

ORIENTE MODERNO

RIVISTA D'INFORMAZIONE E DI STUDI
PER LA DIFFUSIONE DELLA CONOSCENZA DELLA CULTURA
DELL'ORIENTE ISLAMICO E MUSULMANO

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WHAT HINDU POLICY TOWARD MUSLIMS,
SINCE THE SANGH PARIVAR'S RULE?

What Hindu policy towards Muslims?

Wake up! Arise! Think! Enforce!
Save the country! Save the religion!
Economic boycott is the only solution! The anti-national elements use the money earned from the Hindus to destroy us!
They buy arms! They molest our sisters and daughters! The way to break the backbone of these elements is: An economic non-cooperation movement.

Let us resolve:

1. From now on I will not buy anything from a Muslim shopkeeper!
2. I will not sell anything from my shop to such elements!
3. Neither shall I use the hotels of these anti-nationals, nor their garages!
4. I shall give my vehicles only to Hindu garages! From a needle to gold, I shall not buy anything made by Muslims, neither shall we sell them things made by us!
5. Boycott whole-heartedly films in which Muslim hero-heroines act! Throw out films produced by these anti-nationals!
6. Never work in offices of Muslims! Do not hire them!
7. Do not let them buy offices in our business premises, nor sell or rent out houses to them in our housing societies, colonies or communities.
8. I shall certainly vote, but only for him who will protect the Hindu nation.
9. I shall be alert to ensure that our sisters-daughters do not fall into the 'love-trap' of Muslim boys at school-college-workplace.
10. I shall not receive any education or training from a Muslim teacher.

Such strict economic boycott will throttle these elements! It will break their backbone! Then it will be difficult for them to live in any corner of this country. Friends, begin this economic boycott from today! Then no Muslim will raise his head before us! Did you read this leaflet? Then make ten photocopies of it, and distribute it to our brothers. The curse of Hanumanji [be] on him who does not implement this, and distribute it to others! The curse of Ramchandraji also be on him! Jai Shriram!

A true Hindu patriot!¹

Such are the contents of political leaflets conceived, produced and distributed by VHP activists. The reason why it has been chosen to introduce the present paper is that it briefly summarises Hindu attitudes towards Indian Muslims. When one asks the question "what Hindu policy towards Muslims since the Sangh Parivar's rule", a piece of political literature like the one above efficaciously sums up

1 – *Gujarat Carnage 2002. A Report to the Nation by An Independent Fact Finding Mission*, by Kamal Mitra Chenoy, S.P. Shukla, K.S. Subramiam, Achin Vinaik, Translation of the VHP Leaflet Jai Shri Ram.

the most genuine Hindu attitude toward Indian Muslims.

The most striking aspect is that the same concepts were expressed, in similar terms at the beginning of the anti-Muslim propaganda carried out by Hindu nationalists in the 1930s and 1940s.² Has it has been demonstrated elsewhere, such concepts and arguments were inspired by the nazi anti-Jewish policy.

Today, similar words and the attitudes they reflect have a more gloomy meaning: we all know what racial hatred is, we all had good examples of ethnic cleaning, far beyond nazi atrocities.

Obviously, there is a difference between grassroots propaganda, and the sophisticated discourses pronounced at the top level, by national leaders, in official contexts.

Such a propaganda and the political attitude determining it must be somehow sanctioned at the top level to be possible. The purpose of the present study is to find out the possible connection between the official attitude of the government party, the BJP, and the less official practice of its 'armed' hands. This will be done by the light of the latest facts in Gujarat.

Hinduizing Indian policy across the new millennium

When at the beginning of 2001 I was writing my paper on Benares role in building-up Hindu political identity,³ a few doubts remained unanswered.

It was difficult, at that time, to establish if the Sangh Parivar would have definitely adopted the strategy of temples construction (and mosques destruction) as an instrument of political aggregation, or if it would shift to a policy more comprehensive of- and sympathetic to the country's real problems. The other question was whether the propaganda based on the revival of a strong religious symbolism and on the rhetoric of mosques demolition and temples reconstruction would have lasted as a politically successful strategy in electoral terms. At that stage, the main question was if such propaganda and rhetoric would have continued to underlie the Sangh Parivar's policy.

The latest facts in Gujarat provided the answers to these suspended questions.

Personally, I consider Mehta's case and the riots in Gujarat the most serious outbursts in India in the last two years. The weight of the two facts is obviously much different. In Mehta's story there were no victims and the violence remained at the verbal level, while in Gujarat, it is well known, deaths amount to 850 (according to official sources) and the incidents are still going on at the moment of writing this paper, with eight more killings on 21 April 2002. According to unofficial sources and humanitarian organisations, deaths is 2000 or more,⁴ besides several thousands of misplaced people, now living in camps.

2—Marzia Casolari, "Hindutva's Foreign Tie-ups in the 1930. Archival Evidence", *Economic and Political Weekly* (EPW), 22 January 2000.

3—"Role of Benares in Constructing Hindu Political Identity", *EPW*, 13-19 April 2002. The inspiring story of this paper was the unfortunate case of Deepa Mehta's movie, *Water*. The paper focuses on the role of Benares as one of the main workshops of the hindutva ideology.

4—*Gujarat Carnage 2002*, cit.

The debate that followed the shooting of *Water*, with all threats and claims referring to the chance to go ahead in Benares with more radical actions was, not even too implicitly, connected with the reconstruction of the Kashi Vishvanath Mandir. This could be, according to some local VHP, RSS and KSRSS (Kashi Sanskriti Raksha Sangharsh Samiti) leaders, the end of the story in Varanasi.

Ideological ferment in Varanasi was therefore (and still is) directly connected to the controversy about the reconstruction of Hindu temples in several holy places in India, at the top of which is Ayodhya. The connection between the temple issues in Ayodhya and Varanasi is openly confirmed by Ramachandra Paramhans, president of the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas, interviewed by *Frontline*, in the days of the *shivir*, the RSS national security camp, held in Agra from 15 to 15 October 2000. One of the dominant issues in this occasion was the need to “Indianise” Muslims and Christians.⁵ This is a rather subtle concept: by “Indianise” Muslims and Christians, indeed, it is not meant to prevent them from going to the mosque or the church, to give-up their religion, but to accept certain pillars of Hinduism, like the recognition of Mahabharata and other Hindu epics as part of their cultural heritage. In other words, an eradication of Muslim and Christian values is demanded. The adoption of certain clothes, of a certain diet, based on the acceptance of cow as a sacred animal, and of Sanskrit names should be encouraged.⁶ Muslim and Christian cultural identity should therefore be cancelled. This is much more and much more unacceptable than simply “accepting wilfully that all those who live here share the same motherland, same cultural heritage and same historical predecessors”.⁷ Denying that the majority of Indian Muslims adhere to these three principles is a lie. Indian Muslims do in fact consider themselves as Indians, many of them visit Hindu holy places, some of them may be able to trace their personal genealogical tree from important Muslim families of foreign origin, but most of them have local origin. They belong to more or less important Indian Muslim families whose ancestors, in most cases, are converted Hindus. All these people are normally well aware of such background and are usually also aware of the existence of common ancestors for the entire Indian population. Denying that a certain exchange between the two communities has always been there is a historical falsification.

Political failures and communal violence

Apart from provoking declarations, the general climate in the last two years was relatively calm. The causes of major outbreaks of violence were not connected to

5—*Frontline*, October 28–November 10 2000, *A strident stand. An Interview with Ramachandra Paramhans and An agenda of Indianisation.*

6—*rediff.com*, 23 March 2000, *RSS chief asks Muslims to Indianise*, reports a declaration pronounced by the RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan, while 7 October 2000, *RSS chief wants Christians to set-up ‘swadeshi’ church* is based on a speech K.S. Sudarshan, at the annual Vijayadashami gathering of the RSS in Nagpur. *hinduonnet.com*, 25 February 2001, *Indianise Islam: RSS chief*, based on a speech held by K.S. Sudharshan in Bhubaneshwar on 24 February.

7—*Frontline*, *ibidem*.

communal matters and communal disputes were limited to episodes of minor importance. In the lapse of time going from Mehta's story to the ruinous clashes in Gujarat, the general feeling was that Ayodhya issue, that in other times inflamed Indian political scene, was languishing and was becoming prevalent the impression that it was on the way to set.

The controversy remained as a suspended and rather monotonous legal case at the back of India's political scene up to the recent outburst in Gujarat. The lack of agreement between the most radical forces, headed by RSS, VHP and Bajrang Dal, supporting the construction of the temple at any cost, and the moderate position of the government, represented by the person of Mr Vajpayee seemed to be the strongest guarantee for the maintenance of the *status quo*.

However, there was still a suspicion that Ayodhya issue would have been reinforced, with a renewed violence, at the right moment. The right moment was represented by any possible loss of credibility, in particular electoral defeats. Both elements recurred in the most recent developments, so frequent as to involve practically every level of Indian politics.

In order to understand the policy of the Hindu forces, both in power and at the grass-roots level, it is therefore necessary to have a general overview of the main results obtained since 1997. It would be more appropriate to talk about the several failures of the BJP's and its affiliates' policy, both at the centre and at the local level.

The attitude of the BJP and the Sangh Parivar toward the Muslims has to be analysed has part of this policy. The failures of the BJP have to be envisaged in its incapacity to solve the vital problems of the country. The aim is here not to examine in depth the performance of the BJP's policy, but rather to show the link between such (negative) performance and the maintenance (and possible reinforcement) of a religion based ideology. Suffice here to say that the BJP was unable to improve the economic conditions of the country, taking some practical measures, like building-up infrastructures (roads, power supply) and improving services (education and health care).⁸ Moreover, the much advertised neo-liberistic economic policy of the government (by and large the continuation of the reforms introduced at the beginning of the 1990s) proved to be ineffective to produce a meaningful economic growth and to lower the poverty line.⁹

Factors of a more exquisite political nature have also to be considered. Leaving apart the much criticised and much objectionable cultural policy of the BJP,¹⁰ that caused resounding reactions more among the liberal and leftist intel-

8 - For more details on BJP's political performance in UP, see Sudha Pai, "Electoral Identity, Politics in Uttar Pradesh", *EPW*, 6-12 April 2002, internet edition.

9 - Michelguglielmo Torri, "Corruzione, oscurantismo e globalizzazione nell'India del BJP", *Asia Major*, 2001, Bologna, il Mulino/CSPEE, 2001, p. 75-113.

10 - In fact, the cultural policy of the NDA government was almost exclusively inspired and drawn by the BJP and its affiliates inside and outside the government and at various levels of the Hindu society. The BJP could actually succeed in carrying out several meaningful reforms to the Indian education system. This reforms were made possible, first of all, through the systematic occupation, since 1998, of the key posts of government offices involved in cultural

ligentia than among common people, the other main factors of the instability of the BJP as the leading party of the coalition, were its struggle with RSS and the tensions with the coalition allies. These two aspects are somehow interwoven.

Regarding the first factors, quarrels between RSS and BJP are a refrain in Indian politics, that punctually recurred any time the BJP got a stronger political position. In the past, such tensions have been among the causes of the BJP's difficulties in growing up and impose itself on Indian political scene.¹¹ In the 1980s the quarrels concerned more the RSS riotous attitude toward the possibility to give up its movement vocation and transform into an official political force. Such transformation would have determined the risk to be absorbed by the BJP, with an unbearable loss of identity and consensus. At that time, the RSS was not ready (and it is not even today) to lose its outlook of a grassroots organisation. Its popularity and strength was and still is its closeness to the lower layers of the Hindu society. The RSS support proved to be crucial in many occasions in the past, the withdrawal of such support having determined several stand-backs for the BJP.

Since when the BJP is in power, the struggle with its whimsical affiliate and supporter was motivated by their respective different political attitudes. In particular, in order to maintain the unity within the coalition, the BJP had to adopt a moderate outlook. One should not forget that at the 1999 elections the BJP obtained a relative and not absolute majority. On one hand the support of its allies for the governance was essential while, on the other, already since the beginning of 2000 some of the BJP's allies started to develop their doubts and express their critiques to some of the first political steps and stands taken by the BJP at the beginning of the year. The case of the removal of the prevention for members of RSS and other communal organisation to cover public posts, for instance, caused some irritated reactions among the BJP's partners at the government.

matters and important cultural institutions by BJP or, more in general, Sangh parivar men. The Indian Council of Historical Research, the Indian Council of Social Science Research, the Indian Institute of Advanced Studies, the University Grants Commission, National Council of Educational Research and Training, even the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts and the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library are now directed by people connected to the BJP or the Sangh parivar.

The changes in the syllabus of primary and secondary schools were all in favour of the introduction of a reinterpretation of Indian history, cultures and religions, where Hindu values are described and promoted as 'true' ones, to the detriment of the heritage of the other important traditions. Besides, the works of qualified, world-wide scholars like Romila Thapar, D.N. Jha, R. S. Sharma, Satish Chandra e Bipan Chandra have been removed from the list of the school textbooks. Authors like Sumit Sarkar and K.N. Panikkar, labelled as politically oriented scholars, have been denied funds for their publications. Besides, in summer 2001 D.N. Jha received death threats by Sangh parivar's militants, for having written a book where the supposed holiness of the cow was seriously questioned with evidences drawn from the ancient texts, proving that in ancient times cow was part of the Indian diet. All these facts are very well known and had a complete coverage by the press. See also M. Torri, *cit.*, p. 8.

11 – B.D. Graham, *Hindu nationalism and Indian politics: the origin and development of Bha-rariya Jana Sangh*, 1990.

The most troublesome question that put the BJP as a moderate party and its credibility to the test of its allies was what can be defined as a specific feature of the Sangh parivar cultural policy, represented by the already mentioned issue of the construction of a temple at Ayodhya. While, at the times of the last two victorious electoral campaigns Ayodhya has been cleverly used as an aggregating issue, after the electoral result and the installation of the government, Ayodhya proved to be a primed bomb for the BJP. In fact, about Ayodhya started and grew up an increasingly sharp controversy between the BJP and the RSS.

At the head of a coalition government not all members of which were ready to accept the extreme religious rhetoric of the Sangh parivar and to adhere to the exploitation of religious issues for political and, ultimately, communal purposes, the BJP was compelled to slow down and possibly stop any further development at Ayodhya. On the other hand, the RSS, the VHP, the Bajrang Dal, the Shiv Sena and other, less prominent organisations, adopted an increasingly intolerant attitude toward the BJP's official stand, that appeared clearly much more moderate than it was supposed to be.¹²

These factors are quite possibly at the back of the humiliating defeats of the BJP at the State elections of May 2001. As far as more exquisitely economic factors are concerned, it is clear that the BJP's incapacity to solve the above mentioned problems had a direct influence on repeated electoral losses between 2000 and 2002. The BJP's tense relationship with its important and politically influential affiliates, may have distracted the party from cultivating more and better its relationships, for instance, with those political allies that fought the national elections with the BJP, to shift to an alliance with the Congress at the State elections of May 2001. This was the case of the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu, that build up an alliance to which the Congress, but not the BJP, took part.

Significantly, while the carnage in Gujarat started and went on, State election were going to take place in UP.

Under the point of view of the failures of BJP's economic policy, UP had a crucial position. This state represented indeed the main workshop of BJP and Sangh parivar policy since the BJP's victory at the elections in 1997. The importance of this state for the national politics is out of discussion. While in the 1990s UP has been the Sangh Parivar's stronghold, in this state the BJP had to compete with major problems, as unemployment, negative economic growth and political instability. Solving or not solving such problems in UP was an important test for the BJP, with major reflections on its policy at the national level. At the same time, UP was the main focus of the Sangh Parivar religion-based ideology, with two main sites – Mathura and Varanasi – at the centre of a controversy in terms of mosque demolition/temple reconstruction.

Lately, signs were becoming more and more evident for a possible electoral disaster also in this state. It was the case of the panchayat elections of June 2000, when the BJP had severe losses in Lucknow, Kanpur, Gorakpur and Benares.¹³

12–Torri, *art. cit.*, p. 4.

13–Casolari, *Role of Benares*, cit., p. 1420.

Fears to lose also this important stronghold, together with other ones, like the Municipality of Delhi, passed to the Congress after several years of BJP's administration, may have resolved the most radical elements of the Sangh parivar and BJP itself to turn to an old strategy that, up to now, proved to be successful: inflaming communal tensions, provoking violent communal actions, in order to give to the Hindu electorate the impression of the dangerousness of the Muslim menace and that the BJP is the only force able to restore the order and to guarantee the security of the Hindu population.¹⁴ The heavy losses suffered by the BJP in the February 24, 2002 bye-elections held in three assembly seats in Gujarat seem to confirm this impression. The request for anticipated elections by the Chief Minister (refused by the Prime Minister) would otherwise difficult to be explained.

Hindus' attitude toward Muslims:

Gujarat carnage and its implication as the most eloquent example

The intention of this paper was not to provide a reconstruction of the events in Gujarat, as many complete reports are available in the Indian press.

Latest facts in Gujarat offer us the occasion to briefly (but not simplistically) come to the conclusion that they reflect in the most efficacious way the most meaningful trends in Indian policies in recent times, with special reference to the relations between Hindu leadership and Muslim nationals.

The facts exposed above demonstrate that Sangh Parivar never gave up its policy based on the demagoguery of temple re-construction. Such demagoguery was just 'frozen', to be resumed at the right moment.

If anybody had doubts about the premeditated character of the attacks on Muslims, such doubts can find an answer in the fact that the attackers knew very well the location of their targets, even when they resided in highly intermingled areas or, in case of owners of shops, companies of factories, their names did not publicly appear. This means that the attackers had lists of the Muslims living and working in the city. Carefully prepared lists, if they could include the names of owners and entrepreneurs that were not publicly available.¹⁵ Moreover, a certain control on Muslims must have existed since less suspect times, as proved by the following Circular.

Secret Circular of Gujarat Police
To
All Police Commissioners
All District Police Officers &
For Information: Police Ahmedabad
All range IGPs/DIGPS
From: Director of Police (Intelligence)
Gujarat State, Ahmedabad
Ref.:D.2/2,Com/Muslim/Activity/84/99 of 1/2-2-99

14—This impression was widely discussed throughout the press and the debates that followed, at various levels and in different contexts, the events in Gujarat. A good summary is available in *Gujarat Carnage 2002*, cit.

15—*Gujarat Carnage 2002*, cit.

You are asked to intimate the details of persons (Muslims) involved in communal riots which occurred in your city/district during the last five years viz (1) offence registration No. (2) Section (3) Place (4) What judgement by court? (5) How many times the person is booked under CRPC Section 107, 151, 110 or PASA, NASA?

Please submit the dossier of criminals and persons with communal mentality.

Please prepare the complete dossier and send with special messenger about branches of Students Islamic Movement of India located in your district/Cities with the names, addresses telephone numbers of the office bearers and active workers. The details of addresses of offices also be given.

Please intimate how many Darul Ulams are functioning in your districts/cities where the same are located.

The boys and girls studying there belong to which Country/State/District and their numbers.

Details and types of degree awarded. Whether the same are recognised by the Government. and from which foreign countries they receive assistance and quantum of the same.

Please intimate the details of existing Muslim organizations in your district/ with their address and who are the leaders working for their organizations, their names addresses, total members, telephone numbers etc.

Please intimate the places where Istemas are organized by Muslims in your districts/cities and total number of persons attending Istemas. Name the participating religious leaders and the names of persons actively involved in the activity with addresses.

Please intimate about the number of Pakistani Nationals in your District/ cities, when they came. How many went back,

How many got Indian nationality? What are the activities at present?

Please intimate the details of Muslims in your cities who are involved in narcotic and smuggling activities. How many times they have been detained under COFEPOSA, PASS, NASA, and deported? Prepare the dossier with names and other complete details.

Please open the dossier of Muslims individuals who are involved in the offence of assault with knives or scissors, rioting and murder with their names and the copy of the same to be sent here.

Please intimate the names of political leaders, with their names and their party, who are supporting these criminals and assist them for release for help in the polls.

Sd/- P.B.Upadhyaya¹⁶

The purpose seems to be that of controlling elements potentially involved in communal activities. However, the details required, including telephone numbers and other information let us suppose that the controls could have gone far beyond the described limits.

The fear is that similar devices could have been adopted in other parts of India, as a general practice.

The only hope for a change is provided by the already mentioned BJP's electoral failures. It seems that a strategy aiming at creating internal tensions does

16—*Ibidem*.

not repay. Criticism toward a strongly communal policy was raising in India already in the last two years. Gujarat facts had such an astonishing effect on Indian people, that can produce an inversion of tendency in Indian politics.

(3-06-2002)