



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروانِ محبت

2017



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Contents

Introduction.....	3
Day 1.....	6
Day 2.....	6
Day 3.....	7
Day 4.....	9
Day 5.....	11
Day 6.....	12
Day 7.....	14
Day 8.....	15
Day 9.....	17
Day 10.....	20
Day 11.....	22
Day 12.....	24
Day 13.....	26
Day 14.....	28
Day 15.....	30
Day 16.....	33



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

Introduction

A number of independent individuals, organisations and social movements collaborated to take out through many parts of the country a Karwan e Mohabbat, as a journey of atonement, solidarity, healing, conscience and justice with people living with hate violence.

The journey of the Karwan e Mohabbat was intended as a small but audacious effort to offer a garland of empathy across many parts of our troubled land. A tiny lamp lit in a tempest of hate.

The journey began from Assam on September 4 2017. It passed through Jharkhand and Karnataka, before it gathered again at Tilak Vihar in Delhi on 11 September. In this second phase of the Karwan all participants travelled together in a bus. From Delhi, the Karwan moved to Western UP, Haryana, Rajasthan, and on to Gujarat.

The journey is a humble tribute to Gandhi's last and finest months. A million people had died in Hindu-Muslim riots, yet he walked bravely alone in Naokholi for love and peace, even as the entire country was engulfed and ripped apart by hate. Therefore the next point of the Karwan on Oct 2 will be Gandhi's birthplace, to recall his lifelong belief in Hindu-Muslim unity, and his courageous call for love and harmony when the entire country was enveloped and ripped apart by hate. Our call is Chalo Porbandar #HumSabGandhi.

Later in the year, the Karwan will also visit Mhow, to pay tribute to Dr Ambedkar for leading the writing of India's constitution, and to be mindful of his caution to all of us that the core of democracy and our constitution is *fraternity*. It is fraternity that is most under attack in India today.

Did the Karwan accomplish anything? None of its fellow-travellers or humsafars have been left untouched by this odyssey. Of this I am sure. They would continue to carry the painful stories they heard on their souls. But it will take a long time for us to decide if this did in the end make any sense.

Of one thing, though, the Karwan members are sure. That their travels did offer precious solace to the more than fifty families they met across India who were struggling often very alone with the consequences of incredible hate and colossal state injustice. This alone made the voyage of love worth its while for them.

At moments like the stoning of the Karwan by an angry mob that did not want it to pay a floral tribute to Pehlu Khan where he had been lynched, the Karwan feared that it needed more impact in many places to appeal to the



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

conscience of the majority community in many local areas that they visited. They found a lack of remorse in the majority communities where hate violence against Dalits and minorities unfolded.

But they still took heart that not just stones and footwear were thrown at them, but also rose petals, in so many places that they journeyed, by ordinary people who joined the Karwan of love. There was a great response to the Karwan call for crowd funding, and the entire Karwan was entirely resourced by crowd funding, and in that sense each of the contributors also joined the Karwan. Large numbers turned out for the peace meetings and to greet the Karwan, even when it was travelling late and arrived at night.

The Karwan wanted to appeal also to the public conscience, and to tried to accomplish this; many humsafars have already begun to tell the stories they heard and saw, and plan to continue to do so, with pictures, videos and words.

The Karwan will not end here. It has much work to do. For justice and healing of the families whose lives we touched. In concrete terms, the Karwan will continue in the following ways:

1. It is committed deeply to ensuring support, in coordination with other groups, to each of the families affected by hate violence that it visited during the Karwan, including for legal justice, psycho-social care and livelihood support.
2. The Karwan members are committed to chronicle through books, films, photo exhibitions and talks the rise of hate and fear that they bore witness to during the Karwan, to inform and appeal to the public conscience.
3. The Karwan is committed to attempting to help establish systems of rapid and longer-term response to hate crimes in the states where these are endemic. These would include help to establish in these states Aman Insaniyat Citizen Councils, and where needed human rights collectives.
4. The Karwan will help establish in collaboration a dedicated cell for tracking hate crimes across the country.



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

5. The Karwan members will continue to journey to old and new sites of hate violence, with the same objectives of solidarity, atonement, justice and love.

Recap

The purpose of this journey across parts of India which are worst affected by lynching was twofold: to respond to the everyday fear of Muslims, Dalits and Christians, and the worrying silences of the majority. We aimed to declare that we stand with our Muslim, Dalit and Christian sisters and brothers in this hour of gathering darkness. But the journey was also a call of conscience to India's majority.

As stated above as part of this large collaborative civil society initiative, the Karwan visited families of those who lost loved ones to hate lynching, attacks on Dalits, targeted fatal attacks by police, and also violence against women in the name of witch-hunting.

A consolidated daily diary of the Karwan is attached. The members of the Karwan met the families who have suffered from hate attacks in each of the states. It offered atonement and solidarity to each of the victim families. For each family, it tried to assess how the family is coping and what they need for livelihoods, psycho-social care and the pursuit of justice. After the Karwan met with the families, they also held public meetings – Aman Sabhas - on the themes of love and solidarity. They also tried to initiate forming of Aman Insaniyat Citizen Samitis of local persons committed to supporting the families for justice and livelihoods, and promoting amity, goodwill, and peace in the larger community.

The Karwan included a wonderful team of chroniclers - writers, poets, photographers, videographers – who recorded what they saw and heard as they travelled for the rest of us, through photographs, videos and words. Some shared this in real time as they travelled. Others will prepare materials in the forms of books, photo exhibitions and films. The purpose is to share with other Indians the fear, hate and injustice with which people are forced to live, and through this to make a call of conscience.

In the course of the Karawan, it wishes to also acknowledge symbolically the long history of mass targeted violence against various vulnerable communities in India after Independence, with their unmet justice and unhealed wounds. It therefore visited the 1984 widows' colony at Tilak Vihar, Delhi, because the Sikh widows have suffered from monumental



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

denial of justice. It will visit later Kandhamal, another site of unhealed wounds and prodigious injustice; and also to acknowledge the history of atrocities for many generations endured by Dalits.

Day 1

We have completed the first day of the Karwan e Mohabbat in Assam. We had a heart-rending meeting with the families of two cousins Riyaz and Abu Hanif who were lynched in Nagaon. They were both teenagers fishing in a nearby non-Muslim village, where on the rumour that they were cow thieves, they were lynched to death by a mob, who also badly mutilated their bodies. Their parents are still inconsolable that their eldest sons were killed by their neighbours, and with such cruelty. We hope our visit offered them a little solace. Ten men were arrested and were quickly released on bail. A group of local lawyers have agreed to work to secure for them justice.

We were also able to constitute the first Aman Insaniyat Citizen Council in the district Nagaon. We hope that collectively civil society will be able to create these councils in every district, to fight hate and violence against minorities, Dalits, Adivasis and women, and all others.

Student leaders spoke in the afternoon of their vision for a new India without hate and exploitation, in Guwahati.

Day 2

Even before the second day of the Karwan was over, we were stunned and grieved to receive the shocking news of the murder of Gauri Lankesh, a brave, fearless and uncompromising fighter against Hindutva politics. Once again the forces of intolerance and unreason have cowardly taken away from us a leading voice of reason and solidarity. But her voice will become only stronger even when she is no longer physically with us.

This second day of the Karwan e Mohabbat was filled once again with sad meetings with bereaved parents. But this time their sons were not killed by lynch mobs, but by other forces of hate. We first met the parents of 22 year old Yakub Ali, in his village Kharbuja in Goalpara District. In this and other districts of Assam, a huge number of persons have been served notices that they are 'doubtful voters'. It is not unusual for the father or mother to be deemed an Indian citizen and their children to be deemed 'doubtful voters'. Yakub joined a protest against this state action which they saw as targeted against Bengali Muslim citizens of India on 30 June 2017. A video records



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

what followed. There was some mild stone throwing by the protestors. A policeman can be seen picking up a rifle, taking aim, and shooting dead Yabub. There is no use of milder force, no advance warning by the police, no shooting below the waist. It was a clear shooting to kill.

Equally distraught were the parents of Lafiquel Islam Ahmed who we met in Salakati Maszid Para village of Kokrajhar district. He was the very popular state president of the ABMSU (All Bodo Territorial Council Minority Students' Union). He had tried hard to build bonds between the various communities in Bodoland, and fought the long history of his homeland of hatred and violence between these communities. His secular, inclusive and reform-based progressive politics made him very popular with all communities, and a threat to the prevailing politics of hatred and division. On 1 August 2017, two armed gunmen pumped a dozen bullets into his body in broad daylight in a busy marketplace. Several thousand people of all communities gathered for his funeral. His main killers are still untraced.

As the Karwan left Assam, it was with much sadness. Hate violence and an openly hostile partisan state have pushed Assam's minorities further than ever before into an intense sense of fear and dread. People committed to constitutional values of equality and secularism from all across India need to stand firmly with them.

Day 3

On a bumpy bus journey from Giridih to Ramgarh in Jharkhand, trying to type my short update for today, the third day of the Karwan.

My heart very weighed down in a day with many reminders of why this Karwan was important to attempt.

The cowardly killing of a fearless, charismatic, influential and uncompromising fighter against religious hatred and bigotry Gauri Lankesh of course cast a long shadow on our hearts. A sobering reminder that the climate of hate, intimidation and fear is mounted not just against minorities and Dalits, but also against those for defend their rights and fight for constitutional values.

We went to a village in Giridih, and found a terrifying replay of the Akhlaq lynching, not just of the events but of communal rationalisations in the village to justify the lynching. The old man who was lynched – Usman Ansari – has just about survived the lynching, but is terribly broken both in body and in spirit. He is still in hiding months after the lynching. The organisers



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

did not let even us know where he had taken refuge, and agreed to only a small group from the Karwan visiting him in secret.

The story that unfolded on 28 July 2017 had many echoes from Dadri. One Muslim household alone in a Hindu settlement. The rumour that he had killed a cow, when a decapitated cow was mysteriously found in the village dump-yard. His neighbours attack him brutally in his home, beating him until he is unconscious. They take him for dead, and set on fire his home, reducing it to ashes. They are about to set his body aflame. His life is saved by seconds because of the arrival of the police and the DC.

The one silver lining of the story is the exemplary role of the young DC, and the police under his guidance. The crowd stones them and their vehicle. But they rescue the old man, and rush him to Hazaribagh hospital. He is unconscious for eight days, and treated in Ranchi hospital for to months. His scalp is still wounded, his hand bones crushed to pieces.

But none from his village tried to save him during the killing, and none have reached out to him since then. The state administration has also given no financial help. The old man wept often when he spoke to us About how his neighbours tried to kill him. About how his sons were out begging for money in the community to help his medical expenses and feed his family. About one son who has lost his mind after the trauma. About his resolve to return to his village, even if no one wants him, even if he may be attacked again, because there is nowhere else he can call home.

Our even greater sadness was in the village meeting that followed. Around 300 men had gathered. We spoke but there was no remorse. They were convinced that Usman was guilty. They asked why we did not express sympathy with the ‘innocent’ men who the police had arrested, and the man injured in the leg when the police fired to disperse the mob that wanted to burn alive the unconscious Usman. A replay of the same arguments that we heard in Dadri. That Muslims were guilty by definition, that Hindus were innocent and nationalist by definition. Our arguments appealing to justice, and to even elementary humanity, only led to anger and hostility among most who gathered there from the majority community, even members of progressive and left organisations. No compassion, no contrition of any kind.

Two reminders – the Lankesh killing and the absence of any compassion for the aged and broken survivor of the attempt by his neighbours to lynch him – of why this Karwan e Mohabbat needed to be done.



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

Day 4

The fourth day of our Karwan began with an unexpected healing moment, when the local gurudwara in Ramgarh district headquarters in Jharkhand where we spent the night at a dharmsala, invited the Karwan e Mohabbat to the gurudwara to endorse its call for solidarity and love. They quoted from Sikh scriptures verses of both Nanak and Kabir to underline its message of inter-religious unity and tolerance. Speakers reflected on how relevant this message was for our times of rising hate. The small local Sikh community settled there after Partition. We remembered the two storms of hate that twice destroyed their lives – in 1947 and then again in 1984 – and how they should teach them the consequences of hate violence today against other minorities.

We then drove to the village Manua in Manoa block of the district, and met there the strong unbroken widow Mariam Khatoon of a man who had been lynched two months earlier in the busy marketplace of Ramgarh town.

On the morning of 27 June 2017, coal trader Amiluddin Ansari leaves his home in his car. About an hour later, imagine the horror of his seventeen year old son Shahban when he receives a Whats App video of his father being lynched brutally by a mob of young self-styled cow vigilantes. He jumps blindly on to a motorcycle to drive to the town in a desperate bid to save his father, but his bike crashes a little distance from his home. He calls his 22 year old brother Shehzad, who leaves immediately with his mother. When they reach Ramgarh, they find their car overturned and gutted in the centre of the market, and Shehzad's father's blood stains on the streets. People tell them that the police have taken Amiluddin for treatment to the civil hospital in Ranchi.

They drive in a rush to Ranchi. There they learn that he had died at the hands of the mob in the Ramgarh market itself. The police does a hurried secret post-mortem without allowing the family to see the body, and to date have refused to share with them the contents of the report. It takes multiple visits to the police that long night before they were given the body late after midnight.

In many episodes of lynching, we are witnessing this bizarre new social phenomenon of hate – of the lynching video. We watched in horror the video that Amiluddin Ansari's sons saw on their phones, even as their father at that moment was succumbing to his attackers. These videos are typically taken by the attackers themselves. You watch them in Ansari's lynching video laughing as the battered bleeding man begs for his life, as though this was a sport, a reality television show or a video game. At one point, a boy



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

grabs the terrified man's face and turns it to the camera, asking the videographer to take a good shot. There are pictures of piles of red meat on the streets, but none of these actually being taken out of the car. No one comes to the aid of the hapless man before he dies.

The state administration has done nothing to support the bereaved family. The younger children have dropped out of school. The meat was sent to check if it was cow meat. A group of local boys angrily protested when the police failed to arrest those of the attackers who could be easily identified from the video. The police has slapped a series of criminal charges against these protestors, who spent 25 days in jail. Some of the attackers were later arrested, but there are many others who eye-witnesses are willing to name. We saw the photograph of a young man beating Ansari with a fibreglass baton that closely resembles that of the police.

Mariam Khatoon was firm and composed as she spoke to us when we met her, breaking down only once when she recalled how difficult the police made it for them to get her husband's battered body the night after he was lynched. 'I only want justice', she said to us again and again. 'I want those who lynched my husband to be punished, not for revenge, but to ensure that no one has to go through what my children and I have undergone'.

In the aman sabha meeting that was organised in Ramgarh after we met Mariam Khatoon and her family, we took solace that there were at least no public rationalisations for the hate lynching as we heard in Giridih the night before, (for the lynching of Usman by his neighbours on the charge that he killed his cow a day before Ansari had been lynched). A few senior speakers from the town soberly agreed with me and said that they should have broken their silences and condemned the lynching when it happened, and not remained silence. They concurred that their silences made them complicit in some way in the hate crime. They agreed to constitute an Aman Insaniyat Committee to prevent and respond to hate crime in their district, and to support its victims.

In the afternoon, we arrived at Ranchi. Here the Christian community had organised a massive meeting to coincide with the Karwan to protest the draconian anti-conversion law recently passed by the Jharkhand assembly. The law, they feared, was designed instil fear in the hearts of the small Christina minority, and to tear apart tribal society, in which in the same family, there may be people who worship by their traditional Adivasi Sarna faith, some who are Christian, and some who identify themselves as Hindu. The gathering endorsed the importance of solidarity, of various oppressed minorities and castes and liberal elements, to stand together to fight



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

violence and discrimination against any peoples, and to uphold and practice love, the call of the Krwan.

And now with a day for travel, we move to Mangalore in Karnataka. The Karwan there will both mourn and pay tribute to the fearless defender of justice and secular values Gauri Lankesh, and continue our sombre journey of atonement to the families who were traumatised by this new rising social epidemic of hate lynching.

Day 5

This fifth day of the Karwan I arrived in Mangalore. Coastal Karnataka has been a laboratory for hate-mongering and hate attacks for many years now.

With local activists including Vidya Dinker and Samvartha, we drove to meet a family that has shifted recently to a village in bordering Kerala. Abdul Shameer was living the life of millions of wage workers in the country. At the age of 13, he went to Mumbai to serve in an eatery. He then changed many jobs, including spending a couple of years in the Gulf, and driving an auto-rickshaw in Mangalore. Just twenty days before he was attacked on 23 August 2014, he had switched jobs because the money was better. He was paid a thousand rupees a day to drive a tempo to transport old cattle sold by farmers for slaughter.

Passing through Mangalore one day, at the heart of the city, his tempo was suddenly blocked by a yellow bus. From this emerged a contingent of Bajrang Dal volunteers, armed with trishuls and rods, shouting terrifying slogans. He was too petrified to run away, as they smashed the window of his tempo. They pulled him out and attacked him with long rods. He recognised in the crowd a fellow auto-rickshaw driver, who he recalls ate beef with him on many occasions. He called out to him to save him, but he joined the attackers. The blows got worse, until one man pierced his skull with a sharp trishul. He fell unconscious, and remembers nothing after that.

He learnt later that the police chowki was just across the road from where he was attacked. They arrived much later, after he was almost dead, and took him to a public hospital. They did not inform his family. But worried because he had not got home, they called his mobile phone. A nurse from the hospital answered, that is how they learned where he was.

His father insisted on shifting him to a private hospital. Over four months, he spent more than four lakh rupees, which he had paid for by selling their small house, and using up all his savings that he had accumulated for



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

Abdul's sister's wedding. Abdul was unconscious for many weeks, and even when he regained consciousness, his body was entwined in tubes, and he could not recognise even his children, and could not stand or walk. After his discharge, his wife tended him night and day, carrying him in her arms.

Since then he has survived on extraordinary public charity, mostly from ordinary Muslims. Emotive television reports of his predicament spurred donations from all over, and this paid for his repeated hospitalisations, his sister's wedding and the daily expenses for his family. The auto rickshaw union with many Hindu members paid for one of his hospital bills, of more than one lakh rupees. Recently a woman donated half the cost of a house for him, and the other half (of a total of twelve lakhs) was collected by crowd funding. Today he can walk slowly and painfully a few steps with a walker, speaks with a slur, but his mind is alert. It appears that he will be disabled for life.

However, justice eludes him. The police arrested only a few men for attacking him, and they were out on bail in a few days. The trial has still to begin. But the police also registered crimes against him, under the Karnataka Prevention of Cow Slaughter Act 1964, and he barely escaped arrest by applying for anticipatory bail. Let us recall that it is a Congress government in Karnataka.

Day 6

Before you read my post on the sixth day of the Karwan, in coastal Karnataka, I request you to look first at the picture of the young man that I attach here. His palms are cupped into the shape of a heart. This photograph was taken by his friend on a day that turned out to be the last day of his life. His distraught family found it in his mobile phone on his savaged lifeless body that night.

His name was Harish Poojari. Is the horror of his lynching greater because the reason for his killing was that he was mistaken to be Muslim, because he was travelling pillion on the bike of his Muslim friend Samiullah?

Harish's father barely made enough money, wrapping bidis at their home in Bantwal village, therefore their only son Harish dropped out of school in Class 9, and apprenticed and learned the trade of an electrician. His mother remembers him to be a dutiful son, who gave her all he earned to run the household. The finances of the family became even more precarious after his father fell to cancer.



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

On November 12, 2015, Harish took the day off picnicking with his friends. He returned home that evening, and set out again only for a few minutes to buy some milk to add to the tea that his mother was boiling. He never returned. His mother Seethamma was beside herself with worry all night. Her husband was bedridden, and her daughter Mithalaxmi out of the village for a family wedding. The next day, her son was brought home dead, stabbed 14 times. She could not understand who could have done this to him, and why.

The story that was pieced together by later investigations was that when he was returning from the shop, his close friend Samiullah, a Muslim, happened to pass by and offered to drop him home on his bike. It was a three minute ride. But on the way, a bunch of young men, allegedly of the Bajrang Dal, accosted them, and fell upon them with knives. Samirullah was badly injured but ultimately survived. His friend, stabbed 14 times and his intestines pulled out, did not.

When the Karwan met Seethamma and her daughter almost two years later, Harish's mother was still uncomprehending of the hate that took from her their only son, and that too with so much brutality. By strangers who did not even know him. His father, heartbroken, died two months after his son was killed. Mithalaxmi works in a travel agency, struggling bravely to hold her family together. What solace could we offer them except that we shared their incomprehension and their pain?



Heavy of heart, we drove from their home to Mangalore where many people had gathered for an Aman Sabha or peace meeting, to welcome the Karwan. We paid homage to Gauri Lankesh, and her courageous battle against communal politics. We reflected together on how coastal Karnataka, long known for its communal amity between people of diverse faiths, had developed into a communal cauldron, a laboratory for Hindutva politics, including lynching that went back to 2004. We stressed the need to speak out and respond; and the meeting hearteningly resolved to set up an Aman Insaniyat Citizen Council to respond quickly to prevent and record hate crimes, ensure legal justice, and support the families shattered by hate violence.



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

In the afternoon, the organisers took us in a smaller group to meet a family in Krishnapuda village that had been bereaved by a different kind of hate violence. This was not by mobs by men in uniform, in the name of cow protection. This happened on 19 April 2014, a year after the Congress government assumed power in the state. Theirs was a family of wage workers. The dead man's brother Imtiaz told us that Kabir, his 22 year-old youngest brother, was a house painter. But he developed an allergy to the paint, and began to look for other work. The law in Karnataka permits the slaughter of old cattle and there was good money in transporting these animals. He was employed as a 'loader' in these cattle trucks for a thousand rupees a day. Farmers sold their ageing animals in a large cattle bazaar in Shimoga, and their trucks transported the animals to the coastal belt. He learnt that there was an established flourishing racket by which at every check-post police had to be paid off, and they would let the trucks with cattle cargo proceed. The truck with Kabir was halted at Tanikot Checkpost in Sangiri, by a special police force established to fight Maoist Naxalites. For reasons that are unclear, there was a dispute at the check-post even after money was paid. A constable fired into the air, and the driver, cleaner and other loaders all managed to run away. But he shot Kabir dead at close range. It was impossible to claim credibly that the man was killed because he was a Naxalite, cow protection was not the mandate of the force, and even if it was, why should a man be killed for this? There was large-scale outrage, and the police finally have charge-sheeted the constable for murder. But recently there are moves in the state administration to close the case without even completing the trial.

Day 7

After a one day break, the Karwan e Mohabbat regrouped today in Delhi, for the ten day bus journey, travelling through four states, meeting families who have been destroyed by hate violence.

We gathered in the morning at Ummeed Aman Sneh Ghar at Qutb, travelled to Rajghat to pay tribute to the memory of Mahatma Gandhi, and then to Tilak Vihar, where the widows of the 1984 Sikh massacre were settled more than three decades back.

For a Karwan that seeks to reach out to those who have survived hate attacks to offer solace and solidarity, we felt it was most important to remember an older painful history of communal and caste massacres through the 70 years of India's freedom. The largest of these brutal communal massacres was in Delhi in 1984, in which more than 3000 Sikhs



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

were massacred on the streets of Delhi. 33 years have passed since, but the working class widows of the massacre who were settled here continue to grapple painfully with memory, penury, and their children with mental health and drug problems. What rankles them all these years later is also the deliberate subversion of justice, as few of their attackers and fewer of those who organised the carnage have been punished.

In the large gathering that greeted the Karwan at Tilak Vihar, this gruesome, many speakers recalled this painful history. Many of the residents of Tilak Vihar had written cards with messages and hung them on strings. In one of these, a 1984 widow wrote that she wished that no one should ever have to suffer the way she has. People said that they worried deeply about the rise of hate violence all across the country. They hear of men attacked, savaged and burnt in their homes and on streets, and this brings back frightening memories of what happened on Delhi's streets and in trains in 1984. They called resoundingly for a country in which people of different faiths live together with love and peace.

Many singers and poets sang hauntingly of love and peace. Children of Tilak Vihar and of the street children rainbow homes also danced and sang. Sonam Kalra, Dhruv Sangari and Shweta Tiwari sang luminously the poetry of Bhulle Shah, Faiz and Javed Akhtar. There was poetry by Adnan Kafeel, Devesh and Suraj Tripathi, and dramatised readings by Fouzia, Syeda Hameed and Lokesh Jain. The youthful Savitri Phule Band also sang, and the children of Tilak Vihar had to conclude with a bhangra.

In the end of the evening, those who had volunteered to join the Karwan were invited onto the stage. There were a wide range among them, of writers, journalists, students, film makers, photographers, lawyers, social workers, teachers, priests, health workers and scientists. They sang one song about love together, ate langar at the gurudwara, and then set out late in the night for the next halt at Shamli in Uttar Pradesh.

Day 8

We arrived after midnight from Delhi at Kandla town in Shamli district in Uttar Pradesh. This is a Muslim majority town, where a few thousand people displaced by the Muzaffarnagar carnage of 2013, who were not allowed to return to their homes, resettled. The BJP MP Hukam Singh had stirred national headlines alleging that the rise in Muslim population in the town threatened the peace-loving Hindu residents of the town, resulting in a large exodus. It was established that his claims of a Hindu exodus were



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

mischievous and entirely false, but the stigma persisted. It is remarkable that even the NHRC intervened on the basis of this clearly communally motivated complaint, but did nothing to support the rights of nearly one lakh Muslim people who were displaced because of the 2013 carnage. We felt that given this communal stereotyping to a town that gave refuge to internally displaced persons, Kandla would be a fitting place for the Karwan to spend the night. We were given hospitality in a madrasa.

In the morning, we visited a village that briefly hit the headlines a few months back, and then faded away, Shabirpur in district Saharanpur, in the Deoband constituency, a 150 kilometres from Delhi. The dispute started because Dalits of the village decided to erect a statue of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar within the campus of a Ravidas temple. They pooled money for the statue and ordered it in Saharanpur. They then began to erect a tall platform. Everything was ready to install the statue on Ambedkar's anniversary on April 14 2017.

Meanwhile the BJP was swept to power in Uttar Pradesh. An ugly rumbling started in the upper caste Rajput enclave of the village. They objected to the tall platform and even more to the statue of Ambedkar pointing to the village road which they too use. 'It is our government now', they are reported to have said. They felt the Chamars needed to be reminded of their position. The Dalits protested hotly, that they had legal title to the land of the temple, and it was for them to decide whose statue they wished to install within it. The administration intervened, and asked them to apply for permission, and the anniversary passed without mounting the statue.

On May 5, the Rajputs decided to celebrate Maharana Pratap Jayanti, the anniversary of the Rajput icon, with unprecedented pomp. The procession began with a loudspeaker blaring loud music, what they call in the village a DJ. The sullen Dalits went to the police station, and complained about the 'DJ'. 'If we need permission to install a statue on our own land, they need permission to play a DJ on a public road'. The police concurred and ordered the DJ to be disconnected.

The Rajputs took this to be an insult, and erupted in rage. They made a call to their caste men to gather from many surrounding villages. They converged on motor cycles and cars on the Dalit basti with daggers and swords. Shouting insulting slogans, they attacked women and men, and set fire to more than 30 homes, vandalising their utensils, furniture and television sets. The police stood by for five hours doing nothing to restrain the attackers. Rajput men blocked the fire engine from entering the village with their tractors and cars.



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

Four months later, we found the Dalits enraged, in grave economic distress, but unbending in their rage and resistance. Most of them were landless, and earlier found work in the fields and brick kilns owned by the upper castes. But they were now unemployed because the Rajputs had imposed a strict economic boycott on employing anyone from their village. The government released a small grant of 25,000 rupees to each household, but withheld further releases claiming there was no budget. Few of the men they named were arrested. But the police charged the Dalits, especially their vocal leaders, with even graver crimes, and many Dalits were in jail.

Dalits have for centuries been suppressed, rare moments of resistance firmly and cruelly crushed. But the Dalits of Shabirpur we found unbent. They decided to renounce the Hindu faith, and immersed in water all their Hindu idols. They converted en masse to Buddhism. Jai Bhim was their call to battle. Even children wore Jai Bhim lockets and fought with their classmates and teachers. In our meeting the women were most vocal in their resolute defiance, not hesitating to speak publicly of the assaults on their bodies, crimes the police continued to ignore.

A few Karwan members went to speak to the Rajputs. They remained contemptuous of the Dalits, claiming that they had set their own houses on fire for the compensation! When asked if they had injured themselves as well, they did not answer. But there was no remorse.

We left Shabirpur inspired but intensely troubled. Many of the Karwan members had never witnessed first-hand the atrocities that are routinely deployed to tame Dalits and Adivasis into submission. The Dalits of Shabirpur have resolved to fight for dignity and equality at great cost to themselves.

They fight not just for themselves but for all of us.

Day 9

Our second day in Shamli began with a meeting of yet another kind of violence that Muslim families are grappling with in Western UP, since the appointment of the new Yogi Adityanath government. It is not unusual for the front pages of local newspapers to carry banner headlines with sensational stories of 'dreaded criminals' killed or injured in dramatic shoot-outs with the police. The media publishes the police version of each of these 'encounters' uncritically. Almost 30 such encounters have occurred since the new government came to power in UP. It does not ring strange to the media who dutifully report these stories that the men shot in each of these



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

are almost always Muslim. It does not worry reporters that most of the men killed or injured in these ‘encounter’ shoot-outs are either just petty criminals or men with no criminal records at all. Nothing seems amiss when in none of these shoot-outs are the police seriously injured. They just report light injuries usually on the shoulders or arms.

One family met us, but I will not mention their names so that they do not get into trouble with the police. Their son, a young man in his twenties with no police record, was picked up by the police with a friend from his village, although the police initially kept no official record of their detention. They were taken one night to the sugarcane fields and the policemen asked them to run. They were terrified, but still refused, fearing that the police would shoot them in their backs. They then laid them on a field, and shot them through their ankles, knees and elbows.

The police announced the next day (and the newspapers duly reported) that they were dangerous criminals, and had tried to run away from the police while firing at them. In self-defence, they shot them. No one asked how the fleeing men could have been shot with such accuracy on their ankles and knees even in a field with tall standing sugarcane crop on a dark night. Today their son is in jail, in constant and unbearable pain. They are day labourers, but have invested all their savings for medicines for the boy in the jail hospital. They don’t have any money left over to engage a lawyer. They fear their boy may never be able to walk again. Even more dangerously, they fear that he will never be able to prove his innocence.

Cases like this are not unusual. A roll call of new encounters are added every other day in Yodi Adityanath’s UP, and there seems no end to the official blood-letting. In the build-up to the elections, the story was influentially plugged by the BJP and RSS that Muslims in Western UP were the cause of the rise in high crime; and this was aggravated when after the Muzaffarnagar riots of 2013, many more moved into Muslim majority towns and villages. The series of reports of Muslim men, all ‘dreaded criminals’, being shot by the UP police in large numbers, gives public credence to the communal stereotyping of Muslims as the main criminals of the area, and of the UP government under strongman Yogi Adityanath the only one with the resolve to abandon the alleged ‘appeasement’ of Muslims by earlier governments, and to come down hard on these ‘criminal elements’. For the Muslims of the region there was already the fear of lynching. Today there is even a greater fear that they may be dubbed criminals and shot one dark night.



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

Our next halt in the pilgrimage of the Karwan was in Khurgaon village in district Shamli, at the home of an old man who lost his son to a mob in 2013, when the Congress was in power in Haryana and the Samajwadi Party in UP. The old man, his face lined with suffering, was expecting the visit of the Karwan. And yet when we arrived, for a long time he was frightened to speak. We did not press him, only explained as gently as we could why we had come to meet him. After a while he was reassured. He wept as he spoke of the wounds of a father who did not know who killed his son, and despaired of any justice. His son Mohammad Salim, recently married, had gone out for work with a friend to neighbouring Haryana, perhaps for the trade of cattle. News came, not from the police but from his companion, that a mob of around nine men had fallen upon their son. He was badly injured when they found him. They took him to a private hospital, but they could not in the end save his life. The police did not do a post-mortem on his body, and handed it over to them for his burial. Pressure built on the state administration, and more than a week later, the body of their boy was exhumed, and a post-mortem done. The words used by his heartbroken father was '*kabar phad diya*' : his grave was torn open. He is tormented all the time with the thought that it was utterly inauspicious for the boy to be pulled out of the grave where he had been rested, and this may trouble him in his afterlife. The father had consented to this only in the hope that justice would follow. His agony is that despite their many efforts, they have not even been given a copy of the post-mortem report.

'I just want to know how my father died', the old man wept. *Maine sabar kar lia*, he added. I have decided to endure. Endure what? The loss of a son to a violent mob, not even knowing why and how this happened. Accepting that justice will never be done. We assured him that we would help him in his fight for justice, that we felt broken should he fall so deep in despair. He replied that if anyone could help him just see my son's post-mortem report, he would go to *jannat*.

We drove with memories of the tormented father to our next halt in Nuh in Mewat, Haryana. Our young hosts in Gharesa insisted that the Karwan should spend the night in the village Ghasera, which has a special place in the history of the region. They told us that in 1947, amidst the rivers of blood of Hindu Muslim violence, Meo Muslims of Mewat were leaving in large numbers for Pakistan. Mahatma Gandhi visited Ghasera village in Mewat and appealed to the Meo Muslims to stay on in India. India is your home, he said to them , as much as it is the home of Hindus and people of other faiths. He said if Muslims left India, India would get hollowed out. The Meo Muslims took Gandhiji's appeal to heart, and not a single Meo Muslim went



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

to Pakistan after that day. It is for this reason that our hosts felt that there was no more fitting place for the Karwan to spend a night. We reached to a beautiful gathering, in which singers and speakers recalled and celebrated this moment in their history when their ancestors chose India over their country. But they also spoke of their pain. ‘A strange wind is passing through our country’, one young man said. ‘I am feeling a stranger in my own country’.

Our hosts had invited Junaid’s parents to this gathering. I had met them in their home after their son had been lynched in a train. Her mother Saira took me aside, and said she wanted to say something important to me. She said that her son used to say that he wanted to do something great in his life, maybe to be an imam of a big mosque and deliver the Friday sermon. That was not to be now. But she still thought how he could still do something great, and she now had the answer. She wanted to open a school in his name. A school for girls, where she said they would learn English and Hindi in addition to Urdu. A school, she insisted, that would be open not just for Muslim girls, but also Hindu and Christian girls. I could think of no finer way of remembering Junaid. Not just for his mother, but for all if us.

Day 10

The tenth day of the Karwan was a wrenching engagement with families in Nuh district in Mewat. In the course of an intensive day, we met eleven bereaved and grieving families in five villages. The full account of the stories of these eleven families would fill many pages, and would therefore have to await a longer record.

But I must place before you the alarming picture that emerges cumulatively from these meetings. The pattern is of Muslim men being lynched by mobs – which we knew was happening – but much larger numbers now being killed lawlessly and with communal intent by the police. In each of these, the story is constructed after the killings of road accidents, or dacoities by men mostly with no criminal records. After men transporting cattle are lynched by a mob, or the police shoots these men at close range, the story that appears in the police records is that a truck illegally carrying cattle with great cruelty overturned in an accident, killing the men that the mob or the police had killed. The victims are charged with crimes under cow protection laws and for rash driving. The mob of communal and trigger-happy policemen do not have any crime registered against them, and enjoy complete impunity. Or they are charged with being dreaded dacoits who



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

shoot at the police (who are never harmed), a pattern that we observed a day earlier developing also in Yogi Adityanath's UP.

We found the families in heart-breakingly absolute despair of even the possibility of any justice. Most families chose not to pursue justice. Some did not even complain. A few spoke with us with a well of anger and desolation of how under the present regime, the police and mobs were free to kill Muslims. One Dalit man was also killed because he was on a transport vehicle with a Muslim friend; his father spoke of the bonds between Dalits and Muslims.

And above all, we met family after family of grieving parents, widows, orphaned children, unable to heal or come to terms with not just mobs but state administrations who are open and venomous in their hate of them only for the faith they follow.

The day was also marked by news of anger and hostility to the advance of the Karwan to Behror, the highway crossing where Pehlu Khan had been lynched. The Karwan had resolved tomorrow morning to place flowers at the site of his lynching, in his memory and the memory of others like him who fell to hate violence. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Hindu Jagran Manch and the Bajrang Dal announced that they would not allow the Karwan to enter Behror and pay tribute at the lynch site. The local organisers were told that we would be met with sticks and stones if we entered. The hall owners where we were to hold a peace meeting cancelled out on us, and no one was willing to give us a hall.

We resolved in the Karwan that we would proceed to Behror to remember Pehlu Khan despite any mob opposition. In Alwar, where we arrived to spend the night, senior police and administrative officials tried to persuade us to bypass Behror. We courteously but firmly refused, and said we would visit the police station in Behror to express our disappointment about how the police has let off the men mentioned in Pehlu Khan's dying declaration, and the criminalising of Pehlu and his sons; and then place flowers at the site of his lynching. The police officers said that no one had been allowed to do this so far. We argued – how can an administration block a Karwan that has set out to try to offer a little solace to families bereaved by hate lynching from paying tribute to lynched man's memory.



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

Day 11

The eleventh day of the Karwan became one of unexpected confrontation and tension.

The Alwar district administration again tried hard to persuade us to bypass Behror, where Pehlu Khan had been lynched on the highway. They did accept my request that we visit the Behror police station to ask the police a few hard questions about their investigations into the Pehlu Khan lynching. But they were resolute to not permit us to place flowers at the site at which he was lynched by a violent mob. The district officers who met me said that violent mobs had gathered with stones to block our passage. I remained determined. I told them that I was convinced that we could not allow a mob to violently block a small mission of love and solace.

I spoke to my fine members of the Karwan. All the participants were united in their support of my decision to defy the orders of the administration; to place flowers at the place where Pehlu Khan had been lynched. I however said I was unwilling to put any of them into any danger, except the unavoidable possibility of the stoning of our bus. I therefore insisted that they remain at the bus, while I alone would go the place to place the flowers on behalf of the entire Karwan.

There was both tension but cheer and determination among my co-travellers in the Karwan. John Dayal, the senior most member of the Karwan, spoke movingly of the moral importance of taking this stand. Before we reached the police station, a small group of villagers in Barod village blocked the path of the Karwan. We found this was a group of people who had gathered at an early hour to greet us with rousing slogans, flower garlands and steaming morning tea. At that fraught moment, their gesture was all the more welcome, They made a few impromptu stirring speeches, including of the Hindu Sarpanch, about the importance of fighting the politics of hate that divides us.

We then drove to the police station. The Additional Superintendent of Police and Additional District Magistrate were present there to answer our questions. The closure by the police of cases against men mentioned in Pehlu Khan's dying declaration, they said, was a decision by the state CID, and they could not comment on it. But I told them that it was they, the local police who registered criminal cases against the victims of the lynching, dubbing them criminals, immediately after they had been brutalised by a hate mob. I said it is the duty of the police to defend both the victim and truth, but asked why they let them down so badly? They had no answer.



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

After we emerged from the police station, the administration again tried to dissuade me from the small journey of a few hundred yards to the spot at which I would place the flowers. They said that a furious mob had gathered there with stones and sticks and would cause me harm. I said I was prepared for it, and would not agree to discarding the plans of a floral tribute. I said I would go there alone as I did not want to risk any of my Karwan colleagues being attacked or hit by a stone. I told the policepersons that from my years of experience as a district officer, I knew that it would have been simple to prevent or disperse the small crowd of protestors armed with stones. The senior police officer answered me hotly, saying, 'they have the constitutional right to protest'. I answered – 'I am not sure that anyone has a constitutional right to protest with violence. But even if you so believe, then surely I have at least the same constitutional right to protest armed with nothing other than flowers'.

I began to walk to the site, but the police physically blocked me. I then sat on the ground in a spontaneous dharna. They would have to either arrest me, or allow me to walk to the location and make my floral tribute. I sat for about half an hour, as they confabulated.

Finally they relented.

With two fistfuls of marigold flowers, and surrounded by a few policepersons, I walked the couple of hundred yards to the spot where the ageing cattle trader Pehlu Khan had been cruelly lynched by a mob. It was a dirty nondescript stretch of a sidewalk. I knelt down there, and said, 'I am not a believer, so I cannot pray. But I believe in *insaniyat aur insaaf*—humanism and justice. Therefore, for humanism and justice, I place these flowers here. In memory not just of Pehlu Khan, but of hundreds of others like him who have fallen to hate violence across our land'.

I returned to the bus, and the police bundled us rapidly into the bus. As we drove past, the protesting men threw a few stones at the bus.

On the way, people of the small town Kothputli had planned a small welcome to the Karwan. But in the presence of the police, a bunch of young men arrived, tore down the banners and threw away the flowers, The police said they were helpless to stop them. The police then asked just two organisers to meet the bus outside the police station. I emerged with a couple of colleagues, and the policemen said we had only a couple of minutes. They handed over packets of packed breakfast, and a few men gathered. One of them took off his shoe to throw, as the bus drove away.

The Karwan now had police escort vehicles both ahead and following its bus. It was only with this that the state administration would allow the Karwan



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

to travel through Rajasthan. A sad day when a caravan of love can travel only with the protection of the police. We don't need or deserve protection; it is the bereaved families who we have met these days of the Karwan who the police should protect, but it is they who they fail so profoundly.

Day 12

Our first day in Rajasthan the Karwan was greeted in Behore, where Pehlu Khan had been lynched, with stones and footwear. The second day, in Ajmer, we were pelted instead with rose petals, as we marched for peace and love on a busy street with hundreds, singing and shouting slogans of the unity of people of all faith, and against hate. We were all overwhelmed with the numbers of people who joined the aman rally. We were greeted first by the local gurudwara. Several Christian priests and nuns also joined. As we walked, ordinary people on both sides of the road threw flowers on us. Some recited – *aman, aman, aman, aman* – like a chant. The rally ended resoundingly at the entrance to the historical Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti Dargah, where we were greeted by the entire senior trustees of the Dargah. Rose petals fell from above, as they spoke about the importance of love and compassion, and how fitting that a Karwan of love should come to the shrine of a sufi saint who epitomised love and believed in the equality of all human beings.

The morning however was grim. We went for Dangawas village in Nagaur district, where 5 Dalits and one other man were brutally killed in an attack by the Jat landlords of their village. More than 40 years earlier, a family had mortgaged its land to a Jat landlord against a loan of 1500 rupees. But even after the loan was repaid, they did not allow them to occupy their land. They fought and finally won a long and expensive title battle for the land in the courts, but even then they refused to restore the land. They approached the village panchayat, which also refused to order possession for their land. The Dalit family finally occupied the land, built a house on it, and began to cultivate the fields. They were to live there for only 32 days.

To teach them a lesson, on May 14, 2015, a mob of Jat men, armed with stones, daggers and firearms suddenly reached the fields thrashing the men and running over them in their tractors. We met the families of the bereaved men – who lost their sons, fathers, husbands, brothers in this way. They described the horror of that morning. Even women were dragged, stripped, and molested including by inserting sticks. Some women ran for safety to the roof of their house, but their attackers drove their tractors into the house, and its roof came crashing down. Three men died on the spot, and



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

two more in the hospital. The attackers mutilated the bodies of the men who died there, gouging out their eyes and chopping off their legs. Many more were admitted with serious wounds from daggers, lashings and molestation, but the angry Jats broke into the hospital trying to kill the survivors there.

The role of the police followed a standard pattern. They switched off their mobile phones, and did not come to the site for a full two hours. They registered murder charges for the killing of the sixth man, and also claimed that this slaughter was not a Dalit atrocity but just a land dispute. But the local Dalits were not cowed down. Organisations from across Rajasthan rose in solidarity with them. The case was transferred after a long struggle to the CBI, which absolved the Dalit victims from any criminal charges. However, they refused to acknowledge the role of the police in facilitating the massacre. The upper-caste villagers are united in boycotting the Dalit families, and therefore they have no work. Even members of their own Dalit caste, other Dalits and Muslims of the village are wary in supporting them. But we found their spirit unbroken, unwilling to be cowed down by caste hatred and violence. It was very brave of them to invite the Karwan to their own village and to speak of what they had suffered in a public meeting. Even women spoke out fiercely about their suffering.

In the evening, in Kekri village of Bhilwada, we encountered a very different kind of hate violence. This was the unspeakably cruel killing of a woman by accusing her of being a witch or *daayan*. Her drunkard husband died, and even as they were mourning his death, his elder brother also died. During the prayers after their ashes had been immersed, her husband's 25 year old niece and another relative the same age, went into a trance, saying that they were possessed by the deity Bheruji. In this trance, they said that the widowed woman was a witch. To exorcise her, they demanded that she be forced to eat human excreta, hot embers be placed in her feet, palms and eyes, and she should be stripped and forced to run outside the house. Even as she screamed in pain and shame, the two women and some other men of her family held her down and subjected her to all these tortures. She pushed her face into a tray of burning embers. Her terrified teenaged son could not bear to see his mother naked and locked himself into a room, and hid himself under a blanket. No neighbour intervened. The next night she died, and the village cremated her in the early hours of the morning hurriedly the police could be informed. The village panchayat met, and imposed a small fine of 2500 rupees on her killers, asked them to take a bath at Pushkar, and closed the matter. There the matter would have rested, except for the intervention of a courageous educated relative. After he



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

learned of the horrific murder, he braved the anger and ostracism of the family and complained to the police. They sat on the complaint for five days, but after a local agitation by some women's groups, they finally registered a murder case ten days later. The woman's killers are today behind bars, but completely unrepentant.

We spoke to her teenaged son. He was clearly still intensely traumatised. He said he wanted to speak to us about how his mother was killed, but he spoke in an emotionless monotone.

We were reminded that the targets of hate violence today are not just religious minorities and Dalits. They also include women, especially single and low-caste women. The incredible cruelty and medieval horror of the way she was killed – by irrationalism and misogyny – left us all shaken and stunned.

Day 13

We had arrived late the night earlier at Bhilwada in Rajasthan, where the Karwan had reached late the night before. Many people still waited for us although we reached only at 10 at night, and spoke to us of the mounting communal divisions and tensions in Bhilwada. The day began with a short aman rally through the streets of Bhilwada. The rally concluded at the statue of Dr Ambedkar, where we recalled his emphasis on fraternity or a shared sisterhood and brotherhood as being fundamental to democracy and our constitution., We drove to Udaipur, where once again many citizens had gathered to greet the Karwan.

We left after lunch for Gujarat. Just across the border, we arrived in a small impoverished tribal village Kotdaghadi in Sabarkantha district. Just over four months earlier, this remote village was the site of incredible horror, once again in the name of the gentle cow.

On 2 May 2017, the police claimed that someone had reported that a cow was killed in the village. The report filed by the police states that they rushed to the spot and found five men gathered around a recently slaughtered bull. In their FIR they designates the bull as *gauvansh* or cow progeny. The FIR describes in graphic detail over several pages the condition of the 'murdered' bull, the cut on his neck, a horn severed, his body cut in two parts, and half the body's skin severed from the body, with dried blood all around. It says that it found next to the body of the dead bull a *tarazu* or weighing balance, an axe and knives. Four of the men are said to have run away after a chase.



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

The police managed to catch one of the men, a Dalit Lebabhai Bhambhibhai, and arrested him for the alleged crime of cow (progeny) slaughter. Lebabhai pleaded that he had not killed the bull; he did not slaughter cows or trade in their meat. His caste determined vocation since he was a boy was only to skin dead cows. That day he was skinning a bull that was already dead. But the police insisted that he was lying, and beat him up brutally. He complained later to the courts that the police demanded two lakh rupees from him to spare him his life and give him freedom. His family was able to raise one lakh rupees but that was not enough.

Later they picked up a 55 year old Adivasi farmer Kodarbahi Gamar, and two Muslim men Imambhai and Shabbirbhai. The men were pitilessly beaten by the police. One of them, Kodarbhai, died from this beating.

We met Kodarbahi's widow Shanthaben in her small earth home. Her husband that morning was sleeping in his fields. Early morning half a dozen policemen suddenly arrived at her home mercilessly thrashing her husband. She screamed, pleading with them to let him go. The policemen pulled her harshly by her arm. and asked her to look at her husband's face one last time. She should then prepare for his funeral.

They then dragged the man outside the home, beating him viciously with a belt and batons all the way to the village centre. Her grown sons and other villagers said that they thrashed him so badly as a crowd watched that he soiled his clothes with his excreta and urine. They then drove him to another village 20 kilometres away, and again on the village square harshly thrashed him in the same way. These public lashings seemed designed as deliberate public spectacles of a man accused of killing a cow. This display had everything in common with a lynching. Except that it was done by lawless men in uniform rather than by hate mobs.

The police then drove him to the police station. That evening, Kodarbhai rang his neighbour from the police station to call his son. He sobbed as he spoke to his son on the phone, 'I have been beaten so badly. I cannot walk. I feel sick all the time. They hit me with a belt on my head. They say that they will let me go if we pay them 4 lakh rupees. Mortgage our land, get this money to the police station as soon as you can. I will not live otherwise'.

His sons desperately set about immediately trying to mortgage their land with a richer landed neighbour. But the next night, their neighbour got another call, this time from the police, that Kodarbhai had been admitted to a hospital in Ahmedabad. A group of villagers hired a taxi to the hospital. There they found him critical, surrounded by tubes. The next day he died.



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

Shanthaben repeated the story of this horror to us. Her husband had never done any work even remotely connected with the slaughter or skinning of cows. They had two local cows, that gave them only enough milk for their tea. He worked on his farms, and as labour for the rest of the year. She could not understand why the police had accused him of killing a cow, and had killed him for it. Her husband had left behind eleven children, the youngest five years old, the oldest in his thirties. She did not know how she would now raise her children alone in the world.

‘Our life is worth less than a cow’, she wept. ‘Our life is that of a dog’.

This was like a perverse parody of a morality play. One Adivasi, one Dalit, and two Muslims, all charged by the police to have killed a cow, who was not a cow, but a bull. All thrashed brutally by the police, who extorted blood money as the price to stay alive. One of them beaten and humiliated ruthlessly and publicly, in the style of public lynching, so severely that he dies.

Truly ours has become a country in which the lives of Adivasis, Dalits, and Muslims are worth less than that of a cow.

Day 14

The Karwan is approaching its final days. The team of travellers is feeling a weariness not just of body but of the soul, from bearing testimony to so much hate, cruelty and oppression in state after state. And yet we remind ourselves over and over again that even though it is so gruelling to deal with just listening to stories of hate violence; we must be always mindful that it is infinitely harder for families that have to live with and endure the loss of loved ones to hate violence, living every day with memories and persisting everyday realities of hate, supported by the state.

Today, the Karwan visited the family of Mohammed Ayub, an auto rickshaw driver who was lynched by gau rakshaks or cow vigilantes a year ago. His family had observed the first anniversary of his death just a day before our visit. They were just two brothers, Ayub the elder of the two. Their father was an alcoholic, and lived away from home, paying nothing for their upkeep. Their mother raised them with great hardship, working as a domestic helper. The two boys dropped out of school early to support their mother and sister. Ayub had married, and had two children.

Before Bakra-eid last year, he decided to earn some extra money for his family by transporting animals from neighbouring Rajasthan. They were



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

returning from Rajasthan with some cattle in a pick-up, when a group of around eight gau rakshaks chased his vehicle in cars and on motor-cycles. They speeded as fast as they could, but the vigilantes pursued them hotly, overtook them and blocked their path on the highway. The driver and other loader managed to make good their escape. But the gau rakshaks caught up with him. They fell upon him, pounding and pulping him until he was knocked unconscious. They then left him in the middle of the road, hoping that he would be run over, and his death thought to result from an accident instead of lynching,

Fortunately a police patrol jeep found him, and admitted him to hospital. The family showed us a photograph of Ayub in his hospital bed. His face and every limb seemed pulverised. He fought for three days before he died.

In what is almost a rule in every state that we visited, the police first registered criminal charges against the victim Ayub, charging him with violations of the severe law in the state prohibiting cow slaughter. A second FIR they filed against him for rash driving. A third FIR they filed against an anonymous mob for attacking Ayub. But the family and other human rights activists had seen CCTV pictures from cameras in shops and homes near the highway, which established clearly the identities of the gau rakshaks who lynched Ayub.

After he died in hospital, seniors of his community mobilised a crowd of over a thousand people surrounded the hospital, refusing to accept the boy's body until their FIR which accepted that Ayub was killed by lynching and that this lynching was not by an anonymous mob but by a small group of motivated gau rakshaks. They protested that there were a number of CCTV cameras in the area which had captured their faces, and the supporters of the family had identified the men. The police held off for as long as they could, but the protesting crowd swelled and just would not budge. There were many negotiations, and the police secretly shifted the boy's body to their home. But Ayub's family would not still relent from their demands. They added that they wanted the men arrested in a maximum of a couple of days. The police finally gave in to all of these demands. A new FIR was filed, of murder under Section 302 of the IPC, of a targeted lynching by named gau rakshaks. The family finally tearfully lowered the body of their loved one under the earth, and made its last offering to it of soil. The gau rakhaks whose faces were recorded by CCTV were arrested. But they were released on bail, granted in appeal by the High Court.

Of all the families we met in this long Karwan, this one had been the most successful in fighting the consistent and shameful attempts of state



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

administrations everywhere to protect the men who lynched, and criminalise the victims. The long and courageous battles for justice for the survivors of the 2002 communal massacre in Gujarat had set new traditions of human rights resistance by survivors of hate violence against their attackers protected by malevolent and communal state administrations. There has not been any lynch attacks in the name of the cow in the year since Ayub's lynching, and they and we speculate that the charging and arrest of the gau rakshaks who murdered Ayub deterred other hate adventurers in ways that they are not deterred in any other of the states which we visited.

The FIR of murder against the gau rakshak killers of Ayub offered some solace to Ayub's grieving mother, his young widow, his brother and sister. But a year later, they could not still come to terms with the brutality with which their loved had been snatched away from them and from life.

Day 15

In our third day in Gujarat, we drove to the site of a communal conflagration earlier this year that has barely registered in the national consciousness, but which led to one death, several injuries and the burning of 140 houses. We drove to the village Vadavali in district Patan, and sat with Naseem Ben, the widow of the Ibrahim who had been killed in the violence.

The official story was that the 'riot' arose from an altercation between students of different faiths. A Rajput boy was seated next to a Muslim student as they wrote their Class 10 Board examination. The instructor found that the Rajput boy was cheating, and turned him out of the examination hall. The boy was convinced that his Muslim neighbour in the exam hall had complained about his cheating to the instructor. When he came out of the hall, the Rajput boy fell upon him. An elderly Muslim man tried to mediate between them, but the furious Rajput student beat him up as well.

The Rajput boy then went to his village, which neighboured Vadavali, and returned with 15 older Rajputs who heatedly argued with the Muslim boy. Elders intervened and said that hot-blooded youths should not be encouraged to escalate a small matter. The Rajput men left.

A couple of hours later, a crowd of around 2000 Rajput men from surrounding villages arrived on tractors, cars and motorcycles, armed menacingly with daggers, rods and a few rifles. They also carried with them petrol and a white chemical to burn down cement walls and roofs. They went on a rampage, vandalising and burning each of their homes in the



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

Muslim neighbourhood, and thrashing the men. Terrified women and children ran out and hid in the fields, the men often within their homes or on roof terraces.

Naseem Ben spoke of how her family were sitting outside their home when the enraged mob of Rajputs appeared suddenly. Her husband Ibrahim, a day labourer, panicked when he heard the roars of the rampaging mob, and sent out the terrified women and children from the back door. His sons ran outside and hid on rooftops. Ibrahim locked himself inside his house. The crowd came to his home, shouting out his name. They broke down the door, found him cowering in a corner. They dragged him outside and lynched him until he died. Through all of this, the villagers claim, the police stood by and only watched.

This official version of the events – that it was a spontaneous clash between the two communities sparked by the squabble between the students from the two communities - does not explain how within two or three hours of the scuffle, such a large mob of Rajputs from several villages could gather, and how they could have collected such large quantities of petrol and incendiary chemicals, as well as their array of weapons. This strongly suggests an earlier conspiracy, in which the fight between the students was not a flashpoint but an excuse for the assault on the Muslims of the village.

The Muslim villagers agree: they believe that the reason for the assault was quite different from the official claim. The panchayat elections were under way. The Muslims and Patels of the village had sizeable populations, but neither commanded enough votes to elect ‘their’ Sarpanch, a person from their caste. The leaders of the two communities reached an unprecedented agreement to join hands, and agree to have a Muslim Sarpanch for half the term, and a Patel Sarpanch for the other half. The Muslim Sarpanch was elected unopposed, because the village knew they had the numbers. The Rajputs were reportedly furious, as their village had never elected a Muslim Sarpanch. According to this version, the Rajputs resolved to teach the Muslims a lesson that they would not forget. For this reason they shot the Muslim woman Sarpanch’s husband (the bullet entered his groin, but he survived); and to kill Ibrahim who was one of his main supporters.

The police surprisingly seemed to support the latter theory, by registering a case under Section 120A of the Indian Penal Code against the Rajput mob. This section deals with the crime of criminal conspiracy. But as we have seen in virtually every case of hate crimes that we looked at during this Karwan, the police also registered criminal charges against the victims, charging them of causing grievous hurt with dangerous weapons. They



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

charged all the leaders of the Muslim community including the Sarpanch's husband of this fictitious crime.

Also in common with most of the cases, no one from the administration ever visited the family who lost their loved one in the communal assault, or offered any assistance. And no one from among their non-Muslim neighbours came to their aid.

We drove a few hours from there to a village Kashor in Anand district. Here we met Shailesh Manibhai, of the Dalit Rohit community and his mother Maniben. The caste occupation of the Rohit community is the skinning of dead cattle. Although he has studied up to Class 10, Shailesh still could find only this socially demeaning work. His father had been bedridden for 15 years. His untouchable 'unclean' caste occupation thrust on him stigma, but helped bring food to his family. He worked in partnership with a couple of Rohit brothers in a neighbouring village who owned a tractor. Whenever a cow or buffalo died in any household in the village, they sent word to Shailesh. He would call his partner, and they would lift the carcass in the tractor and transport it to a lowland of the village designated for disposing dead animals.

On 11 August 2017, a Rajput of his village sent word that his cow had died, and Shailesh arrived with his tractor and hauled the dead animal on to the tractor. Heavy rains in the village had turned the designated lowland for skinning into a swamp, so Shailesh drove his tractor to another waste patch of land adjacent to the funeral ground of the village. This angered the upper-caste residents of the village, and they went there with the Sarpanch to rebuke Shailesh for polluting the site with the dead cow. Shailesh agreed to continue to use the swampy lowland to skin animals in future.

There the matter should have ended. But the next morning, a group of around 150 enraged Rajput men stormed into the Rohit enclave, and began thrashing Shailesh for his comeuppance. His mother tried to intervene and they beat her as well. All the while they cursed them with caste-laden insults. His mother spent a few days in hospital.

An earlier generation would have accepted the beating and insults passively as part of their caste burden. But not Shailesh. He went to the police station, and filed a detailed complaint naming the upper-caste men who had attacked him. The police registered a case under the SC ST Atrocities Act against the upper-caset men of the village listed in Shailesh's complaint. He also announced that he would refuse to lift or skin animal carcasses in future.



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

The upper-caste people of the village are irate, incensed that a low-caste boy could challenge them in this way. The charge of committing atrocities against a Scheduled Caste family is a grave one, which if proved could result in long jail terms. And they now have to lift the polluting dead cows and buffaloes themselves, digging a shallow grave for them.

The upper-caste people of the village have unanimously decreed a complete boycott of the Rohit caste. Since they are the land-owners, the community is out of work. For fear of caste-taunts and retaliation, they have shifted their children to schools in more distant villages. A man who worked in a factory for 11 years was suddenly told to resign by his upper-caste managers, because he belonged to the village which had the audacity to file charges of caste atrocities against upper-caste men. 'Who knows when you may use the same law against us?' He too has challenged his discharge in labour courts.

We found the spirit of the Dalits in the village high, because they had defended their self-respect before the upper-caste people of their village. 'Jai Bheem', they would shout at every step of our journey to the village. I said to them that when they fought for equality, they fought not just for themselves. They fought for all of us.

Day 16

Our last visit to a family targeted by hate violence in this phase of the Karwan was to a single Dalit woman Dahiben in Karola village in the tribal Panchmahals district of Gujarat, who has been persecuted as a witch or *daakan* in Gujarati for a more than a dozen years since her husband died. But this is also the story of a woman who spiritedly fought back, and overcame.

When we set out on this journey, we expected to meet families hit by lynching, Dalit atrocities, and communally driven state violence. But our feminist hosts first in Rajasthan and then in Gujarat reminded us that along with religious minorities, Dalits and Adivasis, women, especially single women, continue to be battered by a medieval violence, by being branded as witches.

Dahiben was just 30 years old when her husband suddenly died, leaving her with two young sons. No one had detected any previous grave illness, and his death was sudden and immediate. From what she described to us, it sounded like a classic heart attack. But her husband's older brother was convinced that his sister-in-law Dahiben was a *daakan* or witch, and she



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

had brought the death upon her husband through her diabolic witchcraft. Since then, she was blamed for every misfortune, illness or death in the family, even when a nephew took ill in distant Bangalore.

Her husband had earned his livelihood as a part-time sanitation worker in a public veterinary hospital, and after his death, she inherited his job. The salary was as little as 350 rupees a month, but it was precious in helping her feed her children.

However, her brother-in-law continued to harass her, labelling her a witch everywhere she went. He frequently followed her to her place of work, and abused her. Finding her alone anywhere, he would try to force himself sexually on her. His wife became paralysed and he attributed this adversity also to her evil witchcraft. He performed many dramatic public exorcisms. He also stalked her in her home, a small earth hut which her husband had built in the fields he jointly held with his brothers. He demanded that she abandons her home, as she was destroying her husband's family with her witchcraft. She argued back feistily that if she was indeed a witch, why would she leave him alive? She said she would never leave the home her husband had built, or his share of the land which she held for her two sons, whatever happened.

One day he accosted her as she was walking to work at the veterinary hospital. Screaming that she was a witch who must be destroyed, he hit her on her head three times with a hockey stick. She fell to the ground, her skull bleeding profusely, and her spine painfully injured. A shopkeeper phoned for an ambulance. She spent 20 days in hospital, with 24 stitches on her head. She recovered painfully. Her older son dropped out of school, and resolved that he would not let her out of his sight. He found work for both of them, making packing boxes in a milk cooperative, so that she would not have to go anywhere alone. They go to work together, and return together.

Anandi is a tribal and women's rights organisation that comes to the aid of women who are branded as witches. With their help, they were able to get a police case registered against her attacker. But he was arrested only for a day and immediately got bail. He was an influential man in the village, a patwari.

He is unrepentant even today, perhaps convinced that his continuing misfortunes are caused by her witchcraft, or perhaps wishing to expel his brother's widow from the land her husband jointly held with his brothers. Whatever the reason, he continues to stalk her, humiliating her publicly as a witch each time, demanding that she leaves her home and land, and



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

threatening this time to ensure that he kills her. But she has two fine and protective grown sons, and the many meetings organised by Anandi with the local community have resulted in greater local support than we have encountered in any instance during the Karwan.

Today was the last day of the second phase of the Karwan. We arrived late at night earlier in Godhra. The day began with a meeting at the Gandhi Ashram in Godhra. The meeting was significant for two reasons. The first was that it was the burning of a train compartment at Godhra station tragically killing its Hindu travellers more than 15 years earlier that have set in motion of a cycle of hate violence that has not ended until today. The second was that the Gandhi Ashram in Godhra was established exactly 100 years back, in 1917, by the Mahatma, and he often held his prayer meetings, for peace between people of diverse faiths and for his work to fight untouchability, in the same hall with a high tiled roof in which we had gathered a century earlier.

Many friends today reject Gandhi because of his opposition to untouchability but not to caste. On this I find myself entirely with Ambedkar, who believed that untouchability is not an aberration of caste but is intrinsic to caste, and that social equality and fraternity requires not the reform but the demolition of caste. However I still love and revere Gandhi as the bravest fighter for an India built on the foundations of love and mutual respect and good will. I thought often during our travels of what we believe was Gandhi's finest hour, the last months of his life. Think of it. A million people had died in Hindu-Muslim riots, the country had been torn apart in a frenzy of hate, trainloads of people were slaughtered in trains travelling in both directions, and angry refugees were returning in millions from what was now Pakistan with terrifying stories of communal bloodletting, loss and betrayals. And yet amidst all of this Gandhi still had the courage to speak unwaveringly of love, unity and equal citizenship as the *only* legitimate basis of Indian nationhood, as he walked alone in places where hatred was at its pinnacle, like Naokholi and the country's capital Delhi smouldering with hate. It is this radical love to which the Karwane Mohabbat has tried to pay small and modest tribute, therefore we were both inspired and sobered to sit in the same hall in his Ashram, as we paid tribute to the audacious fearless courage of his love, in a town that had become the epicentre of hate politics, exactly one hundred years after him.

In the Karwan, we lustily shout out the slogan Jai Bhim. But we like to follow this immediately with Jai Gandhi. In both these great icons we find



KARWAN E MOHABBAT

कारवान ए मोहब्बत

کاروان محبت

pathways to love, to fraternity, to a sisterhood and brotherhood of all peoples. Jai Bhim! Jai Gandhi!

And here ended the second phase of the utterly extraordinary journey of the Karwane Mohabbat. A small but audacious effort to offer a garland of empathy across many parts of our troubled land. A tiny lamp lit in a tempest of hate.

Did it accomplish anything? None of my wonderful fellow-travellers, humsafars – mostly half my age or less, but some older – have been left untouched by this odyssey. Of this I am sure. They would continue to carry the painful stories they heard on their souls. But it will take a long time for us to decide if this did in the end make any sense.

Of one thing, though, we are sure. That our travels did offer precious solace to the more than fifty families we met across India who were struggling often very alone with the consequences of incredible hate and colossal state injustice. This alone makes the voyage of love worth its while for us.

We wanted to appeal also to the public conscience, and to try to accomplish this, many humsafars have already begun to tell the stories they heard and saw, and plan to continue to do so, with pictures, videos and words. In order to inform and appeal to our sisters and brothers across the country, to care, to speak out, and to resist.

Where we had the least impact in many places was to appeal to the conscience of the majority community in many local areas that we visited. There is a stunning, numbing lack of remorse in the majority communities wherever hate violence has unfolded. But we still take heart that not just stones and footwear were thrown at us, but rose petals, in so many places that we journeyed, by ordinary people who joined our Karwan of love.

Our Karwan will not end here. It has much work to do. For justice and healing of the families whose lives we touched. To chronicle our troubled times of engineered and pervasive hate. And to find ways to fight this, bravely and resolutely, with justice and love.