

Conference on State Politics in India in the 1990s: Political Mobilisation and Political Competition, December 2004.

Hindutva and beyond: The political topography of Gujarat

Achyut Yagnik and Nikita Sud¹

In the last few years, especially after the carnage of 2002 in which at least 2000 Muslims were killed, Gujarat has increasingly been referred to as Hindutva's laboratory. This refrain, used by the proponents of Hindu nationalism², as well as by journalists³, activists⁴ and academics⁵, conjures up images of a controlled set-up in which exactly measured ingredients are being brought together to produce a desired reaction. Keeping the 'laboratory' impression in mind, we will examine Gujarati politics and governance in the 1990s through an exploration of (a) Gujarat's formal elite politics in the 1990s, (b) the State's⁶ trends of Savarna dominance, and attempts in the last twenty years to forge a Savarna-Avarna Hindu unity (c) Hindutva's mass mobilisational efforts through politics of yatras, and (d) the nature of the state apparatus that has supported Hindutva mobilisation. Our paper will indicate that politics in Gujarat in the 1990s does not resemble the image of a controlled laboratory experiment. Nor does it approximate the linear construction of a smoothly rising graph of Hindu nationalism. Contemporary Gujarat needs to be understood as a complex web which has emerged through the criss-crossing of several social, economic and political threads, both in the State and at the national level, which have facilitated the strengthening of Hindu nationalism in Gujarat. At the same time, Hindutva has become entangled in them too.

Formal, elite politics in the 1990s

From the inception of the State in 1960, Gujarat has been politically and socially tumultuous. The same trend continued in the 1990s when the State saw eight Chief Ministers and a spell of President's Rule and its public fabric was riven by communal violence. The KHAM

¹ We would like to thank Professor Barbara Harriss-White and Suchitra Sheth for their helpful comments on this paper. The authors alone are responsible for any remaining inconsistencies.

² Praveen Togadia, VHP, quoted in Hindustan Times, 15/12/2002

³ Tripathi, P. (2002) 'Gujarat and Beyond', *Frontline*, 12-25 October

⁴ Human Rights Watch (2002) "*We Have No Orders To Save You*". *State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat*. Washington: Human Rights Watch

⁵ Engineer, A.A. (2003) 'Is Secularism Dead in India?', *Secular Perspective*, March 16-31.

⁶ In this paper, 'state' refers to the state apparatus- a set of political, administrative and coercive institutions and organisations, more or less well coordinated by an executive authority: the government (Mooij 1996). 'State' (capital 'S') implies the constituent units of the Indian federation. Gujarat is a western Indian State/province.

politics of the Congress party evolved in the decade immediately preceding the tumultuous 1990s. KHAM was an electoral combine of Kshatriyas-Harijans-Adivasis-Muslims which brought the party a resounding victory in the 1980 Assembly elections. This victory as well as the Congress's subsequent moves to introduce reservations for the Other Backward Castes in education and government employment, propelled Gujarat's upper castes and upper and middle classes towards political parties that represented their interests. The highly eventful history of changing Gujarat ministries in the 1990s indicates that the support of the latter groups was lent to several leaders and parties, with the BJP becoming an obvious choice only in the latter half of the 1990s.

While the 1980s saw an OBC and an Adivasi leading the State as Chief Ministers, the 1990s saw the re-assertion of Savarna dominance reflected in the political leadership of Patidars, Brahmins and Vaniyas. The political history and sociology of a State cannot be understood merely through an analysis of formal, elite politics and the nature and composition of government ministries. Yet, a glance at the elite politics of Gujarat significantly reveals political trends. 1990 is considerably symbolic for Gujarati politics. The year saw the appointment of Keshubhai Patel as Deputy Chief Minister- the first State politician to reach high office without ever having been associated with the Congress party. He began his public career as a swayamsevak in the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh). Thus, the year 1990 was a symbol of the Congress' decline and the beginning of the rise of Hindutva forces. However, between 1990 and 1995, Gujarat had political formations dominated by the Janata Dal-Bharatiya Janata Party, Janata Dal (Gujarat)-Congress, Congress (into which the JD (G) had been merged), and finally the BJP. The dominant players in these formations often switched political affiliations.

In the Assembly elections in 1990, the 55.6 per cent vote share achieved by the Congress party in 1985 fell to 30.8 per cent. The gainers were the BJP and Janata Dal, which together got 56.2 per cent of the vote and formed a coalition government. The formation of the JD-BJP government was significant for many reasons. After an all-time low in 1980 when, for the first time in the history of independent Gujarat there was not a single Patidar minister of Cabinet rank in Madhavsinh Solanki's cabinet, Patidar power was very much on the ascendant in the 1990 Gujarat government. Both the Chief Minister Chimanbhai Patel, and the Deputy Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel were Patidars. At the national level, in 1990, India's upper caste urban youth instigated nationwide protests against the central government's move to implement the Mandal Commission's recommendations introducing reservations in education and government

employment for socially and educationally backward castes. The BJP's core support base of the urban and semi-urban upper caste middle class was very much apart of the protests against the Mandal Commission recommendations as they perceiving them as a threat to their domination. To deflect national attention from the issue of Mandal, BJP leader L.K Advani launched a Rath Yatra to advocate the building of the Ram temple at Ayodhya. After Advani's arrest in Bihar in October 1990, the BJP withdrew support from the VP Singh-led National Front government in Delhi, and the Chimanbhai Patel-led Janata-BJP government in Gujarat. The politically shrewd Chimanbhai supported the new Prime Minister in Delhi- Chandrashekhar, and saved his government in Gujarat. Chimanbhai's plans in Gujarat got support from Congress President Rajiv Gandhi and, going against the State Congressmen, he agreed to back Chimanbhai Patel's newly formed Janata Dal (Gujarat). Congress leaders from Gujarat were directed from Delhi to unconditionally support Chimanbhai Patel. The already weak Gujarat Congress faced the position of having to lend support to a man they had branded as pro-rich and pro-upper caste and vehemently opposed in the assembly elections (Shah 1996: 165-166). Eventually, Chimanbhai Patel merged the JD (G) with the Congress. In this way, he continued in power by various means till his death in 1994. From February 1994 till March 1995, another erstwhile JD (G) leader- Chabildas Mehta became the Chief Minister of Gujarat's last Congress government till date. He was also the last of Gujarat's top leadership to have risen from the political ranks of the freedom movement.

From 1995, three of Gujarat's five Chief Ministers- Keshubhai Patel, Shankarsinh Vaghela and Narendra Modi have been RSS swayamsevaks. Modi was an RSS Pracharak till his political and organisational skills were delegated to the BJP. Gujarat's two non-RSS CMs since 1995- Dilip Parikh and Suresh Mehta- are industrialists. All five have been associated with the BJP at some point in their political career. Vaghela, a former swayamsevak, is a Union Minister in the Congress government in Delhi today. These are telling comments about the state of Gujarati politics. They indicate the decline of the 'Gandhi-Nehru Congress' and the rise of alternative socio-political forces that hold sway in a Hindutvaised Gujarat.

Cracks in the BJP

The Sangh Parivar-BJP has held political sway over Gujarat since 1995, but not without complications. The BJP has been ridden with factional fighting representing individual egos, quests for greater power and different socio-political support bases of caste and community. The dominance of a political ideology that unites Hindu society across caste and region, as the Sangh

Parivar claims, cannot be concluded from the contemporary Gujarati political scenario. To give an indication of the tensions within the formal Hindutva politics and the upper caste-led politics of 1990s Gujarat, one just has to glance at the fate of the top leadership of the 6 ministries that Gujarat has seen after BJP came to power. In the wake of the confused, infighting-ridden governance of the Janata Dal/Congress between 1990 and 1995, and benefiting from aggressive Hindutva propaganda of various yatras, anti-reservation and pro-Ram temple politics, the BJP received a thumping majority in the 1995 assembly elections. The party almost doubled its seat tally between 1990 and 1995, garnering 122 out of 182 seats and 42.5 percent of the vote share. Keshubhai Patel became leader of the State's first ever BJP government. But, after a mere seven months in power, he was forced to step down as CM. He had faced rebellion from a fellow RSS swayamsevak Shankarsinh Vaghela, who engineered a split in the State BJP on the grounds that attempts were being made by the CM to sideline him. Patel made way for a compromise candidate of the BJP- Suresh Mehta. The rift in the BJP kept deepening and Mehta was sacked as CM when he failed to prove his majority in the Assembly. A month of President's Rule was imposed on Gujarat in September-October 1996. Shankarsinh Vaghela meanwhile left the BJP, along with 48 supporting BJP MLAs and formed the Rashtriya Janata Party. With the outside support of the Congress, Vaghela became the sixth CM of Gujarat in the last quarter of 1996. Barely a year later, he was forced to step down as CM over differences with Congress leader Amarsinh Chaudhary. However, Vaghela successfully manoeuvred his RJP candidate Dilip Parikh, originally from the BJP, into the CM's Chair. Within months Parikh faced dissatisfaction within the Congress-RJP alliance and resigned though he continued as caretaker CM till Assembly elections in March 1998.

The RJP-Congress alliance did poorly in the 1998 election and got only 57 seats, and the BJP received a significant majority with 117 of the 181 seats. The BJP benefited from aggressive Hindutva propaganda. The party also benefited from the fact that the Congress was faction-ridden, organisationally weak, with no clear ideology or agenda. Moreover, unlike many other Indian States, a viable third party has not emerged in Gujarat. Other than the Congress and a significant political contender like the Swatantra Party in the 1960s, or the BJP from the 1980s, third party challenges from the KMLOP of Chimanbhai Patel or RJP of Shankarsinh Vaghela have been short lived. Therefore, the electorate- from both the Savarna and from the upwardly mobile sections of the lower and backward castes- perhaps saw no alternative in 1998 but to give the increasingly aggressive BJP the mandate. In the wake of several government changes and

political instability, the seemingly firm and ideology-driven BJP appeared to be a viable political alternative. Once again, Keshubhai Patel became Gujarat's Chief Minister in March 1998.

Role of Local Power Structures

The BJP victory in 1995, and again in 1998 was propelled by the factors discussed above. The party's electoral triumphs in two consecutive assembly elections must also be attributed to the strategic infiltration of Sangh Parivar ideology and people into the local power structures of Gujarat in the 1980s and 1990s. The party's first major electoral triumph came in 1983 when it captured the Rajkot Municipal Corporation. Then, after the anti-reservation riots of 1985 and communal riots of 1986, the BJP gained control of the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation in 1987. Ahmedabad was the worst hit by the anti-reservation violence. The upper caste backlash against the Congress government was therefore manifested in this city by the election of a majority of BJP Corporators. The infiltration of local power structures did not happen overnight of course. In the 1987 District Panchayat elections, the weakened Congress was still able to win 50.7 percent of the votes, whereas the BJP got 14.4 per cent and the Janata Party won 20.5 per cent of the votes. After 1995 the BJP made a clean sweep of elections in local self government institutions ranging from Municipalities to District, Block and Village Panchayats. In the six municipal corporations of the State for instance, the BJP won 395 seats and the Congress got a mere 37. The reversal of fortunes between the BJP and Congress is revealed in the seat tally of the successive Taluka Panchayat elections of 1987 and 1995.

Seat Tally in Gujarat Taluka Panchayat Elections- 1987 and 1995

	Congress	BJP	Others
<u>1987</u> (total number of seats: 4178)	2494	387	1293 (Independents: 696, Janata Dal: 594, Others 3)
<u>1995</u> (total number of seats: 3782)	860	2445	305

In less than a decade, absolute majority in Block Panchayats shifted from the Congress to the BJP. The implications of this steady takeover of local power structures between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s are far-reaching. With control of Panchayats and Municipalities came the opportunity to spread Hindu nationalism into the grassroots core of Gujarat's governance. Significantly, after 1995, the Sangh Parivar also acquired the legitimate means to appoint

compliant officials and active Hindutva supporters into crucial administrative posts. Moreover, the Parivar used its newly acquired official power to oblige present and potential supporters with favours. Thus patronage, say in the form of subsidised land for pro-Parivar educational trusts, was used to further expand the support base in Gujarat.

It is important to note that while local power structures refer to official structures such as village, block and district Panchayats and Municipal Corporations, control of para-statal institutions such as co-operative banks, cooperative milk dairies and sugar cooperatives as well as agriculture produce market committees, play a vital role at the grassroots. The rise of the BJP leader Vajubhai Vala in Gujarat politics clearly demonstrates the importance of these institutions. Vajubhai Vala started his public career as a Director of the Rajkot Nagrik Sahkari Bank in 1971 and became its Chairman in 1975. Within ten years he became BJP Mayor of the Rajkot Municipal Corporation in 1983 and finally rose to become Finance Minister of Gujarat, a position he holds till today. The BJP's hold over official structures of governance by the mid-1990s gave them greater control over para-statal and even non-state organisations. Today, it is not unusual to find a BJP MLA or Corporator on the Board of a sugar or milk cooperative, and even a VHP or RSS functionary leading an educational trust, marketing federation or business chamber. Penetration into local power structures at village, block and district levels has played a critical role in increasing the physical presence and popularity of the Sangh Parivar.

The Sangh Parivar has used its influence in the organisations of grassroots power to attract a wider support and leadership base. In the 1980s and 1990s, unemployed youth and lumpen elements were made village-level and block-level office bearers of organisations such as the Bajrang Dal and Hindu Jagran Manch. Large numbers of Dalit, Adivasi and OBC youth became local representatives of these organisations as well as middlemen in the implementation of government welfare programmes. It is significant that from the late 80s, on the one hand Congress organisations like the Sewa Dal, Mahila Congress and Youth Congress began to decline and on the other hand, the Sangh Parivar was spreading its physical and ideological presence outwards- from their core base of big towns and cities to the smallest villages of Gujarat. The message was clear- the prominent vehicle for upward mobility and power for different sections of the population in 1990s Gujarat was the Sangh Parivar and its Hindutva ideology.

The combination of power, prestige and patronage accruing through the takeover of governmental and para-statal structures at the micro-level has been a potent weapon in the Sangh Parivar's bid for gaining control over the administrative and political structures at the macro-level

in Gujarat. To illustrate how these micro-macro linkages play out, one can take the example of milk cooperative society elections, which are no less than mini-assembly elections. To be elected Director of a milk cooperative, an investment of several lakhs rupees is made. The stakes for posts like Chairperson are much higher. After extremely competitive campaigning, in which financial and campaign support from political parties is often sought, a candidate may get elected to a milk cooperative executive. He then has the reciprocal duty, and the power, to support his party with votes, money and manpower in panchayat or assembly elections. By controlling or having an influence over a large number of cooperatives, marketing committees, etc. at the micro-level from 1995, the BJP has been successful in dominating the State's macro politics.

Setbacks for BJP

The BJP, supported by the Sangh Parivar, had been able convincingly to demonstrate its political strength at local and State level in 1995 and 1998. The fact that the party has never lost power in the Gujarat Assembly after 1998 suggests that its control over the State's politics and governance is substantial. Yet, a closer look at local election figures, as well as the internal dynamics of the party indicate that the Sangh Parivar's future dominance of Gujarati politics cannot be a foregone conclusion. Things started to go wrong for the BJP almost immediately after the 1998 Assembly election victory. Some BJP legislators and ministers protested at the overbearing presence of the RSS. Party workers complained of increasing favouritism in the organisation that had come to power claiming to be 'a party with a difference'. Factionalism increased in the party- with legislators and workers divided between the supporters of Keshubhai Patel and Narendra Modi, and between the 'moderates' and those who supported the hardline stances of the Sangh Parivar. Favouritism and factionalism were instrumental in the stunning defeat that the BJP faced in the 2000 Panchayat elections when some of their own people campaigned for political rivals. The following table representing the seat tally in District Panchayat elections in 1987, 1995 and 2000 indicates the spectacular rise and subsequent decline of the BJP in Panchayat politics.

Zilla Pachatyat Election comparison by Number of Seats: 1987, 1995, 2000

Zilla Panchayat Election Year	Congress	BJP	Janata Dal	Others
1987 (seats- 683)	492	62	91	37
1995 (seats- 772)	111	599	n.a.	20

2000 (seats- 717)	513	192	n.a	12
----------------------	-----	-----	-----	----

With the BJP faring very poorly in Panchayat and Municipal Corporation elections in 2000, Keshubhai Patel faced rebellion within his party. Despite coming to power in 1998 with a decisive electoral triumph, Keshubhai was yet again unable to complete his five-year term. In October 2001 he was replaced by Narendra Modi who rode the pro-Hindutva wave of March-April-May 2002 to win the Assembly elections for the BJP in December of that eventful year. That electoral wave was preceded by the Hindutva protest against the Godhra train carnage. This transformed into an orgy of mass violence against Muslims and in the process, the internal divisions of the BJP and Sangh Parivar were papered over. The very real local grievances that had resulted in panchayat poll reversals barely a year earlier, hardly played a role in the 2002 assembly elections. Modi and the Parivar successfully projected Hindutva as the only issue to deflect attention from issue of governance and development. The BJP under Modi won an all-time high 126 out of 181 seats in the Gujarat assembly.

But once again, true to the unsettled pattern of Gujarat's politics, Modi's leadership has not gone unchallenged within his party and fronts of Sangh Parivar. His leadership and policies have faced strong vocal and public revolts from the Patidar-dominated farmers wing of the Sangh Parivar because his government has made moves to increase agricultural power tariffs within the context of economic reforms that the state is trying to pursue. There were even calls to remove Modi from the CM's post from Gujarat's BJP legislators and members of the party's national leadership in June 2004. And, just two years after the 2002 assembly election victory, the BJP saw its victory margin against the Congress being substantially reduced in the 2004 parliamentary polls. The BJP could win only 14 out of the 26 Lok Sabha seats from Gujarat while the Congress doubled its tally by winning 12 seats. Neither Narendra Modi's popularity, nor the BJP's hold over Gujarat is certain in "Hindutva's laboratory". It seems that Gujarat's eventful politics of the 1990s continues to remain quite unsettled even today.

From Savarna to Hindutva: dominance and constituency-building

Despite electoral storminess, Hindutva has grown beyond its original core constituency of upper caste middle class Hindus and has been able to expand and appeal to a larger section of Hindu society including Dalits, Adivasis and OBC. This they have achieved by systematically

constructing a Hindu “we-ness”. Savarnas or the Hindu upper castes have been dominant in Gujarat throughout the 20th Century. Urbanisation and modern living first forced Gujarati Brahmins and Vaniyas to transcend caste and sub-caste divisions for a broader upper caste unity. With the freedom movement, the Patidars too enhanced their social status resulting in a Brahmin-Vaniya-Patidar unity as Savarnas. This had important implications as Patidars are numerically powerful in Gujarat. In the freedom movement, Sardar Patel led them to political prominence and from peasants they became peasant nationalists. From then till now, they have been politically prominent in Gujarat, barring a brief period of being on the sidelines of power in the KHAM years. In the 1960s and 1970s, Patidars have also benefited economically through the Green and White revolutions. This caste has been the driving force of the development model of Gujarat with its focus on widespread industrialisation. Moreover, a large number of Patidars live overseas while continuing to have wide-ranging economic and political interests in the State.

Association with the Congress through the freedom movement, and well into the 1960s may have given Patidars political, and later, economic power. However, it is their newfound Savarna identity which has given them social legitimacy. The Savarnas of Gujarat would have continued associating with the Congress- as they had done during the freedom movement- had it not been for the split in the Party in 1969. The Congress rhetoric of socialism did not suit the Savarna, largely conservative, rich agricultural and trader-business groups. Seeking a new political anchor, and disenchanted even further with the Congress’ pro-poor KHAM politics which was perceived as undercutting their power, the Savarnas lent their support to the anti-reservationists in the caste violence of 1981 and 1985. A substantial section of the leadership during this anti-Dalit and later anti-Muslim violence came from the Hindu nationalist forces. This was followed by an increasingly aggressive expression of Hindu pride in the various yatras of the late 1980s and 1990. During this period the Sangh Parivar organised five major yatras beginning with the Ekatmata or Gangajal Yatra in 1983, followed by Ram-Janki Dharma Yatra in 1987, Ramshila Pujan in 1989, Ramjyoti and Vijayadashami Vijay Yatra of 1990 and Advani’s Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya at the end of the year. Through these Yatras they successfully attracted and mobilised large sections of backward communities – Dalit, Adivasis, OBCs – to create a larger Hindu fold. While attempts have been made to transform Savarna identity into a wider Hindu identity and Hindutva constituency, this does not imply a challenge to the dominance of Savarnas within the larger Hindutva framework. It merely connotes a wider political canvas for this group to control.

The process of Hindutva mobilisation has been supported and validated by the ‘new Hinduism’ propagated by modern Hindu sects like Bochasanwasi Akshar Purushottam Sampraday (BAPS)- a Swaminarayan sub sect, Swadhyay Parivar and Asharam Bapu Ashram among numerous others. The gurus and swamis of these ‘new Hindu’ sects endorsed the construction of the Ram temple and hardly raised any issues about the means through which this project was to be realised. They supported all the Yatras, directly or indirectly, and did not raise their voice against the violence that followed each Yatra. Nor did they raise any concern about the increasing demonisation of Muslims and the attacks on them and their property. The cardinal principal of Hindu tradition, *ahimsa parmohartha*, non-violence is the highest religion was completely ignored. Because these gurus and swamis endorsed Hindutva politics in one way or another, their supporters also followed suit, thus swelling the social base of the Sangh Parivar. Significantly, this support base included the Dalit, Adivasi and OBC middle class, which had joined these sects in their search for a meaningful status where they could transcend their lower social status. The sect became a stepping-stone for their entry into Hindutva ideology. Thus, by the mid-1980s, the message of the Sangh Parivar that the idea of Savarna had to be supplanted by that of Hindutva as the binding cement for Hindus had spread. While the ultimate symbolic target of hate for the Savarnas till 1985 was the Dalit, now the attempt was to project this hate towards the Muslim. That Dalits and Adivasis participated in the anti-Muslim violence from 1990 onwards indicates that the efforts of the Sangh Parivar to forge a ‘Hindu’ unity have been quite successful.

At the same time, Savarnas continue to dominate Gujarat. In the current cabinet of Narendra Modi 11 out of 15 ministers belong to the upper castes. There are only 2 OBCs, 1 Dalit and 1 Adivasi, of which only the latter has Cabinet rank, the rest are Ministers of State with charge of ministries like social welfare, cow breeding and animal husbandry, which are considered rather soft. Portfolios like Finance, Industry and Agriculture continue to be controlled by Savarnas. Of course the CM belongs to an OBC community but he has done little to strengthen the backward castes and communities in the State. In fact, he seems keen to downplay his OBC identity. Thus, he has tried to adopt the title of Chote Sardar, after the original Sardar-Vallabhbhai Patel. Sardar Patel of course was first the Sardar of the Patidars and then of Gujarat’s freedom movement. In the present political scenario, Modi would like to be identified as the Sardar or leader of all Hindus. This explains the second title Gujarat’s Chief Minister has tried to adopt- ‘Hindu hriday samrat’- the ruler of the hearts of *all* Hindus. Despite these efforts, the BJP’s dissident MLAs led by Patidars like Keshubhai Patel resent having a leader at the helm of affairs

who does not emphasise Patidar concerns. Moreover, the upper caste leadership of the Sangh Parivar might have programmes for Dalits and Adivasis, but these are designed more to secure their support base rather than usher in social transformation. Highly powerful Hindu sects like the Swaminarayan sampraday, which lend support to the Sangh Parivar are essentially Patidar-Savarna sects. They do admit Dalits, but continue to practice caste discrimination. For instance, Dalit ascetics have to wear a different costume from those belonging to the upper castes, and the latter do not accept food made by the lower castes (Williams 1984). Thus Hindu unity may have been achieved, to an extent, in the political sphere but the social sphere is hardly influenced.

The state apparatus in Gujarat: communalised, centralised and sub-nationalist

Much has been written since the Gujarat carnage of 2002 about the manner in which the state apparatus became a tool of the Sangh Parivar's violent Hindu nationalist agenda. We are all familiar with how much of the police and bureaucratic machinery at the grassroots as well as decision-making levels either turned a blind eye towards atrocities against religious minorities, or actively turned perpetrators in fundamentalist violence. This happened in the violence against Christian tribals in the Dangs in 1998 (see NAWO 1999), but most visibly and widely in February-March 2002. Taking the view that the state has been 'communalised' in the 1990s, and this explains its actions during the carnage of 2002 is linear and incomplete. The communalisation of the state apparatus has to be viewed alongside on-going processes of the centralisation of politics and governance, and promotion of sub-nationalism all of which form the complex web of Gujarati politics today.

The split in the Congress in 1969, anti-government protests during the Navnirman movement and again during the anti-reservation movement, made the politically volatile Gujarati state resort to coercive measures against social and political movements. A weakened Congress party, with less and less contact with the grassroots, derived its leadership and strategies from the top. By the mid-1980s, the Gujarati state apparatus as well as Gujarat's political model were highly authoritarian and centralised. This tendency was further precipitated by the political tumult of the 1990s. A politically weak state apparatus did not possess the will to pursue the planners and main instigators of communal disturbances or mafia-led bootlegging and land scams. Indeed, lacking a mass base or legitimacy, the state became increasingly dependent on private power centres- be they from the mafia, industry or Hindu nationalism. Being dependent on the elite castes and class for legitimacy, the politically unsteady governments before 1995 demonstrated their power during recurring communal violence through coercive measures against the weaker

sections of society, especially religious minorities. Law and order decisions came from the top, not from the realities of the field. After 1995, the functioning of the state has been constantly monitored by the highly authoritarian and centralised RSS and its affiliates. It is not surprising then that the weakened state apparatus all but crumbled in the carnage of 2002. Police sub inspectors, and village and block level officials owed their allegiance, and often their job appointments to the politicians of the Sangh Parivar. Most of them followed the orders of these power centres during the communal violence, and not those of the few district or Gandhinagar-Ahmedabad officials who may still not lean towards the Sangh ideology. In any case, the power centres- extra-constitutional, i.e., the Sangh, and constitutional - i.e., the Chief Minister's Office, were able to arbitrarily transfer officials seen as doing their duty during the Gujarat violence of 2002. Without a highly centralised and authoritarian state structure, the Hindutva forces would not have been able to engineer communal riots so easily. The fact that the same party held power at the Centre and turned a blind eye to the event in Gujarat is also an important contributing factor.

The centralised and authoritarian manner in which the state deals with law and order fits into the larger emerging picture of the nature of the Gujarati state today. In the post-liberalisation scenario, centralised unaccountable decision-making is apt for palming off unpopular policies related to land acquisition for industry, the liberalisation of agriculture, the withdrawal of labour legislations, etc. In fact, in the last few years, the state has become so centralised that more and more decisions are made at the highest level of the executive- the Chief Minister's Office without consulting line departments and even the legislature. Thus, in August 2004, Chief Minister Modi called a day's special session of the legislative assembly to condole the death of a political leader. He then decreed that the requirement for the Assembly meeting once in six months had been fulfilled and the House need not meet till February 2005. Legislators in the Opposition Congress and in his own party- the BJP felt this was a deliberate plan to avoid discussing important issues at the legislative level. Modi's tendencies of centralisation are some sort of a nadir of practices that have been building up from the 1980s. In earlier decades, legislators would meet in the state assembly for around 60 days in a year. From the 1990s, this number has gone down to around 35 (Indian Express, August 27 2004). And now, attempts seem to be on to reduce this figure further. Deliberations that would have once been held in the legislative assembly and at various levels of the executive, are held today with private industrial houses, influential NRIs and the leaders of religious sects and Hindutva ideologues.

Previous sections have indicated that Hindu social unity eludes the Sangh Parivar. That is, the strong thread of Savarna identity and dominance that runs through the sociology and politics of Gujarat can counter attempts to forge Hindu unity. In a similar fashion, the Hindu Right is finding it difficult to weave Hindu national unity in its so-called 'laboratory'. Indeed, a Gujarati-Hindu versus nationalist Hindu contradiction is apparent even in the rhetoric emanating from the highest offices of the Gujarati state apparatus. After taking over as Chief Minister, Narendra Modi popularised slogans like 'Garvi Gujarat' (Gujarat's pride) or 'Apnu Gujarat, Agvun Gujarat' (Our Gujarat, a unique Gujarat). Soon, members of the administration and ruling party were reciting these slogans. There have also been frequent and loud calls to the regional sentiments of 'five crore Gujaratis'. Sub-nationalism is being fostered in Gujarat in rhetoric as well as in practice. A canvas on which the struggle between nationalism and sub-nationalism is being played out in practice today is the Gujarati state structure. In 2001-2002, newly appointed Chief Minister Modi appointed 15 Collectors for Gujarat's 25 districts from the Gujarat Administrative Service, or from Gujarati officers who had been promoted from other services to the IAS. Similarly, 13 Superintendents of Police in the districts were from the Gujarat Police Service or promotees (Indian Express, December 15 2002). This is a reversal of convention which decrees that members of the all-India services, i.e., the IAS and IPS be appointed to these crucial posts to encourage uniform national governance standards in a federal structure, and relative impartiality. According to members of the Sangh Parivar interviewed by us, Gujarati administration and the needs of Gujaratis can best be understood by 'sons of the soil'. This explains the on-going drive to turn convention and ideals of national unity in administration upside down by blatantly using sub-nationalist considerations while making government appointments. Gujarati officials are also more likely to have caste and sub-regional affinities with those administering and leading local power structures. Sub-nationalist rhetoric and practices might increase the popularity of politicians and the state structure in Gujarat, but it certainly does not facilitate the long term objectives of the Hindu *nationalist* movement. Dynamics such as sub-nationalism that have been nurtured in contemporary Gujarat do not necessarily make it Hindutva's ideal laboratory. In fact, they contest the basic Hindutva premise of Hindu unity.

Various strands of complexity crisscross the political web of Gujarat. Some, such as a centralised state apparatus support the strong thread of Hindutva that runs throughout this web today. Other strands of Gujarat's political, social and economic reality however, counter Hindutva's agendas of Hindu Savarna-Avarna and national unity. These links counter Hindutvas attempts to colour Gujarat's political web saffron. Hindutva has taken great strides in the Gujarat

of the 1990s. Rather than constructing or conjuring up the Gujarati political scenario as would be done in a laboratory however, Hindutva has moulded various political and socio-economic threads to get to the very core of Gujarat's political web. The web is more complex than ever today. To reduce it to a linear graph depicting only the rise of Hindutva, or to the sterilised environment of a laboratory, would be an underestimation. The political topography of Gujarat cannot be viewed without Hindutva, but one also needs to look beyond.

References

Engineer, A.A. (2003) 'Is Secularism Dead in India?', *Secular Perspective*, March 16-31

Human Rights Watch (2002) "*We Have No Orders To Save You*". *State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat*. Washington: Human Rights Watch

Mooij, J.E. (1996) *Food Policy and Politics. The Public Distribution System in Karnataka and Kerala, South India*. Wageningen: Faculty of Politics and Social-Cultural Sciences

NAWO- National Alliance of Women's Organisations (1999) 'Hindu jago Christy bhago! Violence in Gujarat. test case for a larger fundamentalist agenda', *Report of the Citizen's Commission on persecution of Christians in Gujarat*. Ahmedabad: NAWO

Shah, G. (1996) 'BJP's Rise to Power', *Economic and Political Weekly*, January 13-20. Pgs 165-170

Tripathi, P. (2002) 'Gujarat and Beyond', *Frontline*, 12-25 October

Williams, R.B. (1984) *A New Face of Hinduism: The Swaminarayan religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Newspapers

Gujarat Samachar (Gujarati)

Hindustan Times, Delhi Edition (English)

Indian Express, Ahmedabad Edition (English)

Sandesh (Gujarati)

Times of India, Ahmedabad Edition (English)