

Remains of the 2002 day being dug up in Gujarat village

The horrors of the 2002 Gujarat sectarian violence came back to haunt Thursday with an investigating team recovering human bones from the site of a house that had been razed -- along with 23 humans inside it.

It was on March 1, 2002 that villagers in Ode in Anand district, about 80 km from here, took refuge in the house of Akhbar Khan Bikha Khan Pathan, hoping to escape a mob thirsting for revenge for the burning of a train and the deaths of 59 Hindus in Godhra town four days earlier.

But it was futile. In one of the worst massacres of the 2002 violence, the house was gutted and only four of 27 people survived.

More than six years later, the remains of the day are still being dug up.

On Wednesday evening, a Special Investigation Team (SIT) found three bones. On Thursday morning, two more human bones measuring 2 to 2.5 inches were found, official sources said.

Many household vessels were also recovered from the mound of earth -- all that survives of the once bustling household.

The digging operation is being supervised by SIT member Shivanand Jha, Anand District Sub Divisional Magistrate R.D. Chaudhary and the police. The operations are expected to continue for two more days.

The SIT investigation, on the orders of the Supreme Court, began a few days ago with water being pumped out from a dilapidated step-well and the digging up of an empty well. The step-well is located in the middle of the village while the empty well is on the banks of Malav-Bhagol lake.

SIT officials suspect that more human remains can be found from the two sites. Work is also in progress for a way around the step-well to reach the bottom, an official said.

The Ode village massacre was one of the 10 incidents during the post-Godhra violence in which at least 1,000 people, mostly Muslims, were killed that the Supreme Court ordered an investigation into.

This is the first time that the step-well and the empty well have been dredged for evidence.

Ode village is also called an NRI village. Its tobacco fields provide employment to about 200 Muslim homes. The bulk of Muslims are concentrated in four pockets -- Sarewali Bhagol, Malao-Bhagol, Pirawali Bhagol and Ode Nawabpura.

Villagers have blamed about 90 people for the massacre in Ode. Many of those who have been accused have fled the country while six have died. Survivors of that terrible day wait anxiously to see if the law finally takes its course - and the culprits are brought to book.

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