



POLITICAL REGIMES AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES IN KARNATAKA: 2008-2018

CANDIDATE NAME = NANDKUMAR SAJANBHAI HEMCHANDANI
DESIGNATION= RESEARCH SCHOLAR SUNRISE UNIVERSITY ALWAR

GUIDE NAME= DR. UMESH CHANDRA
DESIGNATION= ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
SUNRISE UNIVERSITY ALWAR

Abstract

This paper attempts to understand the political initiatives and the relationship of political regimes of Karnataka with religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians. The two political regimes selected for the study are the BJP government from 2008 to 2013 and INC government from 2013 to 2018. The central objective of the paper is to study the political initiatives of selected political regimes, whether or not they have resulted in the inclusion and protection of Muslims and Christians. The paper highlights the political ideology and the social bases of INC and BJP, particularly in Karnataka. It highlights the election details, social coalitions, manifestos of the political parties, electoral outcomes, formation of governments and its implications upon religious minorities during both the political regimes. Four prominent issues concerning religious minorities, one each from religious, cultural, legal, and political spheres, are examined.

Keywords: Karnataka; Religious Minorities; State Policies; Political Regimes; Public Policy; Development; Political Ideology; Social Bases; Minority Issues

INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of this working paper is to study and understand the political initiatives of two different political regimes, whether or not they have resulted in the inclusion and protection of religious minorities, particularly towards Muslims and Christians in the state of Karnataka. The paper will exclusively focus on the relationship between political regimes and religious minorities. The initiatives of political regimes towards Muslims and Christians will be documented through an overarching historical, descriptive, and comparative framework. It shall highlight the political processes that have occurred in the realms of state government concerning the question of religious minorities.

A timeline of ten years, i.e., from 2008 to 2018, will be considered wherein a few issues, discussions, debates, and decisions carried out by the state government regarding the religious minorities will be highlighted. Attempts will be made to understand these issues, demands, and how the religious minorities articulated them to the respective political regimes. Correspondingly, it will try and comprehend how these issues were resolved or fulfilled by the incumbent political regimes.

The paper will take note of the state's responses on the issues and to what extent the state was able to address the prevailing situation faced by the religious minorities. It will engage in analysing the political regimes wherein the focus would be to understand how the concerned matters, issues, and challenges faced by the religious minorities were addressed, responded or rectified through specific state interventions. In doing so, it shall highlight the numerous ways and means which the



state adopted to redress the grievance highlighted by the religious minorities.

After a brief background, the first section discusses the meaning of 'Political Regime' and also traces the political ideologies of INC and BJP along with their respective social bases. The second section describes the kind and type of political regimes formed from 2008 to 2013 and 2013 to 2018 as it provides a broad idea about the ruling as well as opposition political parties. Third, it will take note of a few issues that occurred in the state during this period concerning religious minorities and how they were addressed or responded to by the ruling political regime. Lastly, a comparative analysis between these two political regimes will be made in terms of their performance, achievements, and popular notions perceived by the religious minorities or on their behalf.

Background

From the year 2008 to 2018, the Karnataka legislative assembly witnessed two full-term governments formed by two different political parties. On both occasions, it was the national parties that formed the governments, i.e., Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Indian National Congress (INC) in 2008 and 2013, respectively. BJP formed the government in the year 2008, which was the thirteenth legislative assembly, and whose tenure ranged from May 30, 2008, to May 5, 2013. Likewise, INC formed the government in the year 2013, which was the fourteenth legislative assembly, and whose tenure ranged from May 13, 2013, to May 17, 2018. While there were three Chief Ministers during the BJP, i.e., B. S. Yeddyurappa, D. V. Sadananda Gowda, and Jagadish Shettar, there was only one during INC, i.e., Siddaramaiah.

The elections to the thirteenth legislative assembly were conducted by the Election Commission of India (ECI) in three phases, i.e., May 10, 16 and 22, 2008. The total number of constituencies wherein elections were held was 224 out of which 36 seats were reserved for Scheduled Castes (SC), 15 for Scheduled Tribes (ST), and the remaining 173 were open category seats. Election results were declared on May 25, 2008, wherein BJP won 110 seats, INC won 80 seats, Janata Dal (Secular) [JD(S)] won 28 seats, and independent candidates won six seats. The BJP was short of three positions to form the majority government, i.e., 113; and all six independent members supported the BJP and it formed the government on May 30, 2008. For the first time in South India, BJP formed a fully-fledged majority government. During this legislative assembly period, B. S. Yeddyurappa was the Chief Minister (CM) from May 30, 2008, to August 4, 2011; D. V. Sadananda Gowda was the CM from August 5, 2011, to July 11, 2012, and Jagadish Shettar was the CM from July 12, 2012, to May 12, 2013.

ECI conducted the elections to the fourteenth legislative assembly in a single phase on May 5, 2013. The total number of constituencies wherein elections were held was 224 out of which 36 were reserved for SC, 15 for ST, and the rest 173 were open category seats. The election results were declared on May 8, 2013, wherein INC won 122 seats, BJP won 40 seats, JD (S) won 40 seats, and Independent candidates won 9 seats. Additionally, Karnataka Janata Paksha (KJP) won 6 seats; Badavara Shramikara Raitara Congress Party (BSRCP) won 4 seats, while Karnataka Makkala Paksha (KMP), Samajwadi Party (SP), and Sarvodaya Karnataka Paksha (SKP) won a single seat each. The INC was well ahead of the halfway mark, and it formed the majority government on May 13, 2013. During the legislative assembly period, Siddaramaiah was the only



CM throughout the tenure, i.e., from May 13, 2013, to May 15, 2018.

Political Regime

In general terms, the word 'political regime' refers to a government or a system of rule or administration, i.e., a ruling government in power. The political regime is understood as a system of government, a political system, and a particular ruling system that has the authority to organise and manage the political unit. It is an act of governing that exercises authority over its citizens within a well-defined jurisdiction. Precisely under the discipline of Political Science, a regime is understood as a form of government which regulates the government operations, institutions, and its relationship with the larger society. In a political regime, a different set of political structures are put together to form a state. In brief, a political regime includes the way a state is governed, organisation and policy-making by the government.

Additionally, when political regimes are referred to, they are not just confined to the ruling government and administrative machinery. The political regime, in a broader sense, also includes the ruling party, its leadership, ideology, organisational structure and social bases. Given the context of parliamentary democracies, the representatives are directly elected through the citizens and candidates are fielded by different political parties. The members of the party contest the elections, seek votes from the citizens, adhere to different ideologies, target a specific set of social bases, nurture distinctive preferences, cater to select interest groups and promise a particular set of state policies.

In the Indian context, a few studies were undertaken for understanding the political regimes and their social, economic, and political initiatives towards the citizens. "The State and Poverty in India: The Politics of Reform" is a well-known book that is considered a significant contribution in the field of analysis of various regimes in different states. In this work, the author has analysed the policies and the programmes initiated by the state regimes to alleviate poverty. The attempt was to figure out the regime characteristics that have shaped both distributive as well as redistributive outcomes through different state-initiated programmes (Kohli, 1987).

For understanding the functioning of political regimes in different states, an analysis was carried out by Harriss to identify differences in political regimes in terms of caste or class groups and the organisation of the political parties in different states. He makes a case that these differences among the political regimes assist in understanding the influences upon formulations as well as performances of state policies (Harriss, 1999).

Political Ideology of the Indian National Congress (INC) Within the broad spectrum of political ideologies, INC is placed on left of centre. The values which the party claims to propagate are a social democracy, secularism, democratic socialism, inclusive growth, progressivism, Indian nationalism, social justice, and Gandhian socialism. In the party constitution, there is a reference to the party objective, mentioning that its purpose is advancement and wellbeing of the citizens through peaceful as well as constitutional means. It aspires to establish a socialist state with a parliamentary form of democracy wherein equal opportunities and rights are accorded to all Indian citizens. It also declares allegiance to and faith in the Constitution of India and support for the principles of socialism, secularism and democracy.



The party has maintained that it stands for the protection of rights and entitlements of marginalised, discriminated, and minority sections of the society. It also vows to pursue a different kind of nationalism which upholds support for values such as freedom, individual rights, tolerance, and equality. Above all, it considers Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru,

K. Kamaraj, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi, and Rajiv Gandhi as the party's inspiration.

Hasan (2012) mentions that the early leaders of INC like Jawaharlal Nehru wished India to be a secular state which would accord equal respect to all religions and thereby prevent violence against religious minorities. Secularism became an "absolute necessity" given the extraordinary pluralism and diversity found in India. However, consensus on secularism faded away in the 1980s due to the decline of INC and the rise of political parties based on religion, caste, and region. The Hindutva majoritarian politics continued to attack secularism with a sustained campaign. They argued that the Hindu majority was denied its due share in the public sphere, and perceived minority rights as minority appeasement, especially towards Muslims.

Post-2004 Lok Sabha elections, INC, the leading party in the United Progressive Alliance (UPA-I) attempted to revive secular governance and cultural pluralism. It started to change public policies towards religious minorities by giving prominence to pluralism and diversity promotion, particularly in public institutions. Earlier under minority rights, only formal equality and rights were protected, such as freedom of religion, culture, and the establishment and administration of educational institutions. It was recognised that social and economic policies that were mainly targeted towards religious minorities needed to be framed to address the concerns of social exclusion, economic deprivation and political underrepresentation of religious minorities (Hasan, 2012).

Political Ideology of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

BJP is a right-wing political party which has declared 'Integral Humanism' to be its foundational principle and official ideology. It has formally claimed to pursue five guiding principles of its political path, i.e., nationalism and national integration, democracy, Gandhian socialism, positive secularism, and value-based politics. Considering India as an eternal and ancient nation, it speaks of 'cultural nationalism' consisting of a glorious knowledge tradition. It also articulates a commitment to Hindutva, and the party policies have over time manifested Hindu nationalist positions advocating social conservatism.

On the definition of secularism, it claims that it is a western concept that called for a separation of state and religion. Instead, the party affirms that in India, secular culture always meant 'equal respect for all religions' which is different from western secularism. Moreover, it has been vocal that in the name of secularism, other political parties in India have endeavoured into nothing less than appeasement of religious minorities. Hence it has called this sort of approach a 'Pseudo-Secularism' that was practised at the cost of majoritarian communities.

Patnaik and Chalam (1996) describe the politics and concept of Hindutva as an "ideological construct" that vocalises the 'interests' of one particular section of the inhabitants vis-à-vis other sections to achieve unity within "classes and communities of a Hindu social order". It seeks the integration of Hindus in ideological opposition to Muslim and Christian communities. They



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analyse Hindutva to have been constructed as an ideology wherein its practitioners hold Hindustan both as their pitrubhoomi (fatherland) and punyabhoomi (holyland).

Accordingly, Muslims and Christians cannot be part of Hindutva even though they may consider Hindustan as their fatherland, but their holy lands are not located within its geographical territory. It is argued that the believers of Hindutva perceive Muslims and Christians as fostering 'extra-territorial loyalties' apart from Hindustan. Hindutva, along with Hinduism, encompasses members of other religions originating in India such as Sikhism, Sanatanism, Veerashaivism, Buddhism, Jainism and others. With this prism, Hinduism is perceived to be a homogeneous religious community and the religion of the majority population. The inhabitants of Hindustan share collective ground based on their common Rashtra, Jati, and Sanskriti, the three principal pillars of Hindutva (Patnaik and Chalam, 1996).

Jaffrelot (2010) analyses that the ideology of Hindu nationalism is codified and developed by Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) wherein it has close affinities with the BJP. RSS enables Hindus to assimilate, overcome their vulnerability feelings and builds a sharp sensation of community. While propagating Hindu nationalism, they strategise through stigmatisation and resist effectively against Muslims and Christians claiming they are posing a threat to Hinduism. They aim to re-establish the grandeur of Hindu culture and its supremacy in the land of Hindustan. They want to infuse "nationalist conscience" and a "sense of solidarity" among the members leading to a homogeneous Hindu nation.

Additionally, the RSS, over a period, created and expanded a host of social, cultural, economic, and political networks targeting specific sections of the population. All these associated networks, organisations, unions and fronts are commonly referred to as 'Sangh' (organisation) and its 'Parivar' (family) put together as 'Sangh Parivar'. Some of these specialised institutions are Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) for students, Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) for labourers, Vanavasi Kalyan Ashram (VKA) for tribals, and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) as a consistory bringing together various representatives of Hindu sects. Along with these, it started Seva Bharati for healthcare dispensing and educational work, Saraswati Shishu Mandir for school children, and finally Jana Sangh as a political party which later got transformed into BJP (Jaffrelot, 2010).

Social Base of INC and BJP in Karnataka

It is well acknowledged and recognised that dominant castes significantly influence the politics of Karnataka. The two dominant, as well as land-owning castes in Karnataka, are Lingayats and Vokkaligas. Both these castes are predominant in numbers and owners of assets in the form of land and capital. The other influential community consists of the Other Backward Castes (OBCs), comprising, to name a few, Kurubas, Edigas, Billavas, Bunts, and Gollas. Besides, there is a significant population from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Finally, there are religious minorities who like others are spread throughout different parts of the state.



Table 1: Religion-wise Population of Karnataka as per the 2011 Census

Sl.No.	Religion	Population (%)
1	Hindus	83.33
2	Muslims	12.92
3	Christians	1.87
4	Sikhs	0.05
5	Buddhists	0.16
6	Jains	0.72
7	Other Religions and Persuasions	0.02
8	Religion Not Stated	0.27
	TOTAL	100

Source: Government of India, Census Data, 2011

According to Census of India 2011, the population enumerations of Karnataka in terms of religion are as follows: Hindus constitute 83.99 per cent; Muslims constitute 12.92 per cent; Christians constitute 1.87 per cent; Sikhs constitute 0.05 per cent; Buddhists constitute 0.16 per cent, and Jains constitute 0.72 per cent. Besides, Other Religions and Persuasions constitute 0.02 per cent; and those who did not mention belonging to any religion constitute 0.27 per cent (Government of India Census, 2011). The government of India, through its census, collects information about the caste of the citizens; however, caste-wise data is not made public. One has to rely on other kinds of primary and secondary data from both governments as well as non-government agencies.

The INC government headed by Siddaramaiah as CM decided to conduct a caste census in the year 2017. Despite completing the exercise of collecting the data and putting it in the form of a report, it was not released by the government. However, several media and other data agencies reported that perhaps the government would not release the report at any time as it may open a Pandora's Box. Moreover, there were speculations and guesswork by various analysts, demographers, and journalists to arrive at the caste-wise population of Karnataka (Live Mint, 2017).

Before the Karnataka state legislative assembly elections in 2013 and Lok Sabha elections in 2014, the population according to caste and community as speculated by various media and data agencies was as follows: Lingayats at 17 per cent; Vokkaligas at 13 per cent; Kurubas at 9 per cent; Scheduled Castes at 15 per cent; and Scheduled Tribes at 5 per cent. Subsequently, before the Karnataka legislative assembly elections in 2018 and Lok Sabha elections in 2019, the speculated population was as follows: Brahmins at 3 per cent; Lingayats at 14 per cent; Vokkaligas at 11 per cent; Kurubas at 7 per cent; remaining OBCs at 16 per cent; Scheduled Castes at 19.5 per cent; Scheduled Tribes at 5 per cent; Muslims at 16 per cent; Christians at 3 per cent; Buddhists and Jains at 2 per cent; and Others at 4 per cent. All these were mere speculations and assumptions based on earlier population enumerations (News18, 2018).

INC in Karnataka had a strong traditional social base from the communities belonging to OBCs, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Muslims. One could witness the convenient formation of different shades of social coalitions such as Muslims, OBCs and Dalits (MOD); and Religious



Minorities, Backward Classes, Dalits and Tribals (AHINDA). This social coalition put together comprises half of the state population, which is more than sufficient to garner the electoral victory. Even if one assesses the party membership and support of INC, it gains strength and support mostly from the backward, marginalised and alienated sections of the society.

BJP in Karnataka has a strong traditional social base emerging from the upper castes as well as dominant castes, specifically Lingayats. Besides, they have the support of certain castes belonging to OBCs, particularly from the coastal Karnataka region, i.e., Uttara Kannada, Udupi and Dakshina Kannada. Additionally, efforts are exerted by BJP to gain support from Buddhists, Christians, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Political Regime of BJP in Karnataka: 2008 to 2013

BJP forming the government in Karnataka in 2008 was itself a significant milestone in the history of South India. For the first time, BJP was able to come to power on its own without allying with any other party, though of course with the support of six independent candidates. For the BJP to exhibit its strength in the assembly and pass the vote of confidence, it needed the support of independent candidates, which it duly obtained. It showed its gratitude by inducting five out of the six independents in the first cabinet as ministers. The election victory and formation of a government by the BJP in Karnataka was perceived as its expansion and achievement in making inroads into South India.

Contextualising the discussion generally in South India and particularly in Karnataka, one can say that it has witnessed broader shifts in the formation of political regime by BJP. The twelfth Karnataka Legislative Assembly, i.e., from May 2004 to November 2007, was dissolved due to various political swings. The results of 2004 state assembly elections did not provide a clear mandate to any single political party to form a government. As a result, the INC and JD (S) came together agreeing to form a post-poll coalition government, Dharam Singh was unanimously decided to be head of the government and was sworn as CM on May 28, 2004. This coalition was very fragile, lasted only for twenty months, witnessed many upheavals, and Dharam Singh had to resign on February 2, 2006.

Meanwhile, H. D. Kumaraswamy, along with all the MLAs from JD (S), deserted the coalition to bring down the government. The JD (S) allied with the BJP to form the government and Kumaraswamy was sworn in as CM on February 3, 2006. As part of the agreement over power-sharing, it was decided that JD (S) and BJP would rule the state for twenty months each. However, after being the CM for twenty months, i.e., February 3, 2006, to October 9, 2007, he refused to transfer the power and instead offered his resignation to the Governor of Karnataka. From November 2007 to May 2008, Karnataka was under the President's Rule, after which state assembly elections were held in 2008 wherein the BJP emerged victoriously and formed the simple majority government.

Reflecting upon the victory of BJP in the 2008 Karnataka assembly elections, Shastri and Padmavathi (2009) have argued that it was due to a squabble among many of the INC leaders and decline in the support base of JD (S). Discussing the factors that led to the success of BJP, they have highlighted the role played by "different regions as distinct political entities". The BJP consolidated the principal seats in Bombay Karnataka, Central Karnataka, Coastal Karnataka, and Bangalore regions which resulted in it winning a large number of seats. However, the BJP bagged



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the minimum number of seats in Hyderabad Karnataka and South Karnataka regions wherein the contest was between INC and JD (S) (Shastri and Padmavathi, 2009).

Assadi (2009) has pointed out that the victory of BJP in 2008 Karnataka assembly elections were due to multiple factors. The first was that the BJP was able to secure the maximum support and strength from its social bases, i.e., Lingayats and Brahmins (LIBRA). Second, the BJP was successful in dividing the vote banks of Vokkaligas by fielding many candidates from this caste. Third, the BJP was able to co-opt Other Backward Castes (OBCs) and Dalits, which are a new social category to its social bases by providing many tickets to candidates belonging to these caste categories. Fourth, the BJP projected B. S. Yeddyurappa, who hails from the dominant Lingayat caste, as its chief ministerial candidate. Finally, the BJP attempted vigorously to retrieve the lost political power after the collapse of an earlier coalition with the JD (S) (Assadi, 2009).

During the assembly elections, BJP did not field even a single Muslim candidate while INC and JD (S) allotted seats to a few with their party tickets. The INC election manifesto spoke about constructing around one lakh houses in the name of the Tipu Sultan Housing Scheme and the implementation of the recommendations proposed by the Sachar Committee Report (2006). Additionally, it promised to celebrate Khwaja Bande Nawaz festival by the state in Gulbarga and to construct Moulana Azad Residential Schools in all districts of Karnataka.

The only thing which the BJP had mentioned in its election manifesto concerning religious minorities was that it would enhance the quality of education in Urdu medium schools. The JD (S) in its election manifesto said it would implement the Sachar Committee Report; give monthly pensions to Imams and Muezzins after their retirement. Further, it would set up a special committee to implement the recommendations made by the Karnataka State Minority Commission (KSMC); compulsory recruitment of minority community members in police personnel; and building an Urdu Bhavan which would be named after Tipu Sultan.

Among 224 Members of Legislative Assembly (MLA) only eight Muslim members were elected, i.e., seven from INC and one from JD (S). The BJP government appointed a non-elected Muslim member – Prof Mumtaz Ali Khan - into its first Council of Ministers (Cabinet) as a Minister for Minority Welfare, Haj and Wakf. However, in the subsequent cabinets in the same BJP regime, he was removed from the cabinet. Under the chief ministership of D. V. Sadananda Gowda and Jagadish Shettar, there was not even a single member representation for the minority community in the entire cabinet. All the other MLAs belonging to minority communities were part of opposition parties as they were party members from INC or JD (S).

Political Regime of INC in Karnataka: 2013 to 2018

Assadi (2013) argues that the swinging back of religious minorities, Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and Scheduled Castes to their “traditional platforms” along with the misdeeds of BJP government resulted in its loss and victory to the INC. More than national issues, it was the local issues which were the priority for the voters, and very importantly, corrupt governance by the ruling party would result in anti-incumbency. Moreover, the political coalition of social groups such as MOD (Muslims, OBCs, and Dalits) or AHINDA (Religious Minorities, Backward Classes, Dalits, and Tribal's) returned to their old allegiances. The rift created due to the



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resignation of B. S. Yeddyurappa from the BJP and his contesting as a KJP candidate divided the votes of the dominant castes in Karnataka, i.e., the Lingayats and Vokkaligas (Assadi, 2013).

The INC returned to power in Karnataka after a seven-year gap and formed the majority government in the year 2013 without an alliance or support from any political parties. The constant infighting within the BJP, corruption charges, quitting of CM from the party, and change of CM thrice was noted as some of the primary reasons for the defeat of the incumbent government. Further, small regional parties such as KJP, BSRCP, KMP, SP, SKP, and independent candidates won a few seats. Additionally, the well-known local party, JD (S), was able to secure forty seats comfortably.

Concerning the religious minorities, the INC in its election manifesto committed to implementing the recommendations proposed by the Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission as well as the Justice Sachar Committee. It pledged to make a significant allocation in the state budget to religious minorities on the lines of SC/ST Sub Plan and to constitute an independent legislature committee for the welfare of religious minorities. It pledged to provide vocational training and employment opportunities at taluk levels for women among religious minorities. It promised to carry out a comprehensive survey as well as identify the properties of Wakf and give representation to religious minorities in various state-level statutory bodies. Further, it promised encouragement and support for establishing minority-run educational and training institutions. Similarly, it vowed to provide scholarships for minority students, aid to Arabic and Urdu schools, and residential schools for religious minorities in all the districts of Karnataka.

BJP in its manifesto under the section Social Welfare pledged to provide free training to religious minorities along with a monthly stipend. It vowed to empower the minority communities through employment generation, skill development, housing schemes, education, and construction of community halls. Specific reference was made to Christians, assuring them appropriate representation in KSMC and other minority development boards.

In its election manifesto, JD (S) vowed to implement the recommendations of Sachar Committee. To support and encourage minority women, it promised to construct women's hostels for both students as well as working women in all districts. It pledged to strengthen the Wakf committees at the district level and support the establishment of institutions managed by Wakf and Dargas. To increase the representation of Muslims in government, it would start such training centres for Muslim children. Further, it promised to establish Zakat Boards at the district level, protect places of worship, and offer loan waiver through the Karnataka State Minorities Development Corporation (KSMDC), allot space for burial grounds and construct an Urdu Bhavan in Bangalore.

The BJP did not nominate even a single Muslim candidate in the entire state while INC and JD (S) fielded Muslim candidates with their party support in several constituencies. INC fielded seventeen candidates, and the JD (S) also fielded seventeen candidates in the elections. There were many other small and unrecognised political parties along with independent candidates from minority communities who contested the assembly elections. However, in the end, only a handful of minority community members won the polls. A total of 14 minority candidates (Muslims – 11; Christians – 2; Jains – 1) made it to the legislative assembly where 12 were from INC, and the



remaining two were from JD (S).

The INC, after forming the government with Siddaramaiah as the CM appointed a total of five minority community members (Muslims – 3; Christians – 1; Jains – 1) in the Council of Ministers. They were made ministers with portfolios such as Municipalities, Local Bodies and Public Enterprises; Home Ministry; Health and Family Welfare; Infrastructure, Minority Welfare, Wakf, and Haj; and Youth Services and Fisheries. Till the completion of the government's tenure in May 2018, there were representatives from minority communities in the cabinet even after the reshuffle in subsequent days.

Attacks on Christians, Churches and Christian Institutions in 2008

On August 17, 2008, three months after BJP came to power, there were attacks on churches in Davanagere, and the district administration issued a notice wherein it asked for an inquiry on churches that were running without authorisation. In Shimoga, two Christian-run institutions, i.e., Sacred Heart High School and Mary Immaculate High School, received show-cause notices from the Deputy Director, Department of Public Instruction for declaring a holiday on August 29, 2008. On this day around 2,000 Christian institutions across Karnataka had decided to close their institutions as a mark of silent protest observed due to the intensified attacks on Christians and churches in Orissa.

On September 14, 2008, a press conference in Mangalore was organised by Mahendra Kumar, President of Bajrang Dal, Karnataka. He said that they had been carrying out attacks on prayer halls mainly belonging to Christians as a final resort to put an end to forcible conversions. He asserted that these attacks would continue until Christians stopped activities related to conversion. He argued that they are carrying out the attacks and taking actions based on the complaints received from Hindus and that Christians should not feel hurt by their attacks on churches. Further, he stated that their activities should be perceived as warnings to people so that they mended their ways. On the same day, fourteen churches were attacked in Mangalore, Dakshina Kannada, and Chikmagalur.

On September 21, 2008, St. James Church, Mariannanapalya, Bangalore was vandalised, which was a significant part of attacks on churches across Karnataka. Observers and analysts argued that communal conflicts were spreading across Karnataka and several incidents were reported concerning the attacks on churches as well as Christians. It was estimated that around 55 such attacks had occurred in August and September 2008 in the districts of Bangalore, Davanagere, Kodagu, Udipi, Chikballapur, Mangalore, Kolar, Chikmagalur, Tiptur, and Shimoga. The number of attacks on religious minorities had increased during this time, and radical religious outfits claimed responsibility for initiating these actions (Sanjana, 2008).

On September 15, 2008, the attacks on churches continued wherein the miscreants pelted stones on a place of worship and desecrated the statues and other items of worship. Various religious and civic organisations submitted memorandums to the respective District Commissioners (DC) for protecting the lives and properties of Christians and their places of worship. Numerous Christian leaders called for a peaceful shutdown to be observed in districts where attacks had been carried out. A day before, i.e., on September 14, 2008 (Sunday) Christians in Mangalore went on a protest march on the main roads of the city and continued their protest throughout the day. For making



their voices heard, the church bells rang continuously in almost all the churches in the town.

The then Governor of Karnataka Rameshwar Thakur directed the CM to initiate urgent steps and make necessary arrangements for protecting the lives and properties of religious institutions leading to communal harmony. CM B. S. Yeddyurappa convened a high-level meeting and held a press conference on September 21, 2008, over the attacks on churches and Christians. He denied the participation of the state government in the communal attacks, however, and blamed police personnel for failing to perform their duties by not initiating precautionary measures. He stated that politically motivated vested interests are attempting to blemish the image of state government. Instead of encouraging attacks, it had made dedicated efforts for stabilising communal harmony and peace throughout the state.

The CM further asserted that the priority of the state was to uphold law and order, as nothing was above the law and the miscreants involved in church attacks would be surely punished. It was asserted that special protection would be provided to places of worship, and an investigating commission would be constituted. Later in February 2010, the BJP government allocated a sum of Rs 50 crore towards Christian Development Projects as part of the budgetary allocations. The CM appointed Justice B. K. Somashekara, a former judge of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh High Courts, as a one-person commission of inquiry to probe the attacks on Christians, churches, and Christian institutions in different parts of Karnataka.

Sri Guru Dattatreya Bababudan Swamy Dargah

The Dargah has become a site of communal politics where representatives from Muslim and Hindu communities have claimed its ownership and management. Once upon a time, the place was considered as a part of syncretic culture found in different parts of Karnataka as both Muslims and Hindus revered the shrine. However, from the early 1990s, the site was embroiled in a political, cultural, social, religious, and legal battle between Hindus and Muslims. Cashing in on this issue, various political parties, political organisations, hard-line socio-cultural organisations, and a few individuals converted the problem into a political and ideological fight along with a communal twist. The Dargah has become a bone of contention to be fought on, and trouble erupts almost every year.

The Dargah is located inside a cave on Baba Budan Giri Hills, Chikmagalur district. Muslims believe that it was the abode of a Sufi saint Sheikh Abdul Azeez Makki also known as Dada Hayath Meer Qalandar. Hindus believe that it was the meditation place of Dattatreya, an avatar of Vishnu, Shiva, and Brahma. Despite conflicting claims, the Dargah had remained the site of a syncretic culture where both Hindus and Muslims considered it as sacred and believed in the intercession of the saints. If one traces the legal history, it started with the dispute over the right of management between two government departments, i.e., Karnataka State Board of Wakf (KSBW) and the Muzrai Department. In 1980, the Chikmagalur District Court transferred the right of management to the Muzrai Department and ordered that the Dargah was worshipped by Hindus and Muslims and managed by a Sajjada Nashin, who would be a Muslim.

On September 8, 2008, four months after the BJP came to power; the government ordered the restoration and additional construction of the Dargah as a part of the cave had collapsed due to rains. However, this restoration or construction was against the status quo order of the Supreme



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Court of India. Despite these orders, Bhoomi Pooja was performed in front of the Dargah wherein a large number of state-level BJP leaders participated. These acts were clear indications of attempts to convert the site of syncretic culture into an exclusive place of worship for Hindus. The speculations were that the Bhoomi Pooja was carried as part of preparations for the Datta Jayanti, an independent Hindu festival held every year in December.

Before the 1990s, the only large gathering held at the Dargah was the Urs of Dada Hayath Meer Qalandar organised annually in March. It was led by Shah Khadri who would appoint daily priests for carrying out the religious rituals, and the Muzrai department would manage the shrine. Since the early 1990s, a range of exclusive Hindu events was initiated such as Datta Jayanti which was turned into a grand celebration. In the late 1990s, another unique Hindu event referred to as Datta Mala Abhiyan was introduced, which gained enormous attention. As these events were organised every year, they were used by the BJP and its affiliate political-social-cultural outfits to communalise and politicise the issue. Currently, the administration of the Shrine is carried out by the district officials. Meanwhile, the syncretic culture of the Dargah is getting eroded systematically (Assadi, 1999).

The Dargah issue crops up every year when either Urs or Datta Jayanti is organised, and it also becomes a hot topic for discussion among the political parties. Governments have noted the issue to be highly sensitive, fragile, communal, and politically motivated wherein several communal riots and disturbances have occurred in different parts of Chikmagalur district. Additionally, BJP leaders and affiliates are participating in huge numbers during these events and use the platform to strengthen as well as mobilise support in their favour. Many party leaders have come to light in the state by using the platform of Dargah as they continued to communalise the issue. Some state-level leaders have gone farther ahead by terming the otherwise syncretic shrine as the “Ayodhya of the South”.

From the 1990s onwards, the Bababudan Dargah has been intensely highlighted and politicised by Hindu political outfits that have made efforts to convert it into a Hindu Dargah. The issue has been spoken and discussed at length as they perceive its potentiality to be a rallying ground to garner politico-ideological strength. The Datta Jayanti, Datta Mala Abhiyan, Padayatra, Rath Yatra and Shobha Yatra have been increasingly used as platforms to deliver provocative, hatred spewing and communal speeches. There were specific calls given wherein they asked for the liberation of the Dargah from Muslim control, which was also apparent from slogans such as Turukarige Dhikkara (Condemn Muslims). Moreover, the cave shrine has been associated with Tipu Sultan and Nawab Hyder Ali Khan, and it is argued that they were the ones who converted the Dattatreya Mandir into Bababudan Dargah.

Neither of the governments has settled the ongoing Sri Guru Dattatreya Bababudan Swamy Dargah issue which has become a prominent contentious matter in Karnataka. Both the political regimes have only attempted to make sure that communal tensions are kept at a bare minimum whenever either Urs or Datta Jayanti are organised. As the issue is in the Supreme Court of India, they have been ordered to maintain the status quo wherein the shrine would be administered by district officials, with the rights of management under the Muzrai department, and continuation of religious rituals by both Hindus and Muslims.



Even though there is mention of Sajjada Nashin, he has been wholly excluded in matters of decision making. Political parties are involved in giving political and communal colouring to the hilltop shrine. As a result, the district has witnessed sectarian tensions and curfews due to intensified polarisation and communalisation among the members of different religious communities instead of their leading a peaceful life with syncretic culture. There are calls by some of the BJP MLAs who want to declare Datta Peeta as Hindu Peeta, want Muslims to vacate the Dargah at Baba Budan Giri voluntarily, and say they will continue to fight religious, political, and legal battles.

Prevention of Cow Slaughter and Cattle Preservation Bills

In March 2010, the state government passed a bill titled Karnataka Prevention of Cow Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Act, 2010. The act in its various clauses and sub-clauses directs prohibition of slaughtering cows and buffalo calves and for the improvement and preservation of cattle breeds. The bill also endeavours to organise agriculture as well as animal husbandry on the lines of the Constitution of India, pointing specifically towards Article 48. The bill was passed by the assembly and sent for the Governor's consent. However, the bill was further forwarded to the office of the President.

Again in the year December 2012, the Karnataka Legislative Assembly tabled and passed the bill titled Karnataka Prevention of Cow Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill (Amendment) 2012. The bill defined all animals coming under the category of "Bovines" to be prohibited from slaughter in the state. The bill stated that the slaughtering of bovines was an offence and subject to punishment. This bill aimed to provide specific protection and prevention of slaughter of cows, bulls and buffaloes, which are of fifteen years and below. Moreover, the bill proposed to expand the definition of Karnataka Prevention of Cow Slaughter and Cattle Prevention Act 1964.

In its 2008 election manifesto, the BJP had promised to pass a law that would prohibit the slaughter of cattle in the state and accordingly to fulfil this pre-election promise, the government introduced and passed these bills. Along with extending the definition of cattle, the bill proposed a severe punishment. Imprisonment could be extended to seven years for those individuals who are found violating the provisions of this act. It has been observed that in different parts of Karnataka, the issue of cow slaughter has been used by political parties and organisations to create communal clashes. The state has witnessed several skirmishes and tensions due to the purchase, transportation, and slaughter of cows.

Some political analysts and activists have viewed the move by the state government as specific targeting of religious minorities. They say the Act interferes in the daily food habits of people, not just of religious minorities but many of the backward communities, particularly Dalits. Members of Dalit organisations have opposed the move by the state government, terming it as interference in food habits and also an attempt to fulfil the upper caste agenda of Sanskritisation. Additionally, the Act would be a cause of burden upon farmers and people engaged in animal husbandry who would have to look after their older cattle which are not productive. Besides, the complete ban on cow slaughter will have a tremendous economic impact upon lakhs and lakhs of employees who are involved in cow slaughter and allied activities.



The INC government in the year 2014 withdrew the Karnataka Prevention of Slaughter and Preservation of Cattle Bill 2010 as well as Karnataka Prevention of Cow Slaughter and Preservation Bill (Amendment) 2012. The legislative assembly and council permitted the state government to withdraw these two bills which were passed by the earlier BJP regime. CM Siddaramaiah had expressed his intention, and in August 2013, the Cabinet decided to withdraw the bills.

The opposition party BJP expressed its dissent over this move of the state government, and it intensified the campaign against the state government. The opposition staged a dharna in the legislative assembly and council to mark the protest against the withdrawal of these two bills. The then leader of opposition Jagadish Shettar said that the BJP would hold an urgent meeting of high-level state leaders to draw up a state-wide campaign against the state government by involving the farmers.

Tipu Jayanti Celebration

November 10 of every year is celebrated as Tipu Jayanti, the ruler of Mysore Kingdom in the final decades of the 18th century. Lately, the figure of Tipu has been politicised as well as communalised calling him as anti-Hindu, anti-Kannada, anti-national, and also a terrorist. However, this was never the case earlier as he was hailed as a freedom fighter, warrior, a people-friendly and fair ruler, and also Tiger of Mysore. Historically, the texts have mentioned that he was an able King, had the technological know-how, advanced military arms and ammunition, and upheld the secular ethos of treating all the religions alike. However, due to the increased assertion by various extreme Hindu organisations, he has been called as a traitor, murderer, ruthless, and a killer. Additionally, Nawab Hyder Ali Khan, father of Tipu Sultan, is remembered as the one who planned and captured the fort of Chitradurga. Nawab Hyder Ali Khan was pitched against the warrior lady Onake Obavva, who single-handedly fought against his army's efforts at capturing the fort.

Every year, there is hue and cry by various political parties as well as political organisations throughout the state about the state celebration of Tipu Jayanti in November. Between 2008 and 2018, there has been a celebration of Tipu Jayanti amidst protests and processions against the state governments. Even in 2012 when the BJP government was in power, along with celebrating the Tipu Jayanti, the then CM Jagadish Shettar had also praised the contributions of Tipu Sultan to the erstwhile Mysore kingdom. The BJP and other political organisations who are opposed to the celebration highlight Tipu as a communal ruler who killed many Hindus and also forcibly converted many into the Islamic fold.

There was also a petition filed in the High Court demanding that the state should not celebrate Tipu Jayanti as he was an invader, dictator and glorifying such a personality was shameful. The petitioner contended that Tipu carried out violence against the Kodava people during his rule. The INC government in 2015 decided to organise a mega state-sponsored celebration of Tipu Jayanti in the Banquet Hall of Vidhana Soudha. It allocated funds and directed the concerned ministries and departments to oversee the organisation and management of the function. However, the BJP government opposed the move and termed it as appeasement towards the minority communities. The other Hindu outfits formed Anti Tipu Jayanti Committees. They called for protests and agitations in Bangalore and other districts against the decision by the state government to celebrate



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the Tipu Jayanti.

CONCLUSION

While the BJP government led the thirteenth legislative assembly from 2008 to 2013, the fourteenth was by INC from 2013 to 2018. It is a popular trend in Karnataka since the 1980s that the electorate does not re-elect the incumbent government, and also vote differently in assembly and parliamentary elections. In 2008, for the first time, BJP succeeded in forming a government in South India, but it could not keep up the same momentum during its tenure. In 2013, the INC returned to power as it gained full support from its traditional social bases, i.e. backward castes, Dalits, tribal's and religious minorities.

The attacks on churches and Christians in 2008 were one of the devastating events that occurred in Karnataka months after BJP came to power in the state. The polarisation and saffronisation of coastal Karnataka and other pockets in Karnataka has threatened the secular fabric of society. The minority communities in general and Christians, in particular, were aggrieved as their places of worship came under attack. The convening of a high-level meeting and press conference by the then CM did not result in any positive outcomes. One of the consequences was the decision by the government to allocate Rs 50 crore to Christian development projects.

Sri Guru Dattatreya Bababudan Swamy Dargah issue remains to be a bone of contention, and neither BJP nor the INC government resolved this issue. Though the legal matter is still pending in the Supreme Court, there are increasing demands by the Hindu extremist groups to convert it into an exclusive Hindu place of worship. The issue is opened and revived each year during the time of Datta Jayanti by the political parties. National level leaders are invited to be part of the proceedings. Even though the Urs, Sandal, and Paduka worship are celebrated, it has almost lost its spiritual sanctity without its syncretic outlook and complete exclusion of Sajjada Nashin.

Even though the Karnataka Prevention of Cow Slaughter and Preservation Bill 2012 has been withdrawn, its repercussions are felt on the minority communities. Now and then, there are reports and cases of violence in the name of cow slaughter or beef consumption. There have been cases wherein some extremist groups take matters into their hands and indulge in violence, even without any verification. Moreover, this issue is day by day turning into 'cow politics' where there have been instances of physical abuse and mob lynching, particularly towards members of the minority communities.

The celebration of Tipu Jayanti by the state government also crops up once in a year, particularly when it has to decide whether or not to celebrate it. Tipu Sultan, his role, views, actions, and contributions are discussed widely, and the issue becomes prominent just weeks or months before the celebration. The Tipu question is not perceived from a historical point of view and in the context of a monarchical form of administration. Instead, Tipu is propagated as a communal question. Attempts are exerted to divide society in the name of Hindus and Muslims and give it a communal colour. Many of the BJP leaders were part of the Tipu Jayanti celebrations in 2012. INC has been involved in not just espousing Tipu as a freedom fighter but has also engaged in state-sponsored Tipu Jayanti celebrations.



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It is to be noted that the political regime of BJP witnessed events wherein religious minorities and minority issues were affected. Along with these issues that affected their life and society, religious minorities did not find their concerns to be represented in the legislative assembly. The ruling party had not fielded even a single representative from the religious minority communities, and as a result, there were none to represent their voices. It was only in the opposition party where a few of the representatives belonged to the minority communities. During this regime, even the welfare programmes and schemes towards the development of religious minorities initiated by the state were relatively low in number. The lack of minority representation in the cabinet did not allow minority communities to secure the minimum required space in the governance.

During the political regime of INC, there was minority representation not only in the ruling party but also in the chief minister's cabinet. This representation, though small, enabled a space for discussing and debating the issues of religious minorities and thereby catering to their social, economic and political needs. Not only were there an increased number of welfare programmes and schemes initiated by the state during this period, even allocation of funds under the state budget to the Department of Minorities Welfare, Haj, and Wakf kept on increasing every year.

The BJP in its 2008 manifesto had promised to enhance the quality of education among Urdu medium schools. However, despite coming to power, the ruling party did not keep up its promise, and the quality of education among Urdu medium schools is deteriorating. These schools not only lack the necessary infrastructure and amenities, but they also do not have a proper academic atmosphere with skilled teaching as well as non-teaching staff. In many places, Urdu medium schools have been either shut down or are on the verge of closing down.

The INC regime was also unable to keep up many of its promises declared in its 2013 manifesto. The recommendations of the Justice Ranganath Mishra Commission and Justice Sachar Committee are yet to be implemented. Constituting of the religious minorities sub-plan and the independent legislature committee for the welfare of religious minorities has not taken place. A comprehensive survey and identification of the Wakf properties are yet to be initiated, and there is a lack of minority representation in various state-level statutory bodies.

More importantly, the Constitution of India in its various articles and clauses has made provisions for positive discrimination to empower the welfare of religious minorities. Additionally, there are negative injunctions which are in place to counter the practice of discrimination, marginalisation, and alienation of the minority communities. The Constitution, in its article 29 and 30, discusses in detail about the protection of the interests of religious minorities and rights of religious minorities to establish and administer educational institutions. Hence, the Constitution is an essential and powerful tool which safeguards and protects minority rights, obligations, entitlements and interests.

The sections above have attempted to understand the political initiatives of selected political regimes, whether or not they have resulted in the inclusion and protection of religious minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians in Karnataka. The political processes occurring in the state government on matters related to religious minorities were highlighted within a timeline from 2008 to 2018. Four prominent issues were highlighted concerning religious minority communities, one each from religious, cultural, legal and political spheres wherein the state governments had to



decide and respond accordingly on the concerned matters.

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