

Damning the Dalits for the Bania-Brahmin Crimes in Gujarat

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“I am a Hindu” answered Dahyabhai, a youth in his 20s or may be early 30s, when I asked him about his identity. Dahyabhai is an inmate of the Kankaria relief camp in Shahpur, Ahmedabad, one of the five camps that housed non-Muslims. Kankaria camp has been his abode since 2nd March, when he fled his burning hutment in Bapunagar with two deep knife scratches on his back and his uncle in the pool of blood in the courtyard. The world did not note this death of Dahya’s uncle in the communal carnage of over 2000 Muslims. There were some 39 such deaths of Hindus only in Ahmedabad city and some 108 in entire Gujarat during the communal conflagration. His narration had a ring of familiarity that it was Muslims who attacked them –the Hindus first. Hindus’ was only the ‘reaction’. It was amusing to see the sociological Modi’fication of the Newton’s third law reflected in the conversation of commoners like Dahya- the Dalit. Of course, Dahya did not know that even in his neighborhood that the Muslim had suffered more than the Hindus.

What was amusing about the Kankaria camp was that everyone there identified himself or herself as Hindu. They were all Dalits. As a matter of fact Hindu cannot be an adequate identity for anyone. Hindu only evokes curiosity about the caste. Unless one knew the caste, the identity was not complete. But for the past decade or so this impossible identity is being concertedly forged in the laboratory of Hindutva. It is not that Hindutva has dissolved castes, abandoned its *varnashramdharma*. Far from it, it has used it skillfully to lure the lower caste Dalits and Shudras and the non-caste Tribals into its fold as Hindus against the other religious minorities. It is therefore Dahyabhai who identified himself as Hindu would not readily say *Harijan*, the Gandhian epithet derided and discarded by the Dalits elsewhere but habitually worn by most Dalits in Gujarat as their identity. He appeared puzzled, some what annoyed with my enquiry about his caste. Took a longish pause before he muttered the caste that he belonged to. I did not get it right, but my friend who knew Gujarati told me that it was a scheduled caste. I checked it with Dahyabhai, “Dalit?”. He nodded in affirmative but said, “han, *Harijan*”.

This split second commonplace conversation reveals volumes about the consciousness of the Dalits in Gujarat, the hegemonic spell of Hindutva over them and their resultant condition post-Gujarat carnage of unsung death and devastation.

Dalit-Participation and Predicament

It is clear that the massacre of Muslims that took place in Gujarat with State connivance as all the fact finding reports highlight had a little Dalit blood also accompanying it. The heart rending devastations that visited Muslims during this macabre campaign of communalists was also shared by the Dalits albeit in a small quantity. The experience of agony, the tears and tribulations; the pangs of pain that overwhelmed the Muslims had besieged the Dalit community too. Even the camps for victims from both the

communities resounded the similarity in their pathetic condition. Despite the seemingly 'connected' people frequenting these 'Hindu' camps, their condition was not a shade better than the Muslim camps that were run by the community volunteers. The condition of Dalits in these camps thus clearly mirrored the material reality that Dalits irrespective of what label they are given cannot be the part of the Hindutva privileges. Whatever their contradictions with their Muslim neighborhood they cannot escape the same predicament as that of Muslims. The Gujarat violence clearly highlighted the truth that the communities do not make much difference in people's suffering; their classes do.

But, when the fact finding reports of the civil rights organizations noted the Dalit role in the Gujarat carnage against Muslims and the various commentators started issuing their comments thereon, it created an impression that the entire killing was executed by the Dalits and the Tribals. Notwithstanding, the now established fact that the carnage was not at all a spontaneous reaction but a well planned operation against an unarmed people, notwithstanding the uncovering of identities of some culprits, who planned and led the mobs to commit some of the most ghastly crimes, and the fact that they were not Dalits, and notwithstanding the general observation that the Hindutva forces managed to get people across all castes, classes, ages and even genders to participate in this carnage, the involvement of the Dalits and Tribals only received particular attention. It came handy for the caste prejudices of people to insinuate that such heinous killings cannot be the act of the cultured Brahmins in the Sangh Pariwar. It had to be the barbarous people like Dalits and Tribals to commit such inhuman acts as to rape teenage girls and old women in public view, to reap open the uterus of pregnant ladies, extricate the foetus with spike of trishul and stuff the burning rags into her uterus- cavity; throw the kids into bakery ovens etc. It evoked disgust, not for the Modis, Zadaphias and their VHP Bajrang Dal cohorts who planned and directed this odious tragedy but for the poor innocent people like the Dalits and Tribals. It confirmed their mental models hammered out in their minds by their obscurantist socialization and casteist culture that the Dalits were uncultured, barbarous and intrinsically inferior people.

It is a fact that the Dalits and Tribals were used in large numbers in violence against Muslims but no one can say that the entire carnage was their act. Rather, being in the neighborhood of Muslim masses, only the Dalits suffered their counterattacks. It was not because they identified their attackers as living in their neighborhood but because of their sheer vulnerability. The caste people and that includes backward castes, the torchbearers of the Hindutva, are not to be found in the relief camps because they are not as vulnerable. These people did it and got away with it. Either way, if people are to be charged it always came handy to catch hold of some one like a Dalit. The bias is intrinsic, embedded in the system that readily problematizes the have-nots. While the Tribal crowds looting the shops and houses belonging to Muslims was eloquently written on and showed on the television, there was no such media celebration when the high caste gentlemen and ladies from well to do homes looted the high brow Muslim stores in the posh localities of Ahmedabad in broad day light. Now that the storm is settling and the police machinery is getting activated, it will be the Dalits and Tribals who will be stamped as the sole perpetrators of the Gujarat carnage.

The concern of the civil rights activists and organizations as well as the progressive elements of society about the Dalit role in the Gujarat genocide is understandable. They feel aghast at the victims acting at the instance of their exploiters against another. Dalits and Tribals are the victims of the vile Hindu social system which is sought to be revived by the Hindutva project. It is verily the consciousness and struggles of these victims apart from the forces of modernity that had humiliated this system and rendered its protagonists defensive. The influence of western liberalism representing modernity in India created a class of social reformers among the Brahmins with a tacit purpose of eliminating certain identified weaknesses of the Hindu society and thereby making it stronger. None could effectively touch the caste system although it was the most visible lesion on the body of the Hindu society because, castes constituted its core. Without castes, there could neither be Hinduism nor the Hindu society. It is only when its victims – the Dalits got up in rebellion that its protagonists really became defensive. Now when in the changed circumstances they are seeking to revive it through their offensive against the religious minorities like Sikhs, Christians and Muslims, the people who represent reason and sanity are naturally pained to find its historical victims on the side of Hindutva.

Build-up in Recent History

Dalits choosing to be the foot soldiers of the Hindutva forces against Muslims indeed surprised many. The 1981 anti-reservations riots against Dalits were sparked off by the very same Brahmins, Baniyas and Patidars who constitute the Hindutva command today. 20 years should not be too long a period for the collective memory of the victims to be effaced in favour of the perpetrators of crime. The riots were a part of their protest against the reservation system that gave Dalits access to medical and engineering colleges. They were based on falsehood and blatant lies even then as any of the riots thereafter and the recent carnage are. It led to riots in which Dalits were targeted in 18 of Gujarat's 19 districts. The backlash was so harsh and widespread that it marked a watershed in the Dalit consciousness.

Historically, Gujarati Dalits never developed Dalit consciousness that characterized the Ambedkarian movement in neighboring Maharashtra. They remained under paternalistic influence of Gandhi as his Harijans as a part of Hindu community. The Dalit Panther movement in 1970s did stir the educated Dalit youths in urban areas but could not reach out beyond them. For the first time the statewide 1981 riots awakened the Dalits to the ground reality and impelled them towards the Ambedkarian Dalit identity. The following birth anniversary of Ambedkar marked this sudden change of consciousness. Many Ambedkarite activists had striven before for creating this Dalit consciousness in them through the Dalit Panthers, various Buddhist organisations, Bamcef, DS4, BSP etc. but their influence remained at best confined to certain pockets. The violence of 1981 riots achieved in one shot what they could not do over many years. It is significant to remember that during these riots the Muslims had sheltered Dalits at many places. Dalits faced the wrath of same Brahmins, Baniyas and Patidars combine again in 1985 although this time their agitation was against the hike in job quotas for the OBCs in government and educational institutions. Ironically the Dalits upheld the reservations for the OBCs

under the Mandal Commission and bore the wrath of the higher castes but the actual beneficiaries continued not only to be with the higher castes but also against Dalits.

In fact it was not 20 years but just a single year, because just in 1986 after 1985 riot, during Ahmedabad's annual Jagannath rath yatra, the Dalits were found enthusiastically supporting the BJP. When riots broke out all over Gujarat in 1990 during L.K. Advani's rath yatra, spearheaded in Gujarat by none other than Narendra Modi, the then general secretary of the State BJP, Dalits and middle class Hindus were clearly set against Muslims. The BJP strategy of winning over Dalits, thereby consolidating broad sections of Hindus and polarizing the population along communal lines at least bore fruits in Gujarat. It is said that these riots began the spatial segregation of Muslims in all the three areas- the old walled city, the industrial mill areas and the new middle class and elite town. The subsequent riots that broke out after the demolition of the Babri Masjid in 1992 ghettoised the city further. Muslims increasingly shifted to Muslim majority area for safety and Hindus vice versa. While this happened in case of middle classes, the poor people from both the sides could not shift their abodes and continued to live next to each other.

The 1981 reservation riots were motivated by the political aspirations of the Brahmins, Banias and Patidars trio, the traditional ruling classes but which was totally marginalized in the State politics by the KHAM (Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims) strategy of the Congress during the late 1970s. With this strategy, the Congress (I) leadership had succeeded in dislodging them from all core party positions between 1976 and 1980, so much so that there was not a single Patidar Minister of Cabinet rank when the Congress(I) formed the government in 1980 after sweeping the polls. This power hungry upper caste trio needed to do something to regain its lost grounds. The reservation issue, which always carried potential to galvanize entire non-Dalit Hindu population against it, provided them this opportunity which they grabbed by sparking off statewide riots. Soon however, they realized the folly of this strategy in electoral terms- the anti-reservation stance could possibly antagonize 75% population of the SCs, STs and OBCs, and started wooing them into the Hindu fold. While, realizing the increasing unreliability of the traditional vote banks, the Congress had begun to woo Hindu majority after the second coming of Indira Gandhi by openly communalizing the Kashmir and Punjab problems, BJP smartly jumped on to consolidate entire Hindu mass on the basis of Hindutva, counterpoising it against the religious minorities. The Dalit, OBC participation in the riots in 1986 during Ahmedabad's annual Jagannath rath yatra against Muslims was a first demonstration of the BJP's new face.

Economic Crises and Decline of 'Dalit'

The general economic dilapidation of Dalits in Gujarat due to closures of textile mills during 1980s came handy for BJP to lure away the crisis-ridden masses to its obscurantist projects constructing a viable identity of the 'other'. Over 50 major textile mills were closed down during the middle of 1980s throwing over one lakh workers on the road. Later, during 1990s due to impact of globalization, the spate of closure and retrenchment followed aggravating the economic crisis of the Dalits further. Generally the Dalits who

constituted unskilled or low skill labour in factories could be easily displaced by new automating technology and social prejudices made them further vulnerable to loss of job. Their struggle for survival impelled them to take up some casual work which was traditionally being done by the Muslims. Thus began a sort of economic competition and clash of interest between the Dalits and the Muslims. Wherever the Dalit-Muslim clashes have occurred in Ahmedabad, this economic contradiction can be underscored easily in the change of occupational pattern that came during the last two decades. With no regular source of income and without any regular job, as Jan Breman¹ observed, many could not even escape the wave of lumpenisation which augered well for any kind of rioting.

The impact of globalization should not be conceived in narrow terms as entailing mere job losses. The growth centric economic development that globalization promotes invariably marginalizes people issues as has happened in Gujarat. The economic boom in early 1990s created along side great disparities; while the industrialists, traders and educated middle castes benefited with this boom the farmers who had enjoyed tremendous prosperity during the green revolution years until the previous decades saw stagnation in their income, the lower classes anyway left out of the distribution net. When this boom receded resulting into the decline in the living standard of population as indicated by the actual decline in per capita income after 1996-97², it created fertile grounds for communal identities to flourish. Few realize that Globalisation with its ideological thrust on the autonomy of an individual and free market that provides unfettered space for these autonomous individuals is intrinsically supportive of the all shades of 'social Darwinism' that certainly includes fundamentalism, communalism and fascism. It is not only in India, where the growth of the Hindutva forces can be directly correlated with the advance of globalization, but also all over the world that the fundamentalism of some kind is seen on rise. The atomized individual is basically an insecure creature in the market place, having lost the protective cover of the organizations like trade unions etc. readily accepted community in Hindutva when offered by the Sangh. Dalits also could not be exception to this process.

The Dalit awakening through 1981 riots could not last despite suffering another riot that immediately followed it in 1985. The reasons for it are not difficult to see. The seedling of Dalit consciousness sprouted in the historically alien soil of conservatism could not receive sustaining nutrients in absence of any live Dalit movement and on the contrary had to face strong floods of the BJP strategy for wooing Dalits! Battered in two successive riots, the overtures of the Sangh Pariwar offering them a notionally sanskritised Hindu identity therefore were welcomed by the Dalits. It solved their existential problem insofar as it saved them from ongoing conflicts with the high castes which were becoming quite oppressive; it gave them a sense of elevation in the social

¹ Jan Breman, 'Communal Upheaval as Resurgence of Social Darwinism', Economic and Political Weekly, April 20, 2002.

² Mahadevia, Darshini, Gujarat's Development: Experience and Success of Hindutva, a paper presented in the Seminar on Lessons from Gujarat, Mumbai, July 12-14, 2002.

hierarchy and provided with a hope of certain material gains through the relationship with powerful and rich Brahman-Bania-Patidar people. Many well known Ambedkarite Dalit leaders in Gujarat jumped on to BJP bandwagon during this time.

Muslim Apathy

While this happened on one hand, there were no organized efforts ever from Muslim side to identify with Dalits. Dalits have tried severally to bring about unity between themselves and all the religious minorities, but Muslims have never responded to it with commensurate zeal. They always reflected indifference to the issues of caste and untouchability. This apathy of Indian Muslims, particularly Muslim intelligentsia towards the Dalits has been historical. Although, it was Dalits who embraced Islam and swell their numbers, the Muslim intelligentsia always reflected elitist orientation quite akin to Brahmans and did not show any concern for Dalits. It may have been the political necessity of the Muslim rulers to align with the high caste Hindus to establish their rule, it may be that later when high caste people actually embraced Islam brought in the Brahmanic ideology in Muslim society; whatever may be the reason their indifference towards Dalits is a sad reality. Except for Sufis that sprang up from Islam during the Bhakti movement in India and actively identified with the low castes, there is no evidence of Muslims making a common cause with the Dalits. During the British colonial period, Muslims preferred to parley with the Hindu majority but not see a possible alley in Ambedkar. There has been this peculiar tendency in Muslim community world over that even in the wake of attack they tend to contract inwardly, respond either by strategies of retaliation or meek forbearance but never identify with the similarly placed people of other faith to resist the attackers. One wonders whether the concept of kafir in Islam has influenced this behaviour!

There is a comparable case of Indian Christians who also have been the target of the communal frenzy of the Sangh Pariwar. As a matter of fact, they were the first to be attacked by the Hindutva forces after the BJP came to power in Gujarat. Amazingly however, there were no reports of participation of Dalits and Tribals in those attacks. The reason is simple that there is a close relationship between the Christians (the victims among whom still rear the identity of Dalits and Tribal unlike Muslims) and the Dalits and Tribals that easily transcend their religious barriers. The same is not the case with the Muslims. This Christians have built this relationship throughout the history. Whatever may have been the strategies of Christian rulers, the Christian missionaries consciously worked among the Dalits and Tribals, introduced education to them, extended health services to the poor masses irrespective of whether they embraced Christianity or not. In one way, one can attribute a large part of Dalit awakening to their efforts. In contrast, Muslims never undertook such work. Lately, with the Dalit Christian movement having come to the fore the dividing line between the Dalits and the Dalit Christians has almost disappeared. In the case of the current carnage, one finds the Christian organizations in arm with the other progressive organizations and individuals in forefront to help Muslim victims and to take up their cause against the might the State. Same did not happen with Muslims when the Christians were attacked.

Even now the Muslims may identify, under the influence of media propaganda the Dalits and Tribals as their killers and marauders. They never understand the difference between the Hindus and the Dalits and Tribals who have actually been the biggest victims of Hindus' social oppression. They would never comprehend the nature of contradictions between them. They identify them as Hindus and serve the Hindutva cause. Muslims must understand that the Hindutva forces do not have any inveterate hatred towards Muslims; if so they would not have loved Abdul Kalam and catapulted him over their heads. Their main objective is to consolidate larger Hindu majority as 'us' by creating 'they' of them to win enough political power so as to carry out their larger imperialist agenda. The communal carnage but is mere means to that end. So is their love for Dalits. It is just a matter of convenience. The hatred for Dalits is more inveterate than that for any one including the Muslims. It is hard coded in their canons. As Ambedkar had to painfully conclude there cannot be Hinduism without caste. It may be extended to say that there cannot be castes without Dalits being outcasts. So long as the Dalits stick to their rung, they can be tolerated. What happens when they assert their human right can be gauged from the Hindutva response in Maharashtra towards the Ambedkarite Dalits (Nav Baudhhas), an assertive section of the Dalits the Shiv Sena separated out from the others. It will be a historic blunder of Dalits to become the Hindutva's cannon fodder in communal holocaust. Likewise, it will be a fatal mistake of Muslims to consider the Dalits and Tribals as their enemy and thereby serve the Hindutva agenda.

Crime of Bania-Brahmins

The crime of Gujarat carnage lies not so much in physical participation, which doubtlessly is shared by all the castes and classes but in the cold blooded conceptualizing, planning and leading in its execution, which is done entirely by the Brahmin-Bania combine –the vanguard of the Hindutva Brigade. The enormity of it cannot be determined only by counting the numbers of killings, rapings, lootings and burnings etc. but by the long term damage it inflicted on the moral fabric of the society. They have not only violated the penal code or the Constitutional articles but also the civilizational mores of this land. The crime of the Sangh Pariwar in Gujarat is unpardonable! It is not the crime against only the Muslims in Gujarat or India but also against the entire humanity as it has mutilated its civilizational platform.

Much is made of the Godhra incident by the Hindutva Brigade as the action to which the Gujarat carnage in the Modi'fied Newton's law was said to be a justified reaction. Godhra met with condemnation from all as it should. However, the fact remains that people still do not know who did Godhra and who were killed. The behaviour of authorities in dealing with crime of such an enormity and sensitivity, the subsequent Forensic inferences refuting the versions on which this 'action' was conceived and the overall silence observed over it in the area where it happened thicken the veil of mystery around this unfortunate incident. No one can say for sure, whether Godhra was planned and if so by whom. This being the state of 'action', the 'reaction' however materialized instantaneously in a manner that may shame even the expert planners. The gangs were organized and scheduled such that they would not attack their neighborhoods, they were equipped with the printouts of the targets and provided with guides to pin point them in

the midst of others, the resources such as Trishuls, LPG cylinders and petrol cans, not to speak of jeeps and vans were coordinated and most importantly the information flow between them was maintained with enviable efficiency never seen before. As it stands exposed by all the fact finding reports, the state had actively participated in this heinous 'reaction'. The question does not end there however. If the reaction was spontaneous, what explains the intricate planning that has gone into it? How did thousands of Trishuls reach the hands of killers; who supplied LPG cylinders from whom and to whom? When and who had done the print outs of the Muslims? Thousands of such questions arise to which answers may never materialize.

There is no doubt that the Gujarat carnage was not a reaction but an intricately planned and passionately executed project with definitive objective of consolidating majority community in order to winning political power. This was particularly necessitated because of the successive debacles the BJP faced in the elections all over the country and even in the local elections in Gujarat. Qualitatively there was nothing new in it as the Sangh Pariwar always thrived on the communal polarization of people to win political power without scruples. Still, for its magnitude of macabre it was a new experiment. Its replicability elsewhere also demanded that it be formulated and executed like an experiment in a laboratory. Gujarat, characterized by the hegemony of the Brahman-Bania conservatism, well oiled Sangh Pariwar-machinery for propaganda and militant action that had made deep inroads not only into Dalit colonies but also the Tribal hamlets and relatively longer standing BJP rule that succeeded in communalizing institutions of state and civil society became a natural choice as the laboratory. The trail of this crime must extend therefore to the spreading of communal venom among the innocent Tribals and gullible Dalits by various outfits of the Sangh Pariwar. It is one thing to exploit political vacuum among Dalits and Tribals to create political constituency but it is entirely different matter to communally convert them for the genocide of some other people. The former can be legitimate political work; the latter is an utterly illegitimate criminal act which the entire Sangh Pariwar in Gujarat is guilty of.

Under the guise of religio-cultural work, the Sangh Pariwar has been working for 'Hindutva' which is essentially a political concept. The religio-cultural concept of 'Hindu' though inimical to the Dalits and Tribals represented, according to many scholars, a dispersed identity that is located in a multicultural and multireligious tradition and social organisation. In contrast 'Hindutva' pretends to be inclusive of the Dalits and Tribals, as the RSS has declared its opposition to untouchability, (and of course not to castes!) but strives for a monolithic culture and, based on it, a monolithic nation and state as well. The genesis of Hindutva that can be informally traced back to Tilak and formally to Savarkar was based on this political motive to create monolithic and monocultural Hindu rashtra and admittedly it forms the source of inspiration of the entire 'Hindutva' movement – from Mr. Advani's Rath Yatra to the Modi's 'reaction' in Gujarat. It resorted to build a repertoire of cultural resources with intellectual thuggery. Hindutva, never hid its fascist fangs right since its birth, and rather showered its praise on the likes of Hitler through its greats like Golwalkar. As for the Dalits, true to their Hindu culture, the Pariwar people first ignored them and then realising their political importance and taking advantage of their frustration, lured them into their fold through their Samarasata

Manch or by coopting Ambedkar as one of their Pratah Smaraniya. They made Adivasi Tribals into Vanavasi, skillfully depriving them of their ownership antecedents and making them uncivilised junglees, Hinduised them through their Vanavasi schools, replacing their Tribal gods with Ganeshas and poisoned them with communal hatred against other religions by organising various campaigns like the “Trishul campaigns” they conducted a few months before the carnage.

Many civil rights people found it difficult to come to terms with how Tribal and Dalit people could make common cause in this massacre with the upper castes.³ Part of the explanation lies in their historical peculiarity, economic crisis, political vaccum, but most of it lies in the motivated manipulation carried out by the Hindutva brigade over a long time. Where the persuasion did not work, the VHP- Bajrang Dal terrorised these weaker sections to show compliance. As one activist in Gujarat stated the Dalit and Christian communities were so terrorised that they were willing to do the bidding of the upper castes.⁴

Dalits and Tribals found guilty should be definitely punished but only after the king pins of the VHP / Bajrang Dal who masterminded the carnage; the Modis and Zadaphias who put the State might in support of the carnage and the Bureaucrats and Police big wigs who crawled and let the carnage go on are duly punished for the genocide.

The Path Ahead

Dalits cannot escape the painful realization of being the cannon fodder of the Brahmin-Bania Hindutva forces when the FIRs are filed, their arrests are effected and eventually they are punished for what they have done and even not done. It is certain that the real culprits who conceived and carried out this heinous carnage will never be touched. It will largely be Dalits and Tribals who would be made sacrificial goats. Even those who are out of the legal net, the living will be far more stressful in the vicinity of the antagonistic Muslim neighborhood. It is said that the VHP/ Bajrang Dal- the carnage managers had a meticulous planning in not using the neighborhood people against the Muslims. It may have helped them in executing their plans but it is not going to help Dalits. For the Muslims they are Hindus who have done it! Much worse, they may be condemned by the world as the ones who committed the unthinkable brutalities on innocent people.

Muslims likewise cannot escape a lesson that their traditional contracting inward will not save them. Their obsessive religiosity has so far served only the vested interests of a few among them and shall serve here onwards the agenda of the Sangh Pariwar in identifying as ‘they’. They cannot wish away the reality that with mere religious identity they are but

³ Mander, harsh, Borders in the Mind: Glitter and Gloom in Gujarat, The Times of India, August 20, 2002.

⁴ Macwan, Joseph, This ‘unique’ land, <http://www.india-seminar.com/2002/513/513%20joseph%20macwan.htm>

a minority in this country. Necessarily they will have to transcend this identity and seek alliance with the forces that are in contradiction, potential or otherwise, with the brute majority. As the present agenda of this brute majority goes, all the religious minorities will have to come together and see common cause with Dalits and Tribals who are the traditional victims of the project the majority wants to reconstruct. The situation of Dalits and Tribals is largely precarious; backward, divided and disorganized as they are they could be easily swayed by the Hindutva forces. In fact, a large section of them have already been brainwashed to be in its fold and it would be uphill task to extricate them back. It is only a demonstrable unity of the anti-Hindutva forces that can win them back. Fortunately, for the proposed anti-Hindutva front there is a sizable section of Dalits whose political consciousness is still in tact. Muslims will have to come forward and embrace them wholeheartedly.

Muslim community is politically disintegrated into more reactionary factions than the progressive ones. One end represented by the clergy holds it back to utter anachronism and the other end represented by naked opportunists is out to fleece it. The progressive elements on this continuum are extremely scarce. The inertia of Islam moreover does not allow any degree of freedom beyond the 'given' framework and tends to alienate even the genuine progressive people. There is a viable way out of this morass and that may be to organize all the backward caste Muslims⁵ and tie it with the Dalits in other communities. The fact remains that majority of the Muslims today are of Dalit origin and over the long years there has not been any difference in either their material condition or social status. The Bhahmanised Arab Muslims and upper caste converts have not let any benefit of egalitarian Islam reach them and on the contrary allowed it to be contaminated with castes. They have kept them blindfolded in the name of religion not to realize that their pathetic condition is not ordained by Allah but is caused by the exploiting class. If the majority of these Muslims wake up and make common cause with their co—sufferers, it can pose a formidable challenge to communalism of any and every hue.

Some people, terror-struck by the display of inhumanity in this carnage wished to restore peace between the two communities by educating both the sides on the real precepts of their respective religions. There is a considerable number of such people who think that the lofty tenets of Hinduism and Islam, if explained to people in simple language, would dispel hatred in their minds for each other. One of my good rationalist friends in Ahmedabad who has been tirelessly working for the victims and trying to bring about peace between Hindus and Muslims voiced similar opinion in one of his interviews to a prominent news paper. Well meaning though, it betrays the misunderstanding that people indulge in misdoing because of their misunderstanding of religion. It is rather the religion, right or wrong, has been the root cause of people's misdoing. No amount of preaching in the name of religion would bring sanity in people. Let people have their respective religions as their personal faith; let it not come out in the social arena. Let them dust away the traces of religion in the social space so that they can clearly see the relations of exploitation that the system has woven around them. Only the existential concerns, the concern of survival that can bring people to senses. Even in empirical terms

⁵ There is already an All India Backward Muslim Morcha (AIBMM) set up in 1994 convened by Dr. Ejaz Ali. It is an umbrella group of over 40 Backward Caste Muslim organizations.

it is never the religion, but the movements of the toiling sections that eliminate the communal riots. For instance, during the historic textile strike in 1980s, there was no communal strife in Bombay and the influence of Bal Thakre and his Shiv Sena was at an all time low.

The surest way to eliminate communal conflict is to subordinate all other identities to the class identity. Beyond the tactics of resisting the advance of Hindutva forces, the strategy of class struggle only could pave way for better tomorrow!

Ahmedabad,
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