

## Modi's Hindutva eclipses Sangh Parivar hardliners

Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi's Hindutva rhetoric has completely overshadowed all other hardliners of the Sangh Parivar electioneering in the state.

Now that the first round of balloting has ended, it is clear that none of the hardliners, most of them from Uttar Pradesh, has cut much ice in the poll campaign. It has been Modi's show all the way.

Insiders in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) maintain that Modi, who is setting the campaign agenda, himself wants to keep at bay leaders of allied Hindu nationalist groups collectively known as Sangh Parivar.

Moreover, Modi's strong Hindutva line has made the allied groups - who normally shoulder the responsibility of raking up Hindutva passions - redundant in the Gujarat elections.

This is quite unlike the Uttar Pradesh elections of April-May where Modi was extended a cordial welcome. The party banked on him, among other leaders, to win Hindu votes for the BJP. That the BJP lost is another story.

Modi has not reciprocated this gesture in the same spirit.

Since Hindutva is the mantra in vogue in Gujarat, one would expect other Sangh Parivar hardliners to strengthen Modi's campaign. However, this has not been the case.

When IANS asked Sangh Parivar leaders about the conspicuous absence of the likes of Pravin Togadia and Ashok Singhal from the campaign, they were defensive.

Even former BJP president - and now BJP's prime ministerial candidate - L.K. Advani seems to be playing second fiddle to the formidable Modi.

Uttar Pradesh BJP spokesperson Hriday Narain Dixit counters this: 'About 70 workers from our state are campaigning in Gujarat.' But he could not name any prominent face.

The carefully orchestrated rhetoric whipped up by Modi during electioneering has shown that he continues to bank on Hindu-Muslim divide more than development issues notwithstanding some reports that it is the other way round.

After coming under attack from Congress president Sonia Gandhi, Modi - a powerful orator -- virtually justified the killing of Sohrabuddin Sheikh in a supposedly fake police gun battle, sought early execution of a key accused in the 2001 parliament attack, and talked about the 2002 Godhra train burning that sparked the communal riots that year.

This has led the Congress, fearing possible communal polarization that would work to its disadvantage, to tread a careful line so as not to alienate the Hindu voters.

Bajrang Dal's firebrand leader and former Uttar Pradesh BJP president Vinay Katiyar denied that Modi did not want other Hindu hardliners to campaign in the state.

'I was there twice and visited Surat, Baroda and other districts,' Katiyar told IANS. However, he is back in Ayodhya - his seat of operations.

In any case, none of the hardliners, otherwise known to utter polemics at the drop of a hat, has lived up to their expectations. Modi's own din has drowned them.

Party sources concede that if Modi were to win the Gujarat battle, he would emerge as a strong force nationally within the party. He would then command the clout to make the party more rightwing. And he is one BJP leader known to speak his mind out - and do his own thing.

While this would unnerve the non-BJP opposition and even some BJP allies, it would also affect the Sangh Parivar organisations like the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), Bajrang Dal and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), which were till now considered the champions of extreme Hindu sentiments. If a BJP under Modi steals their agenda, these groups would find themselves eclipsed.

*Rakesh Mohan Chaturvedi ( © IANS / India eNews)*