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**The Political  
Historiography of  
Modern Gujarat**

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# THE POLITICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY OF MODERN GUJARAT

Tannen Neil Lincoln\*

## Abstract

*The focus of this paper is on the political history of modern Gujarat, which has been an intriguing one. The paper identifies and discusses in the broad landscape of Gujarat's politics three notable developments that have shaped its trajectory over the years: First, the creation of Gujarat as a separate state in 1960 and its bearing on the state's polity; Second, the three-decade rule of the Congress party and its political tactic of assimilation in the form of the Kshatriya, Harijan, Adivasi and Muslim (KHAM) formula that enabled it to continue in power, despite the party's decline at the all-India level; and third, the ascent and the stranglehold of the BJP on the political reigns through the employment of different tactics that have oscillated from the spread and consolidation of the 'Hindutva' ideology to the mantra of 'good' and 'inclusive governance', which now forms part of the party's official lexicon.*

## Introduction

The attempt to write a political historiography has a central motive, which is to trace the developments made in the political domain and how it has come to define the 'idea of Gujarat'<sup>i</sup> in the modern<sup>ii</sup> times. While the exercise of tracing the entire political genealogy of Gujarat would prove herculean in nature, for the purpose of this paper, I will restrict it to the landmark developments made in the late 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The approach would enable us to be focused and also qualify us to put into perspective the social, economic and political events that have shaped the ideas and predilections of a generation. In the case of Gujarat, previous scholarship or works of political historiography have reflected upon a multitude of factors that have made significant contributions to the formation of the 'Gujarat State' as well as the 'Gujarati Identity', thus capturing in essence the all encompassing 'idea of Gujarat'. Scholarly works ranging from identifying the influence of the Indus Valley Civilization (circa. 2400 BC to 1800 BC); to the role of the Central Asians in disseminating the Vedic culture; to the inclusion of the then Gujarat in the Mauryan Empire; to exploring the trade relations established between the Shakas (2<sup>nd</sup> Century BC) and the Romans; to the half-century rule of the Rajputs till their defeat by Allaudin Khilji and losing the kingdom to the Delhi Sultanate, followed by the annexation by Akbar in 1572; leading to the disintegration of the Mughal Empire in 1707 and finally the establishing of the British Empire in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century have in a sense captured every facet of Gujarat (Dalpatram; 1887; Forbes, 1924 Commissariat, 1938 & 1957; Chaube, 1975; Das Gupta and Pearson, 1987; Ratnagar, 2001) .

The historiography that has wonderfully been captured in various treatises has not only explored possibilities of history shaping modern Gujarat but has also acted as a conduit in shaping the public memory of the Gujarati people. Public memory is best approached not in terms of a subject-

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The arguments presented in this paper are part of the author's ongoing doctoral studies at ISEC, Bangalore. For this paper a thorough review of the literature on Gujarat enabled the author to explore different facets of the state's polity in a cogent manner. The author would like to acknowledge the support and guidance given by his supervisor Prof Supriya Roychowdhury at every step of his academic pursuits.

object structure but rather as non-subjective enactment in and as such things as institutions, practices, and discourses (Phillips, 2004). The characterization of this has emerged in the form of 'Gujarati Asmita'<sup>iii</sup> or 'Gujarati Pride' that has come to define the present day modern narrative in Gujarat's polity. The dichotomy of 'us' versus 'them' that has been the hallmark of Gujarat's politics, especially from the 1980s when the *Hindutva* narrative gained traction in the political sphere is testimony to this claim. Although what precedes the rise of *Hindutva* in the shaping of a Gujarati identity in contemporary times, that has premised itself on the Aryan identity primarily among the middle classes, can essentially be traced back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century writings of Gujarati poet Narmad in his poem titled *Koni Koni Chhe Gujarat?* (Whose is Gujarat?). While the poem has been hailed as one of the earliest works to have been written in systematic Gujarati language following the lexicon and which has at its heart the central tenet of Gujarati asmita, it also upholds the distinction between 'Aryadharmā' and 'Paradharmā':

*"It (Gujarat) belongs to all those who speak Gujarati; to those who observe Aryadharmā of all varieties; and also to those who are foreigners but nurtured by this land; and to those who follow other religions (Paradharmā) but are well wishers of mother Gujarat and therefore our brothers."*<sup>iv</sup>

Similarly, an essay written in 1856 entitled *Swadeshbiman* referred to the Gujarati motherland as a Hindu entity which was desecrated by Muslim rule. This phase of Gujarati literature created Gujarati nationalism that clearly lay down the distinction between Hindu rule and Muslim foreign rule (Isaka, 2002 a, 2002 b; Mehta and Mehta, 2011). In another literary text entitled *Gujaratno Nath* (Master of Gujarat) and *The Glory that was Gujardesh* by K M Munshi sentiments of Hindu hurt were projected. However, it was the first Gujarati novel written by Nandashankar Mehta entitled *Karan Ghelo: Gujaratno Chello Rajput Raja* (The Last Rajput King of Gujarat) written in 1868 that highlighted the decline of Gujarat after the Rajput rule (Mehta and Mehta, 2011). It was such a contribution by the Gujarati literary personalities that also brought forth the destruction of the Somnath Temple by Mahmud Ghori that was to be etched into the collective memory of the Gujarati people, particularly the Hindus (Thapar; 2004). It is this collective sense of destruction of a Hindu symbol that gave greater credence to the *Hindutva* discourse that was popularized by the *Sangh Parivar* and the Bharatiya Janata Party in the 1990s to unite the electorate in Gujarat.<sup>v</sup>

It is important to note that traditionally the state of Gujarat had been divided into 4 geographical regions that have followed different paths to cultural and political homogeneity that have intersected with each other at different points in time. The 4 regions are mainland Gujarat, the region of Saurashtra, Kutch (also spelled as Kachchh) and Eastern Gujarat, which consists of the Adivasi belt.<sup>vi</sup> An interesting aspect of the history of Gujarat is that during the reigns of the Maurya's and also the Gupta's, the land had never been identified as a single homogenized political entity. This was due to the fact that the 4 geographic regions of Gujarat had largely been shaped separately by distinct influences in history and were therefore administered under 4 separate socio-cultural sub-regions. It is because of this unique distinction found in different topographies of Gujarat that the Bharatiya Janata Party's and the *Sangh Parivar's* effort to unite the regions through *Hindutva* has acted as a strategy in assimilation.

Given the parameters of the research endeavor- the arguments put forth in this paper largely trace the political historiography of modern Gujarat that serves as a background to understanding the dynamism of Gujarat's politics.

## **Genesis of Mahagujarat (1956-1961)**

The origins of modern Gujarat lay in the Mahagujarat Movement that demanded the carving out of a separate state from Bombay based on linguistic grounds. It should be pointed out that until 1947; a mere 15% of today's Gujarat had been directly under the control of the British administration (Mehta and Mehta, 2011). In fact, the topography of present Gujarat included more than 300 erstwhile princely states along with Baroda. Post-1947 under the stewardship of Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, the princely state of Baroda and other parts of Gujarat were merged with Bombay. Initially, the Congress Party that had been at the forefront in India's political scenario went against the idea of having a Swarnim or greater Gujarat that would encompass regions of Saurashtra/ Kathiawar, Baroda and Kutch based on linguistic basis. However, the protests of activists in the Andhra region which was spearheaded by Potti Sriramulu resulted in the creation of Andhra state in the year 1953. It was then on that the idea of forming states based on linguistic grounds gained traction in Indian politics and also a change in the policies of the Congress. The Maha-Gujarat Janata Parishad (MGJP), which was an umbrella organization of leftist forces, spearheaded the movement together with the Hindu Right, farmers groups and even Congressmen under the leadership of Indulal Yagnik following a series of negotiations with the Congress government and parallel talks with the Samyukt Maharashtra Parishad in Bombay. In 1956 the MGJP opposed the recommendations laid down by the States Reorganization Committee that sought to create a bilingual state of Bombay that would include parts of present day Saurashtra, Kutch Vidharbha and Marathwad. Interestingly, it was the politically shrewd Congressman Morarji Desai who agreed with the States Reorganization Committee recommendations. The political logic behind the support was the creation of a massive state that would act as the countervailing force to the political behemoth Uttar Pradesh (Sud, 2012: 23). This proposition of Desai and the Congress party proved to be their undoing when in the 1957 elections the party lost to the MGJP, especially in mainland Gujarat. The MGJP managed to win 29 assembly seats. The clash between the demands made by the MGJP and Congress finally came to rest in 1960, when Gujarat was born as a separate state. The MGJP surprisingly disintegrated after that. Therefore, Congress being the sole powerful party in the newly carved out state, gathered 50.77% of the assembly vote in 1962. Dr Jivraj Mehta assumed office as the Chief Minister thereon.

## **Gujarat Politics under the Congress Party (1961-1995)**

The political developments of Gujarat post-1960 until the early 1970s were coloured by the clash of Indira Gandhi and Morarji Desai on the national political scene. The floating of their outfits recognized as Congress (R) and Congress (O) respectively set up a clash in Gujarat in the 1972 assembly elections. The Congress (R) secured 139 out of 168 seats and Congress (O) secured a mere 16. The 1972 elections could be considered symbolic in two important ways: First, the older support or social base of the Congress that was predominantly upper caste in nature lost its power quotient in the newly established powerful Congress (R). Second, the numerically dominant caste and other groups in Gujarat began to play a greater role in forming the party's new social base. This new base comprised the emergent Kshatriya, a combination of higher caste Rajputs and Darbars, as well as Kolis, Baniyas and Bhils that constituted 30% of the population which was numerically significant. It is important to note

that prior to the 1972 split of the Congress, the party had considerable support from the Brahmins and Baniyas as well. However, with the rise of the significant Patel or Patidar community, they were overshadowed. While relative political stability was achieved for a brief period in the 1970s, the party ran into new problems when the newly elected Brahmin leader Ghanshyam Oza was handpicked as the Chief Minister by Indira Gandhi. The newly acquired power status achieved by the Patidar community under the leadership of Chimanbhai Patel quickly overthrew the new arrangement, thus asserting its all-powerful status in Gujarat politics. The situation that ensued quickly coincided with the Navnirman Movement that added to the troubles of the party and its leadership. The Navnirman Movement was over the issue of rising food prices, which was an outcome of the monsoon failure in 1972. Initially, the movement was supported by academicians, lawyers, doctors and other sections of the society, but as the movement gathered an all-India status, it directly challenged Indira Gandhi's position at the national level. The tumultuous phase in the early 1970s achieved relative stability when it found a stable voter base in what is called the KHAM coalition.

The birth of the KHAM coalition can be traced back to one of the meetings conducted by the Gujarat Khedut Ane Vikas Parishad (Society for the development of farmers and farmland) in the 1970s (Sud, 2012: 27). The need to quickly adopt the political strategy was stressed by Jinabhai Darji, who was the Gujarat Pradesh Congress President. The simple logic behind the KHAM coalition was to target the Kshatriyas (40%), Harijans (7%), Adivasis (14%) and Muslims (8.3%) that constituted 69.3% of the state's population. This electoral formula also strived to include within itself the backward communities that were named in the Bakshi Commission of Gujarat (1976) and were recognized as OBCs. With this the Congress party for the first time provided a space for socio-political mobility for the backward as well as Muslim minorities. The KHAM coalition provided handsome returns to the party in the elections of 1980. Out of the 111 KHAM candidates put up by the Congress for the 182 seats, 96 got elected (Sud, 2012: 27). With this huge win and new found success in the KHAM formula, Madhavsinh Solanki, who hailed from the Kshatriya community, was sworn in as Gujarat's CM. The powerful KHAM formula not only dominated the assembly but also exercised its power through the different government boards and corporations that existed which were equally important<sup>vii</sup>. The success of KHAM as an electoral strategy could be traced back to 1985, when Congress won the assembly elections and Madhavsinh Solanki continued as the CM. But the negative repercussion of this step was the alienation of the Hindu upper castes that were pushed to the fringes of Gujarat's politics for the first time. It was this disgruntled class that was to become the new power base of the BJP in the 1990s. In spite of the Congress party's initial success with the KHAM formula, it experienced negative repercussions when it lost the elections to the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation in 1987. This along with several other factors ushered in a new era in Gujarat politics that saw the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party in the state.

In retrospect, the political scenario of Gujarat, post-1960 under the Congress regime was characterized by two very important developments. First, the party in its quest for power through its KHAM formula expanded its voter base by including the backward castes and Muslim minority which in a sense provided an opportunity for them to be upwardly mobile in politics. This significant step of Indira Gandhi pushed back the notion of the party being an upper caste, land lord dominated party (Varshney, 2000). The tactic adopted also alienated the upper caste who found greater acceptability later on with

the BJP and within the *Sangh Parivar*. Second, the party continued to exercise power in the state in spite of it losing power in other Indian states, which was described as the decline of the 'Congress System'. This decline of the Congress provided a space within which the growth of the BJP took place culminating into it being catapulted to political power in the '90s.

## **The Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) ascent to power**

The BJP's ascent to power in Gujarat could be neatly traced by dividing it into three phases locating the factors that brought the party to power and further reflecting the dynamism of the party and tactics it employed to sustain itself in power for two decades in Gujarat. The division of phases could be as follows: the First phase from 1995 to 1998; the Second phase from 1998 to 2001 and the Third phase from 2001 to the present<sup>viii</sup>. The detailed analyses of the three phases are given below:

### **Phase I (1995-98)**

The BJP in Gujarat laid stake to power in 1995, when it captured 122 seats in the assembly elections. The party's win was not sudden in nature nor was it due to the anti-incumbency factor of the Congress regime, but was due to the meticulous support structure built by the party at the grassroots level since the 1960s (Shah, 1996). The prelude to the BJP's growing popularity was seen particularly in the late '80s when it captured power at the local-level institutions.

The BJP initially captured the Rajkot Municipal Corporation in 1983 and subsequently the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation in 1987. These wins were symbolic and indicative of the party's rise in the state and in a sense set the ground for the assembly elections thereafter. But, while the party gradually developed political legitimacy at the urban level, it was the growing influence of the various affiliates of the *Sangh Parivar* that penetrated the local structures at the rural level, which ranged from co-operatives to agricultural boards and committees. While analyzing this growing political power of the BJP, an important aspect emerges –with the party expanding or consolidating its new power base in the rural as well as urban areas, the creation of new patronage networks began to surface. Initially, with the Congress dominating the political scene and by default extending its patronage to especially the KHAM members, these institutions acted as springboards for those who harbored political ambitions. However, now with the BJP these institutions acted as gateways to restructure the old patronage networks of the Congress within the administration (Shah, 1996). This in a sense as a political tactic worked very effectively for the BJP, by first institutionalizing and then legitimizing the principles of '*Hindutva*' that was backed by the 'yatras'<sup>ix</sup> and other activities in the state. It further acted as a prelude to the upcoming elections in 1995 when the BJP formed the government in Gujarat for the first time in the state's history.

The Gujarat Assembly elections in 1995 have proved to be a crucial and critical event that marks the position of the BJP as a supreme party that has dominated the political scene hitherto, for almost two decades. Deconstructing the factors and the consequences of these elections, .i.e. in terms of its political strategy and its voter base provides for a background to the present popularity or status of the party enjoyed among its political or electoral base. To begin with, it is important to stress that it was the 1995 assembly elections in Gujarat that was to be a direct confrontation between the BJP and

Congress party (Shah, 1995; Yadav, 1995; Yagnik, 1995). This was because prior to 1995, the BJP had either been a partner in a coalition government in the state or had seat sharing adjustments with other small parties. Therefore, the BJP went all out and contested the entire 182 seats that had been up for grabs. One of the factors that forced the BJP to contest elections all by itself was its impressive victories in the Zilla Panchayat election, where it secured 599 seats out of the total 772 seats. In comparison, the Congress party secured a mere 111 seats in the very same elections. The BJP's performance could be termed stellar, when compared to its performance in 1987 where it managed to win a mere 62 seats out of a total 687 seats. On the other hand, the Congress party that had secured 492 seats in 1987 got its tally down to 111 seats in 1995. Therefore, sensing its popularity in the rural as well as urban populace the BJP decided to contest elections all by itself in 1995. Another prime reason that forced the BJP to become pro-active in the state could be traced back to the failure to capture power in the two electorally significant states of Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh in 1993. A shrewd political tactic that was inspired from these defeats was the task of expanding its base in Gujarat. A nuanced understanding to this could be through the analysis of the Jan Sangh in the state which was established in the 1960s and gained immense popularity among the Bania and Brahmin castes, who belonged to the class of petty traders. Among these supporters were also a section of Rajputs, who hailed from Saurashtra. Slowly and steadily the Jan Sangh attracted the powerful Patidar/Patel community to its fold in the '80s as well. However, the anti-reservation agitations and the Ram-Janmabhoomi movement in the '80s and '90s forced the backward communities and the upper castes to mobilize together and shift their loyalty to the BJP from the Congress party. The political allegiance of these communities was seen in the 1995 assembly elections.

The outcome of the 1995 assembly elections proved to be the starting point for the BJP's stranglehold over power in the years to come in Gujarat. Out of the 182 seats the party contested, it won 122 seats with 42% of the total votes in the state. Deconstructing this figure, it could be seen that the party secured 53.2 % votes in the urban areas, followed by 45.9% in the semi-urban areas, and 41.4% and 39.1% votes in the rural and tribal areas respectively<sup>x</sup>. Among the Backward communities, the party gained considerable ground but it performed phenomenally well among the OBCs. It secured 38% of the vote share among the OBCs. However, the highest vote share for BJP in terms of percentage was among the upper castes (67%) and Jains (50%). Surprisingly, it also received 7% of the Muslim votes in rural Gujarat as well. These elections projected the BJP's voter base that extended from the OBCs to the Adivasis and also the Dalit communities. Interestingly, the KHAM strategy that aimed to consolidate this vote bank stood decimated in the face of the Congress party. However, the BJP's newly acquired voter base, whether proved a stable one or not, could be seen through the analysis of the political scenario post-1998, which marks the second phase of the BJP in Gujarat.

## **Phase II (1998-2001)**

The period from 1998 to 2001 could be marked as the second phase of the BJP's rule in Gujarat. This phase is particularly important as notable developments took place not only for the party but also saw the emergence of *Hindutva* and religious polarization that had electoral ramifications and came to dominate the political narrative of this period.



A notable aspect of politics that emerged during this period was the convergence of caste and communal identity as the prime factor on which the BJP expanded its electoral base. In retrospect, it was between 1985 and the late '90s that the *Sangh Parivar* popularized the notion of Savarna viewed through the prism of *Hindutva*, that was to be a binding factor for the Hindu community in the state. Earlier versions of polarization in the society based on the hierarchical difference existing between the Savarna and Avarnas, which was also reflected in the anti-reservation agitations, had now turned into a direct Hindu-Muslim confrontation, which was an outcome of the support enjoyed by the Muslims of the Congress Party in the long stint of power it enjoyed in the state. The different methods of the *Sangh Parivar* especially 'yatras' which were organized<sup>xi</sup>, acted as counter-measures to nullify this Muslim support for the Congress. These *Sangh Parivar* initiatives not only entailed significant political capital for the BJP, but also marked the time when the party faced tremendous internal differences. However, the party was very well able to hold on to the reigns of power in the state. The 1998 Gujarat Assembly elections were symbolic as the party secured 117 seats, with a total vote share of 47.44%. It was the powerful Patel leader Keshubhai Patel who was sworn in as the Chief Minister. It was almost immediately after the momentous victory that factionalism surfaced within the party (Patel, 2004). This resulted in divided loyalties between the supporters of Keshubhai and the then General Secretary of the party, Narendra Modi<sup>xii</sup>. This factionalism had serious repercussions for the party and the upcoming Zilla Panchayat elections in the year 2000. The BJP managed to secure 192 seats out of 717 seats in various Zilla Panchayats. The abysmal performance of the party in turn created intense pressure on Patel to resign. Subsequently, it was Narendra Modi who was appointed the caretaker CM for Gujarat in 2001. What is also central to the consolidation of political legitimacy of the BJP in this phase of politics is the internal differences among the Congress Party that fractured the mandates of the leaders among the electorate and prevented it from projecting themselves as a unified party, unlike the BJP who capitalized on its mass cadre to spread the agenda of the leadership and the party as well.

The two most important outcomes of this phase of Gujarat politics were: first, the discourse on *Hindutva* that was largely restricted to the difference between Savarnas and Avarnas was now shifted to the Hindu-Muslim divide. This reflected in the growing popularity of the *Sangh Parivar* in Gujarat which enabled it to expand its political base well beyond the Savarna castes. Second, the BJP as a party was now seeing an established and effective parallel power structure under Narendra Modi. It is this power structure that came to define the third phase of the BJP, i.e. post-2002 that in turn sees the BJP unit of Gujarat almost become a powerful autonomous unit of the party and that also leads to its social base including even the Muslims within it<sup>xiii</sup>. This in a sense sees a change in the trajectory of the *Hindutva* movement in the state, which in turn challenges several presuppositions of the movement or narrative established in the relevant literature (Yagnik and Sheth, 2005; Berenschot, 2011; Desai, 2011; Sud, 2012).

### **Phase III (2001- present)**

The significant development that took place within the BJP during this phase of Gujarat politics has been the rise of Narendra Modi, who had been the party's General Secretary in the state. The ouster of Keshubhai from the party led to the appointment of Narendra Modi as Gujarat's CM in October, 2001<sup>xiv</sup>.

An important aspect that Modi brought to the table was that it was for the first time that an individual or politician from the OBC was made the CM. Given the strong OBC population in the state, which stands at 37.6%, the community in a sense was now at the forefront of Gujarat politics, which acted as a countervailing force to the Brahmins (3%), Vaishyas or Jains (2%) and the powerful Patel (14%) who dominated the political scene not only under the Congress but during the earlier rule of the BJP preceding Modi as well. The rise of the OBCs during this phase provided it with an opportunity to have greater representation within Gujarat's polity. This phenomenon was congruous to what Jaffrelot (2003) termed as the 'silent revolution'<sup>xv</sup>. An insight into this newly attained status of the OBCs within Gujarat, under the BJP which was still viewed as an elite or Brahmin-Baniya dominated party, provided the party's leadership to tap into the potential of the community as a vote bank.

The juncture at which Narendra Modi occupied political office was fragile for the party. The BJP not only was faced with anti-incumbency especially from the Patidars in Saurashtra region, but also due to the former CM Keshubhai Patel's administrative inefficiency in dealing with the rehabilitation of the Kutch earthquake victims (Mukhopadhyay, 2013). The other troubling factor for the BJP was the loss it faced in the 2001 by-polls: it lost one Lok Sabha and two Vidhan Sabha seats<sup>xvi</sup>. Prior to this, in 2000 itself it lost the Ahmedabad and Rajkot Municipal Corporations in the state. It is ironic to see this as the BJP catapulted to power by initially capturing these institutions. Apart from this, in 2000 the BJP won a mere 27% of the District Panchayat seats. This in comparison to its performance in the 1995 elections, where it secured 82%, could be dubbed abysmal. However, the leadership factor under Narendra Modi gave it a fresh lease of life. The perceptions of the voters and citizens on Narendra Modi and the BJP were a positive sign towards the revival of the party in the state, especially after 2002. Table 1 here highlights the effect of Modi's decisive leadership on the people of Gujarat in the fragile period of 2002, when Gujarat had experienced the horrific Godhra riots:

**Table 1: Voters' Views on Narendra Modi's Leadership and Work, 2002<sup>xvii</sup>**  
(Percentages)

<b>Statement About the effect of Modi's leadership (1)</b>	<b>Agree (2)</b>	<b>Disagree (3)</b>	<b>No View (4)</b>
Economic condition of Gujarat has improved	49	31	21
Prestige of Gujarat has increased	48	31	21
Gujarat has an effective leader in Modi	46	30	24
Work on the Narmada dam progressed well	46	27	27
Threat of terrorism has decreased	40	34	26

**Source:** As quoted in Patel, 2003 Pg.139 (CSDS Pre-poll Survey, 2002)

While on a positive high, the BJP simultaneously had to confront the backlash of the Godhra incident in 2002. Out of 182 constituencies, 154 were affected by violence or riots (Dhattiwala, 2014). The electoral benefit gained by the BJP due to the polarization of voters is well established. However, identifying it as the sole reason for the BJP's win in the 2002 Assembly elections that followed would not

be a fair assessment of the situation (Yadav and Patel, 2002; Kumar, 2003; Yadav, 2003; Dhattiwala, 2014). A view of the social composition of voters in those elections indicates the growing support to the party with a diversified political base that has remained intact. The performance of the party in the successive elections of 2007 and 2012 too are indicative of this trend of a growing political base. Table 2 provides an overview of the aforementioned trend observed in Gujarat's politics:

**Table 2: Voting Preferences of the Different Communities in 2002, 2007, 2012  
Assembly Elections<sup>xviii</sup>**

Caste and Community	BJP			Congress		
	2002	2007	2012	2002	2007	2012
Upper Caste	76	69	60	24	26	22
Patels	82	71	61	9	21	10
Kshatriyas	61	47	55	38	40	41
Koli	NA	42	54	NA	52	36
Other OBC	57	54	56	39	38	28
Dalit	27	34	25	67	54	61
Adivasi	34	38	33	49	33	43
Muslim	10	22	21	69	67	69
Others	-	61	70	-	26	21

**Source:** Author's compilation from CSDS Pre- and Post-Poll Survey of 2002, 2007 and 2012 Gujarat Assembly Elections as quoted in Patel, 2003 and Jaffrelot, 2013.

The party secured 117 seats with a 49.36% vote share in the 2007 Assembly elections and 115 seats with a vote share of 48 % in 2012<sup>xix</sup>. What is particularly noteworthy about the trends that emerge out of Table 2 is that although the BJP received an overall majority of votes from different caste and community groups in subsequent Assembly elections, the vote share of these sections have declined over the years. Especially the vote shares of the SC and ST communities have been declining. Contrary to this, a positive development for the party has been the steady gaining of votes from the Muslim community. As seen in the Table 2, from getting a mere 10% of votes in 2002 the BJP have received 21% in 2012. This is a noteworthy development for the BJP, especially after the 2007 outreach initiated by Narendra Modi that enabled it to build trust among the Muslims.

The other notable development that occurred post-2002 under Narendra Modi's rule was the all important 'Sadhbhavana Mission' that was targeted towards the reconciliation of the Muslim community in Gujarat, which was particularly alienated after the Godhra incident and the violence that followed. Also, there was to be a shift in the broad political discourse from *Hindutva* to 'Good governance' and 'inclusive development'<sup>xx</sup>. The Muslim community's support to the party in successive elections points to it working as a successful strategy for Narendra Modi and the BJP. Although what is of interest is that one can see the considerable number of Muslims voting for the party. From an initial 2.5% votes in the rural areas and 4% in the urban areas in 1993-94, the quantum jump was 22% in 2007 and 21% in 2012. A considerable amount of the Muslim vote was received from Kutch and

Saurashtra regions. What is also significant is that other than the elusive Muslim vote, a slew of other communities, such as the Patels, the Kshatriyas and the OBCs, have provided the BJP with a strong political base in the state. Thus, the BJP under Narendra Modi has managed to 'plebeianize' itself to a considerable extent (Jaffrelot, 2014). The winning formula has kept the BJP in power in the state since 1995.

The three phases of Gujarat politics are discussed here largely to highlight the changing political scenario since 1960 in the state and to highlight the political logic and strategies adopted by the Congress as well as the BJP to consolidate and stabilize their respective wide and politically successful voter bases, over a period of over three decades. This political historiography of Gujarat sets the backdrop for understanding the state's polity that has traversed a long path.

### **Concluding Remarks**

This paper attempts to trace the political history of modern Gujarat and understand the role of history in defining and shaping the identity of a people that is coterminous with the political developments occurring in the state. The transition of the BJP in the political context of Gujarat attains an even greater significance post-2014 as the party formed Government at the Centre and enables us to understand its change in ideology that is reflected through the course of state action adopted. The paper further throws light on the political factors that led to the creation of Gujarat as a separate state in 1960 by briefly exploring the role of the MGJP and its efforts in this regard. Further, the three-decade rule of the Congress party has been discussed to identify the factors (especially the KHAM formula) that enabled it to continue in power and ironically led to its decline in the 1990s. However, the key highlight of this paper is the phase-wise analysis of the BJP and the factors and tactics that enabled it to capture the echelons of power and remain in this position hitherto. The analysis of the BJP rule into three phases and the defining factors of these phases reflect the change in strategy of the party to continue in power uninterrupted. An important development that especially emerges out of the second and third phase of the BJP's rule and that deserves attention is the party's widening political base that has included within itself the OBCs and to an extent the Muslims as well. This contemporary development within the party has enabled it to be less reliant on its traditional Brahmin-Baniya voters. However, the most significant denouement of the third phase of BJP's rule is the strong and decisive leadership of its former Chief Minister Narendra Modi that clearly fetched the BJP a major chunk of votes from the Gujarati people. The lexicon of 'Good Governance' and 'Inclusive Development' reflected the change of tactics employed by Narendra Modi and the BJP to win elections and establish a new trend in Gujarat's politics that is long sustaining and marks a distinctive shift in terms of a brand of politics that is bereft of caste and communal colour.

## End Notes

- <sup>i</sup> It was the Gujarati Poet Padmanabha who in his work titled Kanhadde Prabandh written around the 15<sup>th</sup> Century used the word 'Gujarat' to describe pre-modern Gujarat. Prior to that the landscape was referred to as 'Gurjardesh'.
- <sup>ii</sup> Here 'modern' refers to the developments made in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century.
- <sup>iii</sup> The slogan Jai Jai Garvi Gujarat (Hail Hail Proud Gujarat) was coined by the Gujarati literary figure Narmadashankar Lalshankar Dave in 1851. The slogan has virtually become Gujarat's national anthem. The assertion of what has come to become the Gujarati Asmita has been traced back to this slogan and Narmad's work.
- <sup>iv</sup> Narmad Lalshankar. (1994). *Mari Hakikat*. Edited by Ramesh Shukla. (Surat: Kavi Narmad Yugantar Trust). First published in 1866.
- <sup>v</sup> The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and the BJP under the leadership of Lal Krishna Advani organized the Rath Yatra which was to begin from Somnath in Gujarat to Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh in 1990. The purpose of the larger Sangh Parivar was to project the aggrieved Hindu spirit and therefore conquering both the holy places was to represent a martial Hindu.
- <sup>vi</sup> Mainland Gujarat extends from the Aravali ranges up to the Western Ghats. The region of Saurashtra is also referred to as Kathiawad. The Adivasi belt in the east stretches from the Aravali through to the Vindhyas till the Western Ghat. For a detailed discussion on this division see Yagnik and Sheth, 2005.
- <sup>vii</sup> I will highlight in the second half of this paper as to how the BJP began its stranglehold on power in Gujarat through democratic means captured these boards and departments.
- <sup>viii</sup> An excellent account of Gujarat politics is given by Prof. Priyavadan Patel in his paper, "Sectarian Mobilization, Communal Polarization and Factionalism: Electoral dominance of Hindutva and Voting in Gujarat. While this paper too discusses Gujarat politics in three phases, I do not agree with the cut-off points for the phases. Henceforth, building upon this, I have introduced a phase-wise analysis based on my understanding of Gujarat Politics.
- <sup>ix</sup> For a detailed discussion on the 'politics of yatras' see Yagnik and Sheth, 2005
- <sup>x</sup> The BJP won 14 seats in the Schedule Tribe reserved areas.
- <sup>xi</sup> For a detailed discussion on this aspect, refer Yagnik and Sheth, 2005 and Ashish Nandy *et al*, 1995.
- <sup>xii</sup> This crucial aspect of the party was observed in the previously cited paper by Prof. Priyavadan Patel titled, "Sectarian Mobilization, Communal Polarization and Factionalism: Electoral dominance of Hindutva and Voting in Gujarat."
- <sup>xiii</sup> An important development that took place during the third phase under Narendra Modi has been the allocation of tickets to Muslim candidates to contest urban local body elections. In 2012, out of 256 Muslim candidates given tickets to contest elections 117 candidates won. Apart from this especially in Kutch district the Bohras, Memons and Khojas have openly supported the BJP in the assembly as well as national election. This attempt to woo the Muslim community may well be a political tactic towards greater inclusivity, but it further points towards the BJP's effort to model itself as a good governance party that peddles inclusive governance.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Apart from the style of leadership between Narendra Modi and Keshubhai Patel, another factor that led to Patel's ouster was the mishandling of the relief and rehabilitation work of the 2001 Kutch earthquake, that occurred in Gujarat. For the politics surrounding this aspect of relief work, see the brilliant work of Edward Simpson titled *The Political Biography of an Earthquake: Aftermath and Amnesia in Gujarat, India* (OUP: New Delhi, 2013).
- <sup>xv</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot in his work titled, "The Silent Revolution" captured the democratic upsurge in Indian politics by gauging the growing representation of lower castes in state legislative assemblies.
- <sup>xvi</sup> I am thankful to Achyut Yagnik at SETU, Ahmedabad, for highlighting this point, which was previously unknown to me.
- <sup>xvii</sup> The data collected by CSDS, New Delhi, in 2002 was based on a survey conducted in Gujarat during the years when Assembly Elections took place.
- <sup>xviii</sup> The data collected by the CSDS, New Delhi, through a survey has been conducted in 2002 and repeated in 2007 and 2012. The reliance is on survey data in this exercise because no Election Commission official data set provides patterns on choice or voting patterns of the electorate. Survey data in a sense enables us to draw causal inferences and draw a pattern of voting behavior.
- <sup>xix</sup> In the run-up to the Assembly Elections of 2012, the BJP in their Sankalp Patra (Party Manifesto) clearly mentioned the thrust towards the Neo-Middle Class, which is a rising class that has benefited from the state's high paced growth. The articulation of the Neo-Middle class by the BJP, and recognizing and catering to them is symbolic as the focus is not on any particular caste or religion. The BJP through the recognition of this Neo-Middle Class has focused on the urban electorate. Politically this is a positive step as Gujarat is a highly urbanized state and 49.7% of the population is residing in the urban areas. The party has over the years built considerable sway in the rural areas and to ensure rotundity in their political base the BJP had specifically targeted urban voters thereon.

<sup>xx</sup> A content analysis of the BJP's Sankalp Patra (Party Manifesto) released during the Assembly elections of 2007 and 2012 revealed the references to 'Good Governance' and 'Inclusive Development' as major thrust areas for the party to carry out if voted to power again. Also, the public speeches made by the then CM Narendra Modi at Ahmedabad; Baroda; Kachchh; and parts of Saurashtra during the run-up to the elections constantly reiterated these catchwords.

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