

OXFORD

The Algebra of Warfare-Welfare

A LONG VIEW OF INDIA'S 2014 ELECTION

edited by
Irfan Ahmad | Pralay Kanungo



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HINDUTVA'S REACH OUT TO MUSLIMS IN THE 2014 ELECTIONS

A Historical Analysis

Mohammad Reyaz

With electoral mobilization reaching its climax in the first quarter of 2014, Delhi was dotted with posters saying: '*Na doori na khaai, Modi hamara bhai*' (Muslims have no differences with Narendra Modi, our brother). Jamaat Ulema-e-Hind (henceforth Bharatiya Janata Party's [BJP] Jamaat), not to be confused with Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind, had put up those posters.¹ The BJP's Jamaat is one among many organizations that the saffron party and its ideological fountainhead, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), have been promoting for many years in order to 'reach out' to the Muslim community. Besides the minority cell of the party, Muslim organizations such as the All India Organization of Imams of Mosques (AIOIM) and the Muslim Rashtriya Manch (MRM) also worked to make the BJP acceptable to Muslims. The MRM's mentor Indresh Kumar is a senior RSS functionary. (Though not formally charged, Kumar was linked to

¹ To avoid any confusion over the similarity of names, this chapter will henceforth refer to Qasmi's Jamaat as BJP's Jamaat and use JUH for the original Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind.

the 2007 Samjhauta Express blast.) Individuals such as businessman Zafar Sureshwala and journalist-turned-politician M.J. Akbar were also engaged in such mobilizations.

The BJP scored a landslide victory in the 2014 elections. They won 282 seats by themselves. A grand total of the BJP and its National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners' seat tally summed up to 336 out of 545 seats (*Firstpost* 2014). So, did these overtures towards Muslim voters really play a role in helping the BJP win? Or did the BJP win without Muslim votes? Based on my fieldwork as a ground reporter during the 2013 assembly elections in Rajasthan and Delhi and the 2014 parliamentary elections, as well as interviews with some political leaders and other stakeholders of the aforementioned organizations, along with a perusal of their literature, this chapter aims to examine three key questions. First, the saffron brigade often accuses other parties of 'pseudo-secularism' and 'minority appeasement'. Where do these initiatives fit in their larger politics vis-à-vis seeing Muslims as the 'other'? Second, are Hindutva leaders willing to broaden their ideological and political horizon, or do they still see Muslims through their old narrow prism? How do Muslim leaders associated with the Sangh Parivar perceive their identity vis-à-vis the saffron party? Finally, were BJP's outreach programmes towards Muslims during the 2014 general election effective?

To answer these questions, I have divided this chapter into three parts. In the first part, while briefly describing the Hindutva ideology, I historically situate its relation to and engagement with Muslims before the 2014 general elections (Figure 8.1). In the second part, I focus on the run-up to the last general elections, assessing the Sangh Parivar's reach among Muslims and the role of the BJP's Muslim leaders. The conclusion emerging from the analysis, in the third part, is that despite 'Muslim fronts' being marginal in the BJP, they are increasingly becoming a critical asset for the party. Clearly, BJP's move to co-opt Muslims in the 2014 elections was not its first attempt. Its antecedents are traceable to earlier elections, most notably during the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led alliance government. In fact, the antecedents delve even further. To comprehend them holistically, a brief account of the RSS ideology and history vis-à-vis Muslims is in order here.

Reyaz