6 Narratives of Vulnerability and Violence: Retelling the Gujarat Riots

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On February 27, 2002, the Sabarmati Express passenger train was attacked at Godhra, a town in the Indian state of Gujarat. A total of 59 people were burned alive in the carnage. Almost all of them were Hindus, many returning after performing religious services at Ayodhya. The rioting that followed after the burning was virtually unprecedented in India. Neither the state machinery nor the ruling party headed by Chief Minister Narendra Modi attempted to control the violence. With few exceptions, even the administrative apparatus seemed to remain indifferent. At the same time, the media largely interpreted the violence in a standard fashion as a product of secular and communal rivalries (Engineer, 2003).

This chapter is a study of the Gujarat riots in 2002. It is an attempt to use the concept of vulnerability to increase our understanding of the riots. Memory and time, we will argue, are crucial to understand vulnerability as a central category of experience. In particular, such focus allows victims to be not merely the object of violence but the subject of history as well. This approach actually makes room for them to tell their stories within a scholarly context. Our argument, then, concentrates more on the aftermath of the disaster than on the rioting itself. To arrive at a better understanding of the nature of the violence committed, we argue, one should carefully consider its effects and the *a posteriori* narrative constructions too. The process of the return to normalcy should be as much part of the analysis as the breakdown of normalcy.

But let us first provide some basic context. Gujarat in 2002 was ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), headed by Modi, who in 2001 had taken office as the state's chief minister. To sustain its power, the BJP had initiated a series of revivalist processions called *Yatras*. *Yatra* means "journey," and in a political sense, the journey is symbolic, a plea to remember significant events from the past and use them to create an invigorating framework for action in the present. As such, these *Yatras* were designed

to travel to sites of pilgrimage such as Somnath (Gujarat) and various sites in Kashmir, which represent epic memories in the Hindu imagination and trigger a mnemonic of stories about violence inflicted on the Hindu majority. Modi rode to electoral power on this revivalist agenda.

In the early years of the twenty-first century, the state of Gujarat was extremely sensitive to social tensions and rivalries. Every year during Holi, Basant Panchami, and other festivals, riots would occur as a matter of routine, claiming a few lives on every occasion (Engineer, 2003). Elections were coming up in 2002, and the BJP was rather uncertain about its future after its defeat in assembly elections in the states of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. The controversies that arose in the wake of the earthquake of 2001 had also created a sense of unease.

On February 28, 2002, one day after the gruesome attack on the train, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, a rightist fundamentalist group financed predominantly by the diaspora, announced a Gujarat *bandh*, a general strike resulting in the closure of the state agencies as a symbol of protest. This gave rise to an explosion of violence on a large scale. On the first day alone, the death toll rose to about a hundred. The chief minister explained it away as the normal reaction of an angry mob. In fact, he described it as a Newtonian phenomenon, with every action triggering an equal and opposite reaction. The rioting would turn out to be one of the longest in Indian history, lasting for some four months and claiming thousands of victims.

The Question of Technology

Can we understand these riots better when we see them as happening in a technological culture? What role did technology play in the riots? Technology enters the riots at three levels in Gujarat—as symbol, as materiality, and as a metaphor for the change of nature erasure and memory.

In a collective sense, the most haunting memory of collective violence is the train. The train symbolizes the massification of violence, the fact that its cargo can include thousands of bodies. The trope of the train marks the beginning of many riots. The train to Pakistan is the unforgettable symbol of the Partition. The train enacted the everydayness of genocide, the reciprocity of violence between Lahore and Amritsar. Saadat Hasan Manto immortalized it with a simple line: "The train to Amritsar was seven hours late." Just that glancing reference to the lost time was sufficient to convey the mayhem that accompanied the event. And the train reared its head again with Godhra. The Sabarmati Express in 2002, carrying *Kar Sewaks* from Ayodhya, was burned at the station, leaving 59 dead.

Killing as a collective act needs the materiality of technology. First, there was the train, and then two lethal instruments of murder followed. There were three everyday objects. The *dharyu*, an agricultural implement used by farm hands, became a tool to disembowel bodies, especially of women. More dramatic was the use of the humble gas canister to blow up houses. Cooking gas became a destroyer of homes. But the systematic nature of the riots is most evident in the use of the third simple technology: computer printouts, which were used to pick out Muslim homes and shops. The 1984 riots in Delhi saw the first use of school registers to identify Sikh homes, but 2002 was the first time computer records were used to systematically identify minority homes.

Yet what made the riots even more macabre was the use of two other technologies. One was the use of the mobile phone to create connectivity among the rioters. The second was the deliberate use of chemicals in arson. Survivors speak of the use of numerous tiny bottles of foreign import, whose contents not only ate into the skin but scorched the walls indelibly. Traces of these chemicals were seen during the Gulberg Housing Society riot, where the Congress MP Ehsan Jafri and 69 others were murdered.

Riots often are too simplistically viewed as a communal problem. They are then seen as occasional bursts of emotion against a particular community. But the Gujarat riots, and probably many others in India, appear to be more systemic threats to minority citizens when we highlight the role of technologies. If we recognize how they are embedded in a technological culture, the Gujarat riots seem to be part of a planned urbanization. They did set the stage for an urban cleansing, equivalent to an ethnic cleansing. When homes are emptied, real estate is born. The sudden upsurge of urbanization in various parts of Gujarat, like Naroda Patia, makes one wonder if riots consciously or unconsciously are a part of a deeper logic. Studying the materiality of loss made us wonder if riots are, in fact, a form of economic warfare. Riots, along with dam projects, have become a major cause for large-scale, collective displacement today in India.

While riots create urban real estate in one part of the state, they also serve to exile minorities ruthlessly to another part. Anyone who doubts this should visit the camp at Citizen Nagar in Ahmedabad. Ironically dubbed a "transit" camp, it clings to a huge garbage site. The dump was small in 2002, but today it is a gigantic structure over a mile in circumference and seven stories in height, a mountain of waste smelling of garbage and chemicals, acrid with smoke, the delight of birds of prey. We see a juxtaposition of two allied forms of waste—urban waste and urban survivors wasted by riots.

The train has become a technological symbol of vulnerability. The waste dump, the mobile phone, the gas canister, the *dharyu*—these are the new material technologies of genocide in Gujarat. In the next sections, we shall explore the concepts of vulnerability and memory, and then return to the questions of technology and memory in the final parts of the chapter.

Vulnerability: Setting an Agenda

The concept of vulnerability has multiple pedigrees. It stems from a matrix of disciplines, each of which has constructed the meaning of vulnerability in terms of the axiomatics of the discipline concerned. As a term, in geography or ecology, "vulnerability" is a systemic property, defining the openness of a system to disruptions, both natural and social. But vulnerability is not just a measure of susceptibility to disruption; it also emphasizes the ability of the system to recover from a disorder. It thus reflects a measure of susceptibility as well as recovery. In this sense, it is an emic term, meant to describe a situation in its own terms. This is the concept that we will elaborate upon here and use in an ethnographic sense, highlighting analysis of narratives and grounding in individual and collective memory.

To develop our argument, it is relevant to capture a sense of the everydayness of life as lived in a camp. Giorgio Agamben's (1998) idea of bare life as lived experience is one example of such effort. To say that hell eludes description does not mean that pain, suffering, or heat cannot be discerned, felt, or described. Capturing such everyday experiences lends subjectivity a new potency without reducing it to the unscientific or the irrational. The notion of social suffering probably figures as the most creative result of such ethnographic and narrative-based analyses. Instead of objectifying pain into poverty or disease, social suffering opens up a middle space where pain, rather than being reduced to a number or symptom, becomes a story and a mode of listening—an articulated autobiography of vulnerability. Here experience does not get reduced to arid psychology. Instead of being merely constructed as an individual experience, pain serves as a mode of companionship with the other in coping with what is disguised, latent, suppressed, and taken for granted. Suffering may thus be gradually constructed as fragments of lived experience (Das, 2006)

We want to argue that each kind of collective violence generates its own quality of vulnerability. Atrocity results from an amplification of violence, where a small, irritable act by the victim creates a disproportionately large response. Atrocities are rampant in a caste system. The freedom of the dalits[1] and other marginal people became a source of anxiety to the

dominant castes. These dominant castes produced the traditional response of a mechanical act of brutality. What created the extra vulnerability was the expectation of justice in a democratic society. The vulnerability of a social system, in other words, increases with the sense of democracy that it is perceived to embody. There is a "baroquization" of the system because even freedom perpetuates and reinforces inequity.

The interesting concept of baroquization was systematically used by Mary Kaldor in her classic study *The Baroque Arsenal* (1981). Kaldor employed the idea to study the involution of innovation to understand the production of weapons in which more and more investment produces less and less impact. One example of this could be the tank after World War II. The weapon reportedly increased in complexity without producing a corresponding increase in efficiency. Baroquization subverts the system in counterproductive ways. In our study of violence, we witness a baroquization of the rule of law. The systems and institutions of democracy, when applied to these systems of violence, make the delivery of justice even more difficult. The baroquization of the system increases the vulnerability of the victim. Instead of being a guarantee of safety, the law has become a ritual of waiting and a parallel system of violence, which compounds the traditional violence.

We can see a similar erosion of justice through the baroquization of the rule of law in other instances of genocide and ecocide. Genocide does not always stem from collective violence or brutality. The collective elimination or displacement of a people can take place with the best intentions. Modern India has created a nation of 40 million internal refugees as a result of the country's efforts to develop economically, and thus it has created more refugees through development than through the wars that it has fought. In all these cases, the system of democracy becomes self-subverting, or anti-citizen.

In this perspective, riots may come to serve as an extension of electoral politics. The majority, tired of some minority, uses its majoritarianism as a vehicle to eliminate this minority. Exterminism becomes a property of majoritarian electoral systems. The chances of a survivor from a minority to successfully appeal to the rule of law increasingly grow smaller, causing vulnerability to become part of the logic of the system. This gives rise to the question of what is resistance and the route to survival in such a system, or what is the nature of agency, recovery, and resilience? Can we still apply Gramsci's (1994) model of the "pessimism of intellect and the optimism of will" to such a system? Our narratives are a search for an ethnography of survival and hope.

Specifically, we explore how the concept of vulnerability can be applied to survivors of the Gujarat riots. Every structure has its story. It is a game of possibilities, specified synchronically and diachronically. Any notion of normalcy or status demands its rituals of storytelling. Vulnerability threatens storytelling by creating a state of being where narratives are too fragile to be completed. Every life as a story demands closure, whatever the variety of interpretations. Vulnerability as a state of being designates the incomplete, aborted story. Order is not restored. Justice is not complete. It is a perpetual disruption of expected narratives. An incomplete, liminal story has sociological and philosophical consequences. A sense of expectations is distorted. Personhood, which biographically demands a collection of stories and the availability of timetables, is thwarted. Time is fundamental to the idea of narrativity.

Vulnerability and the Violence of Riots

The Gujarat carnage of 2002 claimed over 2,000 lives. Ironically, it also helped Chief Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP to retain power. The Gujarat riots strongly differed from earlier ones, in terms of both the sociology of rioting and the governance of its aftermath. First, rioting is generally an urban phenomenon, but the Gujarat carnage spread to over 200 villages. Second, tribal members in Gujarat rarely engage in rioting, but this time they constituted a critical core, which raises issues with respect to political economy or the spread of Hinduization. Third, riots tend to be spontaneous events that peak quickly, but the Gujarat riots lasted for months. Fourth, order tends to be restored quickly after a riot: the state assumes responsibility for the aftermath, and civil society engages in acts of mourning and solidarity. However, after the Gujarat carnage, the state refused to accept responsibility for the victims. Fifth, there was a sense of exterminism, which normally is not part of rioting. In exterminism, one attempts to annihilate the population in demographic terms, denying it the possibility of reproducing itself. There is no space for negotiation, compromises, or the "other" to be part of a future neighborhood. The violence perpetrated has a zero-sum quality in that it aims to eliminate the "other." Exterminism seeks erasure, while most riot narratives suggest some sense of adjustment, interaction, and even instances of compassion vis-à-vis the other. A zero-sum relationship, in terms of both power and orientation, destroys the possibility of reciprocity. Finally, violence, which typically has a random and spontaneous component, here appeared to be planned, and acts of rape were performed by neighbors.

Although the bestiality of the event is obvious, the indifference of the aftermath was more profoundly eerie. It was here that the conventional riot narratives lost their footing. A riot as a form of violence is always temporary. It presupposes a wider social domain in terms of state and law. The community in a larger sense intervenes to restore peace. In this sense, riots presuppose a return to normalcy. This includes not merely relief and rehabilitation, but also a sense of repair, where society intervenes to heal and to rebuild the normative order. With riots, there is always an expectation of healing, of some sense of justice. Riots, no matter how violent, have a sense of embodying the ethics of moral repair. Riot narratives, for example, include stories of how friends helped each other despite their ethnic divide. In a riot narrative, the temporary enemy returns as a permanent neighbor; violence appears as an episodic disruption, never as a permanent state of affairs.

Regardless of the violence, riots also come with the promise of some notion of truth-telling, some idea of justice, and some return to the normal. These three elements guarantee that citizenship for marginals and minorities has some solidity. Citizenship needs order and normalcy, as part of the social contract. Normalcy guarantees that life in a Hobbesian sense ceases to exist and that life is no longer outright solitary, poor, nasty, short, and brutish. Conversely, vulnerability that results in a breakdown of expected narratives and a disruption of rituals and timetables denies citizenship. Such vulnerability is the end of citizenship because it is the end of storytelling as a narrative of return.

In the Gujarat events, we are facing an absurd drama of fragments. The expected narratives of citizenship as a set of narratives of law and order are not available. The idea of citizenship is a claim to normalcy, welfare, and well-being within a specified territory. What vulnerability emphasizes is that the standard timelines and the expectations of normalcy may not happen. The victim remains in a state of liminality, without hope of rehabilitation, reciprocity, or repair. It is a breakdown of the standard narratives of the life cycle of a riot, which always reiterates its temporariness. The riot is always a fragment of a society gone wrong. The usual expectation is of a return to law and order, to some idea of truth and justice. Vulnerability emphasizes that this wait for normalcy may be a long one, even an incomplete one. The conventional idea of vulnerability sees it as an episodic event. The questions we want to raise are: What happens if vulnerability is continuous? What happens when crisis is an everyday situation, when there is perpetual fear and threat, though not always with the thickness of terror?

The anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) proposed the idea of "thick description" as the task of ethnography. Citizenship similarly involves layers of thick description. It is a skin of narratives, events, episodes. Narratives create the chain of being that we call the "citizen." It is when narratives collapse or truncate and time and timetables became so disorderly that vulnerability is born. If citizenship is as predictable as a bourgeois novel, vulnerability is a skin of broken short stories, of a person surviving on fragments of narrative. We have organized the following fragments of testimony into two sets of extracts—one about the riots and the other about the camps. The interviews in their entirety were recorded by Teesta Setelvad, first for *Communalism Combat* and then for the nongovernmental organization (NGO) Citizens for Justice and Peace. [In some cases, we have also included direct quotes from the police's First Information Report (FIR), filed by the victims.]

Testimonies

Set I: Events in February-April 2002, Interviewed at the Godhra Relief Camp, March 22)

Place: ***Randhikpur, Panchmahal district***

Witness: ***Bilkees*** **(age 19; Rabia, her neighbor and relative, was with her at the time of the interview)**

On the highway just outside the village we were set upon by a mob and 14 persons from my family were butchered and killed—7 from my father's family and 7 from my in-laws' side. (. . .)

All had lethal weapons in their hands — swords, spears, scythes, sticks, daggers, bows, and arrows. They started screaming, "Kill them! Cut them up!" They raped my two sisters and me and behaved in an inhuman way with my uncle and aunt's daughters. They tore our clothes and raped eight of us. Before my very eyes they killed my 3½-year-old daughter. The people who raped me are Shailesh Bhatt, Lala doctor, Lala Vakil and Govind Navi, all of whom I know very well. After raping me, they beat me up. Having been injured in the head, I fainted. They left, assuming I was dead. (. . .)

My aunt, my mother, and my three sisters all met with the same fate. I am 5–6 months pregnant. My husband and in-laws were away for Id. My husband came to meet me yesterday. All the other villagers, including Rabia's family, had fled the day before, but we stayed behind because my aunt's daughter was about to deliver. That delay has cost us everything. I have filed a complaint with the police but I don't know whether I will get justice.[2]

Place: ***Piplod Road, Randhikpur; Limkheda (Singvad) Taluka***
Witness: ***Ganibhai Majidbhai Ghanchi*** **(has filed an FIR with the police chief of Dahod, dated March 10, 2002)**
FIR: We live in Randhikpur (Singvad) post and do business. In our village, there are 71 houses belonging to the Muslim community, beside which there are 14 grocery shops, paan, and various other businesses. There is a mosque and a madrassa in the village.

When on February 27, the train incident occurred in Godhra, communal tension spread all over Gujarat and the property of the minority community was looted and burned. And the innocent people of the minority community were being killed. We . . ., as also the people of our Muslim community, were at home on the night of February 27. Around 2 a.m. on February 28, a mob of around 400–500 people, led by the names mentioned below, targeted us with cans of petrol, diesel.

They first looted and then burned four houses of our community. The mob returned around 8 a.m. the next morning, with lethal weapons and material to loot and then burn down more Muslim houses and shops. In addition, they also torched our mosque and our madrassa. Led by the accused we have named, the crowd returned on March 1, about 10 or 11 o'clock in the morning and looted and torched the remaining 10 houses. In addition, about 200 cows, goats, bullocks, etc. were stolen.

We are lodging this complaint against them. These incidents were witnessed by the entire Muslim community in the village. We should lodge this complaint in Limkheda police station but because of the tense conditions prevailing, we were unable to lodge it in person. We have, therefore, faxed this complaint which please accept and take further action.[3]

Place: ***Noorani Masjid, Naroda Patiya***
Witness: ***Nasir Khan Rahim Khan Pathan, Principal, Sunflower School.*** **(Interviewed at Shah Alam Relief Camp)**
I teach English and Maths to students of Std. IX & X. In our school, Hindu and Muslim students share the same bench and study.

On Feb. 28, the day Gujarat *bandh* was declared, a large mob of 5,000–10,000, dressed in khaki half-pants or chaddis, saffron banians, and black hair-bands set upon us. They had spears, swords, acid bombs, and petrol bombs. They used gas cylinders, too, for their work. First, around 10–10.30 a.m., the minaret of the Noorani Masjid was destroyed. Next, the family of Shabir Ahmed Khurshid Ahmed and Mehmood Ahmed Khurshid Ahmed was mercilessly burnt alive. The mobs were attacking Hussain Nagar and Jawarhar Nagar.

I was an eyewitness to the shameful rape of Khairunnisa, daughter of Mahrukh Bano. It was an animal-like mob of 11 who gang raped her. I was hiding in the toilet of my house at that time. After this, they burnt the entire family alive, one by one. The head of Khairunnisa's mother was cut off. I saw them mixing some solvent in the petrol. The bodies found later were in a horrifying condition.

I saw with my own eyes, petrol being poured into the mouth of 6-year-old Imran. A lit matchstick was then thrown into his mouth and he just blasted apart.[4]

Set II: Afterlife
Place: *Talimul Islam, Nandasan, Gandhinagar district*
Witness: *Syed Nasir, Manager, relief camp,*
We stopped getting any relief from the government after May 27. Earlier we used to get wheat, sugar, rice, and oil. For the government there is no camp, no refugees, now. But there are still 419 persons from 95 families in the camp. They are from the districts of Gandhinagar, Mehsana, Patan, and Ahmedabad.

We had some grain that lasted up to June 13; after that it has been very difficult. Some Ahmedabad-based and Mumbai-based organizations have helped with grain. Today, feeding the persons is very difficult. These are not persons with any land. They used to work in fields. Their homes have been completely destroyed but they have received barely Rs 5,000–15,000 in compensation.

On February 28 itself, MLA Sureshbhai Patel was named and identified by many survivors as leading the mob in village Paliyar. One month ago, a two-day meeting was held in the village where it was decided that "Miyabhai gaam ma nahin joyiye" ("We do not want Muslims in the village"). The total population of the village is around 3,000. The Muslims who have fled just do not want to go back.[5]

Witness: *Mozaam Khan*
Place: *Pansar village, Kalol taluka, Gandhinagar district*
Twenty-five persons belonging to four families from our village are now in the Nandasan camp. In Pansar village, there are about 450–500 Muslims. We have been holed up here for four months, because there is a boycott by the villagers who say they do not want a single Muslim in the village. The government is not helping at all either.

The *sarpanch* of our village, Gopalbhai Maganbhai Patel, belongs to the BJP. The *mamlatdar* had directed him to get us back. He flatly refused. He

said, "We do not want Muslims in our village." On top of that, is the utterly uncaring government. I have received a check of Rs 500 to rebuild my house; my neighbor has received Rs 1,000. Many have not received a single paisa. Is this not a mockery of the people who have suffered?[6]

Witness: ***Allah Rakha Shaikh, Lawyer***
Place: ***Por village, Gandhinagar District***
There are 75 Muslim families from Por whose homes were completely gutted using gas cylinders for arson on March 1. Even the *masjid, dargah,* and *kabrastan* were destroyed. The instigators, 53 of who were arrested, had been named, with others, in the FIRs. They have been given bail on the condition that they don't leave Gujarat. The Gandhinagar district court had rejected bail, but the High Court granted it after four months. We have also filed a case for adequate compensation in the HC.

Only the Thakores and Vagharis who looted and from whom some of our things were recovered have been arrested. Due to pressure from Patels we could not succeed in getting the bigwigs arrested. The *zilla panchayat* president Suman Patel and Raman Patel, both of whom also belong to the *Bajrang Dal,* had led the attack. Then we decided not to push too hard since we do not want too much enmity as we have to come back and stay in the same village.

Since the incident, up to now, there have been at least 50 meetings with the police, the collector, village leaders and us, the affected persons. The Gandhinagar district minister and local MLA, Vadilal Patel, was present at some of the meetings. Orally, we have been repeatedly told at the meetings that we should withdraw our cases against the accused. So far we have just said that once it becomes a police case, we cannot withdraw. Fortunately, the SP was transferred and the new SP arrested the accused and they were in jail for three days. This enraged the Patels. Now they are translating their anger and putting pressure through an economic boycott. We are 400 Muslims in a village of about 5,000 people. Muslim women have traditionally worked in the fields of the Patels and our youngsters have driven their trucks and other vehicles. Now they refuse to have any dealings with us. So there is no work and there is impending starvation.[7]

Vulnerability and Memory

The stories in the previous section, we would argue, must be seen as a scream of pain, slowly hardening into memory. We have presented them as a collage to understand the collectivity of the pain that the relief camps

represented. Next, we record reflections on these narratives, treating them as a single text rather than as individual stories.

In survivor narratives, vulnerability is constructed as a status and a form of being. There is fixity and tangibility in the beginning. Vulnerability is constructed with a history, a date, an event, or even a record in a newspaper report or headline. It conveys injured innocence, a cacophony of stories demanding to be heard. Violence involves a brutal invasion of property, dignity, identity, self. Between tales of murder and rape, a community is in shambles and all sense of security is gone. Intrusion, contamination, invasion, threat, violation—it is as if a community has lost its skin. There is a sense of rawness. In the initial phase, vulnerability is seen as a historical event in a certain public or private space. This becomes the initial refrain once space, identity, integrity, and dignity lose their meaning after being invaded. If there are memories of earlier riots, each new event seems an epoch unto itself. Gujarat has always been marked by excessively long periods of rioting, which alter the definitions of vulnerability. A marginal or minority community always fears harassment. Threat hangs in the air but becomes a backdrop in periods of normalcy; threat is domesticated into caution.

The ensemble of fears opens like a Pandora's box in the first days of the riot. What increases the sense of violation is the involvement of neighbors. Violence from strangers allows distancing, but violence by a neighbor has a different venom. Rape by neighbors increases the threat. As a senior woman journalist told us, "[R]ape is more than stigma. It both collectivizes and individualizes violence. It violates an individual woman. It violates the collectivity called woman."[8] Rape by a neighbor increases the visibility of stigma. The perpetrator hangs around in a perpetual presence. His boorishness is a reminder of the event *and* increases the victim's helplessness.

As the events progressed, the language of suffering transforms from the cacophony of lamentation to silence. Silence magnifies vulnerability and each woman becomes iconic of her experience. As one activist observed, "Violence mixes the inarticulateness of rage with the eternity of silence." Silence creates the community of the underground, a body language of shrugs. If sometimes read as denial or fear, it actually signals a lack of hope.

Vulnerability needs a sense of Proustian time when the social scientist sits with a timetable, tracing the sequence of the three R's—rescue, relief, rehabilitation. At one level, the victim responds to everyday assistance. At another, he realizes that justice is absent. Riots are not quite natural disasters, despite the state's attempt to force the equivalency.

Vulnerability demands a multiplicity of lived times that the state and the majority community try to truncate. Vulnerability is created twice: first through violence and then through denial or truncation. It becomes a denial of access to one's right to have a narrative. In violence, storytelling is one entitlement that the survivor demands. The suppression of the story is the second circle of vulnerability. If violence as invasion is the first circle, then silence and repression comprise the second circle. Waiting forms the third circle of this Dantesque world. Waiting appears as a corpus of rituals by which the social signals a return to normalcy. Waiting creates a sociology of expectations marked by a timetable.

However, waiting does not appear only as an extended timetable, but also as an extended geography. One begins with the simple displacement from home. Life in a relief camp marks liminality. This liminality is doubly underlined because the camps are not the creation of a concerned state. After the 2002 riots, for the first time Gujarat refused to establish camps, fearing that it would be read as an acknowledgment and confession of guilt. Intelligence reports of the Gujarat state government presented in affidavits before the Nanavati Commission of Enquiry (reporting in 2008) indicate that in 13 districts for which reliable data is available, 70,000 people have not returned home. "Waiting" means waiting to return to work, and then, when you do return, finding that local things have taken over the place where you had your shop. Neighbors come to you with morsels of hospitality, denying their role in the violence. It is an invitation to normalcy, a signal to forgive and forget.

The rule of law often becomes a ritual of delay. More particularly, and despite the best constitutional intentions, the forces of justice might themselves delay justice. Vulnerability becomes ironic because the very institutions that promise to maintain justice defer the rule of law and contribute to more vulnerability. When justice is performed as farce, vulnerability intensifies because the survivor feels helpless.

History becomes positivist and frozen in print when it is majoritarian and transformed from being plural and unofficial into being hegemonic and official: it becomes a simple narrative of conquest and defeat. Such history reduces memory to one strand of experience, denying validity to other interpretations. Such history leaves minority groups with only two options. First, it legitimates exterminism by converting riots into zero-sum games: electoral majorities now want to eliminate the opponent. The second option is a notion of citizenship as defined by the majority. The ghettoized Muslim seeking his identity is now seen as either a Malthusian

threat or an object of emancipation. Either way, history legitimizes violence. This positivist, majoritarian history—which denies plural, personal, and narrative histories—also demands the erasure of memory. "Let's forget and move on," as argued by the new middle class audience on TV. Justice demands memory, but it is precisely this memory and this right to storytelling that the vulnerable in Gujarat are asked to abandon.

In fact, this explains the confusion around what has been called the Bandukwala argument. Juzar Bandukwala, a physicist and professor at Baroda University, was a civil rights activist who faced threats and harassment for his stands. He repeatedly fought for rights, justice, and memory, but he did so to little avail. One could argue that his act might be misunderstood as weakening the sense of struggle among survivors; but we feel that it needs a sympathetic understanding. After a while, Bandukwala argued that he, as a practicing Muslim and a citizen, unilaterally forgave the perpetrators of the riots and wanted to move on. He explained that he did not want to carry the curdled memories of violence with him any longer. Memory becomes a double burden when justice becomes elusive. In this respect, vulnerability is critically related to memory and time. The structure of expectation is crucial, as is true of the politics of memory. It introduces a drama of choices. Does the victim forgive and move on? Does the majority apologize? Is some form of forgiveness possible? One must add, however, that on rethinking, Bandukwala emphasized that justice is primary, but waiting for justice can induce passivity in the victims.

Vulnerability opens the question of ethical repair, and this goes beyond the question of physical rehabilitation emphasizing a restoration of habitat and occupation. To convert a habitat into a neighborhood requires a *nomos*, a normative sense of understanding, of truth-telling. In this sense, justice is an unfolding of normalcy in time. Waiting for justice, for recognition of what happened, is a waiting in time. Many activists attacked Bandukwala for ignoring the plea for justice, seeing his pronouncements as signs of evasiveness or amnesia. But what Bandukwala argued was that as vulnerability searches for justice, it gets bogged down in stereotype. It needs to recover agency. Vulnerability caught in stereotypes loses its sense of innovation. Bandukwala wanted to tell his own story differently. Vulnerability, by reaching for an alternative narrative, finds a sense of agency. The actor forgives the perpetrator unilaterally and moves on: if justice is unavailable, forgiveness is the only creative option.

A minority always faces a ghettoization in space and time. If it is easy to grasp a ghetto as a spatial enclave, time creates its own ghettos. Is a minority to shut itself off, or can it modernize with the rest of society while

reworking the symbols of its identity? A minority reluctant to modernize might be seen as "backward," "fundamentalist," or "recalcitrant." The minority as a vulnerable category is caught between two kinds of time, between the time of history and development. History, as majoritarian history, ghettoizes them, and development portrays them as citizens reluctant to abandon their community.

What Modi, as the state's chief minister, did was to create a new imaginary, arguing that Gujarat had shifted its paradigms. His speeches imply to leave justice in the old paradigm for consumerism and mobility in the new one. Vulnerability is caught in the double bind of two narratives, both of which cannibalize a state of being. The tragic fact that over 75,000 people have been displaced in the 13 districts for which reliable data are available gets lost in such narratives. A riot not only distorts the story; it displaces or erases the storyteller. Vulnerability is that perpetual promise of non-being. Erasure stalks the victim as a collection of stories no longer available, and injustice becomes a disappearing archive.

At one level, Chief Minister Modi's regime explained the riots away as a loose kind of vigilantism, a knee jerk obeisance to a majoritarian view of history. He added legitimacy to that argument by winning an election. But then he accentuated vulnerability by playing on the difference between normalcy and normalization. Normalcy is an authentic return to order, while normalization is an ersatz narrative that creates a façade of normalcy, a set of props that convinces visitors that life has returned to order and peace. But what does *Pax Modicana* consist of? Can it erase violence by enacting tourist dramas of ethnicity around kite-flying festivals? Can it emphasize investment criteria as an indicator of normalcy? The victim is forced to forget and to repress the violence that he suffered. He loses even the right to its memory. Vulnerability needs its narratives to survive, to complain, to record, to testify. The power of the bureaucracy lays in suppressing and distorting these narratives.

In the last two sections of this chapter, we will return to the question of how vulnerability is constructed and maintained by storytelling, and how the development and modernization discourses in technological culture turn vulnerability upside down into security. Security needs firmness, strong handling, and ruthlessness, and the very authoritarianism of the regime, we will argue, appears as a positive quality in the emerging security discourses. In fact, there has been an appropriation of vulnerability discourses by the middle class. Now the middle classes are potential victims, while the original victims in turn are portrayed as potential terrorists. Security as practice and rhetoric now overwhelms the discourse of vulnerability.

Vulnerability and Storytelling

The sociologist as ethnographer feels helpless. She suddenly realizes that "vulnerability" is a word for a meta-narrative, a sequencing of stories now driven underground through silence. Silence embodies the resistance of vulnerability. The story incubates within, waiting for a future listener often lapsing in silence. Silence is the narrative of vulnerability retreating into its shell. It is the sociologist as activist who creates an opening by listening. She listens, she coaxes. Her word becomes a promissory note for justice. It is almost as if the first tendrils of hope reinstate the sense of vulnerability.

One of the best ways of understanding vulnerability is in the changing nature of narratives about it. One must posit a caveat here. In constructing the narratives of vulnerability, the survivor faces a counternarrative. This is the narrative by the majority community, many of whom seek to brush aside these stories as exaggerations. Some admit there have been aberrations but emphasize the need for "normalcy." The popular idiom is "we must move on." Tales of vulnerability, they claim, damage the reputation of Gujarat as a "brand." They argue that the violence was a minor punctuation mark. To convert it into a major full stop or an interjection was "unfair" and against "progress and development." Oddly, progress and development are two concepts used repeatedly as self-contained arguments for "moving on." Many of them see the violence as an embarrassment, a stigma that they have to carry. For them, development becomes a term providing the cosmetics of erasure, even indifference. They treat the debates on the travails of the victims and survivors as a discussion that has gone on tediously. Development becomes an indirect statement for benign neglect.

As a decade goes by, the narratives of the survivor grow self-reflective. He narrates his story but also listens to that of others. Narratives become a necklace of stories. There are further changes. Initially, emic readings tend to be anecdotal and autobiographical. But then the social scientist enters, and in pursuit of limited generalizations for a middle-range theory, he adds etic narratives using concepts like resilience and vulnerability. But the politics of survival and the requirements of law call for a third style of narratives—the FIR and the testimonies in two languages. This combination of three forms of narrative forges a community of survivors and a network of witnesses. Working together, survivors, social scientists, and legal activists demonstrate that narration and memory are ways of recovering citizenship, of reentering the social and its norms through the institution of law. During this process, two concepts change. Justice becomes a passage

rather than an immaculately hatched term. And there is a change in the tacit construction of vulnerability.

Stories that had been anecdotal, autobiographically discrete, and articulating grief, anger, and pain now become a collection of statements, complaints, and accusations. As the individual survivor becomes community, the concept of vulnerability also grows to network-like proportions. The survivor turns from voice to theory, from narrative to ethnoscience.

For Chief Minister Narendra Modi, the survivor represents a failure of the social and a challenge to governance. Modi differentiates tactically between the Muslim as ethnic and the idea of citizenship as secular. He then argues, while emphasizing his secular claims to governance, that Muslims are welcome as citizens. There is a hint here that vulnerability of the Muslim community is a mask for ethnicity. The Muslim is portrayed as a reluctant citizen. As a populist strategy, this immediately appeals to the dominant majority, which is tired of human rights pleas and critiques from the liberal press. Oddly, claims of vulnerability here increase vulnerability. Vulnerability is read in jurisprudential terms as a self-imposed injury of an ethnic group caught in a time warp and reluctant to embrace citizenship and development.

Realizing that vulnerability is negotiable, the survivor—working with social scientists and activists—builds narratives into testimonials. The survivor thus creates his own social science as a form of testimony, narrative, and resistance. The survivor tuned by the activist realizes that narratives without a sense of concepts might be self-defeating. They sense that concepts are filters that block certain arguments and allow others. Citizenship for the survivor becomes a learning game in law and social science. The government lawyers, in turn, have been peeved at this countermove. They have accused the Citizens for Justice and Peace of "influencing victims." The survivor learns citizenship, learns law, learns the art of legal testimony. The process of learning itself creates a community of pride and competence. Initial indifference of the group now opens into a sense of normalcy and citizenship as a learning curve. These become rituals of confidence building that are forms of healing. One of us confessed at that time that it was a reinvention of citizenship.[9]

What we see here is an appropriation of narratives, of the very act of storytelling. Any recovery of justice must begin with an act of retelling, through the rituals of discovery and investigation that make another form of story possible. The poetry of ethnography that activist-scientists engage in is precisely this—it prevents the possibility of forgetting, of erasure, of

amnesia. Dissent thus is a set of mnemonical aids for a society prone to forgetting and erasure. If vulnerability is pathology in time, only a retelling of times lost and expected can redeem a people. This could be the most important lesson of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (Soyinka, 1999). But one must add a caveat. In India, memory as oral telling is important. It demands listening, and the patience and silence of listening. The TRC was a spectacle, a demonstration, a show, a visual act. What India culturally might need is a style of storytelling that allows for multiplicity and retelling. By conceptualizing vulnerability as a problem of time and a problem of storytelling, one captures the everydayness of violence in the power of language to define reality. If the real accompaniments to terror are silence, indifference, and anonymity, the therapy for vulnerability is voice, narrative, and identity. A timetable for recovery needs to include a ritual of storytelling.

Such an approach to vulnerability does not deny a more scientific definition of vulnerability. It seeks to thicken it. It calibrates and defines. As an ethical term, "vulnerability" is far more textured than "well-being." It is not just about the other; it is about our openness to the other's being. What the middle class in Gujarat is pushing for is that extra bit of indifference, of forgetting. The solitude of the Muslim is the absence of a story.

That is where the strategy and hope of the Special Investigation Team (SIT) were. This team was created by the Supreme Court of India and chaired by the former head of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). Its rituals of visits actually were an invitation to a huge retelling of the story and a plea to listening. It was an invitation to a *Katha* (a storytelling) and a *Sunvai* (a hearing), where the victims record history again. Unfortunately, the SIT failed to meet expectations; it fell back on the work of the local police, showing little initiative of its own. The court had to appoint an *amicus curae* to look into the SIT's investigation. This report is currently unavailable to the public.

In a previous section, we discussed how politics sustains storytelling and how activist and survivor sustain memory. In the final section, we shall confront technology and its challenge to the politics of memory.

Vulnerability and the Discourse of Technology

In a previous section, we listed elements of technology that entered the ethnography of the riots. We have given technology a secondary place in our narrative so far because it was not primarily technology that haunted the riots. Technology—or, more precisely, the technological culture that

forms around it—most significantly played a role by creating vulnerabilities through framing the discourse. The first example is the remaking of Narendra Modi from a communalist to a technocrat; the second is the fate of the Muslim survivor as citizen; and the third example is the role of riots in the overall shaping of the urban discourse.

Modi understood that the core competence of a politician must be built around different identities, or—to switch metaphors—he understood that he needed a second skin. He realized that it was the *Hindutva* man in him that had to be deconstructed and recomposed. Like Eliza Doolittle, he had to project a new way of speaking. He disaggregated elements of his *Hindutva* identity to create a new one. *Hindutva* evoked the state as the god of society. Organizational skills, asceticism, a sense of competence as machismo, and a clear idea of history: these constituted a technocratic style of managing society. Modi presented himself as the *Vivekanand* in politics, a reformer using technology as a cultural metaphor for a new era.

Modi transformed *Hindutva* into a more neutral but aggressive technocratic idiom. Management became a form of masculinity, and the idea of *Hindutva,* first seen as local and parochial, now became globalized. Modi's Gujarat behaved like a city-state, a combination of Singapore and Shanghai on a larger scale. What came to his aid was the language of the World Bank. His expert handling of the earthquake the year before the riots was crucial. Modi used the World Bank rules and vocabularies to transmute his ideologies into methodologies of audit and standards creation as the new form of accountability. Modi was responsive to World Bank idioms and norms, and he could preen himself with numbers.

The new aura of accountability found a connection to an obsession with security. Security became the technocratic idiom of nationalists. Security was also the machismo that would fight terror. Gujarat's handling of terror was presented to the rest of India as exemplary. The brilliance of it was that security and accountability became positivist terms, measured by degrees of control. In Modi's thesaurus, they substituted for the ethics of responsibility. The "old" meaning of responsibility was encompassing in its philosophy. It was inclusive by involving minorities. Responsibility was a way of life that implied conversation. Security and the new, associated form of accountability were handled with forceps. They were distancing terms. If responsibility sounded soft, security was hard. It exuded power, control, and hierarchy. Gujarat was secure under Modi, while Delhi was vulnerable to terror under an effete Congress.

The myth of efficiency, epitomized as security and stability, needed investments as a continuing barometer of success. Modi played the

self-styled magnet for investments brilliantly. In this new age of liberalization, investments are manna, the gift from heaven all tyrants seek. Investments can silence shrill critics wailing about riots. Gujarat was to become the Camelot of investments, and its first center was Sanand, a city in Ahmedabad district. In Sanand, Modi created a dreamland for the automobile industry by inviting Ford, Tata, and Maruti to establish plants there, and contouring this hub with a stunning array of ancillary industries that would add to employment.

Modi's message to the corporations was clear, and Ratan Tata was among the first to sense it when he said, "It would be stupid not to be in Gujarat at this stage." Modi had become Gujarat's best political salesman, and his clients were the corporations and the diaspora. He enacted his vision of shining Gujarat, thus impressing the diaspora Indians, who starved for a sign of efficiency and decisiveness in their homeland. For them, as for *Time* magazine later, here was an Indian who could stand up to the Chinese. It was a helpful aura to have, especially with the US government. A nuclear plant or two would become an apt mutual token of esteem.

Modi has injected the idea of development as a credo deep into the middle class of Gujarat. For them and him, development is a process that cannot wait, that is inevitable as Darwin's survival of the fittest. The Modi credo then suggests that those who act tangential to or are recalcitrant about development are reluctant citizens. The idea of development creates a double demand on ethnics, marginals, and minorities. It presents them two specific challenges. First, it asks them to de-ghettoize and de-ethnicize themselves and erase identity and memory. It asks them to forget the riots: why wait for justice when we are offering you development? It argues that development can be more distributive than justice. The second challenge is that they have to become citizens, and that citizenship is defined as joining the mainstream. Here Modi's discourse also suggests that minorities did hide behind their ethnicity and behaved like reluctant citizens. Modi's is the truly secular option. The majoritarian electoral democracy of Congress plays to religious sentiments, while BJP's offer of development is an invitation to secular citizenship. With this fascinating salvo, Modi claims the higher moral ground. Many Muslims find this suggestion tempting. They realize that they need to join the mainstream, but they also sense the craftiness of the Modi option. He is asking them to abandon memory and justice to accept entry into development, yet development might be a zero-sum game too. They sense that the new urbanization in the aftermath of the riots may disempower them further.

Gujarat has always been the most urbanized part of India, with at least 57 major towns. Modi is now building a new wave of urbanization on top of this. Modi articulates urbanization as process and promise. As a process, there is logic to its demands that necessitate certain decisions. Instant cities, unlike instant coffee, are complex entities. Modi realizes that cities are coalitions of opportunities. The city caters to a middle class, to the corporations hungry for land, to a network of fixers who create opportunities around a city. Each act of Modi invokes a corporation and urbanizes Gujarat. Modi has allied himself with newly emerging entrepreneurs like Advani, Mittal, Nirma, and Tata. He has offered the Japanese, always hungry for land abroad, the opportunity for development in two cities. He has hypothecated the coastline to the corporations, like Adani Enterprises, whose control of pipelines and ports makes it a formidable force. Corporations that are desperate for land find Modi amenable. The middle class, seeing in these investments the prospect of employment, is also content. The Indian diaspora sees in him an almost American competence, quickness, and decisiveness that is rarely evident in Indian politicians. Modi has become the new urban hero.

Yet one senses unease about these new cities. There is wonder whether they are a kind of enclosure movement, a new way to displace nomadic and pastoral populations. Gujarat has been the home of these great nomadic and pastoral civilizations. The speed of Modi's policies of urbanization makes one wonder whether marginal minorities are doomed in this feat of citizenship that we call the city. The local activist has transformed himself into a development hero, with the city as his script. Modi as a development statesman now projects messages at three levels. Locally, he is a BJP chief minister; nationally, he is a future candidate for prime minister; globally, he is a player articulating the rhetoric of climate change. He is handling three parallel identities, with the help of the assets of the technological culture that is being created in Gujarat.

In discussing Modi, we have shown that majoritarian vulnerability resurfaced as security, and that technology reinvented the chief minister as a managerial hero. The vulnerability of the majority trumps the vulnerability of the minority. In the new development discourse, minorities are presented as less-than-modern, reluctant citizens who are resistant to development. The new discourse on development erases the riots, reconstructing them as a philistine and barbarian prelude. The new chorus of progress makes the survivors' protests sound like an outmoded script in a new era of technology. The authors of this chapter wish to emphasize hope.

The concept of vulnerability, we have shown, can chronicle the irony and tragedy of citizenship in the aftermath of a disaster. Thus, tracing the vulnerabilities in technological cultures can offer an understanding that may help to battle for deeper structural changes in society.

Notes

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1. "Dalit" is the term now used preferably instead of "untouchable."

2. Testimony I (2002), Extracts from *Communalism Combat,* March–April 2002, Sabrang Communications and Publishing Limited, Mumbai, Genocide Gujarat, 2002.

3. Testimony I (2002), Extracts from *Communalism Combat,* March–April 2002, Sabrang Communications and Publishing Limited, Mumbai, Genocide Gujarat, 2002.

4. Testimony I (2002), Extracts from *Communalism Combat,* March–April 2002, Sabrang Communications and Publishing Limited, Mumbai, Genocide Gujarat, 2002.

5. Testimony III (2002), Nandasan Relief Camp, Gandhinagar District, *Communalism Combat*, July 2002, Godse's Gujarat, Sabrang Communications and Publishing Limited, Mumbai.

6. Testimony III (2002), Nandasan Relief Camp, Gandhinagar District, *Communalism Combat*, July 2002, Godse's Gujarat, Sabrang Communications and Publishing Limited, Mumbai.

7. Testimony III (2002), Nandasan Relief Camp, Gandhinagar District, *Communalism Combat*, July 2002, Godse's Gujarat, Sabrang Communications and Publishing Limited, Mumbai.

8. Conversation with Leena Mishra, Resident Editor, *Indian Express,* Ahmedabad.

9. Conversation with R. B. Sreekumar, former director of the General Police, Gujarat.