

community-based political parties. This democratic atmosphere of communal amity has faced many challenges since 1984. As we have read in Chapter Eight, this happened in 1984 in the form of anti-Sikh riots. In February-March 2002, similar violence broke out against the Muslims in Gujarat. Such violence against the minority community and violence between two communities is a threat to democracy.

“These proceedings have the echo of the disastrous event that ended in the demolition on the 6th December, 1992 of the disputed structure of ‘Ram Janam Bhoomi-Babri Masjid’ in Ayodhya. Thousands of innocent lives of citizens were lost, extensive damage to property caused and more than all a damage to the image of this great land as one fostering great traditions of tolerance, faith, brotherhood amongst the various communities inhabiting the land was impaired in the international scene.

It is unhappy that a leader of a political party and the Chief Minister has to be convicted of an offence of Contempt of Court. But it has to be done to uphold the majesty of law. We convict him of the offence of contempt of Court. Since the contempt raises larger issues which affect the very foundation of the secular fabric of our nation, we also sentence him to a token imprisonment of one day.

Chief Justice Venkatachaliah and Justice G.N. Ray of Supreme Court

Observations in a judgement on the failure of the Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh to keep the promise that he had made before the National Integration Council to protect the ‘Ram Janam Bhumi-Babri Masjid’ structure, Mohd. Aslam v. Union of India, 24 October 1994

Gujarat riots

In February-March 2002, large-scale violence took place in Gujarat. The immediate provocation for this violence was an incident that took place at a station called Godhra. A bogey of a train that was returning from Ayodhya and was full of Karsevaks was set on fire. Fifty-seven people died in that fire. Suspecting the hand of the Muslims in setting fire to the bogey, large-scale violence against Muslims began in many parts of Gujarat from the next day. This violence continued for almost a whole month. Nearly 1100 persons, mostly Muslims, were killed in this violence. The National Human Rights Commission criticised the Gujarat government’s role in failing to control violence, provide relief to the victims and prosecute the perpetrators of this violence. The Election Commission of India ordered the assembly elections to be postponed. As in the case of anti-Sikh riots of 1984,

GUJARAT IS BURNING

Former MP’s family among 70 dead

HT Correspondent
Ahmedabad, February 28

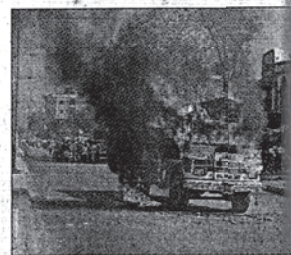
MORE THAN 70 people were killed and several injured as Gujarat reported incidents of stabbing, rioting, arson, looting and police firing on Thursday, a day after four bogies of the Sabarmati Express carrying kar sewaks from Ayodhya were set on fire in Godhra killing 58 people.

The Cabinet Committee on Security put the Army on stand-by in the riot-hit areas.

Over 26 towns statewide have been put under indefinite curfew. Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) activists who had called a statewide bandh on Thursday to protest the killing of the kar sewaks, attacked several Muslim-populated areas of the state and set fire to Muslim-owned properties.

Over 50 of those killed were in Ahmedabad. And 19 of them were relatives of former Congress MP Ehsan Jaffrey, who himself was killed. They died when the building they lived in was set on fire in Meghaninagar. In an earlier incident, 17 Muslim slum-dwellers were also burned alive.

The Wakf Board offices in Gandhinagar were burned down and the Centre for



BACKLASH: A truck on fire in Ahmedabad.

ple of mosques being attacked by VHP activists. Six buses and a truck were also set on fire.

Police arrested 700 people — 80 in Godhra, including two councillors — in connection with Wednesday’s attack.

Two persons died and at least six were injured when police opened fire to disperse a rampaging mob in Ahmedabad on Thursday afternoon. Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi has ordered a judicial inquiry of the attack. He said those responsible for the attack on the

"The tragic events in Gujarat, starting with the Godhra incident and continuing with the violence that rocked the state for over two months, have greatly saddened the nation. There is no doubt, in the opinion of the Commission, that there was a comprehensive failure on the part of the state government to control the persistent violation of the rights to life, liberty, equality and dignity of the people of the state. It is, of course, essential to heal the wounds and to look to a future of peace and harmony. But the pursuit of these high objectives must be based on justice and upholding of the values of the constitution of the republic and the laws of the land.



Can we ensure that those who plan, execute and support such massacres are brought to the book? Or at least punished politically?

Gujarat riots show that the governmental machinery also becomes susceptible to sectarian passions. Instances, like in Gujarat, alert us to the dangers involved in using religious sentiments for political purposes. This poses a threat to democratic politics.

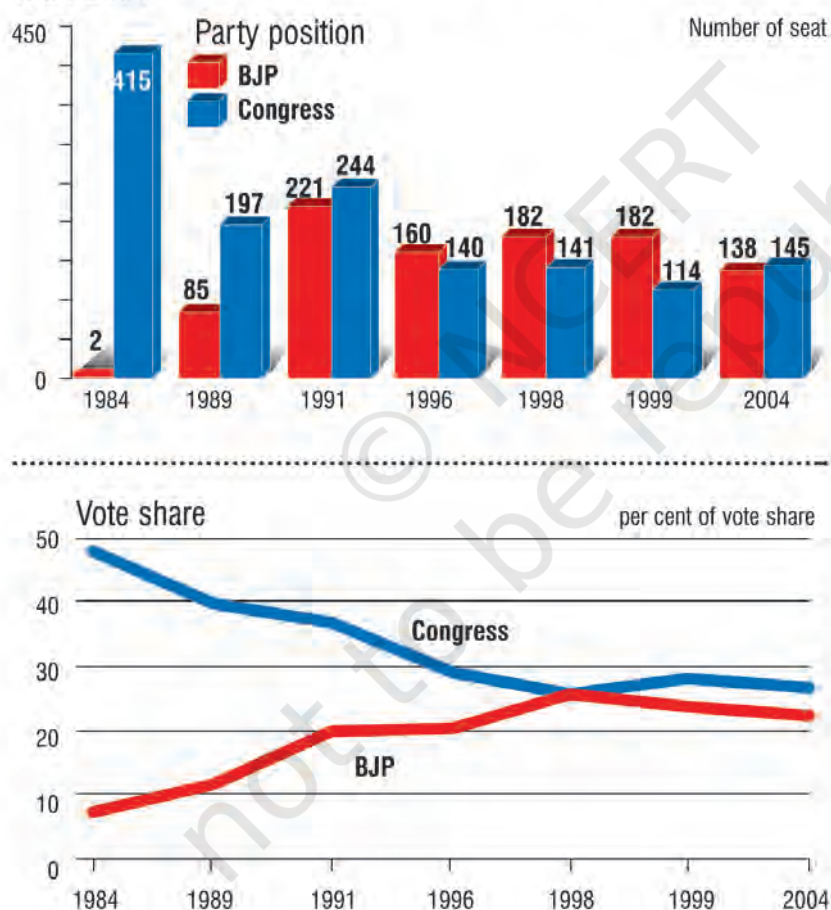
Emergence of a new consensus

The period after 1989 is seen sometimes as the period of decline of Congress and rise of BJP. If you want to understand the complex nature of political competition in this period, you have to compare the electoral performances of the Congress and the BJP.

“My one message to the Chief Minister [of Gujarat] is that he should follow ‘raj dharma’. A ruler should not make any discrimination between his subjects on the basis of caste, creed and religion.”

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Ahmedabad, 4 April 2002.

Changing electoral performance of Congress and the BJP
1984-2004



Now let us try to understand the meaning of the information given in the figure.

- You will notice that BJP and Congress were engaged in a tough competition in this period. What is the difference between