of Ahmedabad after riots but she still lives there at Masjid ki Chali. She is stronger than the rest. She was a security guard at a printing press in Chiloda, but was sacked for sheltering for five years a girl who was raped during the riots.

She says, "She (the victim) stayed in Jawaharnagar alone after her parents kicked her out for not 'adjusting' with her alcoholic husband. I was hiding on a terrace and saw her being raped by 11 men. She ran out of the house naked to save herself."

### Godhra

A policeman sleeps on the cold stone bench beside the burnt and corroded S-6 coach parked outside the railway yard. Children who have grown up seeing the coach here play cricket in the open ground next to it. This abandoned bit of the Sabarmati Express that halted here on its last journey from Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh on February 27, 2002, doubles as the boundary of this make-believe cricket pitch. Inside the coach are plants that have dried up. Remains, such as a dusty rigor-mortified leather shoe under a side berth, a blackened steel plate between the two seats, are the only signs of this ill-fated train journey.

Hadu, a labourer from Ratlam, bangs the steel plate of the railway sleeper with the back of his spade to clean the caked earth inside. With him are other labourers from Madhya Pradesh. "Saleepar bana rahein hain (We are making new sleepers)," he says. 'Dibbe ke time' (from the time of the coach-burning) is an often-heard term in Godhra.

Ismail Jhaba, a Ghanchi Muslim who says he was 16 when the Sabarmati went up in flames, now runs a newspaper, a three times-a-week edition. "From being a source for bigger newspapers, I have become an editor," he says, offering to guide you through the sites that are now part of the police files.

"Those who made Godhra infamous will now know this place for positive things like communal harmony," says Firdos Kothi, president of the Godhra Ghanchi Muslim Samaj. On January 20, he gave a cheque of Rs 21,000 under the 'girl child education programme' to Modi, who was fasting here as part of his Sadbhavana Mission. Kothi's gesture didn't go down well with many Ghanchi Muslims.

Kothi brags about his closeness with local VHP leader Ashish Bhatt and about how for the sake of communal harmony, they have together managed to keep Hindu and Muslims girls and boys from getting into relationships. "We returned four Hindu girls (who eloped with Muslim boys) recently. We have a pact now. Love-shove wears out after some time and our children come out of it soon," he says.

At the entrance of Polan Bazaar and Signal Falia, the place where the train burning was allegedly plotted, a tricolour is unfurled everyday after 2002. A high wall stands where once stood the main gate to Godhra railway station from Signal Falia.

Signal Falia, or 'Singal Falia' as it is called, is where the 'dibbe-waley' live. Over the last 10 years, the Sabarmati accused, mostly from the Ghanchi community of Muslims, have come to accept this label.

Unlike the rest of Godhra, this part is untouched by development and remains on tenterhooks. Wary eyes take note of anything unusual. Isabhai Kazi, an acquitted accused, sells snacks on Polan Bazaar road. He would rather not talk about his jailed years. In the crowd of his clients are other acquitted accused like Yusuf Kala, who is irritated with the media. "Please don't take my photo without my permission,



and don't misquote me," he warns.

The dibba (S-6 coach) has divided the neighbourhood between the 31 who were convicted by the special riot court and the luckier 63 who were acquitted.

Maulana Husain Umarji, who was booked as the mastermind of the killings, is back home to his saw mill business, but stays away from the limelight. Mohammad Husain Kalota, who was president of the Godhra municipality when he was arrested, is back to practising as a criminal lawyer.

They animatedly talk about their encounters with D G Vanzara, Rajkumar Pandian and N K Amin, the policemen accused in the Sohrabuddin Sheikh fake encounter case, and ex-minister Amit Shah, in Sabarmati jail.

Yakub Haji Sattar alias Shakla, 54, one of the acquitted who proclaims he was qaidi no. 5138, says, "We bumped into Amit Shah often. When we were released, the cops came to say goodbye and jokingly said, 'Hamaara bhi kuchh karna (do something about us, please).'"

Sattar, a trucker in the business of shipping stone powder, has four sons and a daughter. "My son Akram would have been a doctor but after I went to jail, he became a bus conductor. This is one thing I cannot forgive Modi for."

Then I saw some kesri pattawalas tug at a burqa-clad woman's veil. They were screaming, 'Musalmaano ko maaro'. We were not wearing burqas. I was very scared. My mother then said we should go back to Signal Falia," she says. Sophiya first said this before the first investigating officer in the case DSP KC Bava, who is now retired.

### What happened that fateful morning

One of the first stories to emerge after the attack on the Sabarmati Express train returning from Ayodhya on February 27, 2002, was that a Muslim girl had been molested and dragged into the S-6 coach, triggering a fight between the Muslims vendors at Godhra station and the kar sevaks. Sophiya Bano Dhantiya nee Shaikh, a quiet 27-year-old mother of a five-year old, still shudders at that memory.

Sophiya Bano's statement was first recorded on March 28, 2002, with her mother's and sister's, by the CID (crime) which was probing the case, but it was never included in the first chargesheet filed in May that year. It was annexed only to the supplementary chargesheets. Later, almost 18 months ago, the police came to take her to the

SIT court to record her statement on the incident.

Sophiya had gone to Godhra with her mother Jaitunbibi Shaikh, 57, and younger sister Saheda, to celebrate Eid at her aunt's house in Signal Falia on February 23 that year. They were to take the MEMU (the local train) train back to Vadodara. "We reached the station around 7.30 a.m. and the Sabarmati Express had just come in from Dahod. We were standing near the drinking water point. There were many people with kesri pattas (saffron bandanas) who got off the train shouting, 'Jai Shri Ram'. We saw one of them beating up a bearded man and got scared. We started walking towards the ticket window and thought the train would go. A kesri pattawala came from behind and clamped his hand on my mouth and tried to drag me towards the train. I screamed for my mother who was ahead of me with Saheda. Hearing me shout, he let me go. Then I saw some kesri pattawalas tug at a burqa-clad

woman's veil. They were screaming, 'Musalmaano ko maaro'. We were not wearing burqas. I was very scared. My mother then said we should go back to Signal Falia," she says. Sophiya first said this before the first investigating officer in the case DSP KC Bava, who is now retired.

"Many big officers came to record my statement. But I never filed a complaint. We were relieved that we were safe," she says. In the court which was held in Sabarmati Central Jail, Sophiya and her mother were cross-examined. "I said the same thing in court," says Sophiya. Jaitunbibi, who also gave her statement, both to the police and the court, too gave her statement which corroborated her daughter's story. Ten years after the incident, Sophiya is still terrified of train journeys. Even though her father works as a fitter for the railways at Vadodara, she did not travel by train for months after the Godhra incident. "Now I go to Godhra station also, there is no way out. I have even been to the same place where this happened with me. The station has changed a lot since then," says Sophiya, who married Suleiman Dhantiya, a store owner, in 2004. The couple has a 5-year-old daughter. Sophiya lives a quiet life in a Muslim pocket of Vadodara and the neighbourhood does not even know that her Godhra journey that day was a critical part of the carnage story, which investigators did not connect to the bigger story.

People in Godhra say Salim Panwala, the absconding vendor on the Godhra railway station who allegedly "spread the rumour of a Muslim girl being molested", knows the real story of how and who set the S-6 coach on fire.

**GORA BHAI** 9831016785

سيد محمد رضا

**G.S.ROADLINES G.S.CONSTRUCTION**

78, Phears Lane, Kolkata-700 073  
Cell: 033 22256280, 22250802 Fax: 033 22371419

KANPUR ADDRESS  
133/181, T.P. Nagar, Canal Road, Kanpur  
Cell: 93359 56104/5/6