

## CHANGING CONTOURS OF GUJARAT SOCIETY: IDENTITY FORMATION AND VIOLENCE

### **Executive summary:**

This being primarily an empirical research, greater stress on primary data collection was laid down. However, the existing secondary data could not be ignored, as the violence in 2002 has changed many dynamics of the theoretical postulations on the subject. Soon after communal violence in 2002, much has been written on the subject, many are descriptive reports while many are exploring various dimensions of the subject, such as, Gujarat as a laboratory of Hindutva ideology; whether burning of train with Hindu passengers was a pre-planned event or not; the carnage was a political gimmick to win the next election or not; such trends of ethnic cleansing and violation of human rights; shrinking of secular space and so on. The triangulation of primary and secondary data has thus become a critical part of the study.

The hypothesis is, “Hindutva forces mobilized mass people of Gujarat to fill the vacuum created due to a gap / competition between the three aspects mentioned above, that is, secular “nationalism - religious nationalism - caste unity” and search of identity or identity crisis due to these factors. The process of identity, formation by Hindutva forces has either responded to identity search or identity crisis through social engineering, and / or on the other hand, the search of identity or identity crisis of people selected to be part of Hindutva forces or passive recipient of the propaganda of Hindutva forces or preferred to be associated actively with its allies and activities. This association or participation may exist in different forms, at different levels, different spheres of life in Gujarat, which has been an attribute to shrinking of secular spaces and homogenization on the line of Hindutva.

The study is focused on - (i) to understand scope of the process of mass mobilization on the line of Hindutva; (ii) religious or cultural symbols used for mass mobilization along the line of Hindutva; (iii) role of these factors in secular spaces; and (iv) important events / landmarks of this process.

The analysis of primary data collected through interview, socio-religious mapping and the survey is presented here. In all 2,958 persons were interviewed through structured questionnaire for the survey while the socio-religious mapping includes 96 places from Gujarat state. The interview of ‘observers’ includes persons from different walks of life, such as media, law, social action, academia and policymaking. The analysis weaves up all the three types of data; however, the quantitative data presented here is largely based on the survey.

### ***Based on social-religious mapping***

In all 96 places from 22 districts have been covered including Sabarkantha (7), Panchmahal (7), Dahod (4), Vadodara (6), Basnaskantha (3), Patan (5), Ahmedabad (4), Mahesana (6), Gandhinagar (3), Anand (4), Kheda (6), Bharuch (5), Narmada (4), Surat (4), Valsad (2), Navsari (3), Dangs (3), Surendranagar (4), Bhavnagar (4), Junagadh (5), Rajkot (3) Jamnagar (2).

In all 439 institutions / groups have been formed in 96 places / areas (rural / village, semi-urban / town and urban / city). This could be taken merely as guideline and no attempt is made to generalize pattern of institutionalization. Some of the observations based on mapping are presented here:

- ↳ Types Formation of institutions / groups: Maximum number of institutions / groups has come up in Bharuch (31) closely followed by Panchmahal (30), Vadodara (27), Mahesana (26), Patan, Sabarkantha and Junagadh (25), Kheda (24), Anand and Rajkot (22) and Bhavnagar (20). Districts with total 10 to 20 institutions / groups include Gandhinagar (19), Narmada (18), Dahod and Surat (17), Surendranagar (15), Navsari and Dangs (13) and Valsad and Banaskantha (12). Jamnagar district is the last in rank with 8 institutions / groups.
- ↳ Formation of institutions / groups across districts: Among various institutions / groups across all the districts, Bajarang Dal (BD) is the highest in number (79), closely followed by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) (78), Swadhyay Parivaar (SP) (71 – except in Dangs district), Hindu temples (68) and Yuvak Mandal (YM) (62). SIMI ranks the lowest with one branch in Junagadh and Durga Vahini (DV) (in Rajkot and Surat) as well as 2 branches of All India Democratic Student's Organization (AIDSO) (in Vadodara and Gandhinagar). Akhil Bhartiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) (25) and co-operative society (16) and Bhajan Mandal (BM) (13) are moderately formed in majority of the districts, except Jamnagar, Dang, Panchmahal and Dahod. Mahila Mandal (MM), savings groups (SG) and Self Help Groups (SHG) are in as small numbers as 4 and 2 respectively. MM are formed in Mahesana, Bharuch and Valsad while SG in Patan, Anand, Navsari and Rajkot. SHG are formed in Rajkot and Ahmedabad districts.
- ↳ Religious places: Compare to other forms of institutions, Hindu temples (68) is the highest in numbers in each district ranging from one to five while 3 Masjids (Rajkot, Kheda and Ahmedabad) have been built during last 3 years. No church or Derasar have been reported.

Highest number and spread over all the districts, Bajarang Dal, Swadhyay Parivaar and RSS as organizations / groups and Hindu temples as religious place catch the attention. This seems to encouragement to the process of Hindutva-isation. Small number of development related activities like saving groups and SHGs shows that this process is rather slow and restricted to few places. The form of co-operative seems to have greater acceptance, as it aims towards economic betterment with democratic approach.

More than a third (39%) of the respondents informed that identity of being an Indian is the first choice, followed by religious identity (33%), caste identity (24%) and regional (4%). Identity as Indian is promoted by majority of respondents from 11 districts (mainly from north-eastern belt, which are violence affected areas and Saurashtra) and almost half of Hindus including upper castes (48%) and SCs (44%). This could be seen as assertiveness of these respondents where 'Indian-ness' is aligned with 'Hindu nationalism'. Among adivasis that follow Hindu religion, the preference for religion is stronger than caste identity. The respondents belong to religious minorities like Muslim and Christian prefer religious identity followed by national identity and last preference for caste identity. Jain and Parsi respondents give almost equal importance to religious and national identity.

Very small proportion (13%) is the members of social and religious groups or is engaged in these activities, which shows lower participation in institutional activities.

Little more than a fourth expressed their consent with 'economy has improved in last 5 years'; little more than 40% agree with the statements like 'employment opportunity has increased in last 5 years', 'middle class has benefited the most with economic improvement in last 5 years' but 'no improvement in social sector along with economic progress' and only about a third agree with 'efficiency of judiciary and executive have improved due to decrease in bribe, malpractice, theft, etc.'. Most of them informed that 'self-experience' is the main source to reach to this opinion, followed by contribution of newspaper and marginal effect of television channel that have contributed to this opinion formation process.

Not more than a fourth feel that religious sects or activities can contribute to communal harmony.

***Acceptance to Hindutva rhetoric*** is moderate, which indicates that proliferation of Hindutva is not as deep as it seemed in year 2002. Nevertheless, one should not undermine its impact and the persistence by Sangh Parivaar and its allies. Sabarkantha, Banskantha and Mahesana districts have shown lesser leaning towards secularism in comparison to other districts along with Panchmahal. One needs to focus on these geographic areas to promote values enshrined in Indian Constitution and secularism. On the other hand, Valsad, Navsari, Dangs, Bharuch and Kachchh districts have shown greater inclination towards secular values, which could be maintained through sustained efforts and spread over other parts of Gujarat. Among Hindus, upper castes, Patels, and OBCs; Jains and Sikhs seemed to be driven by Hindutva rhetoric along with Dalit Christians, SC Hindus and Hindu Adivasis who have moderately supported it. Muslims and Christians (including adivasi Christians) have by and large have expressed their disagreement to Hindutva rhetoric.

***Interventions to curb communal violence by State*** is moderately supported by the respondents; the respondents of Panchmahal, Dahod, Narmada and to some extent Dangs and Valsad districts have more negative perception than the other districts. Christian Adivasis and OBC Muslims are the least happy with it along with 'Other Hindus', SC Hindus, Muslims, ST Adivasis and Parsis. In fact except for the UC Hindus, Patel Hindus and OBC Hindus, none of the other categories are happy with the steps taken by the government to prevent communal violence. Sikhs and Jains also have been quite happy with the state's role in Gujarat; however, variations within the communities are also much sharper. The educated respondents have nearly one voice in stating that the government has not done enough to curb communal violence, while the uneducated with a better perception of the government have a lot of variation within them.

***Perceptions on promoting communal harmony by State and civil society*** are moderately supported by the respondents. The respondents value and respect 'secularism' (all religion are equal and have similar values) and different ways to promote communal harmony; though have shown moderate interest in developing secular spaces like school and admission criteria and have expressed mild consent to inter-religious marriages.

The respondents of Junagadh, Jamnagar, Rajkot and Ahmedabad districts are relatively more satisfied while of Panchmahal, Dahod, Narmada, Valsad and Surendranagar districts have expressed lower level of satisfaction with the role of civil society in curbing violence. The communities following Hindu, Islam and Jain religion seem somewhat less satisfied; Christians are little less happy; Parsi community is highly satisfied while Sikh community is

highly dissatisfied with the role of civil society in curbing communal violence. Adivasi communities have shown their detachment regarding the role of civil society. Patels and OBC Hindus are by and large engaged in cultivation, having no literacy or lower literacy levels and have lower regards and attitude towards promoting 'secularism' and communal harmony, compare to other social categories, occupational categories and educational qualifications.

Understanding of Indian Constitution (IC) and Indian Polity (IP) seem relatively low; many of the respondents have not answered the questions related to this issue, perhaps showing their lack of understanding. However, the respondents have hailed values promoted by IC and they expect State to be impartial and effective, but they have taken middle path for seemingly controversial issues like choice of religion, Hindu Raj and role of the present CM of Gujarat after communal violence in 2002. The respondents of Ahmedabad, Navsari, Jamnagar and Junagadh districts seem to have a slightly better understanding than in other districts but this is not uniform among all respondents. Muslim and Christian communities seem to have the best understanding of the Constitution and the polity, while for the Patel Hindus it is slightly lower and in the case of Parsis it is the lowest. Higher education seems to enable some basic concepts regarding polity and constitution. Female and illiterate respondents have not positively reacted to these issues, which indicate that either these groups are not benefited with values enshrined in IC or not aware of them and therefore not able to support or appreciate them.

Mapping of institutions attempts to capture micro level changes through institutional / groups (for social, cultural, religious, development activities) development and participation of people in last 3 years villages, which could be taken merely as guideline and no attempt is made to generalize pattern of institutionalisation. In all 439 institutions / groups have been formed in 81 places / areas (rural / village, semi-urban / town and urban / city).

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