

'Saffronizing' India – Media and the BJP

Modism in Gujarat

Why has chief minister Narendra Modi remained in office despite the 2002 Gujarat carnage?

Although communal violence between Hindus, Christians and Muslims is not a new phenomenon, the Gujarat carnage of 2002 was peculiar due to the state's alleged complicity and non-action during the events. Narendra Modi, the chief minister at the time is prominently cited saying: "let Hindus vent their anger" (Hindustantimes, 2011). With reference to the preceding happenings in Godhra, where a train that was returning from Ayodhya transporting a number of Hindu volunteers of the VHP, caught fire and killed 59 activists, he stated that "every action has an equal and opposite reaction" (The Hindu, 2010) to explain the riots. Word got out that the fire was intentionally set by a furious Muslim mob. Violence broke out in several cities and districts in Gujarat. The subsequent carnage of Muslim citizens "was explained by the Sangh Parivar as the retaliation by Hindu masses to avenge the Godhra killings" (Parker, 2008). Media response has nearly unanimously disdained the carnage and held forth on the significance of it for the Indian state and nation. In this respect, assuming the BJP and Modi to be heavily disputed within the Indian public and more specifically, in Gujarat, it seems fairly surprising that Narendra Modi appears to be the most popular candidate within the BJP and related organizations for the 2014 national elections. Or does it?



"Gujarat Chief Minister and Bharatiya Janata Party leader Narendra Modi greeted by party's Muslim workers during an election meeting" (The Hindu, 2011).



„Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi being greeted by a Muslim leader during fast in Ahmedabad. (Samvada.orh, 2011)

The Aftermath of the Gujarat Carnage

"The communal polarization caused by the post-Godhra pogrom and the subsequent hate campaign led by Narendra Modi, [...], enabled the Hindu right to score a landslide victory in Gujarat" (Parker, 2008). In fact, the BJP had its greatest approvals in the violence affected districts. This development was explained by the continuous use of 'hate tactics' that were employed up to the election. People were not allowed to forget the burning of the train in Godhra. Media campaigns were staged including the usage of posters, banners, and advertisements. However, the election was not ultimately seen as a vote on the riot of 2002. So what had happened?

The Muslim Vote for Narendra Modi

In Gujarat, Muslims are reported to be increasingly shifting towards supporting Modi. The party has received votes from the Muslim minority and the community is said to be joining mainstream discourse to not be left outside developmental politics, thereby outgrowing anti-Modi rhetoric. The explanation of such unforeseen behavior of coming to terms with the BJP government is due to the fact that "India is a patronage democracy wherein resource distribution depends on the discretion of elected officials as a form of market good rather than an entitlement" (The Hindu, 2011). Thus, remaining proximate to the power centers in government is seen as crucial to survival. Political preference has also been dictated by more rudimentary matters. Slum dwellers are prepared to switch political affiliation, provided their basic needs are met. The economic benefits primarily intended to serve the middle class community have dripped down and also reached the Muslim citizens; this has led to the conclusion on the part of the Muslims that "if we do not assimilate with other communities, it's the end of us" (The Hindu, 2011).

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