

Excerpts from interviews with doctors

Dr B is a private practitioner and honorary consultant in a municipal hospital in Amdavad. Dr B is Muslim. His clinic is in a predominantly Hindu area.

"I did not leave my house for 15 days. My building's janitor removed signboards about my clinic... Otherwise almost all clinics on Ashram Rd belonging to Muslim doctors were ransacked, vandalised and burnt."

Dr B's Hindu neighbours were helpful. Also, "some of my Muslim neighbours were senior police officials and ensured some police protection, though in the process they got accused of dereliction of duty and were threatened with transfers.

"When Muslim doctors were attacked I proposed that we condemn the acts but received no support. When Dr Amit Mehta was attacked there was a chorus of protest, though rightly so..."

Dr B felt doctors generally do not discriminate between patients on the basis of religion, and patients go by doctors' reputation, not their religion. His own clients include **members** of the Sangh Parivar. He felt that even doctors with known allegiance to the Sangh Parivar ideology would not discriminate.

At the municipal hospital, Dr B said, paramedical staff worked hard during the crisis period. They did not discriminate. He did hear that Parivar elements intimidated Muslim patients at the hospital.

Dr V is a surgeon and honorary consultant at a municipal hospital.

"I should tell you that I have worked with the RSS and Bajrang Dal. They helped in my practice, and, also, they talk of good values. I came to be well-known. Otherwise it is difficult for a non-Gujarati like me to get a breakthrough... I am not part of the RSS inner group.

"I do not think Muslims have been discriminated against in treatment, and certainly not in hospitals like VS hospital. I do not bother with the religion of the patient – for me a patient is a patient. I am a professional. I think most doctors in the Amdavad Medical Association (AMA) are professional and would not discriminate.

"However, after the riots, Muslim patients do not go to **private** hospitals. If they do, they turn up late, when their condition has worsened. Second, though they may receive the best treatment here, I cannot guarantee their safety within the hospital. Recently, a doctor who treated a Muslim patient in the OPD found herself surrounded by Hindu mobs threatening to burn the hospital down..."

"Even educated elite, including doctor friends of mine, object to the Rs 1 lakh (compensation) at taxpayers' expense..."

"Muslim trusts run hospitals, but these are staffed mostly by Hindu doctors. This is because barely 100-150 (less than three per cent) of the 3,500 doctors registered with the AMA are Muslims, and most of these are in general practice.

"It is a symbiotic relationship between Hindu doctors and Muslim patients. Many Hindu doctors give free service to Muslim trusts to develop a good practice in the Muslim community. It is a business. Muslim consultants will get attachments in Muslim trust hospitals naturally; it goes without saying.

"I find Muslim patients, whatever their class, are the best patients. They pay well, and in time. They do not complain about fees once agreed upon. Most doctors are happy with Muslim patients.

"A lot of heat has been generated with the stabbing of Dr Amit Mehta. Hindu doctors weigh the benefits (of treating Muslims) with the risks, not only from the Muslim community but also from Hindu militant organisations, because they will be targeted..."

"The best attachment is a religious attachment – a Muslim trust or Swaminarayan trust – rather than VS Hospital or a honoraryship. Organisations with networks are the best attachment for one's practice, and the RSS is the best network going in Gujarat if you want to develop your business. People of all strata are attached to the RSS, from rickshawallas to industrialists.

"There are four cadres of doctors: those who oppose the RSS; those who are with them right or wrong; the fence sitters, and the close sympathisers. As a result of a mass movement, the fence sitters have become sympathisers. There will be hardly 20-25 hard-core supporters. The majority are sympathisers. Those who used to say, 'We have nothing to do with the RSS,' have become sympathisers. Others support the RSS purely for economic reasons. They go to the meetings, meet the network. The RSS does not mind, because they are spreading the tentacles.

"Very few doctors oppose the RSS – about as many as the hard core supporters – but they will not make their views public. In public, even doctors of the opposition party feel they have to say what is happening is right, for business reasons.

"Most Muslim patients were brought to VS Hospital. Maybe the police planned this. Patients' security in the hospital is a problem. Civil Hospital is run by the state government. VS Hospital is under the Amdavad Municipal Corporation which is headed by the Congress. The chairperson of the Board is a Muslim Congressman. These could be the calculations of Muslim patients. Also, the entire settlement behind the VS hospital is Muslim, whereas the settlement in front is all Hindu. Also, **in 1984 or 1985** a Muslim was killed inside the Civil Hospital. You cannot find a Muslim shop for four km around LG hospital. So naturally, Hindu patients prefer to go to LG hospital.

"Still, I don't think doctors have discriminated against Muslims for treatment. You ask the patients, including the burns patients."

Dr B is a gastro-enterologist and an office bearer of the

National Medical Organisation (the medical wing of the RSS) and the Amdavad Doctors Forum. He has been active in the RSS from his childhood days. He said his statement on Dr Amit Mehta was misunderstood. He had said that it was not safe for Hindu doctors to practise in Muslim areas – not that Hindu doctors should refuse treatment to Muslims. If Muslims need medical attention from Hindu doctors they should attend clinics where Hindu doctors feel safe. He feels that all doctors are professional when it comes to treating patients. He has many Muslim patients.

Dr B has paid for some poor Muslim children's education. He said he was not against Muslims; but against unpatriotic Muslims. Education in the madrassas, by mullahs, was turning out Muslim children who tend to become fanatics. When asked about the Hindu equivalent of mullahs in several spheres, including education, he said the subject required a longer discussion.

Dr B said people like Dr Maya Kodnani (named as a perpetrator by several victims of the Naroda Patiya burnings) could not have participated and directed riots. He has great respect for Dr Kodnani.

Dr A is a medical officer with the AMC. He is a Muslim. He has worked at a camp since February 28, when the violence started in Ahmedabad. A week later, the AMC assigned him there on duty.

On the night of February 28, many people were brought to the camp from Naroda Patiya. On the 30th, the camp housed 7,000-8,000 people. Many had burns and/ or bullet injuries. For the first five days, local doctors worked with materials from local chemist shops. People with bullet injuries, and burns of 50 per cent or more, were sent to hospital; those lesser burns or minor injuries were treated at the camp.

Three women were brought in naked, according to Dr A. (Local women volunteers said they had given clothes to 10-12 women who came to the camp without clothes.) The three seen by Dr A had severe burns and reported physical molestation. He had no experience in treating rape victims, so he referred them to the civil hospital.

Many people sent to hospitals returned saying mobs there did not allow them to be admitted. Also, there were not enough ambulances to shift patients. In addition, riot victims were initially charged user fees by hospitals (including VS hospital).

M is a trustee of the Al Amin Hospital. He said they were told that mobs were preventing Muslim patients from getting treated at VS hospital. He said a mob from the RSS was present even during post mortems. "PM reports mention only injury, not 'bullet'."

On April 3, M was interrogated by the police and beaten up (**by whom?**) in his own ambulance while transferring patients to a government hospital. He said the president of Al Amin Hospital was attacked and admitted to VS Hospital for eight days.

Of the 92 doctors volunteering at Al Amin, 14 were Muslims, the rest Hindus. After the riots, only four doctors were coming for duty – two Hindu and two Muslim.

Dr Amit Mehta is a general practitioner. For 15 years, he has practised in Juhapura, a Muslim-dominated area. He

was stabbed on April 9, after which the Amdavad Doctors Forum issued a statement about Hindu doctors practising in Muslim areas.

Dr Mehta was in his clinic when a man came in with his face partly masked, and stabbed him repeatedly. Most people were offering their Friday prayers and the area was deserted. Dr Mehta managed to call for help. A Muslim woman heard him and ran to his aid. Another person tried, unsuccessfully, to apprehend the assailant. The police was called and Dr Mehta was taken to a hospital in a police van.

Dr Mehta said he had been brought up in a mixed locality and had always worked in a predominantly Muslim area. He does not fear the community where his clinic is, but he is in a dilemma. He has no other clinic, does not want to start over elsewhere, but feels the local community cannot guarantee his safety against attackers (most likely outsiders). He said the people in Juhapura were concerned for him, they had phoned often, but could not visit because of the prevailing tensions.

Dr Sadiq Kazi is surgeon in-charge at Al Amin Hospital. He also has a nursing home located at the junction of two streets, one Muslim dominated and the other Hindu dominated. The main entrance is on the 'Hindu street', but after he was attacked, the entrance being used is through the landlord's house which opens out onto the 'Muslim street'.

On one occasion, Dr Sadiq was chased by a mob but managed to drive to a police picket in time. Later, his car was vandalised twice by men from the nearby locality, who knew it belonged to him; the father of one of them had been his patient. No action was taken on his police complaint. Because of the tension, Dr Sadiq is not admitting patients to his nursing home. Dr Sadiq said that a Hindu doctor acquaintance had been told to stay away from his practice in a Muslim-dominated area.

Dr Sadiq said that in the first five days of the violence, he worked almost round the clock at the Al Amin hospital. For seriously injured people, doctors would bring bleeding under control, start life support, and shift them to a bigger hospital. Only those with less serious injuries were admitted to Al Amin hospital.

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