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that began on January 24, 1990, in Vadodara, and which resulted in the deaths of Baldev and his three accomplices, was planned with surgical precision. "Civilian vehicles were arranged for, the quickest routes to Gujarat were identified so that the squad could get there fast, and complete secrecy was maintained. The result was a massive boost in morale for police and civilian alike," recalls Jedhe. The police control rooms in Vadodara as well as Mumbai had relayed every detail of the ongoing encounter live and by the next morning, the entire country was talking about it.

Over the next two years, the ATS went hammer and tongs after the Khalistanis. Among their chief victories was the arrest of four Khalistanis who had come to Mumbai to kidnap the grand-niece of former Indian Prime Minister PV Narsimha Rao. She was supposed to be the leverage to negotiate the release of the killers of General AS Vaidya, who had headed Operation Bluestar.

Another huge feather in their cap was when they nabbed Manjeet Singh alias Lal Singh, wanted

for the twin bombings of two Air India flights in 1985, at the Dadar railway station in 1992. Manjeet's arrest for the first time confirmed the fact that the Inter Service Intelligence (ISI), Pakistan's premier intelligence agency, was providing support to the Khalistan movement, another common factor between then and now.

Indian intelligence agencies have confirmed that Amritpal has been getting massive support in terms of funding from the ISI. Back then, the

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ATS had discovered that the ISI had provided shelter to Manjeet and given him a whole new identity before sending him back to India with new mission objectives.

"Manjeet was frighteningly committed to the cause. After his arrest, we were interrogating him night and day and at one point, he realised he would not be able to resist much longer. At that point, even as I was interrogating him, he looked me in the eye and bit his tongue off with his own teeth. I can still hear that sickening crunch," Jedhe remembers.

For Jedhe, the revelation of Amritpal's ISI link was anything but surprising.

"The ISI and the Khalistan movement have been in bed with each other for decades. Manjeet's arrest was just a confirmation, but we have always known that they are inter-dependent on each other for the common goal of causing disruption in India," he says.

The ATS' crackdown, however, was not without consequences. Particularly Khan, who became the face of the anti-Khalistan action in Mumbai, constantly had a target painted not just on his back, but also his family. Khan's daughter Alaisha recalls how she came close to being kidnapped when she was

six years old. "I was studying in a school in Vashi and dad's official vehicle, with a police driver used to pick me up. On that day, there was a new driver I had never seen before. Nothing about him, from his accent to his appearance, was like any policeman I was familiar with. My suspicion changed to certainty the minute he turned in the opposite direction, taking me to Turbhe instead of our Thane residence. I rolled down the window and started shouting, and a couple on a motorcycle, who were going in the opposite direction, turned around and started following us. The driver stopped right there and fled," Alaisha shares.

After the incident, Khan sent Alaisha to a boarding school in Panchgani and rented a bungalow close to the school for her mother to stay, so that someone could be close to her. When she was 11, her mother took her to Mumbai for the holidays; they returned to Panchgani some days later. The plan was to stay at the bungalow and go back to school the next morning.

"When we reached the bungalow, the electricity was out and the phones were down. We went to ask the owner, who stayed in another bungalow nearby. The owner's aged mother, who was alone in

A lot of Sikhs had settled in Mumbai when the Khalistani movement made life hell for the common man in Punjab. You couldn't step out of your house after 5 pm in those days, because death stalked the streets. People moved to Mumbai, set up businesses, and ended up becoming prime targets for extortion for the Khalistanis who followed

Iqbal Sheikh, former ACP



the house, started wailing as soon as she saw us. Between sobs, she managed to tell us that men armed with 'big guns' had come to our bungalow the previous day and cut the power and phone lines. Dad sent a team to get us, and we sped back to Mumbai immediately," Alaisha says, still uncomfortable with the memory. As Jedhe simply puts it, "It was war."

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What does hate look like on a map?

An initiative to chart incidents of violence across the country hopes to rouse citizens to intervene and protect India's democratic social structure

SUCHETA CHAKRABORTY



HATE speech has the characteristic of poisoning the social atmosphere," Teesta Setalvad tells us over a video call. The civil rights activist—and secretary of the Mumbai-based Citizens for Justice and Peace (CJP)—is talking to us about Nafrat Ka Naqsha, a one-stop hate map to plot incidents of communal, casteist, ethnic conflicts and gender violence in India. This recent addition to the hate tracking activities of the organization—spanning 25 to 30 years—has been on the CJP website since February 2021.

With the aim to conscientise citizenry to intervene with the authorities, the map's objectives are to track, monitor, register pre-emptive complaints with the police, the district collector, the News Broadcasting and Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA), and others, follow up on complaints, and press to file FIRs and prosecute. Citing the 1987 case of Hashimpura-Maliana-Meerut communal violence, Setalvad explains how



CJP's Nafrat Ka Naqsha, online since February 2021, has evolved from a prototype Peace Map, a seven-stage conflict management product. It aims to warn, predict and prevent violence across India. **MAP COURTESY/CITIZENS FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE**

analysis indicates that three to six months before an upsurge of friction, "hate speech was steadily used by individuals and organisations to ratchet up the public temperature and create an atmosphere of complicity among the wider majority, so that they don't act to prevent violence, to save lives or to generate a counter-narrative against the stigma of hate."

Given the laxity among authorities, who she believes granted impunity to hate-mongering organisations, it was important to take

this stand as citizens, she says. "It's important to do this on a regular basis," she says, "because the assumption that a large section of citizenry is complicit with hate needs to be broken. Many of us believe that this kind of hate is damaging both to the stigmatised community and to all of us because it diverts attention from our democratic issues." Moreover, the Love Jihad campaign, she says, "is frightening because it is eventually targeting women and their autonomy regardless of the community"



As a journalist, Setalvad always believed in taking note of deleterious trends harming the democratic setup and social fabric. She sees the map as a good way of illustrating emerging trends, like the spiralling of incidents during an imminent election. "We all know communal violence and divisive language has some connection with trying to polarise votes," she says, "It's well accepted in political analysis, but how do you establish that? One way is by creating data sets like this." When this data representation is made available to other experts, it also enables creation of other such analyses and inputs.

Unsurprisingly, there is a huge team behind the creation and updation of the map, which involves elaborate processes of authentication with assistance from reliable media and calls with authorities. Moreover, Setalvad points out that organisations such as the Sakal Hindu Samaj openly display their events on their websites, allowing CJP to tip off authorities. Ten percent of the incidents, however, are unverifiable because they occur in remote areas. On whether the map has served as an early warning system for prevention of hate crimes, she shares, "We are trying our best in Maharashtra right now, sending complaints and calling police stations, but not getting much response from the authorities. One

good thing, though, is that registration of FIRs has now begun." She recalls an incident at the Pirana dargah outside Ahmedabad, long before CJP's digitalising efforts, where a concerted campaign by citizens and activists prevented a hate crime.

Earlier editions of Nafrat Ka Naqsha included a Love Azaad map that tracked attacks on inter-faith and inter-caste couples, but also generated counter narratives. "The Azaad map tried to say that even in the middle of all this hate, there are efforts that individual citizens can take to stop it," Setalvad explains. She cites recent examples such as the drive launched by Mira-Bhayander citizens to expel the "hate virus" afflicting MLA Geeta Jain, who had participated in an event on March 12 where hate speeches were made; or the creation of counter communities like the band of farmers led by the All-India Kisan Sabha (AIKS). Their leadership issued a strong statement on March 16 against rising instances of hate speeches and the consistent attempts to stigmatise minority communities in Maharashtra, which was taken back by the farmers to their villages. AIKS spearheaded the protest march—consisting of 10,000 farmers—from Nashik to Mumbai this month to demand better prices for crops and changes to export policies.

Setalvad says while the matter of resources remains, CJP now plans to create bands of peace volunteers, including members of existing mohalla committees, to create counter narratives and intervene in sensitive districts, with proper training.

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