



Revati Laul: *The Anatomy of Hate*

Westland, 2018, Pp. 232, ISBN: 978-93-87894-20-4 (HB)

Bhavinee Singh¹ · Konina Mandal¹

Published online: 10 June 2020

© O.P. Jindal Global University (JGU) 2020

One massacre. Three lives. In a non-fictional account of an event etched deep in the annals of contemporary India, independent journalist and filmmaker Revati Laul has written a compelling account of the 2002 anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat. With the burning of the Sabarmati Express in Godhra on 26 February 2002 as the backdrop,¹ the author stitches together the lives of three protagonists, who may have been victims of their circumstances but were in varying degrees primarily the perpetrators of the violence.

1 Locating the narrative

Journalistic works on the pogrom in Gujarat in 2002 have mainly focused on the complicity of the state² and foregrounded stories of victims and survivors.³ For example, Siddharth Varadarajan's edited volume of essays explores the causes, consequences and political machinations of the violence as well as the roles of

¹ On the date of the incident, the Sabarmati Express was carrying hundreds of *karsevaks* (volunteers) from Ayodhya to Ahmedabad when it was attacked by a mob that killed 59 people. Most of the deceased were *karsevaks* and pilgrims. See Prabhash K. Dutta, 'When Gujarat fell to rioters after Sabarmati Express was set on fire in Godhra' *India Today* (New Delhi, 28 February 2018). <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/gujarat/story/when-gujarat-fell-to-rioters-after-sabarmati-express-was-set-on-fire-in-godhra-a-1179293-2018-02-28>. Accessed 19 April 2020.

² See Manoj Mitta, *Modi and Godhra: The Fiction of Fact-Finding* (HarperCollins 2014).

³ See Dionne Bunsha, *Scarred: Experiments with Violence in Gujarat* (Penguin 2006).

✉ Bhavinee Singh
bhavinee@jgu.edu.in

Konina Mandal
kmandal@jgu.edu.in

¹ Jindal Global Law School, O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonipat, India

complicit institutions, and strategies for the rehabilitation of victims.⁴ Rana Ayyub's *Gujarat Files: An Anatomy of a Cover Up* investigates bureaucratic complicity, fake encounters and state secrets.⁵ However, neither of these works offers much insight into the lives of the perpetrators. The author's book breaks this tradition of reportage on Gujarat 2002. Written sixteen years after the occurrence, her research spans over ten years through which she interviewed around a hundred perpetrators, out of which she zeroed down to three willing individuals who narrated their stories of guilt and complicity. The author writes, 'Distance keeps us comfortable... Getting up close is unsettling...', and does exactly that; she unsettles the readers by stepping into the shoes of the three perpetrators and narrating the events through their eyes (p. 215). Relying on the interview methodology of research and the techniques of investigative journalism, she cleaves a unique narrative into the chronological ordering of events – the day of the occurrence, its antecedents and the aftermath. Her book brings out a layered understanding of the lives of the perpetrators, similar to what Mahmood Mamdani does in his book *When Victims Become Killers*, where he constructs the narrative of the Rwandan genocide and mass violence in a novel way, by looking at collective violence through the eyes of the perpetrators.⁶ *The Anatomy of Hate* draws from this unique perspective to look at the various subconscious as well as conscious levels at which hate operates.

2 Chronicling personal histories

Suresh, Dungar, and Pranav are our protagonists. Though they come from different social and class backgrounds with differing levels of literacy, they have one thing in common — a rebellious attitude towards all things which were forced upon them by virtue of their birth in a particular stratum of the Gujarati society.

Labelled first as the son of a thief and second as *langdo* (limper) since birth, our first protagonist Suresh hails from the tribe of Chharas.⁷ A fractured upbringing, with a father constantly referring to him as a bastard, led him to commit crimes like larceny and rape as a grown man. Suresh initially did not harbour anti-Muslim feelings and grew up close to the Muslim dominated Naroda Patiya area in Ahmedabad. It was when his sister eloped with a Muslim boy that Suresh vowed revenge against

⁴ Siddharth Varadarajan (ed), *Gujarat: The Making of a Tragedy* (Penguin 2002).

⁵ Rana Ayyub, *Gujarat Files: An Anatomy of a Cover Up* (2016). The book was self-published by the author in 2016. See Priya Ramani, 'The self-publishing story of dust and dreams' (*Livemint*, 02 September 2016). <https://www.livemint.com/Leisure/aKyGnfUrG0fWxIPzGS1hBM/The-selfpublishing-story-of-dust-and-dreams.html>. Accessed 19 April 2020.

⁶ Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda* (Princeton University Press 2001).

⁷ Once a nomadic group of small traders, the Chharas had been branded as criminals going back a century. Labelled as 'criminal tribes' consisting of thieves, smugglers and gamblers, they owed their notoriety to a law put in place in 1871 by the British that defined them as people who were addicted to the systematic commission of non-bailable offences. See Revati Laul, '150 Years of Solitude — and a Funeral in Gujarat to End It' (*The Quint*, 01 August 2018). <https://www.thequint.com/news/india/gujarat-chhar-a-criminal-tribes-act-protest-police-atrocity>. Accessed 19 April 2020.

the entire community by wanting to marry a Muslim girl. Having succeeded in ensnaring an underage Muslim girl, Farzana, Suresh's frustrations and suppressed rage towards the Muslim community manifested in the ghastly form of domestic violence, with rare instances of endearment.

Filled with self-loathing and driven by the orchestrations of the Bajrang Dal (BD), with support from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Gujarat, Suresh committed some unspeakable atrocities on Muslim men and women (p. 5). Unbeknownst to him, he brazenly bragged about his capers to an undercover Tehelka reporter, Ashish Khetan, in the summer of 2007, that ultimately led to his imprisonment. As destiny caught up with him, in 2012 he was sentenced by the Gujarat High Court to thirty-one years of imprisonment for murders and rapes that he committed during the 2002 Naroda Patiya massacre in Ahmedabad (p. 170).

Our second protagonist is Dungar, a tribal Bhil.⁸ He is underprivileged and born into what the author calls a 'failed society' (p. 65). Despite being an intelligent child, Dungar was routinely humiliated by upper castes. To match the standards of the upper castes and escape the reality of his 'failed society', Dungar adopted the ways of his upper caste Hindu teacher. Later on, he went on to become a member of the Hindu revivalist Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), an organisation designed to harness anger against Muslims. The VHP's membership gave Dungar a perfect way to relieve his long-held envy towards Muslims owing to their prosperity and superior economic standing in the village. The 2002 violence gave him an even better outlet in the form of arson. With the passage of time, the very person who wanted to run away from his tribal identity held onto it and on the advice of one Rameshbhai, set up a Forest Dwellers Association, ostensibly for the welfare of tribals. Underneath a 'decorative tribal cover', he insidiously carried on his agenda of bringing people under the fold of the BD, the militant arm of the Sangh Parivar (the collective family of the Hindu right-wing organizations) (p. 91). Having become a double-dealing politician, to make up for his arson days, he also took the initiative of rebuilding the very Muslim houses he had burnt down. Unscrupulous and opportunistic, his story ends with him changing alliances to the Congress party, oscillating between his dual role as Muslim baiter and appeaser, and furthering his own thirst for power and control (p. 206).

Our last protagonist, Pranav, unlike the first two, never faced the wrath of forward castes because of his upper caste, privileged and liberal upbringing. Armed with the privilege of choice, the rebel in Pranav made him pursue a degree in arts away from home, against his father's wishes. Incidentally, more than intentionally, Pranav's involvement in the violence was more in the nature of a voyeuristic bystander. However, after actually helping loot a store, a nagging sense of amorality seems to haunt him. Working with an NGO that aided victims of the riot added to his consternation,

⁸ Bhils form one of the largest indigenous groups of South Asia. They were designated as 'criminal tribes' by the British and were defined as being associated with banditry. They held rebellions against the British on several occasions notably in 1846, 1857-58, 1868. They are currently listed as Scheduled Tribes by the government of India. See Susan Abraham, 'Steal or I'll Call You a Thief: "Criminal" Tribes of India' (1999) 34(27) *Economic and Political Weekly* 1751.

but also metamorphosed his entire notion of ‘them’. The realisation that identity was based on prejudice helped him surmount his depressing mental breakdown (p. 192). While a positive realisation dawns on Pranav, the other two seem to be stuck in a vicious cycle of hatred, prejudice and power.

Starkly different from each other, the three characters are situated differently in terms of economic and caste hierarchies, as Suresh is a Chhara from an urban slum community, Dungar is a tribal while Pranav is an upper caste Brahmin. These are people who are not in deep solidarity with each other and may have biases and prejudices towards one another. Therefore, the image of the perpetrator of anti-Muslim violence during the Gujarat violence of 2002, as the author’s account suggests, is not monolithic.

3 Art of the cover

Illustrated by graphic novelist Vishwajyoti Ghosh, the cover of the book depicting a raised hand with an iron rod is a cropped stylisation of a photograph that became the face of the mob in 2002.⁹ The photo was of Ashok Parmar (also known as Ashok Mochi),¹⁰ whose image was on the cover of magazines — fistful hands lifted in the air as if in victory, one with a red thread around the wrist clutching an iron rod, a saffron band tied around his head, walking towards the camera with fires burning behind him. Although the author makes no mention of the photograph (and the man) behind Ghosh’s art, Mochi’s own journey resonates with the complicated image of the three protagonist-perpetrators in the book. Presented in the image as someone who hated Muslims, he now has a different story to tell, having built deep friendships with the victims of the violence of Gujarat 2002, and standing in solidarity with the Dalit movement.¹¹

4 The politics of naming

How does one characterize Gujarat 2002? The author uses the words ‘mob violence’, ‘carnage’, and ‘pogrom’ to refer to the collective violence that occurred in Gujarat. In an interview with the independent new portal *NewsLaundry*, she uses

⁹ We thank Oishik Sircar for alerting us to this connection between the cover design of the book and the photograph.

¹⁰ The photo was taken by Sebastian D’Souza. It was published across newspapers and also made it to the cover page of *Outlook* magazine. See Harsh Mander, ‘From Godhra to Una: The face of the Gujarat riots has attached his name to the Dalit cause’ (*Scroll.in*, 28 August 2016). <https://www.scroll.in/article/813919/from-godhra-to-una-the-face-of-the-gujarat-riots-has-his-name-attached-to-the-dalit-cause.html>. Accessed 20 April 2020. Also see Tarique Anwar, ‘Once The Face Of Gujarat’s Riots, Ashok Mochi Now Talks About Dalit-Muslim Unity’ (*Indiatimes*, 20 August 2016). <https://www.indiatimes.com/news/india/exclusive-once-the-face-of-gujarat-s-riots-ashok-mochi-now-talks-about-dalit-muslim-unity-260309.html>. Accessed 20 April 2020.

¹¹ *ibid.*

the Hindi word *bawal*, which roughly translates to ‘riot’.¹² It is difficult to argue that terms ‘riot’, ‘carnage’ or ‘pogrom’ can be used interchangeably, because they convey differently the intensity of the violence in question. In the context of India, only the term ‘riot’ finds mention in the law. The Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860, defines the term riot to mean ‘force or violence used by an unlawful assembly, or by any member thereof, in prosecution of the common object of such assembly’.¹³ Ashutosh Varshney throws some light on the usage of the above-mentioned terms. He contends that the violence in Gujarat 2002 was ‘organised’, ‘condoned by state authorities’, and the pattern was ‘shockingly different’ in comparison to previous instances of collective anti-minority violence in India. This qualifies Gujarat 2002 to be the ‘first full-blooded pogrom of independent India’.¹⁴ Tanika Sarkar presents a different take on the usage of terms such as ‘carnage’, ‘massacre’, and ‘communal violence’, stating that they have even been overstretched at times to describe situations less horrific than the violence in Gujarat, almost normalising the terrors in the state, making them ‘bearable’. She also goes on to say that our ‘vocabulary is inadequate to describe the horrors of Gujarat’.¹⁵ With enough academic controversy already surrounding the usage of the term ‘riot’, the author chooses to keep the nomenclature of the nature of the violence ambiguous by using a gamut of terms to describe it. Interestingly though, throughout the book, the author uses the expression ‘testosterone-driven’ to adjectivise the violence in Gujarat (p. 59). As she writes, ‘It was in this part of Ahmedabad city, which the law and justice systems had long ignored, that the most testosterone-driven, saber-rattling arm of Hindu right — the Bajrang Dal — decided to proselytise,’ (p. 60). While she does not offer an explanation for this description, it points at an important connection — one between Hindu masculinity and violence — that is a key ingredient of Hindutva ideology.¹⁶

5 Deconstructing the hate

Comprising mainly of such ‘testosterone-driven’ Hindu men, the Sangh Parivar — consisting of the ‘saber-rattling’ BD, VHP and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) — envisioned to ‘herald a new golden age of Hindu rule’. Backed by the Hindu-majoritarian BJP, they led campaigns ‘designed to dazzle...’ (p. 60). When Pranav, our third protagonist, was given the responsibility of dropping off his

¹² Manisha Pande, Associate Editor, *Newslaundry*, Interview with Revati Laul, ‘Revati Laul on Gujarat Riots and The Anatomy of Hate’ (30 January 2019). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HODDsT8gCHY>. Accessed 21 April 2020.

¹³ Section 146 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), 1860.

¹⁴ Ashutosh Varshney, ‘Understanding Gujarat Violence’ (2002) 4(1) Social Science Research Council 1, 2.

¹⁵ Tanika Sarkar, ‘Semiotics of Terror: Muslim Children and Women in Hindu Rashtra’ (2002) 37(28) Economic and Political Weekly 2872.

¹⁶ See Thomas Blom Hansen, ‘Recuperating Masculinity: Hindu nationalism, violence and the exorcism of the Muslim “Other”’ (1996) 16(2) Critique of Anthropology 137.

Christian professor, he realised that the Hindu evangelism propagated by the Right was also anti-Christian. Clearly, even though the ones majorly targeted were Muslims, the Hindu Right's propaganda was a complete segregation between 'us' — only Hindus — and 'them' — both Muslims and Christians.

In this transformation from 'us' to 'them', rather from 'different' to 'enemies', the cornerstone of Hindu nationalism can be traced back to European fascism, as Marzia Casolari has shown.¹⁷ The socialist origins, transformative power, departure from democracy, and demagogic rhetoric of Mussolini's regime in Italy inspired Indian observers, especially in Maharashtra, which is the birthplace of Hindu militant organisations. B.S Moonje's trip to Italy and his experience in the country made him further determined to establish a militarised society.¹⁸ One way of effecting this would be to impart military and paramilitary training to, and disciplining of, the male youth of the country, drawing from Italy and Germany.¹⁹ As our second protagonist Dungar describes his RSS uniform, the author takes the reader all the way back to Hitler's Nazi Germany during World War II. Comparing the Jewish problem in Germany with that of the Muslims in India reveals that the concept of 'internal enemy' evolved explicitly along fascist lines, argues Casolari.²⁰

Other than disciplining and combat training, another way to bring more and more Hindus into the fold is through 'zealous indoctrination' (p. 62). In case of the author's protagonists, Suresh's joining the BD led him to use pejorative terms to address his Muslim friend (Hanifbhai); Dungar's participation in religious programmes and meetings with the Sangh Parivar members convinced him to chant, 'If you are a true Hindu, there is only one party for you. The BJP,'; and when Pranav realized that his head had been 'stuffed with too much propaganda', he wanted to change the way he saw Muslims (p. 137). In this way, the Sangh Parivar's politically driven, ulterior motive was to plant seeds of hate inside the minds of Hindu, Dalit and Adivasi foot soldiers. Through hate propaganda, meetings, and campaigns, the Sangh Parivar thrived on the politics of hate, to make Hindus believe that minority Muslims are 'internal enemies'.

The Sangh Parivar was also immensely successful in drawing the support of the State. Evidenced by the impunity in the aftermath of the Godhra attacks, the Gujarat administration's massive cover-up of the involvement of the Sangh also extends to the breakdown of the criminal justice system, police complicity and apathy. The author writes through her protagonist Pranav and his friends, 'Yes, they were there. In fact, they were the ones telling us we have ten minutes to do what we want and then we have to leave,' (p. 24). Evidently, the police, who happen to be one of the most important arms of the criminal justice system, turned a blind eye to the spread of communal violence in Gujarat. As retaliatory violence began, 'the saffronised police also found a common cause with the criminals (members of the Sangh

¹⁷ Marzia Casolari, 'Hindutva's Foreign Tie-up in the 1930s' (2000) 35(4) *Economic and Political Weekly* 218.

¹⁸ *ibid* 218.

¹⁹ *ibid* 220.

²⁰ *ibid* 227.

Parivar) to “punish” the minorities (the Muslims).²¹ As an extension of the state machinery, the police were not merely bystanders, but direct participants. The apathy and complicity shown by the police clearly reflected the success of the Sangh Parivar in penetrating the very core of the state machinery.

6 Conclusion

The author’s narrative manages to bring to the fore a unique way of looking at the Gujarat violence through the eyes and lives of the perpetrators. She delves into circumstances and instances which plunged our perpetrator-protagonists into a state of victimhood. First victimised by their personal circumstances and then by Hindu right-wing organisations, the ultimate brunt of the consequences was felt by them. Suresh’s imprisonment as opposed to BJP leader Maya Kodnani going scot free, Dungar’s insecurity about his identity and duplicity in changing alliances, and Pranav’s personal turmoil and anguish of seeing helpless Muslims, relegated them to the status of victims in their own ways.

The author gives us a glimpse into the reflections of the protagonists, thereby humanising them. Her gesture is similar to that of the journalist Antjie Krog, who in her memoir on the functioning of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up in the wake of the South African apartheid, also retells the stories of oppression through the eyes of not only the victims but also their oppressors.²² While both the books give the reader a deep insight into human nature, the author’s book doesn’t bear the theme of reconciliation. It does not offer much insight into the victims as much as it does the perpetrators, nor does it establish any reconciliatory narrative. However, it does humanise the characters and brings them closer to her readers. With this approach, the author has made a significant contribution to the existing literature on Gujarat 2002 and this narrative further adds to the reader’s understanding of communal violence in India. The narrative effectively weaves into its folds how individual choice and circumstances are manipulated by majoritarian politics in India.

In closing, the book leaves it to the reader’s imagination to bear witness to violence by attaching oneself to a victim, a perpetrator or a mute spectator. The author’s narrative forces readers to confront their own prejudices and identifications with the perpetrator-protagonists, thus unsettling the voyeuristic gaze with which even the progressive reader in India consumes stories of violence.

Publisher’s Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

²¹ Human Rights Watch, *We Have No Orders to Save You: State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat* (Report Vol. 14, No. 3(C), 2002) 21. <https://www.hrw.org/reports/2002/india/gujarat.pdf>. Accessed 20 April 2020. This report has derived this quote from Manas Dasgupta, ‘Saffronised police show their colour’ (*The Hindu*, March 3, 2002).

²² Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa* (Broadway Books 2000).