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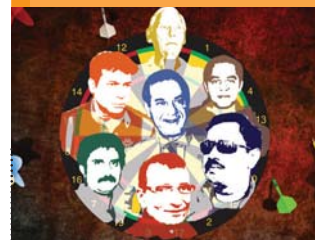
While the Modi model of Gujarat became a major election plank for the BJP, in Tamil Nadu, J Jayalithaa evolved a development model which, while attracting foreign and domestic investments, never lost sight of the poor. **ALAM SRINIVAS** predicts how this would impact the future national politics

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The Churning Within

the issues that trouble the country's largest minority are old, but in the diversity of its responses lies a new hope

By Meha Mathur



MUSLIMS have been a crucial votebank in Indian elections. Political parties desperately try to woo them by raking up issues that affect the community, playing on their fears and anxieties. The reality that even after six decades of Independence, Muslims feel marginalized, insecure, discriminated and stereotyped, provides them enough fodder.

Mandate 2014 accentuated the apprehensions of Muslims in some states. The concern was building up ever since September last year when Narendra Modi was declared the





Photos: Anil Shakya



THE BRAVE NEW FACE
(Above) Law student Fathima Thahalia at a seminar in Calicut

prime ministerial candidate of the Bharatiya Janata Party. NaMo's track record in Gujarat, where he had swept assembly polls thrice by partly riding on the communal card, didn't help matters. Certain Muslims were worried about their fate, after it became clear that Narendra Modi would form the government.

The communal riots in Muzaffarnagar in August-September 2013 were another ominous portent. The feeling of insecurity increased after the BJP leadership in Uttar Pradesh honored two of its MLAs accused of fanning the riots. And even as elections were under way, with the Modi wave unleashing itself across the nation, the north-eastern state of Assam once again witnessed clashes between the Bodos and the Muslims.

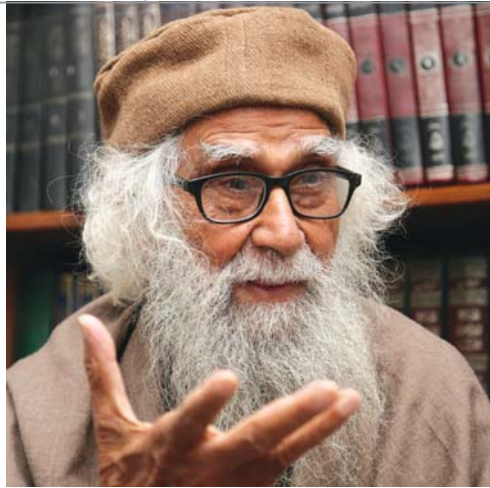
India Legal spoke to a cross-section of Muslims to find out about the community's perceptions on the political developments, its role and position in India, its sense of fulfilment, expectations from the state machinery and judiciary, and worries regarding Modi taking over in New Delhi.

Happily for the nation, the Muslims no longer think en bloc. The community feels far more enlightened, more secure. Opinions and perceptions vary a great deal at individual levels. Responses are well thought out, and not always stereotypical. Reactions range from introspection to anger; from the clamor of assimilation to the plaintive cry for assertion of rights.

The passion to go up the ladder, be a participant in changing times and think independently is almost infectious.

Being typecast as "second class" ▶

Muslims should see their interest in national interest, rather than only thinking about the community, feels scholar Maulana Wahiduddin Khan.



At the time of partition, Muslims loyal to India chose to stay back. Still, our loyalty is questioned and Hindus' loyalty is taken for granted, says IT professional Tariq Jaleel.



citizens," Muslims are at pains to clarify that their love for the country is as intense as any other community in India.

Says Syed Asghar Wajahat, an acclaimed author and playwright, known for his works like *Jis Lahore Nai Dekhya*, *O Janmyai Nai*: "I am an Indian first and a Muslim second. It's as clear as that."

The sense of belonging is further echoed by Kamal Farooqui, former secretary of Samajwadi Party, when he says: "I am confident about my place in the country, about my constitutional rights."

Having said that, there is also pain and anguish at being alienated in their own country. Tariq Jaleel, an IT professional and a project manager with IBM, is deeply hurt by efforts that Muslims generally have to make to establish their loyalty for the country. "For the Muslims of India there was a choice to go to Pakistan or stay back. People who were loyal stayed back. Hindu's did not have that choice. Still, their loyalty is taken for granted, while ours is not."

Extending his argument further, he points out: "We can get President's seat or vice-

chancellor's seat, but not Prime Minister's seat. Our share in important positions in defense or intelligence is insignificant."

RANKLED BY GUJARAT RIOTS

Security is a concern among Muslims today, and the violence and injustice experienced in the past riots rankles. Some have internalized the Gujarat riots, and can't bear the reality that the guilty, especially the high and mighty, have gone scot free.

Two issues in particular perplex the Muslims. One is the role of the judiciary, with the lower judiciary closing most of the cases, and the Supreme Court transferring some cases out of Gujarat on the grounds that free and fair trial would not be possible within the state, but at the same time retaining others within Gujarat. The other aspect is the clean chit given to Modi by the Special Investigation Team (SIT). Aftab Alam, associate professor with Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), laments: "Every time a college or road is inaugurated, the credit goes to Modi. Why is it that in the case of such a big carnage, the responsibility did not rest with the head of the state?"

However, many understand that the judiciary has a limited role in curbing riots in India. They understand that the courts do not make laws but only interpret them. Scholars and professionals aver that it is perhaps time that the Parliament enacts laws that would enable harsh punishment to rioters or deter them from igniting violence.

While Gujarat has become a reference point, Muslims are well aware that in some other states of India, the state machinery has handled communal disturbances in an unbiased manner. Syed Qasim Rasool Illyas, member of the Muslim Personal Law Board and Jamaat-e-Islami Hind, says that in states where the state machinery is efficient, the law and order is well maintained.

The Muzaffarnagar riots have also rattled the Muslims no end. It came as a shock, as the region had retained its peace in Independent India, with the Jats and the Muslims taking pride in common ancestry. Other cases that have scarred the community include the Hashimpura violence of 1987, in which the police had massacred 50 people in

cold blood. The case remains unresolved, and the culprits have not been brought to book.

Some of them complain that judicial activism has shown little regard for riots cases by failing to take *suo moto* notice, which could have provided the healing touch to victims. They point out that in the past 15 years or so, the courts have taken the lead in dealing with issues like environment, corruption, rape, etc but have been rather circumspect to act in cases relating to communal violence. MH Jowher, an Ahmedabad-based rights activist, says that while the lower judiciary may have been communal in the 2002 riot cases, “the Supreme Court also did not act on its own, but only on the petitions of Teesta Setalvad, Mukul Sinha and others.”

The inordinate delay in disposing off riots cases by the judiciary has upset the Muslims. Professor Sabiha Hussain, faculty with KR Narayanan Centre for Dalit and Minorities Studies at Jamia Millia Islamia, says: “Judicial delay causes immense harm in riot cases. It prevents people from coming out of trauma and affects their participation in national development.”

The baggage of “terrorist tag” that Muslims are sometimes forced to carry has caused an irreparable damage to their psyche. To be under scrutiny of law enforcing agencies is excruciatingly painful. Elaborates Prof Aftab Alam: “Muslim youth are arrested after every blast without proper investigation. The arrests are made to satisfy people’s anger. In 98 percent cases, the charges are false and they are later released. In Lucknow a youth was acquitted after 14 years. Who will rehabilitate them?”

MODI FACTOR

In this atmosphere of siege, the worry that the Muslim community harbored, as election results came out, was concerns for its safety under Modi rule. Will the politics that was played out in Gujarat be magnified on the national level? Illyas points out: “A leader gets a clean chit when 15 senior officers of his government are behind bars, and on that basis goes on to build up a national ambition. It will be very unfortunate for the country if he becomes the prime minister.”

Even green horns are able to discern how



Politician Kamal Farooqui has complete faith in the Supreme Court remaining secular, irrespective of whichever party is in power at the center.



Syed Qasim Rasool Illyas of Muslim Personal Law Board is anguished at the clean chit given to Narendra Modi by the SIT.

the communal plank may have aided Modi’s political ambitions. Law student Fathima Thahalia says: “The BJP’s inherent nature is to polarize. It polarized the country on the Hindu-Muslim axis. The party knew that at the end of the violence, the communities will split up and thus create a fertile ground for the BJP.”

There are also concerns about the country’s institutions buckling under pressure following Modi coming to power. Muslims fear that communalism will percolate and that positions of power will be communalized.

The fear of a government headed by Modi working in a dictatorial manner may be real among some sections, but Farooqui dismisses these fears, saying: “I have complete faith that irrespective of whosoever is in power, the judiciary will remain impartial.”

There is the readiness to analyze Modi’s governance outside the communal prism. But even then the hype around Modi makes them think. Illyas feels the catchline, “*Abki baar Modi Sarkar*” implied the party had handed over the reins to him, which was against democratic norms. “Modi’s style of

governance is dictatorial. It's a one-man show. No other minister has a say and the law and order machinery toes his line." He also questions Modi's development model, saying it has benefitted only a few corporates in Gujarat, not the common man.

But Prof Sabiha Hussain of Jamia Millia Islamia has a surprising take: "I would like Modi to be in power. He will ensure that no communal riots take place. He will try to overcome his shortcomings of Gujarat at the national level."

Others too are in a conciliatory mood. Nayema Nasir, an MPhil student of gender studies at Ambedkar University, New Delhi, while fearing for safety, says: "We would not like to carry past baggage with us. If corrective action is taken, the community would like to reach out."

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan in fact chides his community for their negative voting, saying: "You have to see your interest in the national interest. Muslims think only in terms of community interest."

ARMED WITH EDUCATION

Given the divergence in opinions, the issue that unites the community is hunger for education. All Muslims see education as the panacea for all ills and as the only means to break out of present constraints.

Prof SM Azizuddin, historian and director, Rampur Raza Library, feels it's a vicious



Writer Syed Asghar Wajahat of *Jis Lahore Nai Dekhya, O Janmyai Nai* and *Saat Aasmaan* fame voices the sentiments of Muslims when he says that he is an Indian first, and a Muslim, second.

circle: "Muslims will have to give importance to education if they want their rightful place in the Indian society or polity. In the absence of education, they are not aware of the avenues that are available to them."

There's a tremendous hunger for education at least among Muslims of small towns, with ambitious parents nudging their children into higher studies, and youngsters single-mindedly pursuing astrophysics, biotechnology, remote sensing, physiotherapy, nursing, management, media, and, of course, liberal arts, often taking their education to its logical culmination of post-doctoral. If it requires postponement of marriage, so be it. This writer met several students who studied in *madarsas* making it a point to master English language, and burqa-clad women, clueless about careers, still trying to make something of their lives by joining communication classes.

The awareness about education has spread in villages. In fact, the enrolment of children in elementary schools has gone up from 8.3 percent in 2006-07 to 13.15 percent in 2012-13. The dropout rates are high in the middle school, but that, perhaps is the socio-economic compulsion with all disadvantaged communities, not just Muslims.

There's also the realization that quality of education in minority institutions needs to

No to Pak advice

MAULANA Mahmood Madani, executive member of Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, said Indian Muslims don't need Pakistan's advice to solve their problems. At the *India Today* conclave in 2009, Madani made this remark in response to former Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's address. He said: "There are more Muslims in India than the entire population of Pakistan. Indian Muslims know how to solve their problems. We don't need your advice. Seventy percent people of the Indian civil society are ready to stand by Muslims in resolving their problems. Don't try to alienate the Muslims with your remarks."

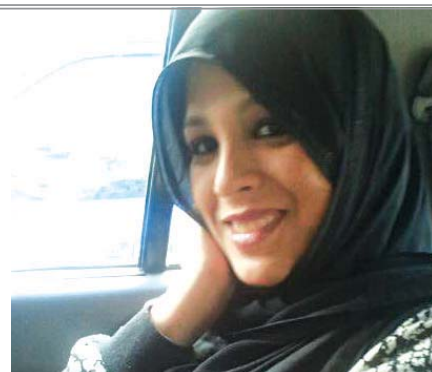




Prof SM Azizuddin, Director of Rampur Raza Library, feels that for Muslims to play a meaningful role in the society, they have to give importance to education.



Prof Sabiha Hussain of Jamia Millia Islamia is keen that Narendra Modi comes to power. She feels he will ensure law and order, and undo his old reputation.



Gender studies student Nayema Naseer says Muslims would not like to carry past baggage and would reach out if Modi is ready to take corrective measures.

improve in these times of excellence and tough competition. Wajahat says: “Most Muslim institutions are not known for excellence. You can’t compare them with IITs and IIMs. Because of this, the students lose out.”

Should Muslims depend on state support to come out of their educational backwardness, or should they come out of dependency, is a point of debate.

Farooqui admits that a number of initiatives have been launched to benefit the community, like the schemes of a number of ministries which directly help minorities. And he claims that “Muslims don’t want any special favors; only equal opportunities.”

But he expresses anger at the Muslims being denied reservations “as a result of the constitutional fraud played by the Congress in 1950, under Article 341, restricting reservations to the Hindus only”.

Others like Maulana Wahiduddin Khan want the community to stand up on its own. Khan says: “Muslim institutions work on the wrong notion that Muslims need favor, which works like poison.” And Illyas, as chairman of Afkar Foundation, is spearheading an initiative to successfully run 100 model schools in northern and eastern India, where best possible education would be imparted, and where students would be guided to take up right courses and careers.

YOUNG VOICES

The Muslim youth, too, has put on its thinking cap. It feels the need to make a greater contribution to the nation. Ahamed Saju, a research student with University of Delhi, feels happy that the prejudices against the Muslims are slowly dying out and the Muslims on their part are mixing with others. Walking the talk, he sought out a Brahmin from Uttar Pradesh for his roommate in his postgraduation days. Saju, coming from Kerala, couldn’t speak Hindi, and the roommate, Padmakar Dwivedi, was not conversant in English, but the two bonded over their career dream to join the civil services.

Graphic designer Zakir Ali feels that Muslims can rub shoulders with the rest of the nation in its progress, and that opportunities are coming to them in all walks of life.

To Nayema Nasir, the very thought of discussing Muslims as a separate entity is an anathema. Expressing her disgust, she says: “The rhetoric on these lines marginalizes the community. I saw a TV debate in which the question being posed was, ‘leading Muslim actors are part of mainstream. Do you think the whole community is part of mainstream?’ This line of thought increases the sense of the other.” **II**

With inputs from Renjini Verghese