

Communal incidents less compared to previous year, however,
communalisation of attitudes more intense

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Incidences of Communal Violence in 2014 were far more spread out, bringing in its fold areas which were hitherto not communally sensitive as compared to previous years. The theatre of communal violence included some new small towns like Hapur and Loni (both in UP) and Gurgaon in Haryana; and mobilized Sikh community too into the communal conflict with Muslims in Saharanpur and Hyderabad.

The most heinous targeted violence of the year 2014 was on 23rd December the Songbijit faction of National Democratic Front of Bodoland (NDFB) killed 76 adivasis (also referred to as tea tribes) which include women and children in 5 different places in Kokrajhar and Sonitpur Districts of Assam and houses burnt. Seven thousand villagers have been displaced. Three Bodos were also killed in retaliatory attack by adivasis.

In 2014, there were 561 incidents of communal violence compared to 823 in the year 2013. 90 people were killed and 1,688 people were injured in 2014 whereas in the previous year 133 people were killed and 2,269 were injured. Minister of State for Home Affairs attributed the trigger of communal violence to “religious factors, gender related disputes, alleged blasphemous portrayal of religion/religious symbols on social media/mobile applications, disputes over land belonging to religious sites and other issues.

Compare 201 dead if we include Assam ethnic violence and 90 if we exclude with 18 deaths and 19 injured in terrorist attacks reported in the year 2014. The 14 deaths include 3 policemen and 4 suspected militants. The terrorist attacks in J & K, resulted in 27 deaths, (including 15 security personnel, 4 civilians and 8 militants) and 5 injured, including 1 Sarpanch and 4 BSF personnel). Yet, while addressing the 49th Annual Conference of DGPs and IGs from all states in Guwahati on 29th Nov 2014, the Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh said that terrorism posed a serious challenge to the security of the country and that the government would not allow any terrorist organization in the world to get foothold in India. He feared that certain misguided youth in the country get attracted to organizations like ISIS but the government is committed to check it. (Online News India, 2014). Communal Violence has killed far more people – more than 14 times the people killed in terrorism. However, there was no mention of communal violence in his inaugural address.

Unless we include Assam where 111 people were targeted by NDFB in ethnic violence unleashed by the Songbijit faction of NDFB on Bengali Muslims in May and adivasis in December, UP would top of the list of number of people killed in communal violence with 129 communal incidences and most deaths (25) and 364 injured in the year 2014 according to

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the data presented in the Lok Sabha. After UP, Maharashtra recorded 82 incidents of communal violence in which 12 people died and 165 were injured in 2014; whereas in 2013, there were 88 incidents, in which 12 people died and 352 people were injured. Next in the list was Karnataka with 68 incidents, in which 6 people died and 151 were injured. In 2013, Karnataka had recorded 73 incidents in which 11 people died and 235 people were injured. In Rajasthan there were 61 incidents in which 13 people died and 116 were injured. Gujarat recorded 59 incidents in which 8 persons died and 172 were injured in 2014 as compared to 68 incidents in which 10 people had died and 184 people were injured in 2013. Bihar was the fifth highest state with 51 incidents in which 4 people were killed and 267 persons injured as compared to 63 incidents in which 7 persons were killed and 283 injured (Times News Network, 2014)².

The institutionalized riot system (IRS) that is capable of producing communal riots whenever need arises and political conditions are favourable, could be seen to be growing from strength to strength, particularly feeling emboldened with election of BJP led NDA government. However, communal incidents and casualties in violence are lesser compared to previous year as there is no political benefit to be derived at present through communal and targeted violence. Nevertheless the IRS was visible in organizing campaigns for mass conversions to Hinduism, opposing rights of followers of non-Hindu religious traditions to freely practice their religion (e.g. opposing use of loudspeakers on mosques and Christian prayer meetings in villages), spreading hatred against non-Hindus using abusive terms (e.g. “*haramzades*”) and calling upon non-Hindus to either convert or leave the country. They have even declared that by the year 2025, India would be 100 per cent Hindu inhabited country. The IRS is busy creating an intimidating atmosphere for non-Hindus.

In Bastar (Chhattisgarh) the Christians are socially boycotted and Christian run institutions are forced to follow practices dictated by the IRS – the Hindu Nationalist Organizations (HNOs). So terrorized are the Christians in Bastar that their organizations requested a fact finding team (constituted to look into violations of the Constitutional right to freedom of religion) to cancel their mission as it would invite violence on them! Less communal incidents but more intimidating atmosphere and far more spread out of HNO networks seems to have strategy. Therefore, though the communal incidents are less, yet the HNOs and IRS seems to have grown in strength and emboldened due to enabling and conducive political atmosphere.

In response to growing intimidating atmosphere, MIM is putting up more aggressive posture and using language bordering hate speeches. The HNOs are certainly benefiting from such posturing and use it to deflect critical attention from, and to justify, their own actions. AAP party leaders have even accused the BJP to have sponsored the MIM candidates in Delhi

² There are discrepancies in the figures of communal incidents in 2013. Tol states there were 84 incidents in Karnataka while PTI states 73 incidents. PTI states there were 84 incidents in Madhya Pradesh. The data has not been given on MHA website. The total number of deaths mentioned in Tol dated 27/11/2014 is 143 whereas Tol dated 3/12/14 states there were 133 deaths. As more than one reports report the Minister of State for Home Affairs to have reported 133 as total number of people killed in communal violence in 2014, we take that as more authentic figure.

elections as MIM too contributed to and benefits from polarization. MIM gains from the polarized atmosphere to a limited extent that it positions itself as hegemonic force representing Muslims and seeks to marginalize other aspirants of Muslim votes.

The cow belt region in the North and the West continued to be the most fatal and communally violent in the year 2014, though the incidents, number of death as well as number of injured were less compared to 2013. Electoral gains in by elections seem to be major motivation behind communal mobilization leading to communal violence. Karnataka seems to be exception to this as a southern state outside the cowbelt. In Madhya Pradesh, communal incidents halved from 84 in 2013 (Press Trust of India, 2014), in which 11 people were killed and 256 were injured, to 42 incidents in 2014, pulling it out of the five worst affected states. The decrease in communal incidents can be attributed to the fact that in 2013 there were general elections and politicians are more prone to communal mobilization during elections. Several studies have pointed out that BJP gains most electorally from communal polarisation as compared to other parties. Communal incidents and fatality were therefore higher in the months preceding election. Muzaffarnagar alone was responsible for 77 deaths in 2013. The BJP and its allies in won 74 out of 80 Lok Sabha seats UP in 2013 and the BJP felicitated the BJP leaders charged for communal violence in Muzaffarnagar and Moradabad. The plan to felicitate on 5th October the 63 party workers arrested in July on charges of clashing with the district administration of Moradabad injuring the District Magistrate was cancelled (Ghose, 2014).

Though the communal incidents in the year 2014 are less, the attempts to communally polarize and spread communal hatred is incessant. BJP MP Yogi Adityanath raised the row opposing interreligious marriages wherein the boy happens to be a Muslim and the girl happens to be a Hindu, stigmatizing it without any basis as a conspiracy to entice gullible Hindu girls and forcibly convert them to Islam. They stigmatized such matrimonial ties as “love jihad”. The Hindu nationalists took a vicious campaign ferreting out all such interreligious unions and terrorizing the young couples in northern and western region of India and distributing propaganda booklets from door to door. Next, BJP minister Maneka Gandhi during her poll campaign in Rajasthan made a statement without providing any basis and widely reported that profits earned in cow slaughter are ploughed into terror activities. If so, the information should have been given to the police for serious investigation but no such action is known to have been taken. Sadhvi Niranjana Jyoti, a minister in Central Government also made a despicable hate speech during her poll campaign in Delhi that there were only two classes of Indians – Ramzades (progeny of Lord Ram, signifying Hindus) or Haramzades (non-Hindus, terming them to be bastards).

In Agra the most poor and marginalized of the society who happen to be Muslims – those engaged in recycling of waste were sought to be converted to Hinduism by the VHP by using both coercion (threat of evicting their plastic shelters) and inducement (offering them ration cards, BPL cards etc. if they converted). This was coupled with threat of large number of conversions in Agra around Christmas from other religions to Hinduism and Pravin Togadia stating that Hindus in India would increase from 82% to 100%. Another BJP MP Shakshi Maharaj stated without any basis and contrary to the facts that all Madrasas were den of terror

training. In fact in many Madrasas Hindu students also study. A bomb blast in a house in Khagrahar, Burdwan, in WB in which one person died is sought to be passed off conspiracy by terrorists by Bangladesh based terror groups (JMB) protected by W. Bengal CM. The entire investigation is sought to be misdirected to suit the political agenda of the BJP and help it politically in forthcoming elections, rapidly communalizing W. Bengal. Amit Shah, the BJP president in his public meeting stated that Saradha chit fund scam money is being used to fund terrorism, a charge rebutted by BJP minister on the floor of the Parliament. Sakshi Maharaj declared Godse to be a patriot and Sushma Swaraj, Minister of External Affairs wanted Geeta to be declared as a national book.

These are just a few examples of continuous attempts by BJP leaders and Hindu nationalists to spread hatred. The BJP leaders also made statements that they would pull down loudspeakers from every mosque. Using loudspeakers in the mosques, routes of religious processions etc. were some other issues exploited to spread hatred against the minorities. What gets reported in the national press is a small fraction of what is happening on the ground and some of it is reported in regional language media. Hindu nationalists of various hues working under numerous banners have become emboldened after victory of BJP in general election. Putting their Hindu nationalist ideology above the law of the land they take liberty to act as they please, often with police in tow spreading ill will among communities, particularly targeting the minority communities. At times, such campaigns turn out to be money spinning rackets. The issue they usually exploit more often is transportation of cattle in which a Muslim is involved as a driver or owner of the vehicle. Such vehicles are stopped without authority and the cattle seized and taken home unless on the pretext that the driver was involved in cow-slaughter activity, unless the driver/owner agrees to pay heavy ransom. The other issue similarly exploited is declaring Muslim immigrants as Bangladeshi infiltrators; disrupt celebrations of festivals like Christmas and New Year and meetings organized by Christians. Schools run by Christians are falsely accused to be converting Hindu students. Such baseless allegations are covered by the regional language media which serves the objective of the HNOs to represent the minorities as homogenous communities with anti-national and anti-“Hindu” attitudes. They also try to provoke the minorities by desecrating their sacred and religious symbols through social media.

In fact, the situation is so polarized that most trifle dispute between persons belonging to different communities can lead to outbreak of communal violence. In Somnath, dispute over payment of Rs. 10 to autorickshaw led to outbreak of communal violence in which about 20-25 persons were injured. Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for a 10 year moratorium on communal violence. However, his party members are either not listening to their leader or it is a neat division of discourse – PM talks about development and the rest do their work.

Continuous propaganda has led to more polarization and communalization of attitudes making minorities feel more vulnerable. This is also evident from the voting behaviour as people belonging to all castes are voting for BJP guided by their anti-minority attitudes. The reduced number of communal incidents and deaths are not accurate measure of communal attitudes. Strategically, the HNOs are restrained so far as violence is concerned, which is more localised. They are running a low intensity conflict, more interested in communalizing

attitudes and preparing for even larger and more widespread conflict than the nation witnessed in 1992-93 and in 2002. But that would be when the Govt. becomes unpopular.