

Another Gujarat in the Making?

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The worst fears of liberal-democratic minded people of Karnataka has come true sooner than expected and of course at a faster pace. The first 100 days of BJP's rule in Karnataka, supposed to be on Gujarat Model, if one goes by the electoral promises of the BJP leaders, has been an exemplary example of Narendra Modi's model of development. But the BJP leader's assurance to the masses of ushering in Modi Model has come true not in the sense of socio-economic development but in communalizing the society and establishing a fascist state through democratic institutions.

Assurances and Populist schemes are not scarce in Yediyurappa's rule. Free Electricity to the farmers, 2 Rupee a kilo rice, free education to children upto 10th class, Loans at 4% interest to farmers, waiver of loans in Co-operative and Commercial banks so on and so forth. But 100 days is not enough to fulfil these promises says the Chief Minister. In his own words all electoral promises have been fulfilled, through allocation of funds on an unprecedented scale. The state is on a role. In another 5 years the state would be on the top, ahead of Gujarat, despite the fact that the state stands numero uno in terms of corruption.

But the ground realities speak otherwise. With 72.9% of the farmers coming under Small and Marginal category and the state being second biggest drought prone areas, the farmers are reeling under the debt trap. Farmers' suicides have continued unabated, shortage of fertilizers has added fuel to fire as farmers are still on the streets, facing the bullets and lathis of the state police. The repressive nature of the BJP government was evident within weeks of its assuming power, with two farmers falling to the police bullets at Haveri, represented by Karunakara Reddy, the kingpin of the state government. The free electricity to farmers having upto 10HP pumpset is farcical to say the least, as the government wants to fix meters to the pumpsets and expects the farmers to clear all arrears of electricity bills to avail of the benefit. While involving political blame game, the government has been callous enough to neglect the shortage of fertilizers and seeds across the state.

The government has failed to set right the anomalies in issue of below poverty line, (BPL) cards, as many eligible families have been deprived of the card due to political intervention and malpractice. The revised BPL list is yet to be released and PDS system has become a mirage for the poor and downtrodden. The much acclaimed NREGA scheme, seeking to provide 100 days job in a year in the rural side, is confined more to the office files as rampant corruption and stranglehold of contractors' lobby is eating away the allocated funds. The government is silent on farmers' suicides, still continuing in the state as private money lending is thriving at large. The infrastructure development, euphemism for acquisition of fertile agricultural lands of real estate, is going on a large scale as more than a quarter of BJP MLAs are allegedly real estate giants.

The hold of Mining Lobby on the government is quite evident considering the fact they could purchase 7 MLAs from the opposition parties. Operation Kamala (*Lotus*) an official programme of the BJP to encourage defection has been a huge success as the government is safe with a majority of its own. In fact

the BJP government has evolved a new scheme for virtual purchase of MLAs and it is official. While the government is safe and secure, the people at large are not. While drought and un-employment is forcing the rural folk to migrate to the urban centres, urban populace is reeling under the communal onslaught of the Sangh parivar, a rejuvenated force under BJP rule.

Close on the heels of a fascist attack on Christian missionaries in Orissa, the Karnataka chapter of Sangh parivar has intensified its fascist attacks on Minorities, not Muslims but Christian missionaries and institutions. Making Karnataka another Gujarat, a long time promise made by BJP MP Ananthkumar, has been given a go-ahead signal in the state as scores of Christian institutions are being attacked over the past two months.

A bundh organized by Catholic Christian institutions in the state against killing of a nun in Kandhamal, Orissa was supposed to be the trigger point for the RSS and Bajrang Dal to unleash a reign of terror against the minorities. Churches are attacked and burnt in Mangalore, Udupi, Ujjire, Kundapur, Kolar, Chickaballapur, Davangere, Bangalore, Shimoga, Harapanalli, Puttur, Surathkal and so many other towns. Though the Sangh Parivar and in tune with it the CM, attributes these attacks to the forcible conversions of Hindus by Christian missionaries like *New Life* in Mangalore, the pogrom seems to be preplanned.

The electoral preparations of the BJP started off when they formed a coalition government with JDS two years back and it was the Sangh Parivar which spearheaded the campaign in the rural side with its anti-minority stance well intact. During the course of JDS-BJP coalition government Coastal Karnataka comprising Udupi, Mangalore, Karwar, Bhatkal and Surathkal were the hot bed of communal politics of Sangh. With the controversial Bababudengiri issue kept alive in Chickamagalur, in the Western Ghats, the communal politics of BJP took a firm footing in this region over the past four years.

Sangh Parivar's attack on Mr Seetharam, editor of *Karavali Ale*, a local tabloid is a case to remember as it helped the communal forces to polarize the masses on communal lines in the peace and harmony loving coastal area. Coastal Karnataka is known for its communal harmony from time immemorial and has a large section of minorities both Muslims and Christians. The 2008 assembly elections saw BJP failing to achieve much success in this belt as Congress could snatch its vote share. While in 2004 elections BJP secured 17 seats with 43.49% vote share, in 2008 it could secure only 12 seats with 41.03% vote share. And this seems to be the prime factor behind the communal attacks being carried out by the Sangh Parivar on Christian missionaries who are in large number in that region.

The attack on Christians in Orissa and a bundh observed by Catholic institutions in Karnataka over the issue was the trigger for unleashing violence against the community. It all started with 12 prayer halls being attacked by Bajrang Dal activists in Dakshina Kannada, Udupi and Chickamagalur districts on 7th September 2008. 18 persons including 10 policemen were injured in the violence, when there were large scale protests by the Christian community. There were some stabbing incidents two days later injuring 3 people. More churches were under attack three days later as Bajrang Dal activist groups attacked churches in Belthangady, Ujjire, Kolar and Chickamagalur towns. The pulpit in the church was doused and bible burnt with kerosene. St Mary's

statue in Kolar town was also desecrated on the same day. A prayer hall in Chickaballapur town near Bangalore was attacked on Monday and some evangelist groups were attacked in Davangere, Harapanahalli. A South Canara bundh was organized by Sri Ram Sene an off shoot of Bajrang Dal, which added fuel to fire as more violent attacks against Christian prayer halls continued after the bundh and it spread to new areas like Kudremukh and surrounding towns of Chickamagalur.

The attacks on churches across the state are attributed by the Sangh parivar to forcible conversions by Christian evangelists, especially *New Life*, an evangelist group, in Mangalore. A pamphlet supposed to have been issued by the missionary and distributed is supposed to contain derogatory remarks about Hindu gods and goddesses. But the printing press mentioned in the pamphlet doesn't exist as on date, as it was closed 10 years ago. The owner of the same press is running a weaving business. The book seems to be 10-year-old and the owner of the erstwhile press, though himself a Christian convert, does not remember the contents of the book.

There is no official evidence to prove that conversions are taking place on a large scale, as people in and around the troubled areas confess that these missionaries are not forcing anyone for conversion. Even if the contents of the literature distributed by the *New Life* do hurt the sentiments of the Hindus, the government should have taken proper legal action by confiscating the books. But the Chief Minister puts the entire onus on the Missionaries by stating that the violence is only a "backlash" from Hindu organizations against forced conversions by Christian missionaries. But on the same day Chairman of the NCM stated that the commission has not received any reports of forcible conversions.

With an eye on the coming Lok Sabha elections the BJP government is trying for a political polarization along communal lines as it aims to recover the lost ground in the Coastal belt and Kolar region.

The BJP government in Karnataka has been repressive at its best be it farmers or students or progressive forces. Identifying Terrorism and Naxalism as major problems confronting the state, the Yediyurappa government is conspicuously silent on the grooming fascism of the Sangh Parivar. If at all the BJP government boasts of any achievement in its first 100 days, it is and it should be of making Karnataka another Gujarat. □