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Questions

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RESPONSE

1. Please provide some information about the place of members of lower castes in Gujarat and any discrimination by the BJP of members of lower castes.

Available source information indicates that lower caste persons continue to experience discrimination and mistreatment across India, including Gujarat. Nonetheless, little information could be located that would indicate that Gujarat state's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government is currently engaged in the widespread targeting of lower caste persons. Information was located, however, to indicate that supporters of the Indian National Congress (INC; or Congress) have been involved in political violence in Gujarat, clashing with both supporters of the BJP, and with police. Information was also located on the situation of the Nai (or barber) caste.

An overview of the available source information appears below presented under the following subtitles: [*Background on caste and politics in India*](#); [*The Nai or barber caste*](#); [*The BJP and lower caste Hindus in Gujarat*](#); and [*The BJP and Congress supporters in Gujarat*](#).

Two recently completed Research Responses may also be of interest:

- *Research Response IND32431* of 8 October provides information on the situation in Gujarat in terms of the relationship between the police, the ruling BJP and the

Congress party, and this is supplied as Attachment 33 (RRT Research & Information 2007, *Research Response IND32431*, 8 October – Attachment 33).

- *Research Response IND32353* of 11 September 2007 provides information on the relationship between lower castes and police in Gujarat, and this is supplied as Attachment 34 (RRT Research & Information 2007, *Research Response IND32353*, 11 September – Attachment 34).

Background on caste and politics in India

A May 2007 report produced by the UK House of Commons Library provides background information on the Indian political situation as a whole in terms of issues relating to caste. Extensive extracts follow below. This background is recommended to readers unfamiliar with issues such as caste stratification (the Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras, and untouchables); the politicization of caste issues; the politics of the Congress party; the politics of the BJP and Hindu nationalism; and the government reservations made available to communities listed as scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs) and other backward castes (OBCs).

B. Caste in Indian Politics

The Indian caste system is a hierarchical system made up of a multitude of different caste identities (jatis). Each caste identity is linked to an occupation, or set of occupations, traditionally carried out by members of that caste. The caste boundaries are maintained by restrictions on intermarriage between different castes and the status of different caste groups is demarcated by socially enforced restrictions. The different castes are categorised into four groups (varnas) and the 'Untouchables'. In the hierarchical order of the traditional caste system, the four varnas are: (1) the Brahmins – the highest caste, whose traditional occupation is as priests and scholars; (2) the Kshatriyas (traditionally rulers and soldiers); (3) the Vaishyas (traditionally merchants and farmers); (4) the Shudras – the lowest of the four varnas and traditionally the servant class for the three higher varnas.

Beneath the Shudras and therefore outside the caste system are the Adi-Shudras or 'Untouchables', their traditional occupations include leather working, manual scavenging, sweeping, cremation work, removing dead animal carcasses and agricultural labour on other farmers' land. The belief that these groups are ritually impure, or 'Untouchable', has led to multiple forms of discrimination against them, as they have been restricted to certain occupations that are themselves believed to be ritually polluting and have been barred access to many public resources. Today, 'Untouchables' are twice as likely as other castes to work as poorly paid daily wage-labourers, twice as likely to be unemployed and twice as likely to be below the official poverty line. 'Untouchables' are also referred to as Harijans ('children of God'), Dalits ('the oppressed') and Scheduled Castes (referring to their special status in the Constitution). Also outside the caste system and subject to discrimination are the Adivasis, the indigenous or tribal population who are also known as Scheduled Tribes. Castes who are not 'Untouchable' but are still considered to be socially and economically deprived are referred to as Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The OBCs overlap closely with the Shudras – the lowest ranking of the four varnas – but also include some non-Hindu groups, including some Muslims.

According to the latest census, 16.2 per cent of the Indian population belong to the Dalits (Scheduled Castes) and 8.2 per cent to the Adivasis (Scheduled Tribes). Other caste groups are not counted in the census but most estimates suggest that OBCs constitute about half of the Indian population. However, the proportions vary substantially across India with the upper castes forming a higher proportion of the population in North India than in the South.

...1. The Law and its Enforcement

The Indian Constitution declares the practice of Untouchability to be an offence. Parliament has introduced a series of laws to ban caste-based discrimination including the Untouchability (Offences) Act in 1955, the Protection of Civil Rights (Amendment) Act in 1976, and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act in 1989. India also has a National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. These legal measures represent important steps towards delegitimising the practice of Untouchability, but caste discrimination continues and prosecutions are rare.

Particularly in rural India, Dalits still face widespread forms of discrimination, deprivation, intimidation and violence. A survey by ActionAid found that in close to half of the villages surveyed Dalits were denied access to water sources used by the upper castes, necessitating a long journey to an alternative water source and/or using contaminated water. In close to a third of villages Dalits had to sit separately and use different utensils at restaurants or tea stalls. Many Dalits continue to carry out occupations that are considered ritually impure, including working as manual scavengers to clean dry latrines, a practice that has been banned but remains widespread. Attempts to challenge the discrimination and restrictions they face frequently meet with violence, rape and other forms of intimidation. Many analysts interpret such violence as an attempt by upper castes to protect their established privilege, including access to cheap compliant labour from the lower castes. Despite the many legal provisions that exist, the criminal justice system in practice often offers little protection to Dalits and may itself at times practise Untouchability. According to Human Rights Watch, “widespread custodial torture and killing of Dalits, rape and sexual assault of Dalit women, and looting of Dalit property by the police “are condoned, or at best ignored.” Human Rights Watch also claims that Dalits are subject to collective punishment by the police and that the “police also actively allow private actors to commit violence against Untouchables with impunity, and at times, collude with private actors in committing such atrocities.”

...2. Policy Responses – Reservations

In recognition of the limitations of legal measures, the Government’s response to Untouchability has included measures of affirmative action through policies for positive discrimination that reserve a proportion of parliamentary seats, government jobs and places in higher education for Dalits and Adivasis.

In total, out of 543 parliamentary constituencies in the Lok Sabha, 79 seats are reserved for Dalits and 41 for Adivasis, a figure that is supposed to represent their proportion in each state’s population. Only Dalit candidates are entitled to stand for election in constituencies reserved for Dalits, while only Adivasi candidates can stand for election in constituencies reserved for Adivasis, but the entire electorate of these constituencies is entitled to vote for these candidates.

...Reservations for employment and places in higher education are also made on a proportional basis but are confined to jobs in the public sector (including state-controlled companies) and places in state-funded higher education institutions. As a result, the reservation policy only affects 20 million jobs out of a workforce of 300 million. Even those jobs that are reserved frequently go unfilled, especially in higher-level government jobs, meaning that Dalits are over-represented in lower government jobs, particularly as sweepers – a job that is considered ritually polluting. Within the Dalits, the main beneficiaries of reservations have been relatively affluent groups.

...Despite significant opposition from the upper castes, reservations in public sector jobs have been extended to the OBCs. ...Unlike reservations for Dalits and Adivasis, reservations for

OBCs are subject to a 'creamy layer' rule to exclude 'socially advanced' people amongst the groups classified as OBCs from the benefits of reservations.

4. The Rise of Caste Politics

In the first decades after independence, Dalit MPs elected through the reserved constituencies were generally representatives of the mainstream political parties, particularly Congress, and therefore had limited influence within the political system. As a result, during the 1950s and 1960s, the Dalits, together with Muslims and the upper castes, formed a major support base for a Congress Party that, particularly in the North, was controlled by the upper castes, who relied on "vote bank politics" to win elections. Parties representing lower castes came to power in the South in the 1950s and 1960s, but took longer to emerge as a serious electoral force in the North. However, in the 1990s a mainly Dalit party, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), challenged for power in India's largest state of Uttar Pradesh and the BSP's leader, Mayawati, was the first Dalit woman to become a Chief Minister at state-level.

The BSP was formed by educated government employees who found they still faced caste-based discrimination despite being the beneficiaries of reservations for Dalits. The BSP received support from an increasingly politicised Dalit population. No longer acting as a Congress 'vote bank', lower castes have increasingly voted for parties representing their own caste. In India today, "the incidence of voting is higher among the poor than among the rich, among the less educated than among the graduates, in the villages than in the cities." The Dalits, as some of the poorest and least educated people in India, are 70 per cent more likely to vote than the upper castes. According to one analyst, India is the only country in the world where "the composition of the electorate had changed in favour of the vulnerable section of the population between 1971 and 1996", as voter turnout has remained at around sixty per cent but the composition of those voting has changed dramatically.

With the declining dominance of the Congress Party in India and the growth of coalition politics, parties like the BSP and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD – which draws its support from OBCs in Bihar), have been increasingly influential in coalition governments at both the state and national levels. The BSP's core vote among the Dalits gives it statewide coverage but it cannot win seats without support from other groups. It has therefore appealed to a broader electorate by fielding non-Dalit candidates and has formed coalitions with other parties, including the Hindu nationalist (and predominantly upper caste) Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This has undoubtedly brought increased electoral success but many critics argue that it has also limited the BSP's ability to prioritise the interests of Dalits. A further concern is that the BSP has focused on exercising its powers of patronage by filling quotas for Dalits in government employment and on symbolic measures such as building statues of Dalit leaders, but has given relatively low priority to developmental activities and education that could improve the opportunities and status of a larger number of Dalits.

...C. Hindu Nationalism and Religious Violence

...The Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was founded in 1980 to replace its predecessor, the Jan Sangh, which had been formed in 1951 but had been incorporated into the Janata party in 1977. The BJP is the political wing of the Sangh Parivar, a group of Hindu nationalist organisations which includes the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a national volunteer organisation, and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), an organisation of Hindu monks. The RSS is seen by many as the head of the Sangh Parivar and, although its support for the BJP is not unconditional, its over 4.5 million members provide the party with a grassroots cadre that most of the other newer political parties lack. Collectively, the organisations of the Sangh Parivar espouse a Hindu nationalist agenda based upon the concept of 'Hindutva', which views India as a Hindu nation that should be run according to Hindu precepts.

Although the Hindu nationalist movement seeks to portray itself as incorporating all castes, the BJP's support comes primarily from the Hindu middle classes and the upper castes. There is little evidence of lower caste involvement. The size of India's consuming middle class grew rapidly during the 1980s and 1990s, partly due to the progressive liberalisation of the Indian economy. For new entrants to the middle classes, religious assertion provided "a means of proclaiming social involvement and gaining community acceptance." The middle classes and upper castes have also felt threatened by the increased politicisation of lower castes and particularly by proposals to extend reservations in government employment to the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). Hansen describes the rise of Hindu nationalism as a "conservative revolution [...] against a broader democratic transformation of both the political field and the public culture in postcolonial India." He argues that the upper castes turned to Hindu nationalism as a force that promises to maintain the hierarchical caste-based order of Indian society. ...The BJP's electoral strength is concentrated in the North and West of India. It wins few seats from Eastern and Southern regions of the country. This, along with the fact that its support amongst the lower castes has remained small, has meant that it has had to rely on forming coalitions with parties that do not share its Hindu nationalist agenda (Harrison, T., *et al* 2007, *A political introduction to India*, UK Parliament website, International Affairs and Defence Section – House of Commons Library, 2 May <http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2007/rp07-041.pdf> – Accessed 11 October 2007 – Attachment 9).

The Nai or barber caste

A person's caste identity may be suggested by their occupation, such as that of a hairdresser. The Nai (or Nayi or Nayee or Naayee or Naai; also known as the Mangali or Hajjam) caste traditionally work as barbers and information on this caste follows below. Information sourced from two scholarly sources is presented first followed by information sourced from news reports, and other sources, cited in reverse chronological order.

A 2006 study by S. M. Faizan Ahmed provides background on the manner in which the Nai have been traditionally perceived as a lower caste insofar as "cutting hair and shaving are viewed as ritually impure work, and those who perform this work are ranked as 'polluted' in social caste hierarchies". Ahmed's case study looks at persons of the Nai caste from "a small town of Bihar" who refer to themselves as Thakurs. According to Ahmed, Bihar's barber caste have sought to distance themselves from the "polluted" Nai identity by presenting their services as those of a beauty parlor rather than as those of a traditional barbershop. The report states that: "One of the points that many of the beauty parlor men made and were adamant about was that they hated to be addressed by the term nai, the caste name for barbers. They see it as a derogatory term that people use as an abuse or an insult". Some pertinent extracts follow.

In Munger, a small town of Bihar, all the workers in this profession belong to a single caste – the traditional caste of barbers, or nai. The barbers call themselves Thakurs, and have their own association – the Thakur Samaj – that addresses the concerns of its members. The Thakur Samaj set up the rules for all beauty parlor workers. It is they who decide the working hours and the holidays for all beauty parlor workers. Nevertheless, the Samaj is a restricted association because it does not take up the issues and concerns of barbers or beauty parlor workers who do not belong to their caste group.

The principles of caste and occupation intertwine to create a particular kind of identity, which is both ascriptive in caste terms and achieved through work. For workers, however, the caste identity is primary and their worker identity is encompassed within caste. Despite this, however, it is quite clear from the workers' statements that individual members of the Thakur caste are free to choose and pursue any career that they want. They are not restricted by their

caste in choosing a field of work. Nevertheless, there is a form of legitimacy to beauty parlor work that includes and goes beyond the traditional work of the barber. The primary work of traditional barbers or the nai is to shave and cut hair. Within the idioms of purity and pollution that govern caste ideologies (Srinivas 1953/2003; Dumont 1970/1980), cutting hair and shaving are viewed as ritually impure work, and those who perform this work are ranked as “polluted” in social caste hierarchies. The flip side of this is that the shaved head and cleansed or shaved face are viewed as ritually purified in the regimes of body care practices. Thus, cutting hair has ritual, cultural connotations that go beyond truncated notions of beauty “care” that are identified with modern beauty parlors. Traditional barbers were also ritual specialists who performed a range of ritual services in their patrons’ homes on specific occasions that went beyond the specificity of work implicit in the term barber. For example, the barber took away the umbilical cord after the birth of a child and shaved the child’s head in the ritual of mundan (the first hair cut). It is also the barber who acted as a messenger or go-between during marriage negotiations. In contemporary society, many of these services are no longer sought or provided by barbers. (pp.171-2).

...The negation of the conventional castebased pattern of work and the modernization of work as profession is evident in the term beauty parlor that occurs repeatedly in his narration to denote a modern work space, replacing the earlier term nai ki dukan (barbershop) and symbolizing the transformation of a caste occupation to a modern profession of beauty care. Rakesh further insists, “Main kabhi bhi ‘nai’ ki haisiyat se kaam nahin karna chahata hoon, balki ek beautician ke roop main karna chahata hoon.” (I will never work as a barber but rather as a beautician.) The use of the word haisiyat in this context is interesting. The word suggests both a status as well as a state of being, the guise in which a person appears – in this case as a beautician, not a nai. The use of words like beauty parlor are a signal of the deliberate distancing from the status of a polluted caste to a modern profession divested of the connotations of pollution, dirt, and inequality inherent in the caste term and caste occupation. (p.174)

...Beauty parlor men express their own sense of self-worth and have articulated a whole discourse around their work and their sense of male self. Because this is a profession associated within the culture of caste with body pollution of hair removal, nail cutting, and the excesses or “debris” of the body, in caste and occupational ranking systems, the barber is ranked low in the social hierarchy. This is further compounded by the association of beauty work with a feminine orientation. Caste and feminine orientation combine to create a particular form of social invisibility of beauty parlor workers. Beauty parlor workers, however, do not accept the devaluation of their work or themselves through their work. (p.181)

...One of the points that many of the beauty parlor men made and were adamant about was that they hated to be addressed by the term nai, the caste name for barbers. They see it as a derogatory term that people use as an abuse or an insult. Waseem feels like he has been slapped on the face if people called him nai. He feels that the term seeks to reduce his status and the dignity of his work, and through that, his dignity. Waseem and Bhuvaneshwar both insisted that there were many terms that they thought were respectful and dignified, unlike nai, which they all thought was derogatory. When asked, they came up with a whole host of terms – hair cutter, beautician, hair dresser, stylist, and *salmani* (a respectful way of addressing the community of Muslim barbers) – that carried connotations of a professional, skilled person and were divested of the associations of low birth (p.183) (Ahmed, S.M.F. 2006, ‘Making Beautiful: Male Workers in Beauty Parlors’, *Men and Masculinities*, Sage Journals Online website, vol.9, no.2, October, pp.168-185 <http://jmm.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/9/2/168.pdf> – Accessed 10 October 2007 – Attachment 1).

A 1999 study of the segregation of social groups in villages in Northwestern India provides the following overview of the local caste hierarchy noting the place of the Nai caste: just above that of those identities accorded untouchable status (it should be noted that, as this extract points out, the specifics of how an identity figures within a hierarchy is subject to variation from one locale to another).

The caste hierarchy is pan-Indian, but the placement of various castes on the continuum of caste hierarchy differs from one region to another. In the plains of northwestern India, where most peasants own their land, the caste hierarchy is different from that of other regions. Here the Brahmans as usual are at the top; then come Rajputs and Baniyas on the second rung of the ladder. In the middle are placed Jats, Ahirs, Gujars, Meos and others, who, but for the Meos, are widely distributed peasant proprietors. These are the dominant landowning castes. The status of a peasant caste is determined by the ownership of land. Landowners are placed high on the hierarchy as compared to the landless. Then come the clean service castes such as Khati (carpenter), Luhar (blacksmith), Kumhar (potter), Nai (barber) and others. On the lowest rungs are placed Dhanak, (pig keeper), Julaha (weaver), Chamar (leather worker), Bhangi (scavenger) and other groups regarded as untouchables.

In the religious sphere the Brahman.s occupy the ritually highest position. In the temporal world, however, the caste which owns the most land dominates in the daily affairs of village society (Singh, J.P. and Khan, M., 1999, 'Hindu cosmology and the orientation and segregation of social groups in villages in Northwestern India', *Geografiska Annaler*, Series B: Human Geography, vol.81, no.1, pp.19-39 – Attachment 3).

In June 2006 *United News of India (UNI)* reported that a national Nai association had demanded that barbers receive scheduled caste status due to their marginal status in Indian society and the alleged mistreatment of Nai caste members. The news was reported from Patna in the northeastern state of Bihar.

Patna, June 16 (UNI) Demanding scheduled caste status for the Nai (barber) community, the National Nai Mahasabha today threatened to launch a countrywide agitation if the government and political parties failed to provide them their 'due' share.

Chief patron of the organisation and Bihar Revenue and Land Reforms Minister Ramnath Thakur said 'Nai' should be included in the list of the scheduled caste, claiming that members of the caste were subjected to humiliation by the upper strata of the society.

The condtion [*sic*] of the community was even worse than scheduled castes, as the atrocities against the latter attracted punishment under a special act while the 'Nai' had no protection of any such law, he added.

Mr Thakur said a national awareness campaign would be launched to apprise the members of the community for their rights and also to prepare them for sustained struggle for their due place in the society. He said other castes were now stepping into the profession of 'hair cutting,' which had denied them the natural way of earning the livelihood.

"The Railways should construct hair cutting saloons in important railway stations of the country and certain numbers of it should be reserved for the Nai caste," he demanded.

He said that the government should extend loan facilities on low interest to the barbers for the business establishments ('Barbers demand Scheduled Caste status' 2006, *OneIndia News* website, source: *United News of India*, 16 June <http://news.oneindia.in/2006/06/16/barbers-demand-scheduled-caste-status-1150472314.html> – Accessed 11 October 2007 – Attachment 5).

In its 2006 annual report the Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR) notes an incident in which: “On 19 September 2005, a group of Dalit women belonging to the barber community were reportedly dragged out of their houses and paraded naked on the streets by some men from upper-caste Khandayat community in Bhubanapati village in Puri district of Orissa after their husbands refused to wash the feet of upper caste bridegroom and other members of the marriage party” (‘SAARC Human Rights Report: India’ 2006, Asian Centre for Human Rights website, 13 December <http://www.achrweb.org/reports/saarcar2006/india.htm> – Accessed 27 March 2007 – Attachment 7).

The following information on the Nai identity was sourced from a 2005 article appearing on a website devoted to henna art. The article notes the location of the Nai in the Shudra caste strata in traditional terms and the manner in which “[t]he Shudra caste was just above the Harijan caste, the ‘Untouchables,’ but was lower than all other castes”. The pertinent section follows:

In traditional India, under the caste system, people were born into their occupations. People learned the family trade and worked those jobs through their lives. The traditional henna artists in India were Nai caste. Nai men were barbers, circumcisers, and they did minor surgeries. Naun, Nai women, were hairdressers, henna artists, and midwives. Nai were part of the Shudra caste. Shudra were artisans and craftsmen: woodworkers, gardeners, herders, laundresses, potters, and barbers. The Shudra caste was just above the Harijan caste, the “Untouchables,” but was lower than all other castes.

All people in the Shudra castes were regarded as inferior to upper castes, because of their impurity. Impurity came from contact with “polluting” substances and social situations. The lowest caste, the Harijan, came in contact with the dead, pigs, and excrement. Among the Shudra, the Mirasis, singers, were superior to henna artists. Singers could entertain upper castes, and were exposed to their gaze, but they didn’t have to touch them. Nai touched hair, feet and blood, and thus were more polluted than singers. The Dhobi, laundresses, were inferior to henna artists because laundering is a more polluting activity as it involves handling clothing soiled with dirt, excreta, and menstrual blood. If a Brahmin was shaved or hennaed by a Nai, the Brahmin was “polluted” by that contact. The Brahmin would have to wash away the pollution before performing a religious function (Cartwright-Jones, C. 2005, ‘The Naun, the Barber’s Wife: a henna artist from 1910’, The Henna Page website <http://www.hennapage.com/henna/encyclopedia/nai/nai.pdf> – Accessed 10 October 2007 – Attachment 2).

An undated article provides the following information on the barber / hairdresser communities of Andhra Pradesh. Please note that this information is sourced from what appears to be a private webpage and that the credibility of the author as a commentator on such matters is unknown. Nonetheless, much of the information given below would appear to be consistent with the scholarly information presented above (this being the information sourced from Ahmed (2006) and Singh and Khan (1999)) as well with much of the information given in the cited news reports. Some pertinent extracts follow:

...The institution of barber is a very old one in India. Usually barbers belong to a hereditary caste or clan, variously called Mangali, Vostaad, Hajjam, Nayee, or Nayi-brahmin. They point out, since they take part in “purifying and cleaning” for everybody, they can jolly well call themselves Brahmin. (they are highly brahmanoid anyway ;-)

...In ancient India, barbers were traditionally used as messengers and go-betweens in delicate matters. Even today, for instance opening the discussion of an arranged marriage alliance to the father of a prospective groom and bride, barbers are the preferred go-betweens. Court

barbers with direct access to the kings and ministers were obviously men of influence. (for that matter the ones of today, who service political leaders too). In fact the founder of the immense Nanda Empire (pre-mauryan) started life as a humble barber.

...Usually cities have barber unions who specify rates for services and this poster is prominently displayed somewhere. The Barbers Associations are basically a vehicle for caste based politicians of different political parties. Now the main aim of the associations as a whole is to somehow get the barber caste to be proclaimed as a “scheduled caste” that is to claim they were “untouchables” in the bad old days. Why? so that they can get benefits today by affirmative action programs. But this is unlikely to succeed since the other communities simply laugh and say good try, but forget about it. For now the barbers have settled for being termed as a “backward” community. (Explanation of backward and forward community: Backward not IQ wise or stupid, but meaning needing special government assistance like cheap loans , etc to become socially on par with the --you guessed it--- forward. Actually this entire backward-forward-sideways-downwards-upwards business is quite complicated ----- and in fact is a vast social con trick. The majority of the members of these castes dont really get any benefit. The savvy smart members of all these “backward” communities grab some educational opportunities, but thats about all.) Nowadays of course the educated barber community individuals take up other avenues in government service, other jobs in large industry, etc. But there are not too many in business other than hairdressing -related or supplies. In the specific hairdressing field, apart from setting up a successful shop, many young barbers aspire to join some central govt establishments like the army, etc where they get other benefits besides a regular salary. The more ambitious [*sic*] ones try for a job in shipping, or in the Gulf. I dont think anyone has tried further afield in this field. . There are institutes which teach modern hairdressing but are found only in the big cities: the hairdressers from here can expect well paying jobs in large hotel barbershops and women’s beauty parlours. There are a few men’s parlours too (Rao, V.R. (undated), ‘A brief note on the Mangali /Nayee Brahmin (Barber / Hairdresser) communities of Andhra Pradesh’, Mostly Culture and heritage in Andhra Pradesh website (Tripod Domain) <http://indculture0.tripod.com/barbers.htm> – Accessed 10 October 2007 – Attachment 4).

Human rights reports on the circumstances of untouchables, or Dalits, often note that members of these communities are excluded from entering barbershops. This may be of interest insofar as it further suggests that that barbers are positioned above untouchable status in the traditional caste hierarchy (see, for instance, page 26 of: National Human Rights Commission 2004, ‘Report on Prevention of Atrocities against Scheduled Castes’ <http://nhrc.nic.in/Publications/reportKBSaxena.pdf> – Accessed 17 September 2007 – Attachment 6; and pages 14 and 100 of: Human Rights Watch 2007, *Hidden Apartheid: Caste Discrimination against India’s “Untouchables”*, February, Vol. 19, No. 3(C) – Attachment 2).

Nonetheless, as is noted above by other sources, it is also reported that castes belonging to the Shudra stratification themselves experience discrimination insofar as they are seen to be polluted, in a way that the upper castes are not, and insofar as they are typically marginalized by their economic and social status. One source notes that, “[h]istorically, there may not have been clear demarcation between Dalit castes and the lowest Shudra castes” (‘Fundamentals of Hindu Law’ (undated), University of Washington website <http://students.washington.edu/ysezgin/LSJ490/HinduLaw-490.pdf> – Accessed 15 October 2007 – Attachment 32).

The BJP and lower caste Hindus in Gujarat

No specific information could be located on the relationship between the BJP and the barber caste. Nonetheless, the general relationship between the BJP and lower castes has been

addressed in a number of studies and reports. A 2007 study by M. Shahbaz Saeed, of Islamabad's Institute of Strategic Studies, provides information on the BJP's relationship to caste based fields of support and political organisations across India; noting that: "While the party [has] aimed at attracting lower-caste voters by co-opting lower-caste leaders, its success was rather limited and it continues to appeal disproportionately to upper-caste voters". Some pertinent extracts follow.

The BJP perceived the crystallization of a [Dalit] caste-based movement as a threat to an undivided Hindu community and sought to avert this threat by dissolving this identity within a broader movement stamped with the seal of Hinduism. While the party aimed at attracting lower-caste voters by co-opting lower-caste leaders, its success was rather limited and it continues to appeal disproportionately to upper-caste voters. Interestingly, the BJP stood up to protect the upper castes against low caste mobilization, while the lower-caste parties were gaining momentum. Co-opted lower-caste leaders can deliver smaller numbers of supporters, but, as was evident in the 2001 breakaway of Kalyan Singh, an OBC leader from UP, the BJP cannot fully rely on the mechanisms of co-option.

...During recent years, caste mobilization has become an important factor in shaping Indian politics. The BJP and the Congress have followed different strategies of political mobilization. The BJP followed a path of sectional mobilization. The core of the BJP's support came from the upper caste, well-off Hindus. The Congress is a party that draws most of its support from the poor and socially disadvantaged groups. But the Congress faces a serious competition for the votes of these groups from regional parties that directly appeal to these communities. The BJP has been more successful in consolidating its smaller catchment area, while the Congress has a larger but more fragmented group of potential voters. At the regional levels, the Congress Party consolidated its social base by endorsing the power of the numerically strong and upwardly mobile dominant – but traditionally of lower status – castes of landowning peasants, i.e., the Marathas in Maharashtra, the Reddys in Andhra, the Patidars in Gujarat, the Jats in UP, and so on. In the process, it has created a patron-client type of relationship in electoral politics, a relationship of unequal but reliable exchanges between political patrons – the upper and dominant (intermediate) castes, and the numerous "client" castes at the bottom of the pile, popularly known as the Congress' "vote-banks". Thus, in the initial two decades after independence, the hierarchical caste relations were processed politically through elections.

...The Bharatiya Janata Party has also showcased its Dalit and OBC leaders to prove that it is not an upper-caste party. Bangaru Laxman, the former BJP president (2001-2002) was a Dalit. Sanyasin Uma Bharati, former Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh, belongs to an OBC caste and was a former BJP leader (Saeed, M.S. 2007, 'Caste System in India and its Impact on Politics', Institute Of Strategic Studies Islamabad website, *Strategic Studies*, vol.25, no.1, Spring http://www.issi.org.pk/journal/2007_files/no_1/article/a4.htm – Accessed 10 September 2007 – Attachment 10; see also, page 49 of: Harrison, T., *et al* 2007, *A political introduction to India*, UK Parliament website, International Affairs and Defence Section – House of Commons Library, 2 May <http://www.parliament.uk/commons/lib/research/rp2007/rp07-041.pdf> – Accessed 11 October 2007 – Attachment 9).

In specific instance of Gujarat, however, it would appear that the BJP has been much more successful in garnering support from lower caste voting communities than it has elsewhere. Sources indicate that this success began in the "mid-1980s". Prior to this time the BJP had pursued an anti-reservation platform which excluded untouchables and which implicated the BJP in anti-reservation/anti-Dalit violence. However, as a 2002 *Frontline* report puts it, "by the mid-1980s, the BJP changed its stand towards Dalits in a bid to co-opt them". The report continues:

Realising the largeness of the number of Dalits and Scheduled Tribe and OBC persons in the State, who together account for 75 per cent of the population, the BJP started attempts to unite all castes under the Hindutva plank. It corrected its anti-reservation stand and was able to reap the gains of this move. When riots broke out in 1986 during Ahmedabad's annual Jagannath rath yatra, the BJP managed to garner the support of the OBCs and Dalits. This marked a shift in its support base.

When riots broke out all over Gujarat in 1990 during L.K. Advani's rath yatra, Dalits and middle class Hindus were set against Muslims (Bunsha, D. 2002, 'The Hindutva experiment', *Frontline* website, vol.19, no.10, 11-24 May <http://www.frontlineonnet.com/fl1910/19100160.htm> – Accessed 25 September 2007 – Attachment 11).

A 2005 study by Dr Ornit Shani provides similar comment, noting the manner in which the BJP took advantage of communal violence in Gujarat, beginning with the Ahmedabad riots, to rise to power by shifting away from the anti-reservation position which promoted inter-caste conflict between Hindus and towards a position which sought to unite Hindus by focusing their collective resentments upon the Muslim communities.

The rise of communalism in Gujarat was unexpected. Before the mid-1980s there was little evidence of enduring or even newly developing Hindu-Muslim strife in the politics of Gujarat. Although there had been major communal riots in Ahmedabad in 1969, Hindu-Muslim tension in the 1970s and early 1980s had been insignificant. The ethnic conflicts of the 1980s had primarily been about reservations policy and the status of the backward castes. The large-scale riots that occurred in Ahmedabad in 1985 began as caste riots over reservations but turned into communal violence. These riots marked the beginnings of the shift from several decades of Congress dominance to the triumph of the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Gujarat as well as in Indian national politics.³ The rise of Hindu nationalism since the 1980s has commonly been understood as a sectarian conflict between Hindus and Muslims, driven by religious and cultural differences, or determined by class conflicts or instrumental manipulations of the masses by political elites.

...The Ahmedabad riots of 1985 erupted over the decision of the Gujarat state government to increase the reserved quota for Socially and Educationally Backward Castes/Classes (SEBC) candidates in educational and governmental institutions from 10% to 28%. However, very soon, conflict between forward and backward caste Hindus over social and economic reforms for the benefit of the lower and backward castes transmogrified into communal violence between Hindus and Muslims. This occurred despite the fact that there was no prior religious dispute between the two communities and religion was not a category qualifying a person for reservation of places in educational and governmental institutions. The local Muslim community had no part in the reservation dispute, but an all-Hindu consolidation against Muslims emerged from a conflict among Hindus, and Muslims became its main victims.

The coincidence of the eruption of communal violence with the caste-reservation conflict seems paradoxical. While militant Hinduism assumes and tries to promote the principle of a unitary Hindu identity, caste conflicts demonstrate deep divisions among Hindus. Moreover, the castes that propelled the communal violence were also the primary generative forces behind the caste agitation.

...The intensification of communal antagonism since the 1980s reflected the resulting and growing uncertainties within the Hindu moral order. The growth of Hindu militancy and the formation of a 'Hindu identity' were informed by the complex interrelationship between caste and class. At the same time, the dynamic of these interrelations, as well as the ascent of communal antagonism, was largely energised and reproduced by the state's policies and political discourses. The intervention of the state, especially in its reservations policy,

appeared to bestow favours on minorities, which Muslims were taken to be part of. State policies addressed issues of equality as if they were synonymous with the rights of religious minorities. In doing so, it enabled caste conflicts to develop and deepen communal rivalries. The construction of a disposition of all-Hindus facing Muslims formed as some segments of forward caste Hindus found the cause of their own 'limited' mobility in these government's preferential treatment of minorities (Shani, O. 2005, 'The Rise of Hindu Nationalism in India: The Case Study of Ahmedabad in the 1980s', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol.39, no.4, pp.861-896 – Attachment 12).

A 2007 study by Dr Nikita Sud provides a similar understanding of the manner in which the BJP has increasingly sought to cultivate the support of the lower castes which it once targeted as part of its former anti-reservation policy.

The 1970s and 1980s were a period of intense political turmoil for Gujarat, with significant consequences for the nature of the state. ...a distinct pattern of putting forth populous backward caste and minority religious candidates on Congress tickets emerged in Gujarat. By the 1980 State Assembly elections, this strategy was called 'KHAM', a winning coalition of Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims.

...A sense of alienation...propelled Gujarat's savarnas (upper castes), hitherto divided politically, to aggressively support two anti-reservation agitations in 1981 and 1985. These were elite revolts against the Congress-led state government's decision to implement 21% reservation for Dalits and 28% for Other Backward Castes (OBCs) in government jobs and education. The violence of 1985, for instance, began as an agitation of upper caste college students against reservations for OBCs. It was soon taken over by the student wing of the Sangh Parivar – the ABVP, and by other upper-caste Hindu groups. It then became a general movement against lower castes and Muslims. ...We also know that prominent members of the Gujarat BJP were actively involved in initiating violence against Dalits in 1981... .

...The Sangh Parivar, with its unifying Hindutva ideology, as well as political ambition to oust the Congress, became an anchor for the savarna combine. It soon realised that savarna identity politics would not attract more than a quarter of Gujarat's votes. The KHAM identity on the other hand united 70% to 75% of Gujarat's population (Sanghavi 1996). Clearly, the savarna identity would be inadequate for taking over political power. With this realisation, the Parivar started promoting an alternative socio-political identity – based on a constructed 'Hindu' unity that included lower castes, former 'untouchable outcastes' and Adivasis. This new identity poached on a large part of the KHAM constituency. Several methods were used from 1983 to 1984 to build a wide Hindu constituency. For instance, Dalits were invited to attend Hindu religious programmes such as 'rath yatras' (chariot processions of deities), till then closed to 'untouchables'. Youth groups were organised in which the VHP asked young people to dedicate themselves to the abolition of untouchability and to work for the all-round development of their 'economically and socially backward Hindu brothers' (VHP 1986). Schools began to be built in remote Adivasi areas to propagate Brahmanical Hindu culture. In fact, towards the end of the 1985 'anti-reservation' agitation, under the orchestration of the Sangh Parivar, most of the victims were Muslims, not Dalits or OBCs. That the Hindu unity strategy was being operationalised is also evident from a bout of communal violence during a rath yatra in 1986 in Ahmedabad. This episode witnessed Dalits and Muslims fighting each other, a significant change from the 1981 anti-Dalit violence in which they had shown solidarity. One of the reasons for the Parivar's success in mobilising lower castes could be the apparent capacity of Hindutva to provide an easy channel for upward social mobility and respect within Hindu society (Nandy et al. 1995). Electorally, given the BJP's political success from 1990, the Hindu unity strategy had paid off. Quite on the other hand, after the death of Indira Gandhi in 1984 and the sidelining of KHAM leaders from 1985, the Congress entered a new post-KHAM phase (Sud, N. 2007, 'Secularism and the Gujarat State: 1960–2005', *Modern Asian Studies*, pp.1-31 – Attachment 13; for another recently published article

that would appear to indicate that this state of affairs remains current, see: Jha, P. 2006, 'Gujarat as another country – The making and reality of a fascist realm', *Himal South Asian*, October http://www.himalmag.com/2006/october/cover_story.htm – Accessed 12 October 2007 – Attachment 19).

A December 2006 report published by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) provides information which suggests that Hindu nationalist organisations, like the BJP, VHP and RSS (the Sangh Parivar), have continued to organize attacks upon lower caste communities in Gujarat, though these attacks have been focused on lower caste Muslims and Christians rather than on Hindus.

In most cases attacks on dalits are open, caste attacks by upper caste men are often backed by village control over landed wealth.

...But in the case of Sangh Parivar organised violence, when the attacks on dalits are well organised and openly attributable to the organisations of the Sangh Parivar, such as the Bajrang Dal, new factors come into play. Sangh organised violence is never seen as or reported by the media as attacks on dalits: they are seen as and reported as attacks on Christians.

In Gujarat most of the attacks on dalits belong to this category. Dalit Christians are branded as anti-Hindu, anti-national elements, much like Muslims are, and Christian missionaries are accused of "spreading Christianity through forced conversions"; and the converted are as much enemies of the people as those who convert them. Attacks on their congregations are represented as contestations with western dominance.

Therefore, also, in the recent decade anti-dalit violence can easily be shown to be on the decline, even as Christian dalits and the Muslim poor (often also of lower caste), bear the brunt of Sangh Parivar violence. The recorded number of cases regarding violence against dalits is much lower than in other states and convictions even lower: recorded number of cases is approximately 1300 and convictions are in one digit number, i.e., about two percent.

And precisely because attacks on Christian dalits are seen as attacks on Christians and not on dalits, it has become possible for the Sangh parivar to co-opt some sections of the non-Christian dalits into their scheme of the Hindu rashtra (Taneja, N. 'Gujarat 2006: Life For Christians, Tribals And Dalits', *People's Democracy* website, vol.30, no.52, 24 December http://pd.cpim.org/2006/1224/12242006_nalini.htm – Accessed 12 October 2007 – Attachment 15; see also: Puniyani, R. 2006, 'Adivasis: A Cultural Cooption', *countercurrents.org* website, 6 April – Attachment 14).

Nonetheless, it may be the case that Hindu nationalist forces in Gujarat have been guilty of continuing to encourage isolated instances of violence towards Hindu Dalits. A February 2007 Human Rights Watch report states that "a Dalit social worker in Gujarat, told Human Rights Watch in 2003 that the VHP had circulated pamphlets demonizing Dalit community members and calling on VHP members to attack Dalits". A 2003 news report states that: "Dalits constitute 7.5 per cent of Gujarat's population"; and that: "The state, according to the National Crime Record Bureau, ranks third in terms of atrocities committed against backward classes". Further to this, the Indian National Human Rights Commission's 2004 report provides information which suggests that police in Gujarat have recorded complaints in a manner that conceals the extent to which Gujarat's Dalit communities are victims of caste violence; "One NGO in Gujarat, in a study covered 11 atrocities-prone districts for four years, showed that 36% of atrocities cases were not registered under Atrocities Act and 84.4% of the cases where the Act was applied, the cases were registered under wrong

provisions with a view to concealing actual and violent nature of the incidents” (Human Rights Watch 2007, *Hidden Apartheid: Caste Discrimination against India’s “Untouchables”*, February, Vol. 19, No. 3(C), p.48 – Attachment 16; ‘Dalit threat to Gujarat conversion law’ 2003, Countercurrents.org website, source: *The Telegraph* website, 15 April <http://www.countercurrents.org/da-conversion16403.htm> – Accessed 19 September 2007 – Attachment 17; National Human Rights Commission 2004, ‘Report on Prevention of Atrocities against Scheduled Castes’, p.33 <http://nhrc.nic.in/Publications/reportKBSaxena.pdf> – Accessed 17 September 2007 – Attachment 18).

The BJP and Congress supporters in Gujarat

Episodes of political violence would appear to be an intermittent feature of the political landscape in Gujarat insofar as Congress and BJP supporters are concerned. Reports of violence were particularly numerous in late 2002 at the time of Gujarat’s most recent state elections. Some recent reports, and reports from the 2002 election period, follow below:

- September 2007 saw violent clashes between Congress and BJP supporters in the suburb of Khadia (‘Khadia clash: Cops caught in crossfire’ 2007, *Times of India*, 18 September – Attachment 20).
- In September 2007 Congress workers are reported to have attacked the surgery of a doctor associated with the BJP who had been accused of rape (‘Cong workers vandalise clinic’ 2007, *Times of India*, 8 September http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Cities/Ahmedabad/Cong_workers_vandalise_clinic/articleshow/2348951.cms – Accessed 15 October 2007 – Attachment 21)
- On August 2007 “The Gujarat police baton-charged a violent protest by the state opposition Congress party against Chief Minister Narendra Modi...Police also detained over 100 Congress workers, including its state president Bharat Solanki and leader of opposition in the State Assembly Arjun Modhvadia. They were released later” (‘Police baton-charge protesting Congress workers in Gujarat’ 2007, *AndhraNews.net*, source: *Asia News International*, 9 August <http://www.andhranews.net/India/2007/August/9-Police-baton-charge-11264.asp> – Accessed 15 October 2007 – Attachment 22; see also: ‘Chaos after baton-charge in Gujarat’ 2007, *Times of India*, 9 August http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/Chaos_after_baton-charge_in_Gujarat/articleshow/2268327.cms – Accessed 8 October 2007 – Attachment 23).
- In December 2005 it was reported that: “Tension gripped the small town of Kodinar on Tuesday after BJP MLA Dinu Solanki and his supporters allegedly attacked former Congress MLA Dhirsinh Barad and his family members. The attack, said to be a fallout of political rivalry, reportedly took place yesterday and left the MLA and his family seriously injured” (‘Ex-MLA, family attacked, tension grips Kodinar’ 2005, *ExpressIndia.com*, 28 December <http://cities.expressindia.com/local-news/fullstory.php?newsid=163111> – Accessed 15 October 2007 – Attachment 24).
- A December 2002 report provides information on tit for tat electoral violence in Gujarat’s Vadodara District, where a “local religious leader supporting the BJP, Krishnanand Saraswati, was allegedly beaten up by Congress supporters” after “BJP supporters attacked” the Congress party’s “sitting MLA Khumansinh Chauhan” (‘2 Rajput candidates to fight it out in Savli’ 2002, *Times of India*, 7 December

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/30600002.cms> – Accessed 15 October 2007 – Attachment 30).

- Another December 2002 article notes that: “One BJP worker was killed and at least four others were seriously injured when they were attacked by alleged Congress supporters this evening just after taking out a victory rally in the Jangleshwar area of Rajkot district, police sources said” (‘Violence follows victory’ 2002, *The Tribune*, 15 December <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2002/20021216/main2.htm> – Accessed 15 October 2007 – Attachment 25).
- In November 2002 it was reported that: “BJP office at Mandhi village in Mehsana district of Gujarat was set on fire during a clash between Congress and BJP workers on Saturday, police said. The trouble started when BJP activists allegedly threw stones at the vehicle of Congress candidate Naresh Rawal, contesting the assembly elections from Vijapur constituency, they said” (‘BJP, Congress workers clash in Gujarat’ 2002, *Times of India*, 30 November <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/29875186.cms> – Accessed 15 October 2007 – Attachment 26).
- An October 2002 article reports: “In a shocking incident which brought back memories of selective targeting of establishments in Ahmedabad during the riots, a health club owned by the son of former Congress MLA Farooq Sheikh was ransacked and looted by suspected Bajrang Dal members near Gujarat College in the upmarket Ellisbridge area on Wednesday morning” (‘Congress MLA’s health club ransacked by Bajrang Dal members’ 2002, *Times of India*, 9 October <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/24696401.cms> – Accessed 15 October 2007 – Attachment 27).
- In December 2002 it was reported that: “The body of a BJP supporter was recovered from a riverbed after a clash between BJP-Congress supporters in Mafatiapara locality” (‘Violence in Vadodara’ 2002, *The Hindu*, 16 December <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/2002/12/16/stories/2002121604990100.htm> – Accessed 15 October 2007 – Attachment 29).
- In June 2002 it was reported that: “A rally taken out by the Congress-sponsored Gujarat Panchayat Parishad was lathi-charged by police when the participants attempted to break the cordon to reach the State secretariat here” (Dasgupta, M. 2002, ‘Police lathicharge Cong. rally in Gujarat’, *The Hindu*, 11 June <http://www.hinduonnet.com/thehindu/2002/06/11/stories/2002061104771300.htm> – Accessed 15 October 2007 – Attachment 28).

It may be of interest that Gujarat’s next state elections will be held this year (2007) “in two phases on December 11 and 16” (‘Cong hails announcement of election in Gujarat’ 2007, *AOL News*, source: *Press Trust of India*, 10 October <http://www.aol.in/news/story/2007101013289022000007/index.html> – Accessed 15 October 2007 – Attachment 31).

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