

Press Release: Student and Youth Collective Ahmedabad strongly condemns the violent attack by Bajrang Dal on the participants of a peaceful reading session

On 27th August, 2026, two groups in Ahmedabad — the Student and Youth Collective Ahmedabad (SYCA) along with Gujarat Reads Anyway — organised a peaceful reading session at AUDA Garden, near DEO Office, Vastrapur at 4pm. All public information from our end - such as posters, WhatsApp messages, and social media posts - clearly described it as a peaceful session where people would gather to read books that believed in free thought and were written by noted scholars, thinkers, and activists across the globe. Both of these groups are entirely volunteer-led and do not have any political affiliations.

Several students and residents of Ahmedabad gathered at the garden at 4 pm to read the books they had brought along. Journalists from BBC, Ahmedabad Mirror, Indian Express, and Gujarat Samachar also covered the reading session. Close to 40 participants attended the reading. Books written by Anne Frank and Malala Yousafzai - namely *The Diary of a Young Girl* and *I Am Malala* were also kept at the circle for people to read.

While the reading was going on silently, some of the organisers of the event noticed a group of men with hockey sticks at the gate of the garden at around 5:30 PM. While this group of men did not disrupt at that moment, when the participants were wrapping up the reading session at 6 PM, they came close to the readers and started questioning the intent of the gathering. This group of men had orange flags and scarfs with them and were chanting '*Jai Shree Ram*', unprovoked. Eventually, they identified themselves as belonging to Bajrang Dal and it was known that they were led by Hiren Rabari. At one point, they said: "*pant utar ke dekh lena ki vo muslim hai ki nahi*" (take off their pants and see if they're Muslims). To mitigate any possible violence, volunteers and readers tried to show this group of men the books on Bhagat Singh and Nehru, but they refused to listen and continued to scream over the readers, trying to provoke them.

This group of men from the Bajrang Dal kept repeatedly asking why the participants were choosing to read Malala Yousafzai's book. One of the participants, Jay Thakkar, tried to ask them to sit and speak with them, but they refused to speak, and they appeared to be ready to beat those present. The participants and organisers continued to speak to them and explain the relevance of the reading session. However, irrespective of the explanations, some people from Bajrang Dal started chanting slogans, shouting, and pushing the participants to the corner, and began questioning everyone aggressively. They tried to target one person in particular, and as their threats became more aggressive and sensing the escalation of the situation, Jay suggested that the readers sing the Indian national anthem. When the national anthem concluded, the readers chanted *Bharat Mata Ki Jai*, as is the norm. People from Bajrang Dal accused Jay Thakkar of disrespecting the national anthem since his shoulder moved during the recitation; the Bajrang Dal men also accused another participant of not chanting *Bharat Mata ki Jai* and started beating the person up, and simultaneously tore up various books, including that by Bhagat Singh.

The violence rippled as more of their members began pushing the participants. The members of the Bajrang Dal had entered the garden with the clear and preplanned intention

to create violence, as several of them were armed with weapons such as heavy sticks and lathis. The mob tried to lynch the readers without any provocation. **It is important to note that, throughout this attack, their violence was not reciprocated, and the members of SYCA and participants did not retaliate violently at any point.** During the reading, there was no sloganeering, banners, or demonstration of any sort from the organisers' and participants' end.

The Bajrang Dal men started to beat Jay first and then other participants, including M. Shashi Kumar, Savan Zalariya, Sneh Bhavsar, and others present. They dragged Jay Thakkar out of the park while continuously beating him with lathis on his feet, back, legs, and left hand elbow, head and his stomach and punching and kicking him across his body. Sneh was also beaten on his head, left hand, both his legs, elbow and back, sustaining injuries across his body. The mob took readers to different points and beat them, slapped them, scratched them, punched them hard, before stopping at the police van. Even in front of police, they beat the readers. The police men told them to sit inside "we do not know with these people, they can even kill you." When M. Shashi Kumar was put into the police vehicle, the goons were hitting him on his forehead, eyes, jaws, back with lathi and they also hit a police officer in the hand in the process. Savan was slapped, his glasses were broken and he was also beaten on his left ankle, head and near his waist with lathis, bats and punches and put into a police vehicle.

They caught Swati Goswami, one of the participants, roughly by the arm and pulled her hair. Another participant Maitry Chhaiya was slapped on her back multiple times. They were put into the police van and taken to Vastarpur station. Aadhya Chhatrola was a participant of the silent reading, she was taking videos of the events that unfolded. The goons threatened her openly demanding to know why she was taking the videos. They said that if she did not stop recording videos they would "make her disappear and no one would find her." This was captured on camera. One goon even sought her out and tried to take her phone by force, she screamed at him and managed to escape. Outside they were spreading false narratives about the nature of the event, such as "anti-nationals and terrorists had ganged up inside the park. They needed to be taught a lesson."

This attack happened in broad daylight, in the presence of police officers and passersby on the street, and among educated people from all sections of society who had gathered for a peaceful silent reading. The people from the silent reading were taken in by the police, but no person who attacked those present at the reading was brought to the police station.

The injured participants filed an FIR against the Bajrang Dal members who assaulted the participants of the reading. SYCA has videos as evidence to support all the claims mentioned in the statement. However, despite all this, it was disheartening to see that three miscreants who were involved in this violent attack were released on bail.

We strongly condemn this horrific and ruthless attack by the Bajrang Dal on the participants of the peaceful reading session. We demand that the police take stricter action against those involved. The reading session was an attempt to learn more about the ideas of not only two authors, but all those who have questioned power and attempted to introduce critical thought within the masses. SYCA has no issues with a dialogue, as is also evident from our attempt to speak to them peacefully. However, the Bajrang Dal members came prepared with heavy

hockey sticks to incite and cause harm and violence; they tore important books. We condemn this completely unprovoked violence. It was also alarming to see them tearing up Bhagat Singh's books during the confrontation.

The youth and broader civil society will not be silenced by this violence, and our fight against disruptive right-wing forces such as the Bajrang Dal will continue. We will continue to raise our voices against the suppression of free thought and the right to congregate peacefully.

Please find some images of the event, including a snippet of the reading; the violent confrontation; the books that were torn; and the sticks that were bought by the goons:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1nvuVHR7XRgZpJPto8cMwG_tloTL1m-c6?usp=sharing

Student and Youth Collective, Ahmedabad

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