

THE POLITICS OF HATE: MODI'S ANTI-MUSLIM CAMPAIGN IN 18TH LOK SABHA ELECTIONS

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



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Introduction

Around the world, political parties and leaders while running their election campaign focus on their past achievements, promises for the future, and the problems faced by society and common people. They instill hope in the people by presenting their vision for a better future. This is not the case in India. In India, among other things, the election season also usually witnesses bashing and all sorts of threats to Pakistan. However, this time around, there is more than that set menu. Besides the traditional anti-Pakistan rhetoric, the Bharatiya Janata Party's ongoing 18th Lok Sabha election campaign is being waged for most part on hate against its minorities, particularly Muslims.

The Election Campaign

It has always been the BJP's tactic to attract votes by stoking hatred against Pakistan. This was true in both 16th and 17th Lok Sabha elections fought in 2014 and 2019 respectively. The false flag operation in Pulwama in February 2019 and how it was used to the benefit of BJP is no more a secret. This time, Modi's hate attacks on Pakistan, Congress and Muslims started even before the elections commenced in India. In Saharanpur, while addressing a rally on 6 April 2024, Modi equated Congress's manifesto with Muslim League and said "Yesterday's manifesto release by Congress

completely bears the imprint of the Muslim League's thinking, with the Muslim League's thinking, with the remainder dominated by leftists.”¹

As India embarked on its seven phase elections, the Bharatiya Janata Party's anti-Muslim rhetoric also gained momentum. In Rajasthan, on 21 April 2024, Modi warned his supporters that if Congress party wins elections, it would distribute India's wealth among the community that have 'more children' and it is for the Hindus to decide whether they would like to give their wealth to 'infiltrators?'² Modi did not stop here and went on say that "they will calculate the gold held by our mothers and sisters, gather information on it, and distribute them among Muslims."³ This comment of Muslims having more children in order to outnumber Hindus in India is a part of the number of conspiracy theories associated with Muslims like the conspiracy theory of '*Love Jihad*'. What Modi claimed at the rally is not only far from reality as government data itself clearly indicates that Muslim fertility rate is dropping more rapidly as compared to other communities in India, but it also generates negative perceptions regarding the biggest minority of the country.⁴

Following 'infiltrators' remark came the '*Vote Jihad*' where Modi declared that "terrorists in Pakistan have launched jihad against India. And here, the Congress party has announced a '*Vote Jihad*' against the BJP, and is asking its followers of a particular religion [Muslims] to unitedly vote against Modi." He urged that voters will have to make a choice between '*Vote Jihad*' and 'Ram Rajya'.⁵

This hate mongering did not even spare sports. On 7 May 2024, in the Dhar city of Madhya Pradesh, Modi warned his followers that if Congress is elected to power, it will give preference to people on the basis of their religion as far as the cricket team of India is concerned. Congress will decide who remains in the cricket team, who will be eliminated from the team. Modi also said that he wants 400 seats to make sure that Congress does not bring back Article 370 for Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu

1 "Lok Sabha Polls: PM Modi Says Congress's Manifesto Bears Imprint of Muslim League," The Times of India, April 6, 2024, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/lok-sabha-polls-pm-modi-says-congress-manifesto-bears-imprint-of-muslim-league-saharanpur-bjp/articleshow/109084864.cms>.

2 Yashraj Sharma, "'Infiltrators': Modi Accused of Anti-Muslim Hate Speech amid India Election," Al Jazeera, April 22, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/22/infiltrators-modi-accused-of-anti-muslim-hate-speech-amid-india-election>.

3 Snigdhendu Bhattacharya, "Does Modi's Anti-Muslim 'Hate Speech' Reflect Nervousness?," April 25, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/04/does-modis-anti-muslim-hate-speech-reflect-nervousness/>

4 Elisha Vermani, "How Global Media Covered Narendra Modi's Hate Speech in Rajasthan," The Wire, April 24, 2024, sec. Media, <https://thewire.in/media/how-global-media-covered-modis-hate-speech-in-rajasthan>.

5 "Choose Between 'Vote Jihad And Ram Rajya': PM Modi At Election Rally," NDTV, May 8, 2024, sec. India News, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/choose-between-vote-jihad-and-ram-rajya-pm-modi-at-election-rally-5613571>.

and Kashmir (IIOJK) or does not put a lock to Ram Mandir built over the demolished centuries old Babri mosque.⁶

On 10 May 2024, in Maharashtra's Nandurbar, Modi accused Congress for plans of Reservations on the basis of religion, which according to him goes against values and principles of Indian Constitution. He vowed that as long as he is alive, he will not let reservations of Dalits, Adivasis and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) be given to Muslims on the basis of their religion.⁷ At around same time, the BJP Karnataka chapter posted an animated video showing Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Karnataka Chief Minister placing an egg labelled as Muslim in a nest where there are already three other eggs. This Muslim egg is much larger in size in comparison to three other eggs that are labelled as Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and OBCs. Rahul Gandhi along with Karnataka Chief Minister is then shown as feeding the bird that came out of 'Muslim' egg. The bird, which is already large in size gets strength and further grows in size and removes the other three birds (SCs, STs, and OBCs) from the nest. The Muslim bird, Rahul Gandhi, and the Karnataka Chief Minister, are all then seen laughing.⁸

When faced with criticism for stoking communal tensions, Modi flatly denied -- saying that he would be unworthy of public life if he stokes anti-Muslim sentiment in his election campaign. This professed intention, however, did not last for even 24 hours as the very next day, on May 15, 2024, at a rally in Nashik, Modi alleged that Congress had a plan to reserve 15 percent of the Union Budget for Muslims. He added that the Manmohan Singh government could not implement this scheme but now Congress intends to reintroduce this plan and that if Congress is elected "they will make two budgets to be divided between a 'Hindu Budget' and a 'Muslim Budget'. I will not allow quotas based on religion."⁹ This claim of 'Hindu Budget' and 'Muslim Budget' was termed as 'outrageous' and 'hallucination' by senior Congress leader P. Chidambaram.¹⁰

6 "Congress Will Give Preference to Minorities in Cricket Team, Claims PM Modi," Mint, May 8, 2024, sec. Politics, <https://www.livemint.com/politics/news/prime-minister-narendra-modi-congress-muslims-minority-cricket-team-sports-religion-lok-sabha-election-11715157030178.html>.

7 Rimjhim Singh, "Lok Sabha Elections 2024: Will Not Let Reservation Be given to Muslims as Long as I'm Alive: PM Modi," Business Standard, May 10, 2024, https://www.business-standard.com/elections/lok-sabha-election/will-not-let-reservation-be-given-to-muslims-as-long-as-i-m-alive-pm-modi-124051000491_1.html.

8 Meryl Sebastian, "India Election: Modi's Party Accused of Demonising Muslims in Video," BBC, May 7, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-68918331>.

9 Bharat Bhushan, "What Is behind Modi's Campaign Doublespeak?," Deccan Herald, May 17, 2024, <https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/what-is-behind-modis-campaign-doublespeak-3026646>.

10 Nikunj Dalmia, "False, Outrageous: Congress Leader Chidambaram Slams PM's 'Congress Wanted to Allocate 15 Pc Budget to Muslims' Remark," The Economic Times, May 16, 2024, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/elections/lok-sabha/india/false-outrageous-congress->

Conclusion

As six phases of the elections have already completed and India is ready to enter the seventh phase, the seeds of hatred along religious lines have spread across India. Targeting political opponents by using the biggest minority of the country as a scapegoat is a potent tactic that the BJP has devised. By targeting Indian Muslims and stoking hateful feelings against them, the BJP is on one hand trying to attract Hindu votes and by showing Congress as the sympathizer of Muslims, it is trying to undermine the Congress's support base. This is nothing but politics of hate.

Continuous references against Muslims by Modi forced the leaders of Congress along with leaders of Shiv Sena (Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray) and Nationalist Congress Party (Sharadchandra Pawar) to say that no PM in the history of India has ever indulged in inciting people on religious lines and that although Modi speaks of democracy, but in reality, he does not know the tenets of democracy.¹¹

Since Modi and BJP find themselves in muddy waters over electoral bonds and Adani scandal, BJP perhaps found it expedient to pitch Hindus against Muslims and Congress and ensure that Hindu vote comes to BJP. By doing so, it may emerge victorious now, but in actual fact, India will lose as no society and no country can thrive on hate and communal divisions in the long term.

leader-chidambaram-slams-pms-congress-wanted-to-allocate-15-pc-budget-to-muslims-remark/articleshow/110164879.cms?from=mdr.

¹¹ "No PM before Modi Has Ever Indulged in Inciting People like He Is Doing': Kharge in Mumbai; Pawar, Uddhav Join In," Financia Express, May 18, 2024, <https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/no-pm-before-modi-has-ever-indulged-in-inciting-people-like-he-is-doing-kharge-in-mumbai-pawar-uddhav-join-in/3492559/>.