

# Erosion of Democratic Norms

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The recently held Gujarat elections, will remain etched in the memory of the nation for wrong reasons. Gujarat witnessed the burning of Sabarmati express at Godhra in Feb 2002. The carnage which followed this train accident claimed the lives of thousands of innocents and simultaneously polarised Gujarat along religious lines. The process of ghettoisation of Muslims and the fear of minorities constructed in the minds of majority community are staring in the face. At the same time the threads of democratic nationalism, national integration are breaking rapidly. While various citizens' inquiry reports did point out the pre-planned nature of the pogrom and the role of RSS combine led by Modi in the carnage, one could all see the same for oneself, thanks to the Tehelka. The consequent polarisation led to the victory of the leader of the carnage back to power in the elections which took place a bit later. In the elections of 2002, the main opposition party, Congress did not gather strength to take on Modi with full vigour. One of the reasons was that Modi deflected the criticism directed against him and against RSS combine as the insult to 5 crore Gujartis, and his assertion was well received in a section of society.

The Tehelka sting showed some of the perpetrators boasting about their crimes in front of the camera, and this made most of the people realise once again the gravity of the crime. Now most of the society got a direct feel of what had happened, who did it. Society also registered that the reports of citizens groups were on the dot in pinpointing the malaise of Gujarat society. It was in this background that Sonia Gandhi in her election campaign called the Modi led BJP as the merchants of death. Modi realised that the truth is being said after all, and tried to raise the communal and criminal sentiments by justifying the extra-judicial killing of Soharabuddin, who was killed in a fake encounter by the police.

The ploy was that since a section of society has been communalised enough, the illegal act of killing someone will get him sympathy votes. He took 'credit' for this 'bravery' of killing of Soharabuddin and his wife. Human rights workers raised the issue of Modi communalising and criminalising the people's mindset. But he presented the criticism against him as the insult of people of Gujarat, of Gujarat itself!

Usual damage control exercises unrolled, 'he has been quoted out of context, he does not justify the extra judicial killings etc'. But the damage was done and election commission took a serious note of it.

The larger issue of democratic norms, morality and polity are put at the backburner, with the leaders doing their electoral arithmetic of what will help them more in getting the power. Now the issue can be discussed at the level of legalities and also at the level of electoral arithmetic. All these do have their importance but one also needs to be concerned about the deeper and broader issues related to the constitution, as to what is happening to the values of democracy enshrined in the constitution?

In Gujarat the legal norms have been put aside in matters of rehabilitation and in the post-violence justice. In 'regular' life patterns, now a section of Muslims are willing to bend on their knees to survive, willing to 'forgive' unilaterally, while nobody is caring to ask for their forgiveness. The 'charisma' of Modi is on the rise. He was keeping the communal card, under wraps till the word Merchants of death was hurled upon him. And then he unraveled his communal face with full force just before the polling. All this sounds so unusual but people are becoming used to the prevalence of these things. Does it ring familiar to something which happened in history? While there are lot of differences from what happened in Germany some similarities are too glaring.

The targeting of minorities, the total abolition of democratic space, the social common sense directed against the minorities and secularists, and consensus built around the fascist state are very similar. 'Kill them, kill them' is what Modi could easily extract from a section of crowd for Soharabuddin. What distinguishes Gujarat from the Germany's state of affairs in 30s and 40s of last century is that here the process is taking place at a slower pace and the same process is on with different intensities in different states of the country. So can one use the term Chronic Fascism in Gujarat in contrast to acute fascism of Germany? Whole of Germany was totally gripped by this politics, while in India Gujarat is worst but all the same in other states also this fascism is strangulating democratic space, though with different degrees of intensity. The biggest similarity is the 'successes' of a fascist party, which in Germany took the pretext of race and here it is wearing the garb of religion. Interestingly earlier and even now the fascist parties are using the democratic space to come to power, to precisely abolish the same in due course.

During last two and a half decades the rise of right wing politics has taken place on the pretext of Hinduism, while it has nothing to do with the humane streams of Hinduism. It claims to be for Hindus, while majority of Hindus have become victim of this intimidating politics. That the concept of Hindu nation is for Hindus, is just a pretext. It essentially aims to abolish the values of liberty, equality and fraternity and strengthens the hold of a particular section of Hindus, the elite, males, on the whole society. The trick is the agenda of a small dominant section of society has been propagated as being for all Hindus.

Coming to Gujarat, one can clearly make out that there is a slow but dangerous march towards a fascist state. The classical fascism which one witnessed in Germany and Italy in the early decades of last century was marked by the targeting of minorities, of social rights groups/parties and at the same time doing away with all democratic norms. It created a terrorising atmosphere, where the handful ruled the roost with the charisma of leader like Hitler, who swayed the people, worked and he got the antidemocratic things accepted by people in the initial part of the rule, till Germany itself collapsed under the weight of the fascist boots. Such politics does discover and project a single charismatic leader, in Germany it was Hitler, in Gujarat it is Modi. Incidentally RSS nationalism also took a lot of inspiration from Hitler's Nationalism, "German national pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of Semitic races-The Jews. National pride at its highest has been manifested here. Germany has also

shown how neigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the root, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by."

The politics of RSS combine has cleverly adopted itself to the Indian situation and has gone on to create a fear of the miniscule minority. It is quite similar to Hitler creating a phobia against Jews, holding them responsible for the plight of Germany, and using that as the centre of his policies terrorising the whole nation into submission to the agenda of fascism, abolition of the concept of rights, something which is the life and breath of democracy, something which is a shield for the average people to survive. While a large section of Gujarat, Minorities, dalits, adivasis and women are suffering the middle and affluent classes are able to get their way through the agenda of vibrant Gujarat!

The analogy does not end here. The terrorising atmosphere created in Gujarat does remind people of the status of minorities. Now the large sections of minorities feel that they have been relegated to the second class citizenship status. Their insecurity is the index of Indian democratic ethos. □□□