

# WE HAVE NO ORDERS TO SAVE YOU

In 1993 Police and State officials were complicit in the deaths of hundreds of Muslims in Gujarat in the fallout of the destruction of the Babri Masjid:

*The police were directly implicated in nearly all the attacks against Muslims. In some cases they were merely passive observers. But in many instances, police officials led the charge of murderous mobs, aiming and firing at Muslims who got in the way. Under the guise of offering assistance, some police officers led the victims directly into the hands of their killers. Panicked phone calls made to the police, fire brigades, and even ambulance services generally proved futile. Several witnesses reported being told by police: "We have no orders to save you."*

Human Rights Watch

They dragged her out of the kitchen, a kitchen they had all visited at one time or another to sample her stuffed *parathas*. But now the circumstances had changed for this was a very different time. The attacks had been sporadic at first, many of them copycat occurrences. But as the news spread they became more vicious in nature. She had always been their *dadi*, in fact she had been everyone's *dadi* and it had not mattered that she was a Hindu low-caste. Lakshmi had often argued jovially with them over a cup of her *masala* tea that she had more in common with her *mussalmaan* brethren than the Brahmins up the road. But it did not matter that she had filled their stomachs with *dhal roti*, it did not matter that she had sheltered them from the heavy summer rains and talked to them about the ways of womankind when they had been thrown out for wasting a weeks wages on a game of *taash*. Right now the only thing that mattered was how quickly she would meet her maker at the hands of the mob. As the blows rained down on her she heard Karim, the young effeminate boy from next door screaming for them to stop. But when they drenched her with paraffin she knew her time had come and as slipped into consciousness she called for Ram to liberate her from this world and transport her to the next life.

The body remained in the yard the charred out remains a black memory of the mob. She was now the same colour as the *tavvar* in the kitchen.

Usman watched the smoke from a distance. The shouting was getting louder and he was beginning to get scared. They had barricaded themselves in whilst his father and older brothers had gone to get his *Mami*. But he was worried not only for himself but for Noreen and Kasir his younger sister and brother who were playing on the roof while he looked on. He would have to make a decision soon but for an eight year old boy he would need to think with a old man's head. Usman knew that they would be safe in Raju's house. His family was Dalits and they would hide and protect both Noreen and Kasir if needed. He didn't want to leave to leave the house and had promised his *Abu*. But the stench of smoke was getting stronger and he knew it would not be long.

Someone had seen the woman's body burn and it had enraged a group of wealthy high caste shop keepers who were now swarming around with *lathi's* in their hands. It did not matter right now that she was from a low caste family. Usman saw the Police stand aside as they passed and gasped as many joined in the rabble that was drawing closer. He knew what he had to do and that the Police officers would also search the Dalit's house if he was not careful. He would have to cause a diversion. Usman led them down the stairs laughing and joking with them and gave them the few *unna* that he had in his pocket and promised them that he would come for them soon. Noreen hugged him tight but didn't let go off her broken dolly. Kasir stared at the money in his palm and smiled. He knocked on Premji's door and saw a set of eyes look through. It wasn't much of a place but they had two rooms and he knew that Premji would look after them. The door opened and he ran in with the children.

'They are after us Premji please take them in. I'll be back I need to get something...' The door slammed tight and he turned around and saw the mob. He shouted 'Allah O Akbar' and ran down the street away from the house. They followed him in righteous anger away from the Dalit's

house and Usman headed for the west side of the city where he could see no smoke. He could see swarms of children and women ahead of him and the laughing police men who were gesturing and pointing, and knew if he could just make to across the Sukat road that he would be safe.

The bus driver had not stopped for the last hour. He knew people had jumped on and off to escape from one group or another but he wanted to get back to Surinder and the kids. These Muslim dogs and Hindu nutcases could kill each for all he cared but he just wanted to get back. He did not see the boy and he did not brake. The boy's body rebounded against the bonnet of the bus and hit the ground but he did not stop. He cursed the day that he had cut his hair and thrown away his turban because that would have given him some protection and maybe he would have taken the risk. All the faces of our enemies and friends look the same in these times he thought. He knew he would be there soon but the boy's eyes did not leave him...

For one moment everyone seemed to stop and there was silence as if a mass realisation had come up with the dawn itself. The realisation that it was the poor killing the poor, one set of rabble against another. But it was yet another incident involving a Police officer which triggered off the third day of rioting - in the savage communalism that followed the Police picked the side that they were part of and knew would win.

The Editor of the paper knew what would happen next:

The government would order a judicial enquiry, the regional council would refuse to cooperate or charge the looters, the great mass of the people would go along with it and as usual communities would be brought off and one or two secular and Muslim judges promoted.

But Lakshmi would not get any justice. Usman and the majority of Muslim families who suffered looses in their family would not get any justice and any compensation would be far too little and far too late. After the moneylenders had taken their cut from the pitiful amounts they received there was hardly any left. The bus driver was suspended but soon afterwards started on a route through a mainly Shia suburb. After all bus drivers were still needed - people still needed to get places and even Muslims still needed to get the bus. The foolish boycotts lasted a few days and even that had been sustained by Leftists brought in by the *Jamat* leaders. The Editor scratched his head and started to edit the text of the story. He had to sell newspapers and he knew that any vaguely pro-sympathetic Muslim line would mean a phone call from the powers that be. He remembered his wife and the children and that he had a well stocked fridge and the small pension that would be owing to him in three years time. He muttered a short prayer and hit the delete button.

### **Glossary:**

<i>Parathas</i>	Fried thick rotis
<i>Dadi</i>	Paternal Grandmother
<i>Masala</i>	Spice
<i>Mussalmaan</i>	Muslim
<i>Dhal roti</i>	Lentils with roti
<i>Taash</i>	Cards
<i>Tavvar</i>	Large pan used to make rotis
<i>Unna</i>	Pennies
<i>Mami</i>	Maternal Uncle's wife
<i>Abu</i>	Father
<i>Lathi's</i>	Stick with a metal tip/blade
<i>Jamaat</i>	Political party (Islamic)