
Impact of the Demolition of the Babri Mosque and Godhra Pogrom on Muslim Voting Behaviour: A Comparative Study of Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and Kerala



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Abstract

Being around fifteen per cent of the total population of India, Indian Muslims constitute a significant minority that cannot be ignored by the political parties in India. Since partition, the Muslims were considered traditional Indian National Congress (INC) constituency, but the failure of the INC to stop the demolition of Babri mosque and Gujarat massacre pushed Muslims to look for other options. In this study, the impact of communal violence on the voting behaviour of Indian Muslims is studied with the help of a comparative study of Muslim voting patterns in Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, and Kerala. This paper argues that the electoral performance of Muslims and their supported party or coalition has a direct bearing on the communal violence against them. By conducting the comparative study of the electoral behaviour of Muslim voters in these three states, it is observed that the most important factor in this performance is the choices they get in a particular state. The political clout and bargaining position of Muslim voters is much better in a coalition system than in a two-party contest and they can play their cards more successfully if they have their own political party as they have in Kerala. This paper also looks at the role of police in communal violence and its relationship with electoral politics.

Key Words: Indian Muslims, communal violence, electoral behaviour, Babri Mosque, Gujarat Pogrom.

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بابری مسجد کے انہدام اور گودھرا کے منظم قتل عام کا
 بھارتی انتخابات میں مسلمانوں کی ووٹنگ پراثر:
 گجرات، اتر پردیش اور کیرالہ کا تقابلی جائزہ
 سعید احمد ریڈ

خلاصہ

بھارت کی کل آبادی کا لگ بھگ ۱۵ فیصد بھارتی مسلمان اقلیت پر مشتمل ہونا ایک اہم امر ہے۔ جس کی وجہ سے انہیں بھارتی سیاسی جماعتوں کی طرف سے نظر انداز نہیں کیا جاسکتا۔ برصغیر کی تقسیم کے بعد سے ہی یہ تاثر پایا جاتا ہے کہ مسلمان روایتی طور پر انڈین نیشنل کانگرس (INC) کے انتخابی حلقوں کے ساتھ وابستہ رہے ہیں۔ لیکن بابری مسجد کو منہدم ہونے سے بچانے میں کانگرس کی ناکامی اور گجرات کے قتل عام نے انہیں متبادل کی طرف دھکیل دیا۔

یہ مضمون دعویٰ کرتا ہے کہ مسلمانوں یا ان کی ترجیحی سیاسی پارٹی کی انتخابی کارکردگی اُن کے خلاف فرقہ وارانہ تشدد پر براہ راست اثر انداز ہوتی ہے۔ ان تین ریاستوں میں مسلمانوں کے انتخابی طرز عمل کے موازنے سے ظاہر ہوتا ہے کہ اس میں سب سے اہم امر اُن کو میسر انتخابی اختیار ہے۔ اس مقالے میں مسلمانوں کے سیاسی انتخابی عمل پر فرقہ وارانہ و مذہبی تشدد کے اثرات کا اتر پردیش، گجرات اور کیرالہ میں تقابلی جائزہ لیا گیا ہے۔

مسلمان ووٹ دہندگان کا سیاسی اثر و رسوخ کثیر الجماعتی اتحادی سیاست میں دو جماعتی سیاست کی نسبت زیادہ بہتر ہوتا ہے اور اس میں اُس وقت مزید بہتری آ جاتی ہے جب مسلمانوں کی اپنی سیاسی پارٹی ہو جیسا کہ کیرالہ میں ہے۔ یہ مقالہ فرقہ وارانہ و مذہبی تشدد میں پولیس کے کردار اور اس کے سیاست پراثرات کو بھی جائزہ لیتا ہے۔

Introduction

Muslims are the second largest religious community in India. Their population according to the 2011 census was 172.2 million, which makes them 14.23 per cent of the total Indian population.¹ In a democratic polity, the votes of a minority community of this size cannot be easily ignored. Sometimes merely the size of their vote has attracted the Indian National Congress (INC) and other secular political parties towards them and sometimes their name is used to get votes, as the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rose to power by creating Hindutva vote based on anti-Muslim communal sentiment.

The demolition of Babri mosque in Ayodhya in 1992 and post-Godhra carnage in Gujarat in 2002 jolted the whole edifice of the Indian polity and raised several questions on Indian secularism. The blatant use of communal violence as a political tool by the BJP and other Hindu Nationalist parties brought new trends and transformations in Indian politics. It also had a lasting effect on Muslim voting behaviour. Since independence in 1947, Muslims were considered a traditional support base for the INC but the failure of the INC to stop the demolition of Babri mosque and Gujarat massacre convinced many Muslims to change their loyalties and wherever they got a better choice they left the INC and voted for the other parties.

To study the effects of the upsurge of communal violence in Indian polity during 1990s and early 2000s on Indian Muslims' voting behaviour the All-India political scene could have been chosen, but India is such a diverse, heterogeneous, and vast country that every single state of India has its own peculiar political, social, and cultural norms of behaviour, which makes it almost impossible to study the whole of India in one paper. Therefore, to get the real picture, three Indian states of Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh (UP), and Kerala are chosen to study the effects of Ayodhya and Godhra incidents on the electoral behaviour of Muslim voters. The selection of UP and Gujarat was obvious because the Ayodhya and Godhra events took place in these

two states, respectively, and these two states are exposed to Hindutva laboratory since then. However, Kerala is conspicuous by its extraordinary stability and the relative absence of communal violence.

This paper discusses the trends of Muslim voters in the aforementioned three states up to the 2004 general elections in India. Therefore, the census figures of 2001 census are used instead of the more recent 2011 census. Moreover, Indian census 2001 was the only census that had initially provided detailed religion-wise figures of literacy rate and other factors of the human development index, which were taken away when a controversy arose over differences in growth rates among different religions, especially Hindus and Muslims.² Luckily, the author had saved the data when it was made available in 2004.

In this paper, first, the impact of communal violence on Muslim voting behaviour in all three states is studied one-by-one and then a comparative analysis of all three states is given to make a sense of the whole phenomenon. This study shows that there is a clear link between the ability of Muslims to make an impact in local politics of the state and the level of communal violence they must face. Muslims are better off in Kerala where they have their own political party in the form of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) and they are worst off in Gujarat where they have no choice in a two-way contest of the BJP and the INC.

The impact of Communal Violence on Muslim Voting Behaviour in Uttar Pradesh

UP has remained the centre of communal violence since the first Hindu-Muslim riots took place in Banaras (UP city) in 1809.³ Since then, UP has witnessed various degrees of communal violence in pre- and post-independence phases. UP Muslims were also at the forefront in the Urdu-Hindi controversy and consequently in the Pakistan Movement during the late 1930s and 1940s. This historical burden still haunts the UP Muslims. The Hindu nationalists often question their

loyalty towards Indian state and hold them responsible for the partition of India in 1947. Even after the independence from the British rule in 1947, communal riots have remained an annual feature in UP.⁴ The cities of Moradabad, Aligarh, Meerut, Allahabad, and Azamgarh are well known for communal riots.

The total population of Muslims in UP was 30,740,158 according to 2001 census and they constituted 18.5% of the total population which was five percentage-points larger than their average population in the whole of India. Due to the flight of educated, well-off, and modern Muslim elite of UP to Pakistan at the time of partition, the socio-economic and political profile of Muslims in UP got very poor. The percentage of Muslims in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) has remained less than half of their percentage in the total population and their presence in the police force constitutes only three per cent of the total police force.⁵ The literacy rate of the Muslim population is 47.8 per cent, which is more than 10 percentage points lower than the overall Muslim literacy rate of 59.1 per cent (2001 census).

The electoral politics in UP can be divided into two phases- the phase of the INC domination from 1952 to 1989 and the non-INC phase of coalition governments from 1989 to 1999. After independence from the British rule, Muslims mostly voted for the INC because they considered the INC as the only secular party, which could save them from Hindu extremists. After the rise of coalition governments from 1967, it was believed that Muslims could swing the election results and they were often considered the largest or the second-largest potential voting bloc in UP due to the belief that Muslims could be mobilised to vote en bloc for one party or a candidate.⁶

Therefore, each political party tried to penetrate this solid vote bank to tilt the balance of power in their favour. Since 1967, Muslims started to have some reservations against the INC and they voted for

Janata Party (opposition alliance) in 1977 elections in hope for a change for the better. But in the 1980 elections of Lok Sabha, the Janata Party lost Muslim voters support as they felt that it did not protect the cause of Urdu and did not take adequate steps to amend the Aligarh Muslim University Act. The increased incidence of Hindu-Muslim riots further alienated the Muslims from Janata Party and the frustrated Muslims went back to the INC and voted for it in the 1980 elections. But in the 1984 Lok Sabha elections, the INC showed indifference towards securing the Muslim votes for the first time and openly criticised them as secessionists like Sikhs. The 1984 elections were described as a watershed in Indian politics. Brass wrote, "The 1984 elections showed that there existed a 'Hindu vote' which can be mobilized for the sake of national unity."⁷

The BJP benefited from this religiosity started by Indira Gandhi and continued by Rajiv. It started to push hard for the construction of the Ram Temple by demolishing the Babri mosque in Ayodhya and thus Ayodhya became one of the most important factors for communal mobilisation by the BJP. The INC was caught unawares and had no clue about what to do. In desperation, they tried to appease Muslims as well as Hindus but failed to satisfy any community. After giving way to Muslim demands in the Shah Bano Case, Rajiv Gandhi tried to appease the Hindu sentiment by allowing the Vishnu Hindu Parishad (VHP) to perform the Shilanyas ceremony⁸ on 9 November 1989 notwithstanding objections from the Muslim organisations.

Later, the INC tried to appease Muslims again by granting Urdu the status of the second official language in UP just before the 1989 elections. But by then, it was quite late. Muslim leaders asked Muslim voters not to vote for the INC and instead vote for Janata party, an opposition alliance having seat adjustments with the BJP as well. The Muslim support to the INC continued to decline as is evident from the number of Muslim Members of Legislative Assembly (MLAs) winning on the INC ticket: 32 in 1980, 30 in 1984, and 11 in 1989.

These were the most difficult times for Muslims as communalism was on the rise and they were gradually losing hope in the INC and looking for new options. Therefore, in the 1991 elections again the Shahi Imam of Jamia Masjid appealed to the Muslims for supporting the Janata Dal. In this election, only three Muslim MPs were elected from UP, out of whom two were from the Janata Dal and one was from the INC. During his first rule as the CM of UP (1989-91), Mulayam Singh Yadav did his best to stop the *kar sevaks*⁹ from demolishing the Babri mosque and earned a lot of scourge from Hindu nationalists for his pro-Muslim stance.

As a result of 1991 state elections, BJP succeeded in forming a government in UP and Kalyan Singh of BJP replaced Mulayam Singh Yadav as the Chief Minister of UP. Kalyan Singh had declared that the temple would be built as promised by the BJP in place of the Babri mosque and everyone saw on 6 December 1992, when Hindu extremist mob demolished the Babri Mosque, a heavy contingent of police present on spot did nothing to stop them.

After 1989, a big change occurred in UP electoral politics and the INC was completely marginalised in the state politics. A.K. Verma described this situation in the following words:

Besides the caste fragmentation, the Congress also suffered the communal fragmentation in its vote bank; the Muslims in UP suddenly found a new saviour in the person of Mulayam Singh Yadav (SP) and lent strong support to him. Thus, we find that the electorate in UP initially fractured on the class lines, later on the caste lines, and further on the communal lines. That greatly harmed the Congress, signalling its very sharp decline, and led to the rise of three very prominent and potential political players in the politics of Uttar Pradesh- the BSP, the BJP and the SP.¹⁰

Thus, the INC lost its traditional support among Muslims and

Muslims shifted their loyalty from the INC to the Samajwadi Party (SP) of Mulayam Singh Yadav. Mulayam Singh had already earned the reputation of Maulana Mulayam for his pro-Muslim stance.¹¹ This image helped the SP to receive Muslim support and Mulayam Singh reached the CM seat thrice with the help of Muslim vote and his strong base in Other Backward Classes (OBCs),¹² especially the Yadav community, in 1989, 1993, and 2003. Mulayam Singh had appointed three Muslim ministers and a good number of state ministers in his 2003 cabinet.

Muslim support for Yadav's party, the SP, is evident from its share of votes among Muslims (see Table.1). Only in 1999 Lok Sabha elections, Muslims voted for the INC in greater number than for the SP, i.e., 43.8 per cent for the INC and 34.5 per cent for the SP. But then in the 2002 Vidhan Sabha elections, Muslims voted 51.2 per cent for the SP. Thus, Muslim support for Mulayam Singh had remained very consistent. This trend continued in 2004 elections where Muslims voted 62 per cent for SP and Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) alliance.

Learning from the SP, Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) also renounced her concept of Bahujan Samaj and accepting the concept of Sarvajan Samaj to open up the party for upper castes and Muslims.¹³ Hence, BSP also started competing for the Muslim vote and its position improved by 2002 Vidhan Sabha elections. Later, when Mulayam Singh had joined hands with Kalyan Singh, the main culprit behind the demolition of the Babri mosque, in the wake of the 2009 Lok Sabha election, Muslims shifted their vote in the favour of BSP and since then BSP became the other major contender for the Muslim votes in UP.¹⁴

Table.1
Muslim Votes in Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha Elections in UP

Party	Lok Sabha 1996	Vidhan Sabha 1996	Lok Sabha 1998	Lok Sabha 1999	Vidhan Sabha 2002
BJP	4.0%	1.9%	6.3%	7.2%	2.4%
SP	54.3%	47.0%	71.0%	34.5%	51.2%
BSP	6.0%	12%	7.3%	7.2%	11%
INC	9.0%	12.5%	7.9%	43.8%	9.4%

Source: Mujibur Rahman, 'Muslim Politics in India and the 15th General Elections', In Ajay K. Mishra (ed.) *Emerging Trends in Indian Politics: The Fifteenth General Election*, (New Delhi: Routledge, 2010).

The important fact to be noted is that the BJP; the exponent of communal discord, gradually started losing its support base in UP in every election after the demolition of Babri mosque at Ayodhya. In 1991, the BJP got 221 Vidhan Sabha seats but its share declined ever since, 177 in 1993, 157 in 1996, and 88 in 2002. This shows that despite Ayodhya being part of UP and UP Muslims carrying a historical burden of the Pakistan Movement, the UP Muslims were able to make their presence felt and were taken seriously of by the political parties like SP of Mulayam Singh and BSP of Mayawati.

The Impact of Communal Violence on Muslim Voting Behaviour in Gujarat

Gujarat had 4,592,854 Muslims according to the 2001 census and they constituted 9.1 per cent of the total population. It means the Muslim population in Gujarat is around 5 percentage points less than the average Muslim population in India. This means that in electoral terms the Muslims in Gujarat are not in a good position to make a meaningful impact. Interestingly, however, in Gujarat, the literacy rate of the Muslim population is quite high at 73.5 per cent and female literacy 63.5 per cent (census 2001). Gujarati Muslims, Bohras and

Khojas, are largely urbanised, skilled community, land-owning, petty shop-owners, and owners of small businesses, and doing blue collar jobs in cities and towns.¹⁵ This was perhaps why they became an easy target of extremists.

In Gujarat elections too, historically the INC dominated till 1989 but gradually the BJP replaced the INC and since 1995, Gujarat is considered a bastion of BJP. In Gujarat, Muslims have mostly voted for the INC as they have no other choice in the two-party system. Overall the BJP had undergone some changes in its policies after coming into power at the centre in the late 1990s, considering the requirements of electoral politics. But in Gujarat not only have they stuck to their Hindutva ideology but have also behaved in an aggressive manner.

Politically, Gujarat has always remained highly conservative or right of the centre. The freedom movement against the British rule was also confined to the typical middle class of higher and intermediate classes and could not penetrate much into lower caste and poor strata. Sardar Patel the main INC leader from Gujarat before partition was not a progressive leader, he always used to target communists as enemies of the freedom movement. Before partition, Ahmedabad was the centre of Muslim League activities and League used to win all Muslim seats in Ahmedabad. Ahmedabad, Nadiad, Godhra, and a few other towns had witnessed Hindu-Muslim riots even before independence. Thus, Ahmedabad and Godhra had a strong communal background. The state was also directly impacted by the partition riots when a large number of Hindu refugees fled to Gujarat from Sindh and settled in Gujarat providing a fertile ground first for Jana Sangh and then the BJP.

At the time of independence, the INC was virtually the only party in the areas of Gujarat (then a part of the Bombay state), the Hindu Mahasabha and the Communist Party of India (CPI) being only the marginal parties. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) was also active in many cities and towns. Soon after the independence, the

Socialist Party came out of the INC but could not get a toehold in the presence of conservative and rightist leadership of Sardar Patel. The split of the INC by Indira Gandhi in 1969 was accompanied by the first major Hindu-Muslim riots in Ahmedabad and in some other towns. According to Girish Patel, many features of the post-Godhra communal holocaust began to emerge in the 1969 riots.¹⁶

This explains that the phenomenal growth of BJP in Gujarat in the late eighties was not abrupt as often misperceived. But the fact is that Jana Sangh (the precursor of BJP before 1980) and the RSS had been making headway in Gujarat politics since the state's birth on 1 May 1960 and played a leading role in the 1969 communal riots, which shook the whole country.¹⁷ Jana Sangh and RSS were instrumental in the movement against Chiman Bhai Patel's ministry in 1974. They forced Indra Gandhi to dissolve the Gujarat Assembly and later on Babubhai J. Patel of the INC (syndicate) with the cooperation of Jana Sangh and other opposition parties formed a weak government in 1975.¹⁸

Muslims in Gujarat had played a silent spectator's role until the INC(I) Chief Minister Madhavsingh Solanki, considering the socio-economic structure of Gujarat, rightly evolved the KHAM, the alliance of Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis, and Muslims (KHAM), consisting of about two-thirds of the Gujarat population.¹⁹ The success of this multi-caste and communal electoral alliance KHAM has been a record in 1985 Gujarat assembly elections. Even BJP has failed to achieve the same level of success in its heydays. This challenged the hitherto enjoyed hegemony of the upper castes in Gujarat politics and Solanki announced reservation for Kshatriya, Harijans (now called Dalits), Adivasis and Muslims and won their overwhelming support. When he tried to increase the reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) from 10 per cent to 27 per cent, the violent agitation was launched by the Hindu extremists, which forced Rajiv Gandhi to secure the resignation of Solanki and install Amarsingh Chaudhry as the CM to

appease the dominant middle-class Hindus in July 1985.²⁰

The 1985 communal riots in Ahmedabad were major riots after 1969, which lasted for one-and-a-half year. The fall of the Solanki Government broke the back of the INC in Gujarat for good. In the late 1980s and 1990s, the BJP succeeded in making inroads in the KHAM vote bank by mobilising the various castes around the issue of Hindutva. KHAM theory was over, and Muslims again found themselves confused in the Hindu caste conflicts. They were losing faith in the INC but not having much space in Chimanbhai's party and unable to join BJP, they were confused. They felt completely isolated and were left with no choice whatsoever.

From here on, Gujarat gradually moved towards the Hindutva ideology of the BJP. Then came Advani's 'Rath Yatra' starting from Somanath in Gujarat in 1989 and passing through large areas of Gujarat leaving behind a long trail of communal tension and violence in many parts of Gujarat. After the overwhelming success of BJP in 1991 Lok Sabha elections from Gujarat, it was confirmed that Gujarat was overtaken by the BJP and it was just a matter of time that BJP would rule Gujarat. After the demolition of Babri mosque on 6 December 1992, Gujarat was also caught in the communal frenzy. It is said that Gujarat had sent the largest contingent of Karsevaks to Ayodhya.²¹ Finally, after the 1995 Vidhan Sabha elections, the BJP came into power in Gujarat with its pure Hindu agenda and its leader Keshubhai Patel became the Chief Minister of Gujarat. BJP won comfortably in 1998 Vidhan Sabha polls and Keshubhai Patel continued as the Chief Minister. All Lok Sabha polls in 1996, 1998, and 1999 were dominated by the BJP in Gujarat.

In 1996 Lok Sabha elections, Muslims were so much confused that they could not make a unanimous or collective strategy regarding who to vote for. In Ahmedabad, the only Muslim candidate of the INC was defeated because of the apathy of the Muslim voters, as the Ahmedabad Muslims did not approve the INC. However, Godhra

Muslims voted in unison for Shantibhai Patel of the INC because he enjoyed their trust.²² Another very interesting fact of this election was the 33.3 per cent voting of Muslims for Hindu nationalist BJP, according to the poll survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), New Delhi.²³

By the year 2002, however, the BJP was slowly losing election after election in Gujarat as communal violence had receded—Panchayat, Zilla Parishad and Municipal—in all elections the INC was winning. Keshubhai, the BJP leader in Gujarat was simply clueless, therefore, the central command in Delhi decided to replace him with the RSS favourite man, Narendra Modi to consolidate the Hindu votes. The burning of S-6 compartment of Sabarmati Express on 27 February 2002 and the death of 58 *kar sevaks* provided Modi with an ideal opportunity to play his game of communal frenzy. The RSS message to the Muslims in Gujarat was, “Muslim minority can live in India only if they can win the goodwill of the Hindu majority.”²⁴ Which meant that after the burning of Coach S-6 of the Sabarmati Express at Godhra, Muslims had lost “the goodwill of the Hindu community” and therefore they must pay the price for it and what followed Godhra is a part of the history now.²⁵

The BJP had openly blamed Muslims for the Godhra event, later on, however, the court gave its verdict that Godhra event was an accident. Human Rights Watch described the post-Godhra carnage as “the greatest human rights crisis in a decade” and an act of “ethnic cleansing” in its second report published in July 2003.²⁶ Before, this in April 2002, Human Rights Watch had released a 75-page first report. The report, based on investigations conducted in Ahmedabad in March 2002, revealed that the violence against Muslims was planned well in advance of the Godhra massacre and with extensive state participation and support. The report had claimed that the State officials of the BJP were directly involved in the attacks.²⁷

Modi dissolved the Vidhan Sabha on 7 July 2002 and sought to advance the poll to take advantage of the communally polarised environment. Court intervened but finally, polls were allowed to be held on 12 December 2002. Modi emerged as the 'master divider and campaigner', launched a series of Gaurav Yatras all across the Gujarat state and talked of *Asmita* of Gujrat (the identity of Gujarat) and pride of Gujarat. He personalised and communalised the elections very successfully and won a two-thirds majority in the Vidhan Sabha. Muslims voted 69 per cent for the INC and 10 per cent for the BJP (CSDS Pre-Poll survey). At some places, Muslims voted for the BJP, due to fear of and gratitude to their Hindu saviours during the violence. This trend continued in 2004 Lok Sabha polls too, as Gujarat is continuously dominated by the Hindutva politics of the BJP.

Muslim Voting Behaviour in Kerala

Kerala has 7,863,842 Muslims (2001 census) and they constitute 24.7 per cent of the total population of Kerala. Kerala has the highest literacy rate among Indian states and literacy in Muslims is also very high at 89.4 per cent and female literacy is 85.5 per cent. As far as communalism in India is concerned, Kerala is unique among the other parts of India, as it has remained a model of stability throughout the troubled decade of the 1990s and despite all the attempts, the BJP has failed to enter as a major force in Kerala politics. Since the early 1980s, Kerala's political scene has been dominated by a bipolar multi-party alliance of the United Democratic Front (UDF) led by the INC and the Left Democratic Alliance (LDF) led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M). They have alternated the power between them leaving no vacuum for the emergence of a third force.

Kerala is generally thought to be free of communal violence, however, occasionally it has also experienced a frenzy and bouts of communal violence. Nonetheless, it is generally brought under control, as the Kerala government usually does not allow things to go out of hand. More importantly, Kerala is the only state in India where

Muslims have their own political party, the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) to represent their interests.

The unique history of Kerala is responsible for these exceptional trends in contemporary Kerala politics. Kerala had a very early tradition of a campaign against untouchability. In 1924, the Satyagraha campaign against untouchability was successfully launched and the left was very strong in Kerala even before the independence in 1947.²⁸ A group of nationalist Muslims also emerged within the INC during the 1930s under the dynamic leadership of Muhammad Abdur Rahman. The leadership of the INC itself eventually passed into the hands of the INC Socialists and the nationalist Muslims who made common cause against the Gandhian group known as the Right Wing.

The 1930s, which saw the rise of Communist radicalism, also saw the rise of Muslim communalism as a force in Malabar politics. The initiative in building up the Muslim League came from the Muslim leaders of North Malabar led by the highly revered K.M. Seethi Sahib.²⁹ It means the roots of the contemporary political culture of Kerala were laid in the pre-independence period and the political system in Kerala continued evolving in the post-independence period until the 1980s when it got a good degree of stability. Gopa Kumar wrote:

In the course of this history, Kerala foreshadowed many political developments in the rest of India: the rise of backward communities to positions of political power, subtle caste-community affiliations with political parties, formation of multi-party coalitions, and the emergence of state as the effective area of political choice. Kerala went through two decades of social upheaval and political instability, the kind that one witnesses in UP and Bihar today, before these patterns stabilized. But once they did, a stable configuration of power and a well-established structure of political competition emerged that explains the unique political trajectory thereafter.³⁰

In Kerala, the Hindus constitute 56.2 per cent, the Muslims 24.7 per cent, and Christians 19 per cent (2001 census) of the state's total population. The Muslims have a powerful presence in the Malabar region, particularly in Malappuram, Calicut, Kannur, and Kasargode. The communal and caste divisions in Kerala are quite different from the other regions of India and contrary to the general impression Kerala has a well-established and intricate pattern of caste-community voting. The traditional four-fold division of society is not applicable to Kerala. Numerous sub-castes have grown around the major castes. Prominent castes among Hindus like the Nairs and Ezhavas do not fit into the traditional caste division.³¹ Ezhavas constitute 22 per cent and Nairs 15 per cent, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes around 9 per cent, but Brahmins only 2 per cent and Kashtriyas are only a microscopic minority here. This is perhaps also one reason behind the failure of the BJP in Kerala, as traditional vote bank of BJP is missing and caste divisions are quite different.³²

Historically, the majority of Muslims and Christians have tended to favour their religious parties. Christians vote for the INC factions led by Christian leaders and Muslim League has exercised effective control over the Muslim vote bank. In Kerala, Muslims have proved their ability to organise themselves politically as one group and by functioning as a balancing political and communal force, the League has registered a spectacular growth. The emergence of coalition politics offered a chance to the League to play its cards successfully and create more political leverage.

Mostly League has been a part of the INC-led coalitions but before 1980 when two coalitions UDF and LDF were not formalised, League did not hesitate in joining the communist-led coalitions for political gains. Becoming a part of CPI(M)-led coalition in 1967 ensured the formation of the Malappuram District and establishment of the University of Calicut. Muslim League got its first jolt in 1975 when one of its sections split to form the All India Muslim League (AIML) but the

Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) remained the most influential. The AIML remained in office in the CPI(M)-led Ministry of 1980. But later, the official policy adopted by the CPI(M) towards the Shariat Laws compelled the AIML to leave the Left Democratic Front and merge into IUML in 1986.

The demolition of the Babri mosque and the rise of communalism and Hindutva had its effect on Kerala politics as well. It came as a first major threat to the bi-polar coalition system. The emergence of the BJP as an electoral force since the 1984 Lok Sabha election, penetrating the traditional vote banks of the INC and the CPI(M), had upset the conventional parameters of bipolar politics. In this case, the 1996 elections were a real test case for the bipolarity. The INC was suffering from internal factionalism between three groups led by K. Karunakaran, Antony, and Karthikeyan. CPI(M) expelled veteran Gowri Amma who formed a new party JSS, which was expected to wean away some traditional Marxist votes.

However, the real threat came to the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) as it was in an alliance with the INC and generally at that time Muslims adopted an anti-INC attitude due to the failure of Narasimha Rao government in stopping the demolition of the Babri mosque. The militant posture of People's Democratic Party (PDP) led by Abdul Nasir Madhani and split of the Indian National League (INL) from IUML caused serious concern in the League and the INC that Muslim vote would be divided. However, just before the elections, the INL reconciled with the IUML.³³ The results of the 1996 elections reconfirmed the bipolar coalition politics of Kerala. In Assembly elections vote share of UDF and LDF was almost equal, but LDF bagged a comfortable majority of 21 seats over the UDF, whereas the two coalitions equally shared 10 seats a piece in the Lok Sabha. The IUML was successful in retaining its premier position among Muslim masses as it won 13 Assembly seats, whereas the INL and PDP failed to get a single seat. Muslims voted 61.2 per cent for the UDF, 32.7 per

cent for the LDF and 6.1 per cent for the others (CSDS poll survey).

In the 2001 Vidhan Sabha elections, UDF staged a strong comeback and won 99 seats as compared to 40 seats won by the LDF and in vote percentage, they gained an almost 6-percentage point difference. The performance of IUML also improved as it bagged 17 seats and 7.59 per cent of the total votes cast. Muslim OBCs voted 64 per cent for the UDF and 33 per cent for the LDF and other Muslims voted 72 per cent for the UDF and 27 per cent for the LDF (CSDS poll survey). The bipolar coalition has successfully survived in Kerala throughout all these years and there seems to be no vacuum for the Hindutva politics of the BJP and RSS in the state of Kerala.

A Comparative Analysis of Muslim Voting Behaviour in UP, Gujarat, and Kerala

When we compare the plight of Muslim masses and their voting behaviour in UP, Gujarat, and Kerala, we find out that where Muslims have got more political options they are better off than the places where they have limited or no option. In most of the cases, more political options lead to a coalition government and in a coalition government a minority can assert itself in a better way because it normally holds the balance and Muslims being the second largest religious community in India can take the advantage of this situation as they do in Kerala and to some extent in UP as well.

Muslims are in the worst condition in Gujarat because they have almost no choice there in the two-party contest of the BJP and the INC. Here no choice also means that the INC takes their vote for granted and does little to appease Muslims except giving some empty slogans. Muslims are in a good position in Kerala where they have their own representative party in Muslim League and they are also welcome in the Leftist parties as well as in the INC factions in Kerala. And they are relatively in a better position in UP as compared to Gujarat because here they can choose among the SP of Mulayam Singh, the BSP of Mayawati, and the INC. It is a general phenomenon that political

parties take care of their voters more if they fear voters can change their loyalties, however, when they know that the voters have no choice, they pay little attention. Just take the example of the US elections; swing states like Ohio, Florida, and Pennsylvania are always given much more attention by the Presidential candidates in the US elections as compared to the states like California, which have fixed loyalties with Democrat candidates.

Filmmaker Rakesh Sharma in one scene of his documentary on Gujarat massacre named *Final Solution* interviewed a small boy of two to three years age, who was a witness to the killings of his family members by the Hindu extremists. In the final scene of the documentary, Rakesh Sharma asked the boy about his ambition in life. The boy replied, "the police officer." He asked the boy why police officer. The boy replied, "I will kill the Hindus by becoming the police officer." This reflects how that small boy observed the role of the police. The role of the police in communal violence had been a decisive factor in the number of deaths and injuries. It is confirmed by reports of the Human Rights Watch and independent research conducted by various journalists and organisations that police if not assisted at least played the role of a silent spectator during the communal violence after the demolition of the Babri mosque and the post-Godhra genocide of Muslims in Gujarat.

The role of the police varies throughout India, depending upon a number of factors, of which the most important is the administrative and political control of the police. Whether the police act against Muslims or do not act against Muslims, when riots occur, depending primarily upon the inclination of their administrative and political superiors, which in turn depends upon which political party or coalition is in power.³⁴ In this regard, the eyewitness account of R.B. Sreekumar who was the Additional Director General of Police (Intelligence) of Gujarat from 9 April 2002, to 18 September 2002 and published a memoir *Gujarat Behind the Curtain* in 2015 is eye-

opening. In this memoir, he has provided a detailed account of the Gujarat police's criminal negligence during the Gujarat pogrom.³⁵

Wherever Hindu nationalists have got political control in their hands, violence against the Muslim community has become widespread because then the police do not perform their duty. If this control were in the hands of a political party or an alliance that is supported by Muslim votes, such a political party or a coalition would surely try to stop the violence against Muslims amidst fear of losing the Muslim vote in the next elections. This shows how the role of the police is directly related to the electoral performance of the Muslim voters and especially to the party or alliance supported by them. One of the most important reasons for the low level of communal violence in Kerala is the effective presence of Muslim vote bank in Kerala and the presence of IUML as a Muslim representative political party. Wilkinson wrote:

High levels of party fractionalization have forced successive governments to order the Kerala police force to prevent attacks on minorities in the state at all costs. The Muslim minority's leaders in the state are well aware that they hold the balance of power between the UDF (Nair-Christian) and LDF (Ezhava) coalitions and are quick to demand action whenever they feel their security is in jeopardy. In 1992, as the Ayodhya mosque agitation was reaching dangerous levels throughout India, the Indian Union Muslim League under Suleiman Sait threatened to bring the INC-led UDF government down unless there was a speedy overhaul of the police and bureaucracy and strong action against those who sought to incite anti-Muslim riots in Kerala.³⁶

In Kerala, police and local officials know very well that if they fail to stop anti-Muslim violence they would be suspended or given punitive transfers. While in Gujarat, police officials were let off with merely written warnings, for allowing hundreds to die. Why this

happens in Gujarat because Muslim vote in Gujarat does not have the same importance as it has in Kerala. BJP was openly anti-Muslim but even the INC took Muslim vote for granted because they knew Muslims had no other option but to vote for the INC.

In *We Have No Orders to Save You*, the Human Rights Watch reported in 2002 that the Gujarat state administration was engaged in a massive cover-up of the state’s role in the massacres and that of the Sangh Parivar.³⁷ Though eyewitnesses filed numerous police First Information Reports (FIRs) that named local VHP, BJP, and Bajrang Dal leaders as instigators or participants in the attacks, few if any of these leaders were arrested. Reportedly, under instructions from the state government, the police faced continuous pressure not to arrest them or to reduce the severity of the charges filed.³⁸ It is really staggering to see the official figures of the cases summarily closed without proper investigation by the Gujarat police. According to a report published in the *Frontline*, 2,0120 cases were summarily closed by the Gujarat police without proper investigation (see Table 2 below).³⁹

Table 2
The Progress of Cases Registered in Connection
with post-Godhra Violence

City/District	Cases registered	Cases charge-sheeted	Closed Summary field	Pending Investigation
Ahmedabad City	959	517	410	32
Ahmedabad Rural	88	71	16	1
Vadodara City	617	390	203	24
Vadodara Rural	242	77	155	10
Anand	199	131	67	1
Kheda	193	113	38	42
Panchmahal	179	111	67	1
Bhavnagar	310	40	270	0

Sabarkantha	467	178	288	0
Banaskantha	61	16	44	1
Mehsana	172	78	94	0
DAHOD	87	24	60	3
Others	678	268	407	3
Total	4,62	2,014	2,120	118

Source: Dionne Bunsha, "Cases of complicity," *Frontline*, Volume 21 - Issue 18, August 28 - September 10, 2004.

In UP, the situation was a bit different. Some governments in UP were able to act effectively when they chose to do so. For example, during the 'Rath Yatra' of the BJP supremo Lal Krishan Advani in October 1990, Mulayam Singh Yadav did not allow *kar sevaks* to demolish the Babri mosque because he wanted to get the Muslim votes. However, when the government changed in UP as a result of 1991 elections, and Kalyan Singh of BJP came into power, he not only allowed the *kar sevaks* to demolish the Babri mosque but also did nothing to stop the communal violence after the demolition.

However, later the situation improved a bit in UP and Paul Brass in his book *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India* published in 2003 reported a gradual reduction of Hindu-Muslim violence in Uttar Pradesh after the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992 and he also described that the 2002 Assembly election results reflected a decline both in riotous activity and electoral communalisation and polarisation.⁴⁰

Brass claims, that the decrease in communal riots in UP resulted in a decrease in the turnout as well. Between 1952 and 1974, the overall trend in UP turnout was upward (see table.3). The first declining slope in the turnout rates occurred in the period between 1974 and 1985. Then, from 1985 to 1993 during the period of highly charged communal atmosphere turnout went up and then in 1996, it started to decline again. In UP, we can observe that during riots people were more charged up so they came in greater numbers to vote but when everything settled down and during the periods of communal

solidarity the people lost enthusiasm and turnout started to decline again.

Table 3
Voters Turnout in UP Assembly Elections from 1952-1996

Turn out	Year
37.88	11952
44.92	11957
48.58	11962
50.96	11967
52.22	11969
55.17	11974
44.87	11977
44	11980
45.22	11985
48.49	11989
47.2	11991
55.83	11993
54.9	11996

Source: Paul R. Brass, *The Production of Hindu-Muslim Violence in Contemporary India*, (London: University of Washington Press, 2003).

“Gujarat has been a low turnout state, and it continued to be so in the decade of 1990s. The Lok Sabha election of 1996 witnessed a mere 35.9% turn out in the state, the lowest ever in the state. Even the highest turn out elections by Gujarat standards fall much below the national average.”⁴¹ But in Gujarat as well the turnout had increased in 2002 elections which were held some nine months after the Godhra incident, from 59.3 per cent in 1998 to 61.52 per cent in 2002 Assembly elections.⁴² However, in Kerala, the riots in other parts of India had little effect on the turnout, which has always remained above 70 per cent in Kerala. This also shows how effectively the Kerala government had dealt with the communal issue.

Conclusion

This study shows that communal violence against a minority is directly related to how sympathetic the political and administrative state machinery is to minority interests and in a democratic polity, it depends on how important the votes of the minority are for the government in power. The role of the police is a determining factor during communal riots. If Hindu nationalists control the state machinery, violence against Muslims is rampant and unstoppable and where Muslim sympathisers are in control they have been able to control the riots against Muslims to a certain degree. This very much looks like the International Relations theory of Balance of Power. Where the balance of power is tilted against Muslims they are made to suffer, with no support system whatsoever and where they hold the balance they are in a better position to secure their interests and are less vulnerable to the extremist forces. The Kerala example proves that if the democratic process and secular forces are strong and the administrative and political machinery is willing to protect the minorities, even in worst circumstances like after the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992 when the whole of India was under communal frenzy, the situation can be brought under control.

This study also shows that Muslims are better off in Kerala largely because of having their own political party the shape of the IUML. In other words, this means disbanding of the All India Muslim League after independence was a mistake. Had Muslims been represented by one single party all over India, surely they would have been in a far better position to negotiate their terms and conditions of cooperation with the parties in power in states and in the centre.

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- ⁸ Vishwa Hindu Parishad had announced that they would conduct the Shilanyas or the foundation-laying ceremony for a Ram Mandir at Ayodhya on 10 November 1989. VHP had collected 'shilas' or bricks from kilns from thousands of villages in India and had amassed them in Ayodhya. Words 'Sri Ram' were inscribed on those bricks and each brick was brought in a saffron cloth.
- ⁹ Interestingly, the phrase *kar sevak* is not from Hindu religious tradition rather it comes historically from the Sikh tradition. In Sikh tradition, the word 'kar' means selfless service for others and a volunteer performing kar seva is called *kar sevak*. But this term became more famous for the role of Hindu extremist *kar sevaks* in the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992.
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⁴² Ibid, 123.