From Circumstantial Bias to Communalism: Hindu-Muslim Violence and the Decline of Congress in Gujarat (I)

As defined in the previous chapter, there are three stages\(^1\) in the growth of communal party society in a state: the stage of communal nationalism is the most extreme. The present chapter analyzes the first stage i.e. the era of circumstantial bias and the beginning of second stage i.e. communalism. It deals with the formal and informal power structures of Gujarat society and attempts to analyze how and why different social, political and economic reasons transformed circumstantial bias and opened the space for communalism and communal nationalism in Gujarat.

Much has been written about the causes of the growth of the Sangh Parivar especially the BJP in Gujarat. The different studies include analyses of caste as the determining component, the political use of religion by the Sangh Parivar, the issue of economic instability and weakness in Congress party, a stress on civil society to locate the reasons for the rise of the BJP in Gujarat and the resulting Hindu-Muslim violence.\(^2\) The present study is different from the existing work on these areas. The study analyzes the political

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\(^1\) First stage is era of circumstantial bias, second is the era of communalism and third is the era of communal nationalism.

functions of BJP and the civic functions of its sister organizations, which have caused its growth in Gujarat. The next chapter elaborates the different formal and informal functions of BJP and other Sangh organizations to communalize Gujarat and to maintain the ideology of communalism.

The study is divided into two chapters. This chapter deals with the period between 1965-1985 and the next chapter analyzes the period between 1986-2002. This chapter discusses the political, social and economic condition of Gujarat from 1965-1985. I argue that the period between 1965-1985 witnessed Hindu-Muslim violence due to the existence of circumstantial bias and of slow spread of communalism among a section of Hindus (mainly upper caste and dominant castes). This chapter studies the different elections in Gujarat, the social, political and economic conditions, caste alliances, Hindu-Muslim violence, the electoral strategy of the Congress and the role of Jana Sangh (predecessor of the BJP) and other Hindu communal organizations to become an influential force in Gujarat’s political and social life. The present chapter takes Ahmedabad as a case study and focuses mainly on the political and civic functions of Congress, the different causes of its downfall and the nature of Hindu-Muslim violence during its regime. It is divided into three parts; part one presents an electoral analysis of this period, part two discusses the political environment and the strategy of Congress to win elections and maintain its power and part three analyzes different acts of violence between Hindus and Muslims during this period. The chapter is a modest attempt to identify and analyze the broad configurations of formal and informal power structures of Gujarat society during the regime of Congress and correlate them with the slow but steady
decline of the Congress and the slow spread of communalism among a section of Hindus.

**Social structure of Gujarat**

Gujarat’s social structure is dominated by the caste system. The political and social structure of Gujarat is defined by castes. The Congress and later BJP mobilized different castes to achieve power. There is a small population of Brahmins, Bania, Rajputs, SCs and STs, the Patidars and Kshatriyas. Any political party which wishes to acquire power in Gujarat has to mobilize these caste groups under their umbrella. The chapter studies the programs and techniques of Congress during 1965-1985 to mobilize these castes and the efforts of the Sangh Parivar to mobilize them on the basis of communal ideology. Among these castes, the Patidars and Kshatriyas are most articulate and important in Gujarat. They do not follow strict endogamous rules but represent broad groups that include conglomerations of various small castes or sub-castes.
The following table shows the percentage of different caste groups in Gujarat.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste Distribution in Gujarat:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Castes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bania</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajput</td>
<td>4.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other High</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>13.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Middle Castes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patidar/Kanbi</td>
<td>12.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Middle</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lower Castes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koli</td>
<td>24.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artisan Castes</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Backward</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scheduled Castes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Castes</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Tribes</td>
<td>17.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>24.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Hindus:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Non-Hindus</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>100.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** (The table is based on the 1931 census; see Ghanshyam Shah, *Caste Association and Political Process in Gujarat: A Study of Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1975), p.9.

**Brahmins and Banias**

These two are among the most important upper castes in Gujarat. They are mainly concentrated in the cities. Some of the first generation nationalist leaders in the region and the state’s earlier chief ministers, like Morarji
Desai (Brahmin), Jivraj Mehta (Bania), Balwant Rai Mehta (Bania), Hitendra Desai (Brahmin) belonged to these upper caste groups.³

**Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes**

They constitute more than 20 percent of the state’s population (See table-2). The Tribal groups are concentrated in the eastern belt of the state and their living standard is miserable.⁴

But the opposite is the case with the scheduled castes in Gujarat who are more advanced than their counterparts in the rest of the Indian states as they are more aware about their rights and more educationally and economically forward. Before independence the efforts and works of the former Maharaja of Baroda and of Mahatma Gandhi brought an awareness of their marginal position among the SCs and they moved towards acquiring education. But a large part of SCs in Gujarat remain backward and poor and they have been the victims of caste bias and riots.


The Patidars, Kshtriyas and other groups

The Patidars:

The Patidar community has been the most dominating and vigorous caste in rural Gujarat. Roughly, they form one fifth of the total population of Gujarat. Besides being traditional farmers, they have been educationally advanced and politically enlightened. Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel, a prominent leader of freedom struggle, utilized the strength of this community in building up the freedom movement in Gujarat. The Patidars of Kaira and Bardoli are known for their involvement with the freedom movement.

The Patidar community of Gujarat is powerful and exercises a strong influence on state politics. In the past, the Patidar community suffered from regional divisions. The Patidars of Gujarat areas were largely land owners, but those of Saurashtra were largely tenant farmers.

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Kshatriyas

Kshatriyas are the next most important community in Gujarat after the Patidars. Their number is higher than those of Patidars but they are a less articulate community when compared to Patidars. The Kshatriyas generally account for two fifth of the overall population of Gujarat. They are mostly rural and deprived since they were tenants of the Patidars in Gujarat region. But this situation is reversed in Saurashtra, in Saurashtra the Kshatriyas are land owners and generally have the tenants from Patidar community. Therefore the Kshatriyas are divided by conflicting economic interest and caste rivalry. The land to the tiller programme erased the class of tenants since it could give land ownership rights to tenants.

Although almost all the castes of Hindu caste system are found in Gujarat, the Patidars and Kshatriyas count most in Gujarat politics. While Patidars represented the leadership of Gujarat politics during 1960s and 1970s, it was Kshatriyas who dominated state politics during late 1970s and 1980s.

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8 The table above does not define the number of Kshatriyas in Gujarat. Kshatriyas are known as backward castes or middle castes in Gujarat. Their number is higher than those of Patidars but they were a less articulated and less aware community. During early years of Gujarat Politics, it was Patidars who had a very powerful position but later years (more particularly the period of 1970s) witnessed the rise of Kshatriyas in Gujarat politics).


Muslims

Muslims constitute about 9% of the population. Like the Hindus, the Muslims are also divided into different groups, for example, Sayads, Shaikhs, Pathans, Mughals, Memans, Bohras and Khoyas. Among them the Boharas, Khojas and Memons are well off. They are big landowners, small industry entrepreneurs and traders. But the majority of the Muslims is poor and regarded as “backward”. They are agricultural laborers, causal laborers and industrial workers.

Part I

Congress and the different elections in Gujarat: 1965-1985

This section provides an electoral analysis of Gujarat. It also deals with the Congress period (1965-1974) and the period of its slow decay (1974-1985). It is the period when Congress had a powerful influence over the politico-civic domain of the masses. This is divided into two sections; section one presents an electoral analysis of Gujarat politics and section two provides the formal and informal power structure of Gujarat politics which influenced these elections.

Section One

The present state of Gujarat came into existence in 1960 as a result of the bifurcation of Bombay state into Maharashtra for Marathi speaking people and Gujarat for Gujarati speaking people. There were some prominent parties in Gujarat during the 1960s and 1970s like Congress, Swatantra

\[11\] See, Footnote number 59 of the Chapter one of thesis. p. 35.
Party\textsuperscript{12}, Praja Socialist Party (PSP), Janta Parishad and Jana Sangh. Although Congress ruled the state during 1962 and 1967 election, the significant number of seats won by Swatantra Party indicated that there was ample scope for right wing politics in Gujarat (see table 2).

**Congress and Gujarat Elections: 1965-1975**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1962 (Seats Contested, Won &amp; Percentage)</th>
<th>1967 (Seats Contested, Won &amp; Percentage)</th>
<th>1972 (Seats Contested, Won &amp; Percentage)</th>
<th>1975 (Seats Contested Won &amp; Percentage)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress (154-113)(50.84%)</td>
<td>Congress (168-93)(45.96%)</td>
<td>Congress (168-140)(50.93)</td>
<td>Congress (181-75)(40.70%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swatantra (105-26)(24.44%)</td>
<td>Swatantra (147-66)(38.19%)</td>
<td>NCO(Indian National Congress;[Organisation]) (138-16)(23.49%)</td>
<td>NCO (101-56)(23.60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jana Sangh (26-0)(1.43%)</td>
<td>Jana Sangh (16-1)(1.88%)</td>
<td>Jana Sangh (100-3)(9.22%)</td>
<td>Jana Sangh (40-18)(8.82%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


This period of Gujarat politics can be divided into four phases. Phase One is 1962-1967, Phase Two 1967-1969, Phase Three 1969-1970 and Phase Four 1970-1975. During this entire period, Congress had consistently lost its

\textsuperscript{12} Swatantra Party was known to be a rightist party, consisting the dominant castes, landlords etc.
position in elections from 1962 (except in the 1972 elections). In the 1962 elections, Congress won 50.8% of votes and 113 out of 154 seats and Bhartiya Jan Sangh (BJS) acquired only 1.4% of votes and got no seat. The BJS forfeited deposits in 23 out of the 26 seats it contested. It signified how difficult the political situation was for BJS to make an impact in the electoral politics of Gujarat. Congress again won the 1967 election but lost 20 seats and got just 4.8% votes. It got only 45.96% votes in 1967 as compared to 50.84% in 1962. This period witnessed the steady emergence of the Swatantra Party with 26 seats and 24.44% of votes. Swatantra Party was an organization of feudal, ex-princely elements, rich farmers, big and small industrialists and bureaucrats. Thus, during this period, the Swatantra Party posed a major electoral threat to INC and successfully made inroads into the Kshatriya votes. It managed to secure 66 seats and 38.19% of votes and emerged as the main opposition party. The BJS contested elections in 16 constituencies and for the first time opened its account by winning one seat; it also registered an increase in the overall share of votes i.e. 1.9% in 1967 as compared to 1.4% in 1962. The significant presence of the Swatantra Party in Gujarat indicated that there was sufficient space for right wing political organizations and this trend also indicated that the Gujarat politics was moving towards bi-polarity. It is also to be noted that the BJS was witnessing a gradual growth during 1967-1975. After the 1967 election, it began to contest the municipalities and municipal corporation elections in Gujarat. The Congress was ruling the state but sometimes with thin and insecure majority.  

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and riot free character, (upto 1969) which soon deteriorated and the period of the 70’s witnessed uncertainty, challenges, crises and riots.

Congress in 1969 suffered from bifurcation into Congress (O) and Congress (R). After the split, a tiny group of five MLAs joined Congress (R) with Kantilal Ghia as its leader. Congress (O) became the ruling party with Hitendra Desai as Chief Minister.

In the 1972 general elections the Congress (R), led by Indira Gandhi won the majority. This was primarily because of the left oriented populist policy of Indira Gandhi. Slogans like Garibi Hatao (Remove Poverty) helped Gujarat Congress (R) to capture power and Gujarat re-entered the phase of ‘one party dominance.’ The BJS also improved its performance. It won only three seats out of a hundred seats that it contested and forfeited its deposits in 68 seats. But it increased its vote share to 9.3% as compared to 1.9% in 1967. Its support base expanded mainly among the urban middle classes, who wanted a change and clean, committed, corruption free and principled politics against the corrupt and unprincipled politics of Congress. On the other hand, Congress (O) contested 138 seats and won only 13 seats with 23.49% of the vote share. Swatantra Party after the elections of 1967 witnessed a decline and was replaced by Congress (O) and Jan Sangh.

later years saw an increasing domination by BJP and a complete decline of Congress (O) and Swatantra party.

The Congress (O) and Jan Sangh both were the disadvantaged political parties, because they failed to make any impressive impact in Gujarat politics during this period. It was Indira’s Congress which became the main Congress party and continued in power. Indira’s Congress was in opposition to the old forces of Congress (O). Congress (O) realized that it had lost the battle but was not ready to forfeit it. Thus both (Congress {O} and Jana Sangh) aligned themselves against Congress (R). They got an opportunity in the form of Navnirman movement of 1974, which successfully removed the majority Congress (R) government headed by Chiman Bhai Patel. Chiman Bhai Patel faced corruption charges and was expelled from the party.

The Nav Nirman movement was a socio-political movement, which was started in the L.D College of Engineering over a dispute regarding a hike in the food bill. It soon ignited a major public agitation, which not only led to the fall of the Congress (R) government but also aggravated a national crisis. The movement was mainly led by students and other youths but was backed and supported by the out of power parties, like Congress (O), Jan Sangh and those factions of Congress (R) who were not satisfied with the local party positions in Gujarat Congress (R). John R Wood remarks,

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Seventy-three days of agitation had left 103 people dead, mostly by police firing, 310 injured, and 8237 under arrest in Gujarat. And yet, within a week, colleges reopened, students became busy with examinations, and normality returned. The Gujarat agitation, having achieved the two goals of removing the Patel ministry and dissolving the Gujarat assembly, ended as quickly as it had begun.\textsuperscript{17}

In the 1975 elections, Indira’s Congress faced a big set back (see table 2). The Congress (O), Jana Sangh, Samyukta Socialist Party and the Swatantra Party formed an alliance against Indira Gandhi and her Congress (R). The Janata Morcha (formed by Jayprakash Narayan and Morarji Desai) won a surprising victory in the Vidhan Sabha (Legislative Assembly) elections of Gujarat on June 11, 1975. The next day the Allahabad High Court found Indira Gandhi guilty of electoral malpractices. It invalidated her election victory and barred her from elective office for six years. This incident, the Nav Nirman movement and people’s movement against Congress (misrule) in Bihar\textsuperscript{18} forced Indira Gandhi to impose a national emergency on June 26, 1975. The newly elected assembly of Gujarat was dissolved and the Janata Morcha government (with Jan Sangh, which won 18 seats and three

\textsuperscript{17} John R Wood, “Extra-Parliamentary Opposition in India,” opp.cite. p.319.

\textsuperscript{18} Jai Prakash Narain organized a nationwide movement (1974-1975) against Congress rule which was full of corruption. India witnessed the problem of unemployment, price rice etc and Narain with some other leaders organized a nationwide protest against Congress. Bhartiya Jan Sangh was also part of this movement. For more, see, Asghar Ali Engineer. \textit{Communalism in India: A Historical and Empirical Study} (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1995). pp. 96-104.
members of Jan Sangh became ministers in Janta Morcha coalition) fell from power.

Congress and Gujarat elections: 1980 and 1985

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats Contested, Won &amp; Percentage 1980</th>
<th>Seats Contested, Won and Percentage 1985</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Congress (I)</td>
<td>(182-141)(51.04%)</td>
<td>(182-149)(55.55%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>(127-9)(14.2%)</td>
<td>(124-11)(14.96%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


1977 to 1980 was a period of competition for power between Congress (I) and Janata Morcha. Janata Morcha was formed by Babubhai J Patel with the help of Chimanbhai Patel, who was previously expelled from Congress (R). Unlike Congress (I), the Janata Morcha was a weak coalition without any institutional mechanism and party organizational structure. In the coalition of Janata Morcha only Jan Sangh, (although not influential enough at that time) was a disciplined organization. The strong political competition led Congress (I) to adopt populist policies and change caste equations. It started giving important portfolios within the party to backward caste leaders. Jinabhai Darji, a tribal and backward caste leader and Madhav Singh Solanki, from the Kshatriya caste were given prominent status in the party. Congress during this period introduced pro-poor policies and a new multi
caste and communal electoral alliance popularly known as KHAM.\textsuperscript{19} This electoral strategy helped Congress (I) to claim 141 out of 182 seats it contested with 51\% of votes share. In 1985 the KHAM strategy again helped Congress (I) to win the highest number of seats. It won 149 out of 182 seats it contested by winning 55.55\% of votes share.

Section Two

Formal and Informal Power Structure of Gujarat and Congress (1965-1985)

After independence and since its birth in 1960, Gujarat, like many other states of India, witnessed the era of Congress government. The early years of Gujarat politics witnessed upper caste dominance in Congress. During this period (60s and 70s) it was Brahmin, Bania at top and Patidars at the district level that dominated the Congress. Brahmins and Banias are among the influential upper castes in Gujarat. Economically and/or educationally these caste groups are well off. They are mostly concentrated in cities. Many of the leaders and Chief Ministers of Gujarat are from these groups, for example Morarji Desai (Brahmin), Jivraj Mehta (Bania), Balwantrai Mehta

(Bania) and Hitendra Desai (Brahmin). The politics of Gujarat, during that period, can be described as the politics of alliance between different castes. The Congress party’s near monopoly of power was based on a Patidar-Brahmin-Baniya leadership that brought together a broad umbrella of Dalits, Tribals and Muslims. The weak opposition in the state in the early period, the Swatantra Party, was primarily a Kshatriya enterprise and was not influential enough to pose any serious challenge to Congress at that time. During the period of 1960s and 1970s, the state legislature was dominated by a highly organized and well disciplined Congress party. Congress during this period followed an accommodative politics but did not touch the socio-economic structure of Gujarat society. It was an efficient organization and performed both civic and political functions through its cadres and different organizations. Several Gandhian social institutions worked among the masses. The Ahmedabad Millowners Association (AMA) (influenced by Congress it was known to be a major Business Association in Gujarat) and Textile Labor Association (TLA) (founded by Gandhi) both worked among the business class and labor respectively and the civic life was maintained during this period. (This point is elaborated in the later section of the

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21 See, Ornit Shani. *Communalism, Caste and Hindu Nationalism in India*. opp.cite.


chapter). Therefore, the Congress had an influence over the politico-civic domain of the masses.

Congress as a party, with its cadres and affiliated organizations worked with a large and varied electoral constituency within its fold without altering the socio-economic status quo. The dominant castes of Patidars, Brahmins and Baniyas persistently dominated the economy/state resources and the Dalits, Tribals and Muslims were the only reliable voters of Congress party. In short the numerically small Hindu upper castes of Gujarat, dominated the state and its resources. This was primarily due to the low level of mobilization among the lower sections and the relative absence of any movements against the upper caste hegemony. Therefore, during this period, the nexus of castes and religion provided political stability in Gujarat and the Congress party ruled the state uninterruptedly.24

Gujarat society is characterized by the existence of strong caste system and caste violence. Although caste divisions do not fully match class divisions, socio-economic power was primarily in the hands of a few upper castes during the 1960s and 70s, i.e. Patidars, Brahmins and Baniyas. Among them, the most powerful caste is the Patidars, who in much of the state practically control the rural economy while Brahmins and Baniyas, (though their number is not significant in state), have a monopoly in the professional services, industry and trade.25 But the period of the 1980s witnessed a change in this trend and the implementation of reservations for backward communities in government jobs and educational institutions challenged the

authority of upper castes. Caste associations, some of them active in party politics, are a common feature of Gujarat’s public life. However these caste associations mostly function as lobby groups seeking to influence politics in order to control state resources.

**Caste Associations/Groupings and Gujarat Politics**

The governmental and political processes of Gujarat have been relatively stable, but it became tenuous in the early 1970s. Violence as a means to make an impact on political system was rare till 70s but all that changed in 1980s. The political environment of Gujarat came to be known for its riots, arson and other kinds of violence during 80s. This was primarily due to growing caste antagonisms between the members of the two major communities in Gujarat; the Patidars and the Kshatriyas.

Although Patidars (also known as Patels and who are a peasant community) constitute only around 16 per cent of the population in Gujarat, they are a dominant force and recognized as Gujarat’s most prosperous caste group. In contemporary Gujarat, apart from agriculture, they have dominant status over small and medium scale industry, for example, oil mills in Saurashtra and the diamond business in Surat. They form the largest portion of the Gujarati diaspora.

Besides this, their supremacy is visible in politics and in the powerful cooperative and education sectors in Gujarat state. Politically, they played a decisive role in over 60 of the state’s 182 assembly seats. Their shift to the
BJP in the late ‘80s propelled the party to power in 1995 and their support is crucial for the party’s fortunes in the state.26

The Patidars of Gujarat were mobilized in the freedom movement with the efforts of their main leader, Sardar Vallabhai Patel. It gave the Patidar community a powerful and a significant role in Gujarat Congress. During that period, the top positions of Congress in Gujarat were controlled by Brahmin or Bania leaders, while many districts or lower level positions were dominated largely by the Patidars. The Congress party was well organized because of the existence of strong cadres and organizations which gave coherence to this caste alliance. The dominant castes, who were small minority in Gujarat, ruled the state even as the levels of mobilization among the lower strata remained relatively very low.27

The Kshatriyas in Gujarat are known to be a backward group. Most of them are small-scale agriculturalists or unskilled labors. After independence Congress had a monopoly over their votes. The Kshatriyas were mainly rural have-nots in Gujarat and supporters of Congress. The Kshatriyas support and opposition to Congress can be studied by considering their concentration in different regions, i.e the Gujarat area, Saurashtra and Kutch regions. Their support or opposition to Congress was based on their economic status in these regions. The Kshatriyas of Gujarat area were mostly tenants to Patidars lands and were rural have-nots. Thus they supported the pro-tenant land


policy of Congress. The Kshtriyas of Saurashtra and Kutch regions were mainly landowners and thus opposed to the Congress land policy.\textsuperscript{28}

Some dominant Kshtriya leaders organized the Gujarat Rajput Keavani Mandal (GRKM) in 1946. With the passage of time GRKM developed into a Kshatriya social reform movement and converted into Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha. The main reasons for establishment of Kshtriya Sabha were as follows:

1. The need and demand of social recognition; in some cases (like Kolis), Kshtriyas were treated as a members of the criminal tribes community by others.

2. Need of Social reform among them to overcome illiteracy, alcoholism, agriculture indebtedness and so on.

3. The need for employment. They demanded jobs in police, paramilitary forces and civil services etc.\textsuperscript{29}

Initially the Sabha was opposed to the Congress and worked for the social reform among the Kshtriyas.\textsuperscript{30} In the 1962 elections (soon after formation of

\textsuperscript{28} An interesting but important point needs to be mentioned here. The Swatendra Party enjoyed support among both Patidars and Kshtriyas like Congress. The landowner Kshtriyas of Saurashtra and the Patidars of Gujarat region supported Swatendra Party and the Patidar tenants of Saurashtra and the Kshtriyas tenants of Gujarat region supported Congress. see, Kirti D. Desai, “Socio-Economic Infra-Structure of Gujarat Politics,” opp.cite. pp.114-117.

Gujarat state), the Sabha appealed to fellow Kshtriyas not to give support to the Congress but elect a princely leader Narendra Singh Mahida from the Swatantra Party. Nevertheless many Kshtriyas continued to support the Congress. The Kshtriya Sabha acted as a pressure group for the upliftment of the Kshtriyas to make them realize their numerical strength. The Sabha supported the Swatantra Party and tried to mobilize Kshtriya support in its favor. Kshtriyas also started posing a major challenge to the power of Patidars in Gujarat. The Congress split in 1969 forced Indira Gandhi to adopt populist politics to attract backward people and more particularly to preserve its support base among poor Kshtriyas. This policy shift in Congress caused the decline of the dominance of upper castes in Congress. This was compounded by the failure of the the Gujarat Kshtriya Sabha to influence the Kshtriya voters in favor of the Swatantra Party. During the passage of time, both the Swatantra Party and the Congress (O) disappeared from Gujarat’s political scene, as both joined with the Jana Sangh to become part of a new party called the Janta Party.

The left leaning policy of Congress under the leadership of Indira Gandhi combated this development in politics successfully. While that helped to secure a wide base for the party at the electoral level, the Congress from this period started losing its ground in Gujarat at the same time. The centralization of power within Congress and the lack of a well organized party showed the inefficiency of the Congress in dealing with the growing

forms of extra-parliamentary agitations that commenced with the Nav Nirman Movement of 1974. The movement caused the downfall of Congress government and provided space to the combined opposition (with Jan Sangh) in its way to capture state power in 1974 under the Chief Ministership of Babu Bhai J. Patel. Thus Hindutva forces were sworn into office for the first time in the state.\textsuperscript{32}

**The KHAM Strategy and Congress**

The Congress returned to power after the emergency, but without any organizational structure. To maintain its influence over the politico-civic domain among the masses, the Congress followed the policy of alliance of have-nots, popularly known as the KHAM formula.\textsuperscript{33} While previously it was the upper castes, like Patidars, Baniyas and Brahmans, who controlled the economy and some crucial nodes, such as the various levels of the state administration, the 1980s witnessed the emergence of a new Congress. The Congress now paid attention to the lower and backward castes who were the have-nots and discouraged upper castes dominance in party structure.

The pro-poor lower caste political mobilization came into force during 70s with the efforts of Jinabhai Darji, a grassroots political figure influenced by Gandhian ideology. He introduced a policy of mobilization of have-nots communities like Kshatriyas, Harijan, Adivasi (Tribal) and Muslims,


popularly known as KHAM.\textsuperscript{34} This mobilization of Darji (supported by Madhav Singh Solanki and Sanat Mehta) created havoc among the upper castes, who had previously benefited from the Congress regime. This led to an erosion in Congress’s upper caste support who slowly moved to the Sangh Parivar.

The Congress and its KHAM policy helped the backward castes leader to enjoy power. This situation was consolidated by the appointment of a second backward caste commission in 1978 under the chairmanship of B.P Mandal by the Central Government. The commission submitted its report in 1980 in which it made recommendations by considering caste as a criterion to determine the social and educational backwardness. It suggested that the policy of reservations for the OBC’s should be centralised. It also suggested that the overall reservation must be limited to 50\% and recommended 27\% reservation for OBC. The Gujarat government implemented the Mandal commission report and implemented 5\% reservation for class I and II posts and 10\% for class III and IV posts for OBC.\textsuperscript{35} The reason for implementing reservation was not solely for the betterment of backward communities. The KHAM strategy and increased number of backward MLA’s forced Congress government to implement the recommendations of the Mandal commission, (see table 4). In the first assembly election of Gujarat, there were hardly any


lower/backward caste MLA in the state cabinet but in 1980, the Gujarat legislature contained as many as 13 ministers and 96 elected representatives of this group. Table 5 indicates the rise of SC, Adivasi, Muslim, and other backward castes leaders representatives (from 26% to 31.8%) between the periods of 1967 to 1980.

Table 4

Congress and KHAM representation in Gujarat Legislature: 1975-1980

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KHAM Party</th>
<th>KHAM Candidates</th>
<th>KHAM Elected</th>
<th>Non-KHAM Candidates</th>
<th>Non-KHAM Elected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1975</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress (R)</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>88</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1980</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress (I)</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>1967</th>
<th>1980</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No.</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahmins</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bania</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patidars/Kanbi</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kshtriya</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harijan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adivasi</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Backward</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While during 1960s and 1970s it was Brahmins, Banias at the central level and Patidars at district level that dominated the Congress, the 1980s witnessed a change in this trend. The main threat to the dominance of Patidars within Congress came from the Kshatriyas. The caste composition of the Gujarat Legislature Assembly also witnessed a change between 1960 and 1980.\(^{36}\) The main trends were:

A. The upper caste Brahmin and Bania slowly but steadily started to lose political power within Congress.

B. The dominant Patidar caste lost its number of seats in the Legislature from 24 to 18 between 1975 and 1980.

C. The Kshatriyas and OBCs (Other Backward Castes or Class) slowly improved their situation in gaining political power which caused the downfall of the Brahmin, Bania, Patidar in the Congress.

Muslims also witnessed the rise in their representation in Congress (see table: 5). Therefore the acceptance of KHAM formula and the rise of lower/backward castes and Muslims in Gujarat politics created havoc among the upper castes. The changed political situation compelled Congress to adopt the Mandal commission recommendations and the counter reaction against this move of Congress was started by upper castes in the form of anti reservation agitation in 1981.

KHAM, Caste Bias and Violence of 1981

The caste violence in 1981 started due to a protest by upper castes students of B.J Medical College in Ahmedabad against the reservation system. Their demands were:

1. Immediate withdrawal of roster system.\textsuperscript{37}
2. Abolition of the carry forward system.\textsuperscript{38}
3. Reduction of the total number of reserved seats in the post-graduate level.
4. Increase in the number of unreserved seats at the post-graduate level.

The agitation turned into violence against Dalits in Gujarat on 5th of January 1981. The Dalits were attacked by lethal weapons and missiles. On 5th February, upper caste medical students tried to topple the statute of Dr. B.R Ambedkar in Ahmedabad and after that the violence became widespread. The Patels (the influential caste) played a prominent role in the violence against Dalits.\textsuperscript{39} The role of media and police was also very negative, while

\textsuperscript{37} In Gujarat, SCs and STs were offered low profile branches of specialization. Thus to stop this the government introduced the roster system to avoid any discrimination. In this system the government, in 1978, introduced reservation to certain departments/specialization to control the ongoing discrimination.

\textsuperscript{38} The practice of carrying forward system means to carry forward the unclaimed seats for a given year to successive year up to a limit beyond which these seats had to be left open for general competition.

the media supplied rumors that were circulated against Dalits, the police in many cases opened fire or lathi charged the Dalits. The Gujarat Samachar, Sandesh and Jansatta (Hindi daily of the Indian Express group) reflected the attitude of dominant upper castes, which further reinforced the bias among upper castes against Dalits and the reservation system in general.\footnote{See, “Report of the People’s Union for Civil Liberties (PUCL),” 1981, cited in Ghanshyam Shah, “Middle Class Politics: Case of Anti-Reservation Agitations in Gujarat,” in the Economic and Political Weekly, Annual Number (May, 1987). p.167.} For example, Gujarat Samachar, published a false report apparently based on certain much discussed rumors that gangs of untouchables had attacked a temple in Ahmedabad and the denial of this news by the priest of the temple was not covered.\footnote{“Report of the Committee for the Protection of Democratic Rights,” cited in Ghanshyam Shah, “Middle Class Politics,” Ibid. p. 167.} Media news coverage portrayed a very negative picture of low-caste students by framing them as dissolute and spread rumors about attacks on high caste women by Dalits.


**The Election of 1985 and KHAM**

With the strategy of KHAM, Congress scored a massive victory in the 1985 election, winning 149 out of 182 Assembly seats. During its second term, 90% of the selected MLAs were new to State Assembly without grassroot
Chief Minister Madhav Singh Solanki supported the Rane Commission recommendation (which was appointed by Solanki government to study the condition of backwardness and supposed alternatives to government action), which recommended that 10% reservation for backward groups should be implemented. It expanded the reservation for backward communities from 10% by an additional 18% which now came to a total of 28% and 21% to SCs and STs respectively. But Rane commission did not recommend reservation on a caste basis but on the bases of social, economic, educational and occupational status. Solanki ignored the class basis of reservation in favor of the caste criteria in order to woo the backward caste communities.

During Solanki’s second term the Patidars and other upper castes - who were numerically a minority but held high posts in the public and private sectors – lead an anti-reservation agitation. The violence forced Solanki to resign as he could not control it. A second mobilization was introduced in the form of anti-upper caste movement by backward communities, but this mobilization was succeeded by right wing, communal mobilization against Muslims (the violence will be discussed later on this chapter). This new mobilization had negative fallout for the Congress both electorally and

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44 See, Howard Spodek, “From Gandhi to Violence,” Ibid. pp.768.
ideologically. After 1985 the tactics of Congress were successfully utilized by the Sangh Parivar and they slowly mobilized a large part of backward masses by projecting the Muslims as a major threat and by inculcating Hindutva ideology among them.

**The Circumstantial Bias and the Violence between Hindus and Muslims (1969-1985)**

In Gujarat the politics of caste dominated the electoral scene. While before the late 1980s it was the socially and economically dominant castes who dominated the Congress, the period of the 1980s witnessed the entry of backward groups thanks to the KHAM strategy of Congress. While before the KHAM phase, Congress was a well disciplined and a cadre based party, the bifurcation of Congress, economic instability of 60s and 70s and Emergency of 1975 and the pro-backward caste policy during late 70s and 80s caused a decline in the organizational structure of Congress. Congress lost its relevance to influence people and strictly followed the politics of caste alliance. Many authors attribute this as the main reason for the rise of communal organizations and the resulting violence between Hindus and Muslims.47

In a chapter of his book *Creating a Nationality*,48 Achyut Yagnik explains the rise of Sangh Parivar in Gujarat by the rapid growth of the urban middle class who are in search of a new identity. Describing its rise from the 1980s, he demonstrates how BJP managed to successfully mobilize Patels, Banias,

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48 Ibid, pp.100-104.
the OBCs and Dalits under the umbrella of Hindutva. Yagnik says that the 1969 split in Congress changed caste equations in the State. When the Congress (I) came to power in 1980 election with the KHAM strategy, the political influence of the upper castes and Patidars in Gujarat politics was eroded. He points out that “between 1976 and 1980, the Congress (I) leadership in Gujarat virtually eliminated Brahmins, Banias and Patidars from core positions in the party. For the first time in history, not a single Patidar Minister was of Cabinet rank.” But the last 10 years of Gujarat politics have seen Patidar resurgence with the rise of BJP. Therefore the support of upper castes to Sangh Parivar provided them an opportunity to make an influence in Gujarat political and social life.

The undivided Congress and economic stability provided a smooth political regime and Gujarat did not witness any major violence between Hindus and Muslims before 1969. But the nation wide split of the Congress in 1969 created an unstable system in Gujarat. Crime increased and the law and order situation worsened. Further the Emergency of 1975 made the Congress unpopular and it began to lose its ground in Gujarat. The centralization of power and the banning of elections within the Congress party added further fuel to the fire. The party now became person centric and not oriented to public opinion. The systematic trust on caste alliances for performing narrow political and/or formal functions proved fatal for the Congress. The Congress, during this period, did not pay attention to party

49 Cited in, Asis Nandy et.al. Creating a Nationality. opp.cite. p. 102.
building and began to distribute tickets to those leaders hungry for power alone. It did not work for ideological campaigns, did little organizational work or mass mobilization. After the 1969 split, the populist policy of Indira Gandhi and caste alliances helped Congress to win the elections between 1970s to 1980s. But this victory was purely an electoral strategy of lower caste and minorities mobilizations (KHAM). The new Congress was a weak organization with no active cadres and organization. The centralization of power, the several social, political and economic factors contributed to the downfall of many Gandhian social organizations, which during 50s and 60s used to continuously work for the communal harmony and for the development of Gandhian principles. These institutions had provided a sound ideological platform for the Congress. But these institutions began to decline. Gandhi’s Sabarmati Ashram, which previously used to work to spread the ideas of non-violence and communal harmony, is no more acknowledged today as an institution which works for communal harmony and the principle of non-violence, while Gujarat Vidyapith, a university which was founded in 1920 by Gandhi, lost its influence and prestige, primarily because the students are more inclined towards the courses that offer them jobs soon after completing the course. Thus, social and political reasons caused the decline of Gandhian organizations. The Gandhian institutions began to decline since late 1960s and have lost their credibility in contemporary times. Gandhi’s ideas are now confined to books and archives and there are hardly any persons who follow Gandhian principles strictly. Some NGOs in Gujarat, however, are working to revitalize the

principles of Gandhism, but they are few and have little influence.\textsuperscript{52}
Therefore Congress witnessed its erosion in the politico-civic domain among the masses and replaced by BJP (Sangh Parivar).

On the economic front the crisis steadily deepened. The decline of the textile industry in Ahmedabad and some other cities, the downfall of the Mazdoor Mahajan, Ahmedabad Millowners’ Association (AMA) and Trade Labor Association (TLA) resulted in the loss of jobs for many workers, both Hindus (mainly lower and backward castes) and Muslims. During the late 1950s and upto late 60s some 66 mills out of a total of 71 mills were affiliated with the AMA. But the number came down to 28 out of 35 mills in 1990s.\textsuperscript{53}

With the downfall of textile mills, the TLA, known as a pillar between Hindus and Muslims communal relations weakened drastically and lost its relevance and influence.\textsuperscript{54} It had 125,000 to 135000 workers and more than 1000,000 members.\textsuperscript{55} Although the downfall of the textile sector started during mid 60s, it only became visible from early 80s\textsuperscript{56}: some 17 textile

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{54} See, Howard Spodek, “From Gandhi to Violence,” opp.cite. pp. 779-782.}
\end{footnotesize}
mills closed during the period of 1983-84\textsuperscript{57} and the coming years witnessed the closure of 15 more mills with as many as 50,000 workers losing their jobs in the mills.\textsuperscript{58} A very few of them were lucky enough to get compensation for the loss of their jobs. Most of the workers were helpless and several efforts of the TLA to provide them compensation were not successful.\textsuperscript{59} These workers were mainly lower caste Hindus and backward Muslims and they took active part in the 1984-85 and 1989 violence. The TLA had lost its influence and failed to mobilize workers against violence.

Jan Bremen analyzes the problems of labor and closures of textile mills and credits it as the reason for the Hindutva upsurge in Gujarat. The jobless workers, mainly Dalits, were mobilized by the Sangh Parivar for its Hindutva cause. Tracing the roots of ghettoization, Bremen says it got accelerated after the decline of the Mazdoor Mahajan founded by Mahatma Gandhi. Describing the pattern of Gujarat’s economic growth as one of “lumpen capitalism”, he concludes that this kind of economic development is based on an ideology of "social-Darwinism", which is not sensitive to the problems faced by labour and is indifferent to the issue of raising the living standards of labor.

The following part of the chapter will analyze Hindu-Muslim violence of 1969, 1982 and 1985 in Gujarat to analyze the circumstantial bias as a main reason behind this violence.


\textsuperscript{58} Ghanshyam Shah, “Caste Sentiments, Class Formation and Dominance in Gujarat,” opp.cite. p.95.

1969 Hindu-Muslim Violence: The Background

The Justice Reddy Commission located as many as 2938 incidents of Hindu-Muslim violence in Gujarat between 1960 and 1969. Ahmedabad has no history of animosity or rivalry between Hindus and Muslims. The Justice Reddy commission of inquiry, which was established to look into the communal disturbance in Ahmedabad in 1969, contends that “the people in Gujarat in general and those of Ahmedabad, in particular, were not prone to communal passion or excitement- both the Hindu and the Muslim community lived by and large in amity except in a few places here and there which had their own special reasons for communal disturbances.”

Therefore, Justice Reddy was of the view that the Hindus and Muslims were not prone to violence before the 1969, but as he said ‘special reasons caused communal disturbance’ I argue that these special reasons (for example local factors or micro level factors) as the conflictual situations between Hindus and Muslims and the bias among a section of Hindus resulted into the situation in which people tend to behave communally, therefore conflictual situation/circumstances and the bias (circumstantial bias) resulted into the incidents of violence between Hindus and Muslims. I also assert that none of these were started or provoked by the Sangh Parivar. Although Hindu communal groups had been in existence, they were not influential enough to create a conflictual situation among or between religions. But whenever they found the conflictual situation and violence (due to circumstantial bias), they became active and tried to utilize the situation. To quote Ghanshyam Shah,

“Communal feelings of a violent kind have been evident ever since the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965. The death of Balwant Rai Mehta, the then chief minister of Gujarat, as a result of his plane being shot down by Pakistan, had particularly disturbed the people of Gujarat. Since then the Gujaratis have been bitter against Pakistan, anti-Pakistan feelings often finding anti-Muslim expression. In this way historic prejudices received a new lease of life. Hindus of Gujarat have found it easy to think of a Muslim as a natural spy of Pakistan and one without loyalty towards this country”.

After 1965 Gujarat witnessed several incidents of Hindu-Muslim violence, Muslims were physically attacked, their shops were looted, and their property destroyed. Veraval, some places of Kutch, Saurashtra and south Gujarat witnessed several incidents of Hindu-Muslim violence. At the same time protest against Cow-slaughter further widened the gap between Hindus and Muslims. The Jana Sangh and other Sangh bodies became active in the state and started communal - patriotic mobilization and acquired influence over the urban Hindu middle class. About the lower/backward castes, the Sangh Parivar utilized their economic frustration due to the downfall of textile industries and labor unions and directed their anger and frustration against Muslims. Thus, the existing circumstantial bias helped the Sangh Parivar to enter into the civic domain of the Hindus.

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62 Ibid. pp.176-177.
63 Ibid. pp.175-208.
Muslim mobilization was also taking place in retaliation against Hindu mobilization and the violence against them. The Jamiyet-Ulema-e-Hind tried to acquire the support of Muslims. In June 1968, the Jamiyet organized a national convention in Ahmedabad. Although it projected itself as a nationalist organization which supported the programs of Congress, the convention clearly indicated that the Jamiyet was moving towards communal politics. Two main leaders, Maulana Asad Maad and Yunus Salim gave provocative speeches and a booklet called *The Communal Riots and the Harm that They have done to the Country and Hindu Religion*, authored by the president of the Jamiyet, Maulana Aqualak Husain, was distributed among the Muslims. The booklet provided an exaggerated version of atrocities committed against Muslims in several riots throughout the country. The Muslim leaders also tried to use the circumstantial bias of Muslims against Hindus for their political purposes. But this act of the Jamiyat to mobilize Muslims provided the justification to the Jan Sangh to found the Hindu Dharma Raksha Samiti (hereafter HDRS). The campaign was intensified by the arrival of M.S.Golwalkar in Ahmedabad. In December 1968 while addressing a rally, he blamed Muslims as invaders and that the country could no longer tolerate them.  

The alleged vandalism of the Koran by the Superintendent of Police, BH Desai, in March 1969 compelled the police to lathicharge a disruptive mob. The police subsequently apologized for the incident. On the eve of Janmashtami, (September 4), a Muslim police officer, who was searching for one Pandit named Balkrishna, dispersed a Ramlila gathering, toppled the table on which an arti and the holy book Ramayan were kept, and allegedly

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64 Ibid. pp.179-183.
kicked the scripture. Quoting a government special report, the commission said: On the night of 10-9-69, Balkrishna approached the local Bharatiya Jan Sangh workers and through them contacted one Harishchandra Shankerlal Panchal, a Jan Sangh activist. It was decided that instead of openly criticizing the act done by Muslim police officer, the agitation may be started under the banner of Hindu Dharma Raksha Samiti, instead of Bhartiya Jan Sangh. It indicates that the BJS wanted to inflame the situation and communalize the civil society through apparently a non-political organization to make it appear a genuine issue. On September 11, HDRS organized a fast seeking action against the Muslim officer. On September 14, the officer was suspended and the fast ended.\(^65\) They successfully utilized the conflictual situation in their favor.

But it was 18th Sept. 1969, the last day of Urs, a Muslim festival, which was crucial. The violence started on the ground that Jagannath Mandir cows going back to temple premises disturbed the Urs. It may be mentioned that the movement of cows was a daily routine irrespective of Urs celebration. To quote Ghanshyam Shah,

“The sight of the crowd disturbed a cow, which in its fright hurt a woman with two children. Angered at this, the lady complained to the sadhus. At about the same time some Muslim youths were making fun of the short-statured sadhu who in anger, lifted his rod which accidentally touched a Muslim woman standing behind him. Annoyed, the woman shouted at

sadhus. In this atmosphere of tension and commotion a scuffle developed between Muslim young men and sadhus. The two sadhus, being in minority, rushed into the temple upon which the crowd threw stones….About thirteen sadhus were injured by stones and there was some damage to temple.

The above mentioned conflictual situations resulted into the presence of circumstantial bias and the violence occurred between Hindus and Muslims. The trustees of the temple appealed the government to establish a commission of inquiry at the same time that the Hindu Dharma Raksha Samiti called a public meeting on 19th Sept to criticize the attack. Pamphlets, rumors and wall-writings appeared overnight, inciting Hindus. The HDRS issued inflammable pamphlets in its own name and portrayed the Jagannath temple incident as a planned attack by Muslims, and even claimed that the legs of Sadhus had been cut off. Such tactics of HDRS (with other communal organizations like RSS and BJS etc) indicates the importance of mobilization in conflictual situation which led the circumstantial bias and violence.

The night of 18th Sept and 19th morning witnessed a series of attacks on Muslims. The Hindu mob continued killing Muslims for several days and the tension, with a series of violent incidents soon spread to various parts of the city. The Ahmedabad workers took an active part in violence against Muslims. It was also a time for economic insecurity for the workers due to the closure of many textile mills. The Hindu communal groups tried to utilize this insecurity and frustration among the Hindu workers and directed

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it against Muslims by projecting Muslims as the root of all problems in Gujarat. The role of press and the government to control violence was essentially passive. The riots that ensued in 1969 left some 1500 people dead.

The question which crops up here is, did Sangh Parivar provoke the violence? Did they mobilize on the basis of their ideology of communalism? The answer appears to be in the negative since they only capitalized on these incidents. The communal organization tried to use the conflictual situation/s when these occurred; they do not appear to have had the influence at this time to actually start the violence. But whenever the conflictual situation was occurred they nevertheless became active and tried to spread and consolidate the anti-Muslim ideas. For example, if we minutely look at the causes of 1969 violence, it was started over the daily movement of cows in Jagannath temple which disturbed the Urs celebration of Muslims. No doubt the activities of Hindu and Muslim communal activities since 1967 played an effective role to convert the issue into violence and once the violence started on 18th of night and 19th of morning, the HDRS organized a meeting and inflame the already disturbed situation. The conflictual situation was used by Hindu communal groups. The negative role of media and government further helped the HDRS to use the conflictual situation. The police also arrested several Muslims; it further confirmed the Hindu communal common sense to consider Muslims as anti-nationals and traitors.

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68 Ibid. p. 177.
Ghanshyam Shah says that it was the period when the Jan Sangh, the first political party related to the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), and the organizational ancestor of the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP), became active in the state. 69 It was the political, social and economic factors and the Indo-Pak war that further added to a section of Hindu psyche to consider Muslims as violent and anti-India/Hindus. The period of 1969-1985 was the era of caste and circumstantial bias: caste bias among Hindus and circumstantial bias between Hindus and Muslims. While the 1969 violence reflected the circumstantial bias, the violence of 1981 further confirmed the existing caste bias among Hindus. The caste bias among Hindus was further reinforced by the reservation policy of Congress government and Gujarat witnessed upper caste anger against lower castes in the form of several anti-reservation agitations by upper castes and riots against lower castes. The 1985 violence is different in this regard as it was based on both caste and circumstantial bias.

Caste and Circumstantial Bias: The 1985 Caste and Hindu-Muslim violence in Gujarat

The caste bias was reflected again in the 1985 riots. The Congress government of Gujarat introduced the policy of reservations to backward communities in 1972 and appointed the Baxi commission to identify the socially and educationally backward communities that would qualify for preferential treatment similar to that which was being granted to the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. The Baxi commission submitted its

report in 1976 and declared 82 castes and groups as backwards. It was the Janta Government which accepted the recommendations of the Baxi commission and implemented a 10% reservation for the backward communities. But in 1982, the then chief minister of Gujarat, Madhav Singh Solanki appointed the Rane Commission, headed by a retired judge of Gujarat High Court C.V Rane, to verify the castes and groups, which was not listed as backward by the Baxi commission. The Rane Commission submitted its report in October 1983 and recommended increasing the percentage of the existing quota of reservations for the backward communities by 18%. The commission suggested occupation and income as the criteria for backwardness and not the caste. After fourteen months, in January 1985, before the elections, Solanki affirmed an increase in the reservation quota of jobs in government services and public educational institutions for the backward castes to woo their votes in the coming election, by avoiding the recommendations of Rane commission which insisted class as the basis for the reservation. This created havoc among the upper castes and they agitated against this move of the government. The 1985 anti-reservation agitation started on February 18 by some upper castes (allegedly supported by Sangh Parivar) followed by the strike in N.D Engineering College and B.J Medical Institute. Unlike the 1981 anti-reservation which was targeted at lower/backward castes, the 1985 agitation was directed against the government and its property. The government buses were the main target of the agitators. The formation of an All Gujarat anti-reservation organization forced the government to close the school and

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colleges in the state on February 20th. The BJP criticized the move by the government and it supported a bandh called for 25th February by the All Gujarat Education Reform Committee. The BJP also affirmed that many leaders of the Congress supported the bandh.71

After the state assembly election in 1985, Congress (I) again won the majority and Solanki was sworn in as chief minister for the second term. The 1985 riots started in March, soon after the newly-elected Congress government came to power again, and was directed against the reservation policy of Solanki government. Some active cadres who were denied tickets, opposed Solanki’s leadership and indirectly supported the agitation. The agitators formed two organizations to lead the second phase of movement, namely the Vali Mandals and the Nay Rachna Samiti. The movement soon became popular among the upper castes and due to its pressure the government on 17th March decided to suspend the implementation of the reservation policy for one year.72

But the agitators were not satisfied and the movement continued. The violence against lower castes turned into violence against Muslims from March 18th. The unavoidable question which arises here is why did caste riots change into communal violence against Muslims. Some theories have made an attempt to analyze this shift. One view blames the government for this violence. It argues that the Solanki government turned anti-reservation upper caste agitation into a communal one to divert the issue. The supporters of this theory also claim that the government also released some anti-social

71 See, Howard Spodek, “From Gandhi to Violence,” opp.cite. p. 768.
elements to instigate the violence against Muslims. The government’s refusal to appoint a judicial committee to inquire the matter further provided support for the claims of these analysts. Other commentators argue that the BJP tried to spread communal ideas among Hindus to topple the Solanki’s government. Another school of commentators blame the liquor tragedy of 13th March in which 22 people died. This had forced police to investigate the matter and the succeeding action by police caused the closure of several illegal liquor dens. The police inquiry against the bootleggers forced them to start violence against Muslims to divert the attention of both the people at large and the police. The many lumpen elements, who became jobless due to the closure of illicit liquor shops, took this opportunity to ransack and loot. This line of argument also blames the land speculators and developers in encouraging the violence to evacuate people from their homes, which could then be grabbed for commercial purposes.

The anti-reservation agitators called for a bandh in 1985. This call was ignored by Dalits and Muslims who primarily lived in the slums of Ahmedabad. This eventually resulted in the incidents of burning houses and riots against them. The ignorance of Muslims about the bandh called by
upper caste leaders caused violence against them, primarily due to fear of Dalit-Muslim unity against the upper caste agitation. In my recent field survey in Ahmedabad, when asked about this issue, the upper castes and the lower castes had two different stories to tell. The upper castes I interviewed replied that both Dalits and Muslims indulged in anti-upper caste activities and that they had to be taught a lesson. Ram Chandra Patel, (name changed, age 67 years) with four others of the Ishanpur area, informed me that the Muslims and Dalits were planning to prepare a counter attack against upper castes; and so the upper castes had to attack the Muslims as well to avoid any such eventuality. When asked who told the violent upper caste mob about the alleged preparations for the attack during anti-reservation, his answer was “many people were discussing about it, and this news spread in the city”. Clearly rumors played an important role in teaching Muslims a “lesson”.

The members of lower castes have a different story to tell. Ishwar Singh, (name changed) of Shree Veer Maurya Nagar, (a slum area) with six other members of his community informed me that the Muslims during anti-reservation against them provided shelter to them but they asked for or sometimes took utensils, money or other valuable items from them and that they teased their women. At the same time there were some Muslims families who honestly and without profit helped them. According to Ishwar

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78 Five members of upper castes were interviewed in the Ishanpur area and five others were interviewed in the Batwa area of the Ahmedabad. All the interviews are translated from Hindi to English.
Singh, when the riots turned against Muslims they joined in to teach the ‘greedy Muslims’ a lesson. Dalits, at the same time, also tried to save ‘good Muslims, he further added.’

When asked about the upper caste riots against them and why the Dalits had not mobilized against upper castes, he replied that,

‘Congress and Muslims were trying to destroy our Hindu culture in the name of caste and by playing caste politics.’ We have nothing to do with the reservation policy of the government. Both of us (upper castes and lower castes) failed to understand this point and started fighting with each other. It was the Congress government and the Muslims during 80s and 90s who made such policies and tried to widen the gap between us. But we soon realized this tactics of Congress and Muslims. The ‘outsiders’ were provoking us and both of us helped each other to fail their policy to divide Hindu society. Thus we taught them a lesson and now see both of them have realized our strength and now they are quiet.’

The Muslims, on the other hand denied such allegations made against them by upper and lower castes. In my interview with the Muslims of Juhapura and Shahpur areas, they replied that they never planned to revenge any communal violence and that they had not made a pact with Dalits for this purpose during the anti-dalit violence. They claimed that (Hindu communal groups) always defamed them by saying that they were always equipped with weapons and that Muslims used mosques and shrines to hide those weapons. About the allegations of Dalits, they replied that the Dalit
communities were very close to Muslims and all of them had been supporters of the Congress. But the advent of the Bajrang Dal and other Hindu communal organizations broke this alliance and now even Dalits were against Muslims. They acknowledged the help they had given poor Dalits during the anti-reservation agitations but denied the allegations made against them by Dalits.

One Muslim gentleman, Sri A.M Khan (name changed, age 66 years) answered me that the Dalits, during those days, were scared of upper castes due to several acts of violence against them and when the violence turned against them (Muslims) in 1985, they extended their support to upper castes and indulged in violence against Muslims and helped upper castes in diverting the riots.

Another member of the same locality name Rahim-bhai (name changed, age 60 years) provided me very interesting and insightful facts. He informed me that the main victims of several caste riots were poor Dalits. Many Muslims used to maintain distance from Dalits due to their lower status in Hindu society. He also made an insightful point about the nature of this distance: apparently Muslims did not keep a distance from the Dalits of the shared locality but maintained social distance from the Dalits from other localities in the city. In the course of the time the Dalits developed resentment against Muslims which intensified with the 1969 riots; the arrival of the Bajarang Dal and BHJAP (BJP is called BHAJP in Gujarat) added more fuel to the fire. There is no doubt that Dalits and Muslims were loyal voters of the Congress but there were hardly any efforts by the party to bridge the
increasing social distance between the two communities.\textsuperscript{79} ‘At the same time there were lots of Muslims who provided help and shelter to Dalits during several riots against them. The upper castes did not like this and were scared that the Muslims would use the caste violence to take revenge for 1969 and other communal riots with the help of Dalits. This may explain the rumors spread in the city that the Muslims were preparing for revenge. The Bajarang Dal with some other Hindu communal groups took active part in creating an anti-Muslim environment and spreading negative rumors about us (Muslims). The upper castes and lower castes were convinced that all the problems of Gujarat were due to us and the caste riots turned against anti-Muslim violence.’

Therefore the circumstantial bias proved to be important then caste bias. And when the issue of ‘we and they’ came in Gujarat, the upper and lower castes joined hands in violence against Muslims, which suspended the caste riots in 1985.

On 19th March, some Hindus attacked Muslims in the Dariapur area of Ahmedabad. This incident caused the death of three people and injured eight. The violence spread throughout the district rapidly. Many localities witnessed Hindu-Muslim violence and the total loss of property amounted to Rs Three Crores (US $2.5 million).\textsuperscript{80} Official figures affirmed the death of

\textsuperscript{79} Even some members of Congress and National Student Union of India (NSUI, a student wing of Congress party) blamed the Congress for not doing anything to mobilize people against communalism or on any other issues.

12 people in 108 incidents of violence against Muslims. But to quote Asghar Ali Engineer,

“the actual figures of death and destruction are much higher. Around 19 persons have been killed, 14 in police firing and 5 in stabbing cases. Fifty two persons were injured, 15 in police firing, 28 in stabbing and the remaining in incidents of arson, beating etc.”

Enquiring into the causes of the communal disturbance in Ahmedabad in 1985, the Justice Dave commission of inquiry in its report wrongly blames the people of Ahmedabad to be culturally violent ever since the first major riots between Hindus and Muslims occurred in 1714. The commission further added that the court’s order to open the lock of Babri Masjid in 1984 further widened the gap between Hindus and Muslims in Gujarat.

However, no historical records and studies have shown that there had existed the rivalry or animosity between Hindus and Muslims in Ahmedabad.

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81 Ibid. p. 630.
84 For Historical documents which did not indicate the rivalry between Hindus and Muslims, see, “Ahmedabad District Gazetteer,” (Ahmedabad: Government of Gujarat, 1984). pp.107-08 and 70-141. For the historical study of lack of animosity between Hindus and Muslims in Ahmedabad, see, Kenneth. L. Gillion. Ahmedabad: A Study in
Even the Justice Reddy commission which inquired into the communal disturbances in 1969 was of the view that there were no historical tendencies of communal animosity/s between Hindus and Muslims\(^{85}\), although it is clear that several communal biases were present. Thus, it may be concluded that the intensification of the existing conflictual situation and bias against Muslims played an important role in causing the riots in Gujarat.

1965 to 1985 was a period of Hindu-Muslim violence due to circumstantial bias and Hindu communal organizations were making an effort to convert it into communalism. The violence of 1985 against Muslims helped Hindu communal organizations a lot in coming decades and they successfully converted the circumstantial bias into communalism. Soon after the riots, the BJP found its power base increasing in Gujarat. From this period the Sangh Parivar successfully transmitted a communal Hindu identity among the masses. The result was evident in the fact that the BJP gained power over the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation in 1987 and from 1995 BJP started to record clean sweeps in the elections to local self government institution like municipalities, block and village panchayats. It finally came to power in the State elections of 1995.

Like the violence of 1969, the violence of 1985 was also not started and provoked by BJP or any Sangh bodies. But they became active and vocal in the state and the period after 1985 witnessed the communalization of Gujarat and powerful presence of Sangh Parivar in the state and civil society.

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Civil Society and the Hindu-Muslim Violence

What is the role of civil society during these periods of violence? What was the impact of these incidents on the civic life of the masses? We will start addressing this question from the 1969 violence between Hindus and Muslims.

During the violence of 1969, the role of several civil society organizations was essentially passive. As stated above, the trade unions, once a pillar of Hindu-Muslim unity, had weakened considerably due to the closure of many textile mills and resulting loss of control over workers. Previously, trade unions provided a space for the marginalized sections of society of both communities. It incorporated the laboring classes of Ahmedabad into a political body and provided them with effective representation.\textsuperscript{86}

The erosion of this important part of civil society (trade unions) caused the poor and backward labor who lived in slums of the city (political society) to become violence prone. This change made workers apprehensive and it was easy for any conflictual situations to explode into violence in the absence of any strong trade unions. Thus the Textile Labor Association, Ahmedabad Millowners Association, Majoor Mahajan etc lost their relevance and influence over the working class in mobilization against the violence or to control the conflictual situation/s.

Before their decline, the trade union also did not pay attention to develop class identity among the labors. To quote Ghanshyam Shah,

“several departments are under the almost exclusive control of one or another caste or community. For instance, spinners are mostly Harijans, whereas winders and weavers are mostly Muslims. Laborers live with their kin in particular localities and “would decline to leave them in order to be nearer a particular mill” thus reinforcing community patterns. The Majoor Mahajan also works on the basis of departmental unions which often correspond to caste and communal groups. All this perpetuated social barriers and strong communal identifications among labourers, who have continued to be Harijans, Rajputs or Muslims have failed to be identified as members of an urban working class.

Thus it can be said that the trade unions did not try to inculcate class identity among the working class and the potential (if not actual) communal bias was controlled but not removed among the masses. Ashotosh Varshney locates two main civil society organizations that were responsible for communal peace of lack of violence, one being Congress party and other trade unions, but I argue that the vibrant civil society was non-existent in Gujarat, the trade unions etc were divided deeply on caste, religious or community

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grounds and they failed to give the class identity among the labor or community members. This is the main cause Gujarat witnessed many conflictual situation which turned into Hindu-Muslim violence.

The role of media in this violence was essentially negative. They spread rumors, projected a very negative picture of Muslims and sometimes stigmatized them as anti-nationals or violence prone etc. The majority of reporters were Hindus and they were biased in their reporting. Whenever a temple was attacked by Muslims, the news clearly said that the temple was attacked, but whenever a mosque was attacked by Hindus, the news was a religious place was attacked. The various reports and news releases helped this situation to worsen The reporters did not visit the riot affected area and the reports which appeared in different newspapers were based on rumors or on official versions released by the government. To quote Ghanshyam Shah,

“Sevak, an afternoon edition of the leading daily Sandesh, reported on the 20th that several women-obviously Hindu from the description-had been stripped and raped in public in Lal Mill ni Chal. It appears that the reporter had not visited the place but got the news from someone he knew who had come from that area. On the next day the report was officially contradicted by the paper, but the damage was done. By the


20th afternoon, killing of men and women, molestation and raping, had already begun.\textsuperscript{91}

In the violence of 1985 also, the role of civil society organizations such as media, trade unions etc was not impressive. Trade unions lost their influence and they did not even try to mobilize people against the virus of communalism. The several Gandhian associations and Asharams did nothing to prevent the violence or to mobilize the masses on Gandhian principles. The members of lower castes/class played an active role in instigating violence against Muslims. The workers, anti-social elements of slums, uneducated, unemployed and unskilled youths took the violence as an opportunity to loot, rob and/or kill.

The media also spread rumors. To quote Asghar Ali Engineer,

\begin{quote}
‘one newspaper published a photograph of a broken idol in a temple. However, the report was soon contradicted by some responsible citizens “before it could do more damage. An inflammatory handbill without any press line was also found circulating but in the absence of communal tension among the people nothing much happened.”\textsuperscript{92}
\end{quote}

The Congress, during this period lost its organizational structure completely and it witnessed a lack of political command. The Kshatriyas, Harijans and Adivasis became anti-Muslims and the Congress government did actually nothing to mobilize its KHAM supporters against the upper caste anti-

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid. pp. 198-199.


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reservation agitation and later anti-Muslim violence.\textsuperscript{93} The labor union, although, was calling for peace but could not exert any influence on people. The textile industry became inactive and did not appeal to the masses to maintain normalcy. The weakening of Gandhian institutions further caused the violence to spread. The Gandhian institutions were not influential enough to mobilize masses against the violence. Lastly the rise of liquor mafia and the inactive role of several Ahmedabad based institution aggravated the situation.\textsuperscript{94}

**Sangh Parivar and Civic Life**

The violence of 1969 led to a residential segregation in Ahmedabad. Muslims were forced to leave their areas of habitation. Actually, the process of ghettoization began after the 1969 riots. Hindu-Muslim families who were previously in a peaceful environment, after the riots stopped visiting each other, the children stopped playing together, there were total destruction of social life between these communities.\textsuperscript{95} The lost trust, lack of dialogue etc further provided a space for the communal organization to convert the circumstantial bias into communalism. The Sangh Parivar found a space to enter into the politico-civic domain of the masses to influence their ideology and to influence their voting behavior in their favor.

The Congress before 1969 split controlled the circumstantial bias. It was a well disciplined and strong organization. The elections within Congress party and its organizational structure in Gujarat further helped in

\textsuperscript{93} See, Howard Spodek, “From Gandhi to Violence,” opp.cite. p. 770-771.

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid. pp. 774-788.

maintaining civic life among the masses. But the 1969 split began a new phase in the organizational structure of Congress. The party after the split became person centric and not oriented to the public. The centralization of power within Congress and banning of election further drew it away from the masses. The Congress with its cadres and organizations failed to work among the masses to mobilize them. Therefore its reliance on caste equation (KHAM strategy) to win election and ignorance of party building further caused its downfall in Gujarat. Congress after 1985 election could not win elections and Gujarat witnessed the rise of BJP in 90s.

The Hindu communal organizations during this period, (although was not influential enough) was behaving in a disciplined manner. In the violence of 1969 Jan Sangh played a very significant role. Even before the violence was started, Gujarat witnessed the arrival of Guru Golwalkar in 1968. The Jana Sangh supported the cow-protection agitation and formed Hindu Dharma Raksha Samiti (HDRS). Once the violence of 1969 was started, HDRS played a very active role and inflamed the already tensed situation. The bifurcation of the Congress and its lack of will to control violence provided ground for the communal organizations to inflame the situation.

The role of police and local administration was also very negative; they either supported the killing of Muslims or became mere spectators. In some places the police was also active in firing against Muslims. During the violence of 1985, BJP started it Rath Yatra which provided it an opportunity to communalize the masses, civil and political society. The period from 1986

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witnessed the active role of BJP, VHP, RSS, Bajrang Dal etc to spread the communal ideas among the masses and social, political and economic status of Gujarat further helped Hindu communal groups to convert circumstantial bias into communalism. The BJP was regarded as party of upper castes, it also opposed the reservation policy of the Congress government. But soon after realizing the numerical strength of lower/backward castes, it moved towards them. Many lower/backward castes Hindus are from the political society and given their educational and economic backwardness BJP tried to mobilize them on communal grounds. The KHAM strategy of Congress witnessed the replacement into upper caste and lower/backward caste mobilization against Muslims. Many methods were used from 1981-1985 to make a consolidated Hindu identity, for instance, the invitation of Dalits to be a part of in several religious programs such as Chariot Processions, the call of VHP to eradicate caste identity etc. This does not mean that caste bias does not exist in Gujarat or that Hindus have shed their caste identity, but BJP has controlled this caste bias to avoid any violence on caste lines. An important point needs to be mentioned here, that in those riots Muslims also took part against Hindus. The media report as mentioned above (see footnote no.77), says that the temples were also attacked during the violence of 1969, Muslim mobilization was also taking place and the bias was from both sides. The period of 1986-2002 witnessed a powerful presence of communal party society in Gujarat. The period of 1986-2002 also witnessed a decline in the Muslim mobilization against Hindus. From here Gujarat witnessed a series of planned violence against Muslims and there were hardly any mobilizations among Muslims against this new development. Thus in the phase of communalism and communal nationalism, it was the Hindu mob influenced by the ideology of Hindutva, which attacked Muslims. The Sangh
Parivar has organized several pre-planned violence against Muslims, thanks for the successful spread of communalism and communal nationalism, and, at the same time, there was no evidence of an equal or successful retaliation by Muslims against these violence. They neither planned a reply nor did they organize themselves for revenge. The next chapter will focus on the foresaid period to locate the reasons of rise of Sangh Parivar in the politico-civic domain of the masses in Gujarat and their technique in the most favorable situation to convert the circumstantial bias into communalism and then communal nationalism.