

# **BJP and the politics of polarization:**

On my recent visit to Muzaffarnagar in Uttar Pradesh, at the refugee camp of the September 2013 riot victims, the name of Amit Shah often came up during discussions. Mr. Shah is the newly appointed campaign manager for Narendra Modi in Western U.P. For those who are keeping a close tab on the human rights situation in India, Amit Shah's name rings an alarm bell.

The appointment of Amit Shah appears to have a lot of political underpinnings. "How did this man who is charged with murder in Gujarat end up being the campaign manager in U.P?", wondered Sajjad, an aid worker to the riot victims in disbelief! Uttar Pradesh has become a pivotal ground for BJP's election strategy and Mr. Shah, who has a winning track record in Gujarat has the full confidence of Modi and the BJP. In order for Modi to become the Prime Minister, UP's share of BJP seats has to be substantially increased from ten seats at present.

Amit Shah has been charged with murder, extortion, kidnapping and five other sections under IPC for the killing of Sohrabuddin and his wife Kausar Bi in 2005. Mr. Shah was Minister of State for Home in the Gujarat government under Chief Minister Narendra Modi, but had to resign in 2010 after he was arrested on charges of having ordered a series of "encounter" killings by the State Police. Currently on judicial bail, the Supreme Court has directed that he may not enter his home state of Gujarat where he may influence the investigations of the encounter killings.

In Muzaffarnagar, they would all lament that it is the first time in the history of the region that Jats and Muslims have killed each other. They are culturally the same people and the Muley Jats are converts from the Hindu Jat community. For instance, both communities observe the custom of pagri rasam ritual which consecrates a new head of a family, lineage or clan. The worship of Goga Pir, a local saint is common among both communities, remembering of ancestors. In a recent incident when an Imam issued a Fatwa against the use of cell phones by Muslim women, the entire community got together and filed an FIR, thereby forcing the withdrawal of such a dictate. The community is primarily known as owner cultivators who also tend cattle and raise chicken farms.

The Jat-Muslim combination was first formed by Charan Singh, and was efficiently used to field Jat and Muslim candidates for a great win that catapulted him to become the Prime Minister of the country in 1979. The BSP in 2009 followed the same strategy and got encouraging results. For the BJP and Samajawadi party, the Jat-Muslim combination has become an obstacle for 2014 election strategy and had to be broken, thereby breaking the hold of BSP and Rashtriya Lok Dal of Ajit Singh.

It was recounted that two Jat youths named Sachin and Gaurav Singh had first killed Mohammed Shahnawaz, a Muslim youth of the village of Kawal after a traffic incident. Later a Muslim mob lynched to death the killers. It looks like it was a perfect situation handed down on a silver platter to these political operatives to put together a racial based game plan to exploit and score for their party.

The rest of the events are there for the record. For the BJP, it presented an opportunity to consolidate the Hindu vote overriding caste divisions in U.P. They went on an overdrive even directly involving Members of the Legislative Assemblies to aggravate the situation by inciting the rioters. FIRs are filed against 19 MLAs though only 3 were arrested and all of them were shortly released.

For the Samajawadi party, adopting a slow response to the worsening situation in Muzaffarnagar was allegedly a calculated move as well. They were determined to break the supremacy of BSP in the region in order to add additional seats for SP President Mulayam Singh Yadav, who is also eyeing the post of Prime Minister in the upcoming election.

Seema Mustafa, Director of Center for Policy Analysis does not mince words when naming the perpetrators behind the violence. 'The BJP, RSS and VHP, supported by the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU), were behind the violence. Moreover, the Samajwadi Party government did not do anything to prevent or control the violence, nor did it rehabilitate the displaced'.

The BJP seems to have accomplished its goal by fracturing the Jat-Muslim combination and their support for the Lok Dal and BSP. The Samajawadi Party might be biggest loser in this whole affair as they have alienated Muslims who voted with them (40%) in the past. Jats who live not only in U.P. but also in Haryana and Rajasthan are indeed tilting towards BJP as the strategy of divisive politics is beginning to pay big dividends.

To add insult to injury, those BJP MLAs who incited the community into violence are now rewarded with tickets to run for Parliament. That includes Mr. Sangeet Som who created a fake video which is blamed for much of the anger and frustrations by the Hindu mob that participated in the melee. Sadhvi Prachi, a BJP leader was also arrested for violation of prohibitory orders and inciting communal violence by speeches in meetings at Nagala Madore area of Muzaffarnagar is heralded as a great champion for the promoting the Hindutva agenda.

If one looks back at the history, Babri Masjid demolition and subsequent riots were results of careful and intensive strategizing by the Hindutva leadership. The demolition of the ancient Mosque in 1992 is the one incident in India's social and political history that marks the climax of the politics of religious identity, and is the source from which caste identity politics originated and became powerful . There were 24 riots that happened last year alone and the the public might even have missed those reports.

Soon after assuming responsibility for UP campaign, Amit Shah reportedly visited the Babri Masjid site and said the temple should be built there. Although he said it was not an election campaign issue, many observers made the connection as soon as the riots broke out, with minority affairs minister Rahman Khan telling India Today magazine that Shah had been sent expressly to stir up communal tension. 'Any polarization along the religious lines would naturally help BJP' another observer pointed out.

Riots seem to be engineered for political purposes and the BJP is mastering the art of creating communal tension for the sole purpose of political leverage or electoral gains. By driving citizens from their homes to refugee camps, these parties are in gross violation of their oath to safeguard the life and property of all citizens guaranteed by the constitution.

Unless the leaders of India, especially from the secular parties show some courage to stand up to fundamentalism that may emanate from any quarters whether it is Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Christian and stop exploiting religion and caste for vote bank politics, India's democracy is headed for serious trouble.

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Babri-Masjid - 1992



Gujarat -2002



Kandhamal, Orissa -2008



Muzaffarnagar, U.P-2013