

**By Sidharth Mishra**



There is no way that the BJP could have afforded to lose the assembly polls in Gujarat. Nobody understood this better than Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Despite the party ruling the roost in the state for the past three decades, the opposition Congress has maintained a fair share of votes all the while. Therefore when he bequeathed the office of the chief minister for job at South Block in the national Capital, Prime Minister Narendra Modi appointed his most trusted lieutenant as head of the party.

Given his training as Pracharak (fulltime volunteer) with the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) and exposure as organizing secretary of the party at the different levels, Modi understood well that his “transformational agenda” would invite sharp reactions and also a level of disenchantment among the voters, and would cause a mid-term crisis for his government.

This midterm crisis would have got further accentuated if its effects not arrested in Gujarat and the Congress not stopped in its tracks. Thus the unprecedented mobilization of party machinery and resources by Amit Shah; best reflected in Yogi Adityanath, the chief of minister of nation’s most populous state spending near fortnight campaigning in the western state.

The Maharaji’s presence, as the Yogi is referred to by his followers, went to consolidate the “Hindu Vote”, a siege to which the Congress attempted to lay through its president Rahul Gandhi’s “Sanskritized avatar”.

The script of poll campaign in Gujarat undoubtedly was -- who is a bigger or a better Hindu, with the opinion of Muslims of the state having been made almost irrelevant. Why this happened? The politics of Gujarat in the past three decades has been closely linked to the Ramjanambhoomi Movement. Following the post-Godhra riots of 2002, the politics of Hinduvta peaked in the past three elections.

The attempts of the Congress to hold Narendra Modi responsible for the riots affected the party’s fortunes adversely in previous polls. The majority community saw these attempts of the Congress as an affront on their interests. Thus the loss of support for the party which reached a crescendo in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls with the Congress losing on all the 26 seats in the state.

## After UP local polls, Gujarat too shows that BJP losing on rural votes

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But three years down the line, the BJP, which is still looked to win the state polls, took extra-ordinary steps to salvage a victory. This was because, it realised that its glorious victory marches in the past polls have largely been on the account of consolidation of Hindu votes and not any appreciation for a development model.

The BJP's worry was that a decade and half after the post-Godhra riots, the Hindu 'hatred' for the minority community had ebbed. The Muslims on their part too tried a repositioning and gave up aggressive posturing. Such a situation threw an opportunity for the rivals of BJP to get a slice of the Hindu vote, a chance which the Congress did not want to let go, though it did not succeed at it much.

Now that the results are out, its breakup presents a peculiar picture. With BJP making a bumper harvest on the urban seats and getting trounced by miles in the rural areas, somewhere, reinforced the theory of communal divide being an urban phenomenon.

It somewhere also replicated the results of the local body polls recently held in Uttar Pradesh. In the municipal polls in Uttar Pradesh, BJP had won 14 out 16 municipal corporation mayor seats. However out of all 198 municipal council chairman seats, the BJP could win just 70 seats. Similarly, at the town committee chairman level, the BJP could win just 100 out of all 438 seats.

In Gujarat assembly polls it won 48 of the 58 urban seats whereas it could win just 51 of the 124 rural seats. This is a definite replication of the Uttar Pradesh voting trends. While ready to believe the Prime Minister that instead of voting for caste-driven campaign of Congress, people opted for the Vikas (development) platform of the BJP, the results could also reflect that the message of Vikas was still to move to the hinterland.

The agrarian crisis in the country, which the BJP government at the Centre inherited from its predecessor Manmohan Singh government, is refusing to ebb. The shrinking job market and uninspiring returns from agriculture is something which the government so far has failed to effectively grapple with.

The BJP to win the 2019 national polls, they way it won it in 2014, must ensure against the urban and re-urban divide getting more pronounced. The after effects of demonetization are still

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bothering revival of several sectors especially real estate. It should not be forgotten that builders are the biggest job givers especially for the labour and mid-level contractors. Secondly slump in real estate has affected the middle-class too, whose investments are stuck in the incomplete housing projects.

If the poll machinery of a cadre-based party were the sole factor for it winning or losing the poll, the Left parties would not have been ousted from governments across the globe and cooling heels in the history texts. Polls are won on popular mandate, and BJP for sure losing grip on it.

(The writer is Editor & CEO, Capitalkhabar.in)