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Diffusing Polarizations: Language and Translation at the Time of the Gujarat Riots

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> Go ask the setting sun
> If he knows whose eyes would he drown in today?
> And if he rises again like a bloodied dagger tomorrow
> Whose chest would he stab?
> Whose address would the death mail carry?
> And who, pray, will hand deliver to whom?
> Into hands that sweat and toil on fields
> Who will place bloodthirsty weapons?
> Who will now survive in this city that floats in fire and tears?

(Dhruv, 2003, 75; translated from the Gujarati by Rita Kothari).

The city that floats in fire and tears is Ahmedabad, in the state of Gujarat. It is a city that I have grown up in. And yet, in my mind, the predominant image of Ahmedabad is not the one of my childhood; it is an image of divisions. Nehru bridge divides the eastern (where religious, and often poor, minorities live) and the

western parts (inhabited by well-heeled, upper-caste Hindus) of the city. The bridge does not 'bridge' as bridges are supposed to: it is another division in a city divided along the lines of caste, class, religion, and gender. These demarcations characterise not only Ahmedabad; all of Gujarat bears these scars. The 2002 riots were born of these divisions, and they, in turn, caused others. Language is one such.

My concern here is not to narrate the contexts of the 2002 riots: both, the gruesome event of 27th February – allegedly perpetrated by a Muslim group – and the consequent Hindu backlash, have been much discussed and debated.[1] I am, however, concerned with the language divide that occurred in the wake of the Gujarat riots, where the English language came to be perceived by Gujarati-speaking and writing groups as anti-Gujarat. References to English media journalists (who, by and large, condemned the riots and the complicity of the government) made by the people of Gujarat abound with phrases like 'secular Taliban', and 'anti-Hindu', or 'anti-Gujarati people.' The elite intellectuals of India critiqued the situation in Gujarat using the English language. Their opinions, coupled with the language they used, served to mark them as enemies of Hinduism, as people whose credentials must be suspect because they wrote in English, and leading people like S. K. Modi, a writer from Gujarat who writes in English, to ask, "Why does the English language media dislike Hinduism? What's wrong with Hinduism? Or Hindutva, if you so please?" (2004, 190).

In some sense, even the discussion of this phenomenon lends itself to a similar kind of branding and is likely to evoke the ire of the Gujarati middle class that would see me as belonging to the opposite camp. It is a risk I am willing to take, not in order to

establish my credibility, or my affiliation with one or the other camp, but to argue that when languages are ascribed with war motives and used to divide people, I see translation as a stepping out of the zones of (con)texts in order to hear and be heard, as a way to heal wounds and bridge distances. This is not an idealistic notion of translation practices per se, but a conscious willingness to make translation perform certain kinds of roles. It is the willingness to migrate out of self-enclosed zones of languages, texts, and identities at large and to move into the zone of the 'other'. This is a sophisticated choice translators can, and sometimes do, make. My paper demonstrates this in the context of Gujarat where polarized viewpoints on right and wrong, secular and fundamentalist, English and Gujarati, have left very few possibilities of dialogue, or even ambivalence. Translators can seize upon the in-between spaces in this state and attempt to diffuse the polarization.

Divided Readerships: Gujarati and English

The first instance of large-scale television and cable coverage of an event in India was the riots in Gujarat. The riots saw the pervasive role of digital communication, the mobile phone, SMS, email, websites, autonomous computer-generated handbills, posters and the digital camera. In covering the events of Gujarat, which appeared to some as rightful Hindu justification for a timeless Islamic terrorism and to others as genocide, media agencies became both narrators and the narrated. Conversations about the riots in English were peppered with words like 'fascism' and 'ethnic cleansing' and 'pogrom'. Strikingly, (with exceptions, of course), Gujarati came to be associated with the articulations of the mainstream local Hindu community of Gujarat which sees itself as 'always' suffering at the hands of the Muslims: the retaliation was

'justified' under the circumstances that provoked such a reaction. To the Gujarati-reading and speaking people it seemed that the English language media was stoking the fires of hatred by constantly drawing attention to the 'sufferings' of the Muslim community, with references to their displacement, fears, and the conditions of the relief camps. On the other hand, the display of the charred bodies of the Hindu passengers burnt on the train, and the sensational details about Hindu women whose 'breasts were cut off' were provocative for those who read Gujarati newspapers and watched the Gujarati news channels. In this case, the role of *Gujarat Samachar* and *Sandesh*, the two major Gujarati dailies, came under the scrutiny of the Editors Guild which investigated the media reportage in Gujarat. According to the Editors Guild Fact Finding Mission Report, there was a "prompt and extensive portrayal by sections of the local press and the national media of the untold horrors visited on innocent people in the wake of the Godhra carnage [...]." (2002, 1). The Report also goes on to state that the Gujarati media was, "provocative, irresponsible and blatantly violative of all accepted norms of media ethics" (Ibid., 2). This is a view shared by all 'secular-minded' people (now pejoratively called 'pseudo-secularists') who found the Hindu backlash in Gujarat unforgivable.

What concerns us here is that in writing or speaking about the Gujarat riots, English and Gujarati came to harness two divergent notions of the nation. The role of the English language reportage in 'mitigating' the sufferings of the Hindus and 'highlighting' the conditions of the Muslims, and the perception that English was being hostile to the interests of a rigidly-defined 'Gujarati-ness', and the deployment of Gujarati in the service of cultural nationalism, promoting a sense of Gujarat as a cultural and political entity, using a purely Hindu idiom, clearly delineated the roles the

two languages were to play. The identity and pride of Gujarat, embodied in the word 'asmita', were evoked, and the English media was denigrated as its enemy. This denigration came from government representatives (See, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, April 2002) as well as individuals who used adjectives such as 'five-star, convent-educated, pseudo-secularists.' For instance, a well-known and popular writer, Chandrakant Bakshi refers to the English-speaking intelligentsia at large as the 'Anti-Gujarat, Secular Taliban', which is also the title of his book. In another case, S. K. Modi says, "What drives these English language men and women? Why do they enjoy putting down their own. Their own country. Their own society. What kind of complex are they suffering from? ... The reporting by the English language media has been so full of bias, so vengeful towards the Hindu community and so full of hate for the Gujarati society at large" (2004, 15-16).

In Modi's view, the English language reportage of the riots is nothing short of a "hate-campaign" (Ibid., 17).

It may be worth asking whether those who critiqued the riots in English did so because they were educated with the ideals of secular cosmopolitanism. Or, is it the case that people who espouse a secular ideology chose to write in English because their anti-state pronouncements would not have been published by the Gujarati newspapers? The answer, I suspect, would lie in a combination of both assumptions. What needs to be underscored here is the non-neutrality of language itself: "Consciously or unconsciously, it performs deft feats of appropriation and exclusion, supported by a dialectic of otherness. Creating and relying upon notions of cultural difference, groups underscore our "we," our identity and solidarity" (Berman and Wood, 2005, 3).

It must be kept in mind that nationhood inevitably depends upon cultural and specifically, linguistic means for its creation. The conflation of Gujarat and Hindu-ness excludes the minorities of the state, and reiterates the notion of a Hindu (sub)nation that obtains many forms of cultural production. It is necessary to note that words like 'it' and 'they' that encompass all those who speak in English, and also denote all 'Gujaratis' who were accused of being complicit in Hindu fundamentalism, have been thrown around after the riots, making the possibility of dialogue almost non-existent. The concept of the Gujarati *asmita*, articulated in a specifically Hindu idiom, closes off all possibilities – within and without – of critique.

It is here necessary to look at Gujarat's relationship with the English language. I have discussed elsewhere that as a mercantile state, Gujarat did not need English for civil services (See, Kothari 2003). Moreover, M K Gandhi's reservations about the English language as a vehicle of colonial domination also influenced Gujarat's attitude towards it. According to Gandhi, "Among the many evils of foreign rule, this blighting imposition of a foreign medium upon the youth of the country will be counted by history as one of the greatest" (Gandhi, in Kothari, 2003, 81). Gandhi believed that education through the English medium was "unnecessarily expensive" and that it "prevented the growth of our vernaculars" (Ibid., 81). The combination of both contexts determined for Gujarat its language policy, with a strong emphasis upon the Gujarati language and the introduction of English only in class eight.

It may be easy therefore to see some patterns in the Gujarati anger against English during 2002 and explain it as residual prejudice from the past. This would however only be a partial truth: Gandhi was not setting up Gujarati and English as adversaries; he saw both

as necessary for a different set of purposes. Gandhi favoured the use of English for learning the literatures of the world and made pleas for translations from English into Gujarati. More importantly, he did not conflate Gujarati with Hinduism, seeing it instead as a language "shared and nurtured by the three great religions of the world – Hinduism, Islam and Zoroastrianism" (Gandhi, in Navneet Samarpan, 2005, 49-52). In a public address made in 1909, Gandhi foregrounded the need for language in imagining a nation. He was speaking to a Gujarati-speaking audience, reminding them that in order to love the nation, they need to take pride in their language. Expressing his well-known reservations about the English language as not only a colonizer's legacy but also morally debilitating, he goaded his audience in a small town in Gujarat, to see themselves as Gujarati and then as Hindustani, the languages of subnation and nation. Gujarat was not the linguistic state it is today, and hence a Gujarati identity had to be drawn essentially from a sense of language and not territory: "After all Gujarati is not a language to be thrown away, it has poets like Narsinh Mehta, Akho Bhagat, Dayaram. It has a lot of scope for development. A language that is shared and nurtured by three great religions Hinduism, Islam and Zoroastrianism can have no limits" (Ibid., 51).

The language war in Gujarat at the time of physical and linguistic violence tells a different story; it divides languages on the basis of religion and irreconcilable perceptions of the nation (Ibid., 51). As a translator who inhabits the in-between space between languages, I am concerned with the fact that this space is under siege. I wish to bring to this space the articulations that lay locked on both sides —in Gujarati (the official language of the state of Gujarat) and in English (a colonial legacy, but now associated, among other things, with journalists who critiqued Gujarat and its treatment of the Muslims in 2002). By foregrounding the role of translation,

especially when done with empathy, I hope to regain the third space wherein languages are not synonymous with loyalties; rather they make and unmake themselves temporarily and elude ownership. As an unsilenced translator, I also wish to ask if the group of linguistic clusters ever tried stepping out of their textualities to listen to the other, or to engage in self-reflection. We shall revert to this issue after a discussion of an extremely controversial article about Gujarat, and the varied responses to it.

Towards Translation

The article, 'Hating Muslims is a Natural Thing in Gujarat' written by Ganesh Devy, one of Gujarat's most well-known intellectuals, activist for tribal groups and former teacher of English, appeared in an investigative English journal, *Tehelka,* about four years after the riots of 2002. This article was written out of a conversation that Devy had with Shankarshan Thakur, the editor of *Tehelka*.

According to Devy, it was triggered off by an incident of violence in the city of Vadodara. The article became a strong, unqualified critique of Gujarat and its anti-Muslim stance, a stance that it ascribed not only to the state, but to each and every individual. The title leaves no room for ambivalence or even reflection. At the same time, Devy's piece gives voice to an anger that many had felt at the completely silent and remorseless state of Gujarat after 2002. When I first read the piece, I was struck at how unlike Devy it sounded. It had seemed to me then that perhaps such anger was necessary for shaking the complacency of Gujarat's upper-class Hindu intelligentsia who had not expressed any condemnation about the large-scale deaths of the Muslim people in 2002. After reading the reactions to Devy's article, I realised that the debate had only reinforced the polarities between the two readerships and

ideologies. I then began to wonder if there were strategies by which a third and not so marked space could be created.

The opening remarks of Devy's article, quoted below, conveyed to me sadness and poignancy and not rejection, as was perceived by some of the Gujarati intelligentsia: "Gujarat has become an intolerable place; at least that is how I find it. Today, there are very few people I can talk to in Gujarat because they simply do not understand basic things, or don't want to. I can make myself a very comfortable citizen of Vadodara [a city in Gujarat, where Devy lives]. But the problem is, I cannot talk to the people of this city; it is like walking in the desert" (Devy 2006).[2]

As will be seen from the extract below, the article heaps generalizations upon generalizations: "I find the popular myth of Gujaratis being peace-loving people impossible to believe. How could all the riots, so many of them since 1969, have happened if this were true? I have thought about this deeply and my sense is that violence is an attribute of their acquisitive nature. Gujaratis are extremely acquisitive people. They will do anything to acquire. The most decent people here, people I would otherwise respect, would do anything to get a visa to the United States, even resort to cheating and dishonesty. They are hungry to acquire. Even Gujarati devotion is about acquiring. They have an exchange relationship with God – I give you devotion, you give me riches. The Muslim hatred practiced here is not conscious or learnt. It is just somehow normal, as nature would have meant it to be. [...] You do not become a bad man in Gujarat if you hate Muslims, you are normal" (Ibid.).

In the first response from Gujarat to Devy's piece, the author Shirish Panchal takes umbrage at the comprehensive use of the word 'Gujaratis'. Panchal's response, made in Gujarati, may be

translated as, 'Are the People of Gujarat that Bad?', wherein he raises the all important question of what is it that the Gujaratis have done to invite such negativism and prejudice. "It is true that for some time now Gujarat has had frequent communal outbursts, but who is responsible for this? Only Gujaratis – or people who speak Gujarati? Each and every person who lives in Gujarat? What happened after Godhra should not have happened,[3] and there is no justification for it but in order to see that it doesn't happen again shouldn't we all strive together instead of which some intellectuals of Gujarat and English journalists are only interested in adding keeping the wounds raw and rubbing salt on them. They keep making comments about Gujarat to people outside Gujarat, as a result, it has created an impression that Gujarat is some kind of a hell" (2006, 6).

Panchal's response is based upon the English original, motivating him to collapse Devy's views with those held by everyone who uses the English language to write about Gujarat. Panchal construes Devy's use of the word 'desert' as a rejection of the city of Vadodara and its people, seeing the city an arid place where Devy finds it infra dig to relate with anybody. Extricating from the word all personal references and the sense of isolation, Panchal sees it as a criticism of the city Devy has lived in but not adopted as his own. To Panchal, the word 'desert' suggests aridity and boredom: "Ganesh Devy finds Vadodara and Gujarat desert-like, but has he tried to know the psychology of the Gujaratis? Has he tried to mingle with them? Devy finds the notion of Gujarati as peace-loving mythical, but he has forgotten this *simple fact* [italics mine] that a trader community is never quarrelsome" (2006, 7).

Speaking about himself, Panchal says that he has spent his life in Vadodara, and especially in the Hindu and Muslim mixed neighbourhood of Panigate where riots are not infrequent: "So

whenever I say something about this city, I am not saying this as a 'pardeshi' (literally a person from another country; in this context, outsider) or 'pravaasi' (visitor)" (Ibid., 6). In doing so he lays claim to an 'insider' status, at the same time highlighting his perception of Devy as an outsider. Panchal's position is clearly the righteous stance of one who has lived in Gujarat, and is a 'Gujarati' and writes in Gujarati and therefore assumes a more authentic and rightful place. Commenting on Devy's remarks about the frequent riots in Vadodara, Panchal says, "sure people were instigated", thereby dismissing Devy's contributions as those made by an outsider, speaking a different, alien tongue. The use of words like 'pardeshi' and 'pravaasi' raises serious questions of nation and who belongs to it. It must be said at this point that Ganesh Devy is originally from Maharashtra, one of Gujarat's neighbouring states. He has been living in Gujarat for over two decades, and has contributed to the state in very significant ways. The vein of Panchal's response reflects his refusal to engage with both the general and the specific aspects of Devy's critique. Panchal also shows no readiness to reflect on the many other observations made by Devy. For instance, Devy mentions that Gujarat, despite being a state that had the outflow and inflow of Partition migrants, shows no signs of Partition memory in its literature. Panchal dismisses this by saying, "When someone asks why is there no partition-related literature in Gujarat, then the answer simply is, 'Partition *had* [italics mine] no impact on Gujarat'" (2006, 8).

In an unwittingly unfortunate manner that shows class differences and Panchal's own obliviousness to them, he also mentions the harmonious relationship between Hindus and Muslims, and says how his washer-man, and vegetable-vendor, cloth-seller, embroidery man, are all Muslims and how the Hindu trader serves tea to the Muslim customer in the same glass that he also uses.

What may be seen here is a completely emotional response: Devy's article is guilty of overgeneralization, Panchal's is devoid of reflection and suggests prejudices about Devy's outsider-ness (a result of his being from Maharashtra and writing in English). The linguistic and territorial parochialism in the responses of Panchal and many others in other Gujarati journals demonstrate how language has become central (more so than territory) to the making of Gujarat's subnationalism, and the ease with which people who are not a part of this linguistic community may be excluded. But this tells only one half of the story: it is important to note that Devy's respondents are upper-caste, male, Hindus who are sees themselves as custodians of Gujarat's *asmita* which is a conflation of language, religion and territory.

Panchal's response was accompanied by Dankesh Oza's Gujarati translation of Devy's piece. Although the article has been linguistically translated, it has not been translated with the empathy that enables comprehension. The inaccuracies of translation in Oza's piece are quite telling: the word 'intolerable' has been substituted with the word 'sahishhnu' in Gujarati, which means 'intolerant.' The use of the apposite phrase, 'at least I think' has been deleted from the original, and the mood of isolation that is suggested by the phrase 'walking in a desert', has been made into a separate sentence in Gujarati to the effect of, 'you feel you are walking in a desert', which serves more to describe the place than a state of mind. Dankesh Oza has translated the piece with some degree of irresponsibility, which is all the more remarkable in light of the fact that this was done at a time when ideologies were so starkly marked.

One of the most established poets of Gujarat, Sitanshu Yashashchandra (2006), documented a strong protest against Devy, and stated how he (Devy) should have been more thankful about

what he had received from Gujarat – repute, fame and money. Another writer, Nagindas Sanghvi, questions Devy's conflation of the "acquisitive nature" of the Gujaratis with violence, and also challenges the conflation between the state and its people (2006). As I have said earlier, the generalizations made by Devy do damage the import of his views; what is significant is that Devy's views themselves are not even heard, but are dismissed – as Gunvant Shah notes – with, "I believe that it is possible to convince Muslims, but not the fundamentalist secularists"; or with, "It has become fashionable to criticize Gujarat" (2006, 35).

Finally, a common theme among the negative responses to Devy is, "that he [Devy] did not use even once the common Gujarati phrase "Aapnu Gujarat" (our Gujarat) to suggest inclusion" (Panchal, 2006, 8). Would Devy have been able to say that in English? Is that kind of inclusive pronoun natural to English? More importantly, would he have wanted to say it, but his English did not let him? Would saying that, however strange it might have sounded in English, not enabled a cultural translation of Gujarati-ness and would the piece then not have been more effective?

Thus, to a large number of people who responded to Devy, his views were in theme and intent, a continuation of the English media that had played a 'negative' role in Gujarat during 2002 and their response suggested a refusal to introspect. Instead, as Dinkar Joshi puts it, "introspection should be done by the so-called intellectuals, who have the audacity to live in Gujarat and yet condemn it" (2006, 49).

While the views presented above characterized the tenor of the Hindu Gujarati intelligentsia's response to Devy's critique, the exceptions to this rule must also be mentioned. According to Anil Joshi, the reactions were a positive sign, a tribute to Devy's stature.

Joshi challenged his compatriots, writers, and members of the intellectual community by asking, "I wish to ask all those who felt very indignant about Ganesh's comments, why were you so quiet when Gujarat was in flames?" (2006, 36). Joshi clearly saw the need to use Devy's overgeneralized comments as an opportunity to reflect and introspect, a need echoed in Ramesh Oza's incisive comment: "in our refusal to introspect, we (Gujaratis) are only proving to Ganesh Devy that Gujaratis are intolerant" (2006, 45).

Some months later, Ganesh Devy wrote a new piece, in Gujarati this time. The article was published in *Nirikshak* – the journal where the issue had so far been discussed. Devy did not write in a national journal that was perceived to be against Gujarat; instead, he shared the 'Gujarati' space by writing in the language of Gujarat and by being published in a journal that everyone could read. In this article, Devy explained the genesis of his previous piece, a work which, according to him, was forged out a conversation that he had with Thakur. Without diluting the convictions that governed his previous piece, the Gujarati article explained why certain generalizations were the result of the interview itself. Devy also explains his own relationship with Gujarat, by showing togetherness and yet difference: "Although my forebears and a generation preceding that of my parents had lived in Gujarat, my parents lived in Maharashtra as displaced Gujaratis. I spent the first 28 years of my life in Maharashtra and for the last 27 years I have been in Gujarat, all this may make my views on Gujarat less authentic than others. However I do know for a fact that the relationship between Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat is far from perfect. I have also noticed how little incidents lead to acts of violence" (2006, 7). Devy further explains how he did not mean to hurt the Gujarati *Samaj* [society] and its *asmita* but that

"custodians of literature especially in the times of violence had a social responsibility" (Ibid., 8).

The only person who wrote with reference to this piece was Prakash Shah, a leftist writer, who notes that Devy voices with inclusion and intimacy a concern about 'Aapne Gujarati' (Us the Gujaratis) and what has become of us?" (2006, 42). There has been no other response to this piece; it is almost as if the debate has been not resolved, but perhaps, exhausted.

The Third Space

From the above discussion it appears that a critique of Gujarat is likely to carry more weight if expressed in Gujarati rather than in English. Although, by and large, *any* questioning of Gujarat appears to ruffle too many feathers, chances are that the English language would only make things worse. If Gujarati is the linguistic means for a subnation called 'Gujarat', it is only by using Gujarati that one can claim the attention of at least *some* Gujarati nationalists. However, this may not be possible in all contexts. Devy happened to know Gujarati; not every person writing about Gujarat might. Also, would critiques about Gujarat be carried in mainstream Gujarati dailies? Perhaps not. In that scenario, translation into Gujarati that is carried out in a manner that does not alienate its readers and creates frameworks for interlingual dialogues is necessary. A space that is neither Gujarati nor English – a third space, one in which a Gujarati-speaking person, writes in English, or where an English-speaking person uses the language Gujarat understands – could break the synonymity of language and ownership, and allow an empathetic entry into the discourse of the other. The point that needs to be made is that since, "multiple linguistic and national identities can inhabit a single state's

borders", translation plays a central role in providing a space that enables dialogues and negotiations (Berman and Wood, 2005, 1).

The onus of creating this in-between position lies on those who write in Gujarati as well as those who write in English. As Berman and Wood note, "It requires attention to cultural values, to economic and political inequalities, to individual choices and perhaps most obviously, to otherness in its linguistic and cultural forms. In the process, it foregrounds some explicitly ethical questions" (2005, 5). Those who write in Gujarati would have to engage in self-critique and ask, as Babu Suthar does, what has happened to their language. Suthar is a diasporic Gujarati writer, who in a very significant and sensitive move, declined a literary prize awarded him by a prestigious literary establishment in Gujarat, saying, " [...] if our language has had the permission to express such hatred for another community [...] it needs to regain its purity and humanness before I can accept a prize" (2006).

Suthar's critique of the language he writes in, a language that makes him a part of a community, suggests an act of translation, of moving out of his textuality, one that had become tyrannical. The identity of Gujarat, that which is called *asmita*, needs to move out into zones other than the self, in order to diffuse what is true, authentic, and credible. In times of language wars, it is useful to attend to Apter's construction of translation. She underscores the centrality of "language wars" in the conceptualization of translation zones. In her words, "In fastening on the term "zone" as a theoretical mainstay, the intention has been to imagine a broad intellectual topography that is neither the property of a single nation, nor an amorphous condition associated with postnationalism, but rather a zone of critical engagement that connects the "l" and the "n" of transLation and transNation" (2006, 5).

It would seem from the above that translation, stepping out of one's textuality and ideology to communicate and listen, is a social enterprise and is needed at the times of linguistic and physical violence such as the one that Gujarat witnessed. However, there are still other forms of violence that this paper has so far not articulated – the suffering and humiliation of women during the Gujarat riots. This is something that remains unmentioned in the entire male discourse conducted by Devy and his opponents. In fact, this is, by and large, in continuation with most writing on the Gujarat riots – especially in Gujarati – which used headlines like, 'Many Men Were Heard Saying, "Sab Ladki Ko Laylo"'[4] to show Muslim violence against Hindu women, with the emphasis not on the inhumanity towards women, rather on the violation of Hindu honour (*izzat*) at the hands of the Muslims.

Some of the most sensitive and trenchant critiques in Gujarat have come from women themselves[5], who wear different hats as writers, translators, healers and activists. Minal Dave (2003) wrote a moving story about a Hindu, upper-class woman travelling by herself during the riots. Her fears are intensified when she sees that her sole fellow traveller is a burkha-clad woman. The two women recognize each other's fears, their vulnerabilities and the common context of fear that binds them in silent ways, across borders of language and religion. They step into each other's experiential textuality by moving out of their bodies – as translations are supposed to do – and create a sisterhood which holds in abeyance the claims of nations and ethnicities. Why would male writers not create a space that is not only neither Gujarati nor English, but also, neither male nor female, and yet comfortable for both? Why are spaces, like texts, so enclosed, and how do we extend the roles of translators to create hybrid, androgynous and open areas? These questions are not possible to answer, for they do not need answers

but a deeper reflection upon the role of translators at the time of violence.

As this paper was coming to an end, I heard from the writer Saroop Dhruv about her forthcoming book, *Ummeed* (Hope), one that she chose to write in Hindi. According to her, "At times when languages are sullied by ideologies, it is better to move out of one's given languages. The very fact that I, who would have chosen to write in Gujarati, have chosen to write in Hindi is indicative of my displacement. I chose to be displaced" (Conversation with Dhruv, 6 May 2007).

This paper began with the words of a woman writer translated by a woman translator; they end with the same agencies to suggest the positionality of women in the discourse on the riots in Gujarat:

> No,
> I do not wish to read the Koranic injunctions and
> become Suraiya,
> The reason being that I am not any different from
> All the Suraiyas, Salmas, Shehnazs or Ameenas of this
> nation,
> Not apart, not distant or far.
> Each time the Dushashans of this country disrobe her,
> I become naked.

(Dhruv, 2003, 83; translated from the Gujarati by Rita Kothari).

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[1] On 27th February, 2002, a train by the name of Sabarmati Express carrying, among other passengers, a group of Hindus associated with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (a Hindu fundamentalist organization) was passing through the town of Godhra in Gujarat. The S6 compartment of the train was torched, leading to the deaths of over 56 Hindus, who were 'karsevaks' or volunteers, on their way back from Ayodhya, one of India's disputed sites, a place where a mosque and the temple of Lord Rama were supposed to have existed. The Hindu volunteers had visited Ayodhya in order to help in the construction of a Ram temple at a spot where – until 1992, when it was razed to the ground – the Babri mosque had existed. The burning down of the compartment has been ascribed to the Muslims who lived along the platform in Godhra, and until further investigations prove otherwise, it is allegedly an act of Islamic terrorism in India. On the following day, that is, on 28th February, the Hindu fundamentalist organizations of Gujarat went on a genocidal rampage and attempted to wipe out all the Muslims in Gujarat, leading to the death of over 2,000 Muslims. The act clearly had state support. (See, Agnivesh and Thampu 2002; Bunsha 2006).

[2] http://www.tehelka.com/story_main18.asp?filename=Ne052006view_point_CS.asp

[3] Panchal is referring to the Hindu backlash that was the reaction to the burning of the Sabarmati Express.

[4] Translated, ‘Sab Ladki Ko Laylo’ means ‘Pick Up All the Girls’. In a Gujarati article, the conscious use of colloquial, impure, Urdu, suggests that these were the words spoken by the Muslim men at Godhra.

[5] Cases in point are Himanshi Shelat, Suvarna and Usha Upadhyaya.