

THE BJP'S TRACK TO TRIUMPH IN INDIA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

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Introduction

The political landscape of India witnessed a historical about-turn when the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) decisively ended the decade-long political monopoly of the Indian National Congress (INC). It goes without saying that the unprecedented victory of the BJP in the recent elections has out-distanced even its own major success of 1998. No doubt, there are a number of crucial factors which paved the way for its resounding success. One, of course, is the political and ideological vacuum created by the rival INC. This said, however, this paper seeks to uncover other distinct and multifaceted factors which led to the overwhelming rise of the tide of Hindutva,⁽¹⁾ and this despite the fact that India is touted as being a secular and pluralistic democratic state.

Not surprisingly, the history of the BJP itself is seminal in understanding the emergence of the party which today enjoys the mandate of a majority of Indians. This essay reveals multifarious aspects of this process as they emerge from a detailed historical account of the evolution of the BJP and nationalistic politics within India. Besides, it attempts to assess both the nature of the present BJP government and its likely future policies.

The narrative that follows is divided into five sections. Of these, the first explores the deeper roots of Hindu nationalist movements and ideologies in India. The purpose is to identify the dynamics behind the honing of Hinduness, which culminated into Bharatiya Janata party, and then emerged as a gigantic force opposing the towering secular powers in Indian polity. Part two is an effort to unravel the internal processes of the BJP to explain just how, through a series of trial and error, it positioned itself to become the successful champion of Hindutva. The third section deals with the characteristics of different BJP

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leaders, and of L.K. Advani, Atal Bihari Vajpayee in general and Narendra Modi in particular, so as to envisage the influence of personalities on the domestic politics of India. This hopefully will provide readers with an understanding as to how communal politics, based on religious affiliations, can be manoeuvred and used as an incisive tool by political players to dominate the mindset of people in the interest of their own ideological mastery and political power. The fourth part delineates the trajectory of BJP's development and the factors that led to its rise. Attention is given to the fact that how this urge for change came from the dissatisfaction of the populace with the ruling class of the time, which in this case was Congress and Manmohan Singh. The fifth and the final section presents a hypothetical analysis of the future policies of the recently formed BJP government. In this, the readily discernible trends are augmented by insights drawn from a range of scholars, researchers and political commentators, as well as by the observations this writer has gleaned from his own analysis and study while observing the growing dominance of Hinduization over the Indian polity and its culture. As a conclusion, an attempt is made to draw together the various threads of argument in a cohesive manner so as to address the issues and concerns of contemporary Indian politics.

The road towards BJP: A historical analysis

Hindutva: An ideological patronage

Before investigating the genesis of the BJP, it is necessary to explain the concept of Hindutva and to understand the ideologies that gave birth to it.

Hindutva stands as the ideology and political philosophy of a group of militantly anti-minority, Hindu organisations. These include the BJP, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP—World Council of Hindus), Bajrang Dal (BD), Shiv Sena, Patit Pawan in Maharashtra, the Hindu Jagran Manch in Gujarat, and many more such regional organisations and political wings of India. The common goal of all these organisations is to establish a “Hindu Rashtra”, which literally means a Hindu nation. However, Hindu Rashtra has also been often referred to as a “Hindu State” as well as a Hindu nation. The origins of Hindutva date back to the nineteenth century when revivalist and nationalist movements were appearing in India during the mid-1820s and 1830s. These movements served as mere stumbling blocks in blocking the march of colonialism, but they did help revitalize Hindu culture and stirred the Hindu community to its very core.⁽²⁾

The concept of Hindutva was first articulated by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar (V.D Savarkar; 1883-1966), one of the pioneers of Hindutva, who politicized religion and introduced religious metaphors into politics. He spent his whole life in an unwavering pursuit of single ideal: to establish India as a Hindu nation. Even today, Savarkar remains the first and most original prophet of an extreme, uncompromising rhetorical form of Hindu nationalism⁽³⁾ in Indian political discourse.⁽⁴⁾ The following lines by V.D. Savarkar can be considered as the starting point for the core belief of Hindutva. This, he wrote, “is not a word but a history. Not only is the spiritual or religious history of our people as at

times it is mistaken to be...but a history in full...Hindutva embraces all the departments of thought and activity of the whole Being of our Hindu race.”⁽⁵⁾ After assuming role as the President of Hindu Mahasabha in 1936, he directed the organisation to pursue a distinctive Hindu ideology which in turn hailed as the true idealisation of the Hindu nation and Hindu nationalism. Moreover, Savarkar's *Hindutva*, first published in 1923, probably best drew the distinction between Hinduism and Hindutva, the two most contesting doctrines at the time. According to him, Hinduism was concerned only with the theological and spiritual aspects of the religion, but Hindutva incorporated the entire gamut of social, cultural, political and linguistic aspects of Hindu life.⁽⁶⁾

In practice, Savarkar's Hindutva was a revolt against the Khilafat movement and most of his thought is based on his deep-rooted hostility towards political Islam and its followers. He insists that the Hindus are the autochthonous people of India, whereas the religious minorities are outsiders who must adhere to Hindu symbols, which represent India's national culture. According to his view, any religious minority should pay allegiance to the Hindu religion and traditions in public, but can worship their own gods and follow their rituals in private. This applies especially to Muslims and Christians who, in his view, are the proponents of truly un-Indian religions. He does not consider Buddhists, Jains, and Sikhs to be non-Hindus. Rather, he sees them as followers of sects closely linked to Hinduism.⁽⁷⁾ V. D. Savarkar's political message, which still remains the unifying and driving force for the Hindus of India, was a theme of religious-cultural unity in face of the need to fight their common enemies, the non-Hindus:

Ye, who by race, by blood, by culture, by nationality possess almost all the essentials of Hindutva and had been forcibly snatched out of our ancestral home by the hand of violence— ye, have only to render wholehearted love to our common Mother and recognize her not only as Fatherland (Pitribhu) but even as a Holyland (punyabhu); and ye would be most welcome to the Hindu fold.⁽⁸⁾

From statements like this, it can easily be deduced that Hindutva advances an extremely exclusivist racial concept that would only embrace the religious communities of India whose origin could be said to be rooted in Indian soil. They must accept Sanskrit, or any other Indian language except Urdu or English, as their mother tongue. Even if an Indian Muslim or a foreigner has converted to Hinduism, he cannot be taken into the fold of Hindutva or the Hindu race, simply because of the blood running in his veins is not of a Hindu race, and so he may be a descendant of an Arab or European or some other non-Hindu people.⁽⁹⁾

The RSS: An organizational patronage

Under British rule, the “communalisation” of politics in the early 1900s is stated to be a core reason for the emergence of RSS, a social organisation ostensibly aimed at freeing “Hindustan” and saving the “Hindu” culture. It also claimed to be a movement directed towards achieving the cultural and spiritual

regeneration of the Hindu nation through the actions and example of a disciplined vanguard that represented the ideal model of Hindu society. In reality, there were other, multiple factors which provided a fertile ground for the foundation of RSS. These included, for instance, the tensions among Muslims and Hindus, both of whom were striving to save their religious identities and interests through political means; the rifts between upper and lower caste Brahmins; and fears of Western cultural domination.⁽¹⁰⁾

In the era of the Montford political-fiscal “reforms” of 1921, the antagonism between Muslims and Hindus acquired new intensity due to the competition for state patronage. Muslims’ interests were taken care of by institutional arrangements such as the separate electorates formed by the British,⁽¹¹⁾ but the Hindus’ interests failed to unite rural India under the banner of the Hindu Mahasabha⁽¹²⁾ and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).⁽¹³⁾ The Hindu Mahasabha was founded in 1916. It was a nationalist organization that participated in the Indian independence struggle. Both Savarkar and Golwalkar were members and chairpersons of the Mahasabha.⁽¹⁴⁾

On the one hand, there was this kind of Savarkarism, and on the other hand, pan-Hindu movement gaining an ascendancy which eventually would overshadow the Hindu Mahasabha. Influenced by Savarkar’s theory of Hindutva a Maharashtra Brahmin, Keshav Baliram Hedgewar (1889-1940), established the RSS in 1925 at Nagpur. In translation the name literally means “National Volunteer Organisation”⁽¹⁵⁾ and it was a paramilitary organisation with the express mission of organizing Hindus on nationalistic lines. For ideological purposes, the RSS promoted Savarkar’s theories with the volunteers being encouraged to read his works (mainly his *Hindutva*). Two other practices of the organisation also indicated its ideological framework: the Prayer and the *Pratigya* (pledge). The prayer was a salutation to the Hindu Rashtra and a solemn promise by the *Swayamsevaks* (volunteers), reading as follows: “I swear that I shall serve the RSS with all my body, heart and money for in it lies the betterment of Hindus and the country.”⁽¹⁶⁾

Hedgewar’s ideological moorings can also be linked to Plato’s *Republic* in that the latter served as a model for “radicalising” Hindu youth with the help of history, music and gymnastics. His own special paramilitary skills proved conducive to moulding the minds of the young volunteer *Swayamsevaks* at the different training camps, called *Shakhas*. Hedgewar’s life itself was a creditable model: he had spent his impressionable years involved with the Hindu Mahasabha, and he had constantly itched to wrest freedom from the British by means of indigenous arms and patriotism.⁽¹⁷⁾

The history of the RSS until 1940 could be called the biography of Dr. Keshav Baliram.⁽¹⁸⁾ After his death in the same year he was succeeded by M.S. Golwalkar (1906-1973), under whom the RSS grew rapidly. In January 1948, Nathuram Godse,⁽¹⁹⁾ a Hindu fanatic who had been associated with both the Hindu Mahasabha and the RSS, assassinated Mahatma Gandhi. On the one hand the former, under the patronage of Dr. S.P. Mookerjee (1901-1953) who had succeeded Savarkar as president in 1943, abandoned its activities because of the explosive public reaction. On the other, the government banned the RSS and

only lifted the prohibition a year later when that organization agreed to relinquish its social activities and adopt a written constitution. The RSS was again banned during the emergency imposed by Indira Gandhi in 1975-1977, when those arrested included many RSS members. It was banned for the third time in the wake of the demolition of Babri Masjid in December 1992, and that ban lasted for two years. Yet the RSS has grown dramatically since the end of the emergency: it has enlarged its organisational base, multiplied to a number of new affiliates, and expanded its membership. The RSS thus, rose remarkably from about one million in the late 1970s to some eight or nine million activists today.⁽²⁰⁾ Although the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha were ideologically close, there was inconstant organisational linkage between them, especially after M.S. Golwalkar took power. Many RSS members, maintain that the Hindu Mahasabha represents only *zamindars* (hereditary aristocrat) and *talukdars* (land or district holders), and so clearly incapable of defending Hinduism.⁽²¹⁾ In any case, over the past sixty years it is the RSS that has emerged as an increasingly powerful force in India, and that has become the head of what is now known as the Sangh Parivar,⁽²²⁾ or family of Hindu nationalist organizations, whose influence spreads across all sectors of Hindu society. These organizations include the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, founded in 1948 and now the largest student organization in India; the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), founded in 1955 and today the largest trade union in the country; the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS), created in 1951; and its successor, the BJP, as the political arm of the RSS; the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), founded in 1964; and its thuggish offshoot, the Bajrang Dal established in 1984 to represent the more explicitly religious wing; and the newly formed Swadeshi Jagaran Manch, founded in 1991 to protect Indian economic self-reliance from the threat of foreign capital.⁽²³⁾

The Bharatiya Jana Sangh: A political patronage

At the time of Partition, the British handed over power to the Muslim League in Pakistan and the Congress Party in India. The Congress had long claimed not to represent only Hindus, but Muslims as well, and gained a larger share of the vote. The reality was otherwise, however, as in the elections of 1946, all the Hindus had voted for Congress and almost all Muslims had voted for Muslim League. This fact was very evident and both Gandhi and Sardar Patel were aware of it. For this very reason they insisted on including non-Congress Hindu leaders such as Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookerjee and Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in the government of "Free India." These non-Congress Hindu leaders worked in collaboration with Sardar Patel and the other Hindu nationalist leaders of the Indian National Congress, but simultaneously disagreed with Nehru on many issues.⁽²⁴⁾ "The situation became worse," writes Professor Bal Raj Madhok, "after Sardar Patel's illness and the Nehru-Liaquat Pact which left the Hindus of East Bengal to the mercy of [the] Pakistani government. Their persecution and forcible eviction from East Pakistan to India continued."⁽²⁵⁾ He further insists that these facts were the basic impetus for Dr. S.P. Mookerjee's resignation from Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's cabinet on 8 April

1950, which was then approved in Parliament on 14 April. In the resignation documents, Mr. S. P. Mookerjee⁽²⁶⁾ warned that Nehru's policies would be devastating for the nation, and would lead to a situation that might become worse than that in pre-partition times, an act appreciated by Hindu nationalists. After resigning from Congress and Nehru's cabinet, S.P Mookerjee turned for support to all sections of Hindu society. But he focused in particular on those connected with Arya Samaj⁽²⁷⁾ and the RSS in the hope they would throw their weight behind a proposed new party — the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS). Nehru meanwhile warned that promoting the cause of Hindutva would doom India. He declared in his speech at Benares that the Hindu Mahasabha was a great threat to the Indian people and polity.⁽²⁸⁾

Meanwhile, with the banning of the RSS because of its fanaticism, which was highlighted by Nathuram Godse's traumatic murder of Gandhi, Sangh Parivar's political influence became vulnerable. This had inflicted a major blow on the RSS organisational enterprise, and its leaders felt the pressing need to find representation either in parliament or the state assemblies. The RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha had relied mainly on Congress leaders to drive their objectives in the political sphere, and especially on Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (1875-1950). He was known to patronise and support the RSS, but the latter lost this ally when Patel died on 15 December 1950. This event put further pressure on the worried RSS and Mahasabha leaders to form their own political wing to confront the Western liberal ideology of the majority of Congress. In addition, Nehru's animosity towards the radical RSS also compelled its leaders to approve the forming of the BJS as a separate wing on the 21 October 1951. Initially established at the provincial level, it later spread throughout India and with it, the baggage of the RSS.⁽²⁹⁾ Furthermore, BJS had also emerged from an earlier Faustian pact between the RSS and S.P Mookerjee, who at the time was the chief of the Hindu Mahasabha. The latter then was aware of the constituent assembly's resolution of 3 April 1948, urging a ban on "communal" organisations. Since the Mahasabha had refused to end its exclusion of non-Hindus, S.P Mookerjee did a deal with the RSS — he would set up a nominally non-denominational party while the RSS would provide the cadres, and the muscle. Before long, therefore, the RSS began to dictate terms.⁽³⁰⁾

Within the Indian spectrum of political parties, the BJS could be described as "reactionary", "communal", "Hindu revivalist", "ultra-rightist," and "militant nationalist" in terms of its organisational behaviour and ideological orientation. Unlike Congress, the BJS could be called "rightist" because of its rejection of "doctrinaire Socialism"—but its programs and affiliates convincingly make it more radical than the rest of the so-called radical parties of the country.⁽³¹⁾ The principles laid down at its birth committed the new party to stand for rebuilding India on the basis of Bharatiya "*sanskriti*" and "*maryada*" (culture and tradition). It explicitly rejected the Western-style democratic patterns imported into India by Congress, as is exemplified by the views of Deen Dayal Upadhyaya. He once openly admitted that:

We therefore reject all concepts of "Right" and "Left" or of "Socialism" and "Capitalism." The life of a country with a

vast and rich heritage like ours cannot into fixed patterns imported from abroad.

Again, in an interview L. K Advani asserted that “the truth is that BJS is neither leftist nor rightist. It is forward looking.” Similarly, Atal Bihari Vajpayee in his Presidential address at Bhagalpur in 1972, referred to Indian traditions: “Jana Sangh is the party which believes in looking backward in its attempt to move forward.” As these statements clearly indicate, the agenda of BJS was to build an Indian nation around the theme of unity or “oneness”: one people, one country and one nation, with the preservation of the old age values of Indian life, culture and religion.⁽³²⁾

At the time of the Jana Sangh's formation, India was still enmeshed in problems arising out of Partition. The biggest worries were the continuation of the conflict with Pakistan, especially in Jammu-Kashmir, and the systematic annihilation of Hindus in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh). Widespread public discontent existed regarding the government's Pakistan policy, which in effect was only an extension of the perceived Congress policy of “appeasing” the Muslims. Amidst this furore, the supreme priority of the BJS was to lay maximum emphasis on warning and preparing the country against the Pakistan danger. The Jana Sangh's leadership was fully alert to the fact that for a newly emancipated country like India, national security and a robust military is as imperative as economic and industrial growth. This is evident in Jana Sangh's first manifesto, adopted on 21 October 1951, in which great stress was laid on making the country “prosperous,” “powerful” and “united.”⁽³³⁾

Hindu Nationalism now emerged for the first time as a credible political philosophy in an independent India when the Jana Sangh stepped forth to challenge Congress hegemony in the 1950s and 1960s.⁽³⁴⁾ Initially, the party's attempt proved abortive but its participation in the Janata Party coalition of 1977 in fact mirrored the erosion of Congress power.⁽³⁵⁾ From 1977 to 1979, Morarji Desai's unparalleled initiatives within the Congress badly damaged the reputation of the Indira Raj.

BJP: A political party formed

The BJS had remained on the margins of Indian politics until the RSS initiated a cow slaughter campaign, under the aegis of Hindu Vishwa Parishad (VHP), in 1966. However, this campaign proved rewarding for the BJS in the parliamentary elections of 1967. A decade later the BJS joined a disparate group of other political parties to collectively create the Janata Party. Much to its own surprise, this coalition defeated Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the INC following her “National Emergency” in 1975. Yet the Janata coalition could not sustain its power and succumbed swiftly to conflicts within its leadership in 1977. The Hindu nationalists of the BJS, newly re-formed as the BJP, themselves re-entered the Indian political fray with new strategies on the 5 April 1980. They were led by the party's president, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who would later become the prime minister. Henceforth the BJP's future success in Indian politics was mainly due to the downward spiral of the Congress, despite a brief revival of the party's fortunes. The BJP now invoked “Gandhian Socialism”⁽³⁶⁾

and adopted the symbolically significant green, identified with Islam, as well as the saffron of the old Jana Sangh in its flag.⁽³⁷⁾

It is noteworthy that the period of BJP's history from 1980 to 2004 has been called one of radicalization. During these years the party employed as many popular policies as possible.⁽³⁸⁾ Under Atal Bihari Vajpayee's leadership, the BJP managed to win only two seats in the elections of 1984. Vajpayee then remained in place for the next two years, after which Lal Krishna Advani succeeded him as party leader. Since then, the BJP gradually developed into a major political force. Under Advani, it adopted a purist stance as the defender of the Hindu society⁽³⁹⁾ and its supporters began to refer to the Congress tenet of secularism as *pseudo-secularism* (minority appeasement).⁽⁴⁰⁾ Advani himself is considered to be the BJP's saviour and builder. He is credited for taking the BJP from the ashes to the sun, and in 1998 the party entered another national coalition government. Having successfully capitalized on the issue of mosque demolition and the resulting communal polarization, the BJP had won 161 seats in the Lok Sabha in the general elections of 1996. The BJP was thus the largest parliamentary party and Vajpayee took over the helm of the state. Yet his tenure lasted a mere thirteen days before, having failed to maintain his majority in the assembly, he had to resign and a coalition of regional parties formed a new government. This also proved to be fragile and short lived. For the midterm elections of 1998, the BJP formed the National Democratic Alliance and Vajpayee again became prime minister. However, this coalition also fragmented in May 1999,⁽⁴¹⁾ when AIADMK's⁽⁴²⁾ leader Jayalalitha withdrew her support and forced fresh elections.

An insight into the BJP

A cocktail of Hindu nationalism

The BJP is a right-leaning, Hindu nationalist party. It also is the first major party to mobilise overtly on the basis of religious identity and to adopt a clearly anti-Muslim stance. In comparison to both the Congress and the Janata parties, BJP members are much more disciplined and better organised. They join the party's cadres after a prolonged apprenticeship while within the party itself, the lines of authority are relatively clear and well respected.⁽⁴³⁾ Technically, the BJP is a different organization from Jana Sangh. Yet they were identical in structure and leadership and some political scientists call the BJP a direct descendant of the BJS. In *India after Gandhi*, the historian Ram Chandra Guha writes that regardless of the factional divisions inside the Janta Party's government, its tenure saw an increase in support for the RSS. Evidence of this was the communal violence of early 1980s. Even so, the BJP sought to gain wider support by adopting a moderate stance regarding the "Hindu nationalist urge of its predecessors."⁽⁴⁴⁾

On the other hand, the BJP has a national presence and has been awarded the status of a national political party by the Election Commission of India. On the surface, it makes no official claim to be a religious party either by its constitution or mandate. Nonetheless, it emerged from the BJS and recruited

the RSS members who have thus had great influence over issues of leadership. Indeed, the BJS justifiably felt a lack of freedom in exercising its own autonomous ideological goals because the RSS' agenda controlled its politics. Moreover, the ideological similarities between the RSS and the BJP (like their religious credentials) have been vehemently debated over the years within Indian political circles. And their kinship is evident in the BJP's continuing informal and organic, rather than functional and formal, relations with the RSS; the BJP has acquired the mantle of being a "Hindu fundamentalist" organisation.⁽⁴⁵⁾ In addition, it has largely rejected the Nehruvian concept of an Indian nationalism that ignores the cultural and religious context of nationalism.⁽⁴⁶⁾ A Hindu nationalist is essentially different from a Hindu traditionalist: the nationalists look more towards revivalism while a traditionalist is backward-looking.⁽⁴⁷⁾ The BJP represents Hindu nationalism.

A number of factors have prevented the BJP from moving in a wholly centrist direction. First and the most important are its close ties to the RSS and a Hindu religious organisation, the VHP. Since the VHP's formation in 1960, it has tried to represent Hindus of India in a chauvinist and exclusionary fashion. In 1960 it was mainly active in converting Muslims, who, it claimed, had been forcibly converted to Hinduism. Again in 1980, it shored up to unite Hindu support for the construction of temple in Ayodhya. There is a marked difference between the cadres and orientations of these nationalists' organisations: for instance, the RSS mainly advocates economic nationalism, the BJP economic liberalization. The VHP has been implicated in provoking violence whereas the BJP seeks stability. Despite such differences, the BJP has maintained its close relationship to the RSS and the VHP. But it is hard to rupture the connection between the RSS and the BJP since many, if not all, high-ranking BJP officials have RSS backgrounds and ongoing ties with it. Furthermore, the RSS always supports the BJP in electoral campaigns and has intervened to mend rifts within the party's branches in various states, thus helping to avoid the splits that plague so many other political parties in India. Although the BJP's relationship to the VHP has been confrontational at times when the BJP is in office, it has been close as well. VHP activists also regularly campaign for the BJP in state and general elections, and the VHP's role in polarizing the electorate along Hindu-Muslims lines after the premeditated riots was always done in such a way as to be of outright political benefit to the BJP.⁽⁴⁸⁾

Long obscured by other issues, the deeply rooted racism and resentment felt by the Hindu nationalists regarding Muslims has come to the surface over time. The rise of Hindu nationalism along ethnic lines was feared by many Indian Muslims. This despair is evident in an op-ed piece published in *The Times* (3 August 1993) by the Indian journalist Khushwant Singh. "The most disturbing development," he wrote, "is the increasing number of senior civil servants, intellectuals, and journalists who have begun to talk the language of Hindu fundamentalism, protesting that religious minorities, particularly the Muslims, have pushed them beyond the limits of patience." He later concludes sadly that while India may retain a secular facade, it "will no longer be the India

we have known over the past 47 years” and “the spirit within will be that of militant Hinduism.”⁽⁴⁹⁾

The demolition of Babri Masjid: The dark side of BJP’s politics

The site of Babri Masjid was considered to have been the location of the temple of the Hindu god Rama.⁽⁵⁰⁾ Consequently, the VHP and BJP coalition’s united front demanded that Ram Mandir should replace Babri Masjid because India was a Hindu country, and it was the responsibility of the government to preserve the symbols of Hindu civilization. This proposal was based on the unspoken and yet obvious assumption that the Muslim rulers of India were tyrants who had mercilessly humiliated Hindus.⁽⁵¹⁾ It was around this issue that the BJP launched its mass mobilization of religious nationalism.

As an issue, Babri Masjid epitomizes communal violence and communal riots, and more broadly points to societal backwardness.⁽⁵²⁾ The associated Ayodhya campaign was the greatest mobilization since Gandhi’s *Satyagraha* (nonviolent resistance).⁽⁵³⁾ In the 1980s, the BJP benefited considerably from tensions roused by the Ram Janambhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute,⁽⁵⁴⁾ and cashed in on the religious symbolism. The Ayodhya issue was cleverly manipulated and instrumental in building support for the BJP in the coming elections.⁽⁵⁵⁾ This assembling strategy helped the BJP both to define its political agenda and to enhance its limited social base so as to become an all-Indian political party.⁽⁵⁶⁾ A vision of Hindutva that had backing from a historical perspective, and the “Indian-ness” championed by the BJP, were extremely effective as means for gaining support from among the Hindu population, and Babri Masjid perfectly seemed to fit the bill. On the one hand, no party dared to oppose the BJP when it raised the Ram Temple issue.⁽⁵⁷⁾ But on the other, the BJP itself developed an argument that was replete with criticism of the “minorityism” of secular parties, the Congress being the main target.⁽⁵⁸⁾ L. K. Advani reportedly expressed his satisfaction that the Rama movement had contributed to the BJP’s success.⁽⁵⁹⁾ The communal activism of VHP and BJP was seriously criticized by those who thought that Babri Masjid issue was in fact a conflict between *Indianness* and *Hinduness*.⁽⁶⁰⁾

The 1990s were marked by a power vacuum that resulted from the Indian people’s apparent rejection of the legacy of Nehru, and this led to a decade of political strife.⁽⁶¹⁾ The rise of the BJP was not primarily due to its own endeavours, but in large part because the Congress had sown the seeds of its own defeat in 1970s: the Indira Raj’s internal weaknesses had created a power vacuum which came to benefit the emerging wave of the BJP.⁽⁶²⁾

Idiosyncratic analysis under BJP

L. K Advani: A brilliant nurturer

Born on 8 November 1927 in Pakistan (Karachi) and having joined the RSS at age fifteen in 1942, Lal Krishna Advani is remembered as the leader who nurtured Hindu nationalistic politics in India. Holding many important positions in RSS, he remained a close friend and ally of Vajpayee, and at times alternated

portfolios with him.⁽⁶³⁾ Without any doubt, Advani became a major figure in the Indian political arena, yet he lacks the charisma of Vajpayee.⁽⁶⁴⁾

After migrating to India, Advani joined the BJS as the joint secretary of Rajasthan Province; after his appointment as party secretary in 1958 in Delhi, he became prominent nationally. During the “National Emergency” imposed by Indira Gandhi in the 1970s, he vehemently demanded the restoration of democratic rights, and as a result, faced 18 months imprisonment. Despite this, he remained in the cabinet as Minister of Information and Broadcasting under the Janata government (1977-1979), and after the birth of BJP in 1980s, Advani was always there to support it. In the BJP, he began as the general secretary before holding the position of party president during 1986-1989.⁽⁶⁵⁾ Furthermore, he is credited with introducing the “*Yatra Politics*.”⁽⁶⁶⁾

After the electoral defeat of the Congress Party in 1989 Lok Sabha (in Sanskrit, “Lok” signifies “people” and “Sabha” signifies “assembly”)⁽⁶⁷⁾ V.P Singh became prime minister as the head of a coalition ministry which had the BJP’s external support. The Singh government resolved to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission⁽⁶⁸⁾ on allocating 27 per cent of all government jobs and posts in institutions of higher education to a group of “backward castes.” This placed the BJP in a tight spot between its upper-caste support base and the lower-caste electorate whose votes were crucial for the success of its Hindu nationalist political agenda. Thanks to the fact it had not officially entered the coalition, the BJP was free to launch a campaign condemning this policy. In order to unite the Hindu community and electorate, Advani launched a 10,000-kilometer-long (approximately 6,214 miles) *rath yatra* or (chariot pilgrimage) in a van fashioned to look like a mythological chariot. His route took him across the heartland of North India to Ayodhya where, on 30 October 1990, the construction of Rama temple was to begin. Riding on the twin pillars of Mandal and Masjid, the BJP engineered a hike in its share of the vote from 7.5 per cent in the elections 1984 to 21 per cent in 1991.⁽⁶⁹⁾ It was Advani who had taken the reins of the BJP into his hands after its debacle in 1984 elections. From 1984 to 1998, the BJP rose from almost nowhere to form the government. The following table shows the BJP’s increasing electoral success:⁽⁷⁰⁾

Election Year	Vote Share	Lok Sabha Seats
1984	7.5	2
1989	11.8	89
1991	20.7	120
1996	20.29	161
1998	25.59	182

Source: Khalid Mahmud, “BJP’s Identity Crisis and Misgovernance,” IRS, 2003.

Advani was particularly instrumental in striking strategic alliances at both the state and national levels. He could rightly be called the pioneer of forming the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government which, led by the

BJP, took power in 1998. His own ranking rose from the post of Minister of Home Affairs in 1998, to Deputy Prime Minister in 2002, and later, after the defeat of the BJP in 2004, he served as leader of the opposition in parliament. While Advani's career had its extreme ups and downs, his robust and unflinching stands against secularism make him a somewhat controversial figure. Hindutva (Hindu First) for him remained a centrifugal force throughout and being a hardliner, he might well have been deprived of the post of Prime Minister. All in all, his constitutional reforms that restricted the number of ministers in both union and state cabinets, his emphasis on overhauling electoral system, and his initiatives for curbing defection and criminalization were the most obvious steps he took towards realising his vision of Indian politics.⁽⁷¹⁾

Vajpayee: The true alternative to the Congress monopoly

Chris Ogden cites the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) as being central in the reshaping and restructuring of the inherited norms and taboos of Hindutva during 1998-2004. This was a period of political advances and reversals but, as a premier, Vajpayee can be credited with encapsulating "Hinduness" as an inherited ideology that aims to serve "Hindu, Hindi and Hindustan" — a triptych that entered the Indian political discourse. The rise of Hindutva and the deeply rooted communal politics have rejuvenated "Hinduness" and so created a more pervasive outlook with regard to the principles and ideologies of "Hindutva." These new trends and behaviours lasted both during the BJP-led NDA tenure, and afterwards. The result was a paradigm shift at the expense of the competing normative trends of secular and liberal domestic politics espoused by the INC.⁽⁷²⁾

Despite the radical promise of its 1998 election manifesto, the diverse nature of the NDA coalition constrained the BJP's activities while in government. From within the NDA's National Agenda (drafted by all its coalition partners), the BJP planned to enact a Uniform Common Civil Code (negating special provisions and personal laws for Muslims and other minorities), to build a temple in Ayodhya on the site of the destroyed Babri Masjid, and to remove Article 370 from the Indian Constitution (providing the state of Jammu and Kashmir with a special status), in opposition to the consensus of the coalition. The coalition partners, however, did agree with the BJP's pledge to "exercise the option to induct nuclear weapons." Apart from this, the BJP held key positions in the cabinet: Atal Vajpayee served as Prime Minister, L.K. Advani as Home Minister, Yashwant Sinha and then Jaswant Singh, as Finance Ministers, and Murli Manohar Joshi as Minister of Education. This dominance of the BJP in NDA cabinet allowed the promotion and injection of Hindutva's core beliefs, and their injection directly into government policies, and then into Indian society.⁽⁷³⁾ With Vajpayee at its head, the NDA coalition thus played a cardinal role in maintaining, and indeed, making the norms and ways of Hindutva a central factor in Indian politics. Now that the BJP has again regained power with Narendra Modi as Prime Minister, it is clear that the untiring efforts of Vajpayee and his fellows to insert a refurbished Hindutva into Indian political life have borne their fruit.

Vajpayee is the only Indian political leader to be elected nine times to the Lok Sabha.⁽⁷⁴⁾ He also has been elected twice to the Rajya Sabha.⁽⁷⁵⁾ As political leader, he is gifted with a unique combination of oratory, charisma, and vision.⁽⁷⁶⁾ During the election campaign of 1999, commentators noted that Vajpayee is a moderate leader with centrist agenda.⁽⁷⁷⁾ He has been in the Indian political arena since Gandhi launched the *Quit India Movement*. Since independence he has involved himself with pro-Hindu, right-wing politics. A founding member of the BJS, he was accorded the portfolio of foreign affairs when the BJS merged with Janata Party of Morarji Desai in 1977. Then, in 1998, he formed the BJP-led coalition that ruled India until 2004, and guided his government to head some of the toughest periods of India's history. It was also on his watch that India went nuclear, and then suffered some of the worst sanctions ever imposed on that country.⁽⁷⁸⁾ He oversaw both India's operations during the Kargil crisis, as well as the BJP's successful efforts to "saffronise"⁽⁷⁹⁾ India under the guise of that issue.⁽⁸⁰⁾ Indeed, the international reaction to nuclear developments in South Asia on the eve of India's nuclear test⁽⁸¹⁾ seemingly harmed his state's good relations with Western nations;⁽⁸²⁾ but by the test itself, the BJP broke completely with the legacy of Nehru on this issue.⁽⁸³⁾ His government was at the helm of affairs when the Kargil war⁽⁸⁴⁾ became a reality. Yet his reign in India also saw high economic growth, and this despite the boycott of the Great Powers. And despite the ups and downs in the region's strategic milieu, Vajpayee attempted to keep the peace with Pakistan by establishing an inter-state bus service.⁽⁸⁵⁾ Domestically, Vajpayee repeatedly reassured the Indian public that under his government that every citizen would be treated equally, and this regardless of ethnic and religious differences.⁽⁸⁶⁾ Although he is best known for his vibrant economic policies which took the Indian rate of Indian economic growth to 8 per cent in fiscal year 2003-2004, and which drastically transformed areas of domestic importance like tax policies, small-scale industry, and foreign investment.⁽⁸⁷⁾ It is paradoxical that BJP had criticized Congress over economic policies, yet when it came into power, it finally surrendered to the realization that economic liberalization was a fact to reckon with.⁽⁸⁸⁾

Adieu to Vajpayee's premiership

Nearing the end of his tenure, Vajpayee called elections early in 2004, almost six months prior to schedule. On this occasion the NDA tried to take credit for the country's rapid economic growth of country and made use of campaign slogans such as *Chamakta Baharat* (India Shining). Instead, the shock victory for Mrs. Gandhi's Congress party arose after a month-long campaign which had focused mainly on whether India's economic boom, built on information technology, had lifted the fortunes of the nation's one billion people.⁽⁸⁹⁾ The results showcased a U-turn when, surprisingly, the NDA suffered an unexpected and heavy defeat. It won only 189 seats with vote share of (39.5 per cent) as compared to the Congress led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) that secured 225 seats (vote-share 36.8 per cent) in the 15 Lok Sabha elections. Meanwhile, the BJP only managed to obtain 138 seats with (22.2 per cent) vote

share in comparison to congress win of 145 seats (26.5 per cent vote share). The latter then formed the government (UPA) and Manmohan Singh, a second non-Gandhi Prime Minister became Vajpayee's successor. Voter's turnout was around fifty eight per cent, total electorates in this election were 67, 1487930 while total number of votes polled were 38, 9342364.⁽⁹⁰⁾ Again, in the general elections of 2009, the BJP-NDA lost additional 22 seats when the number of seats dropped to 116, while Congress by adding 60 seats further strengthened their hold.⁽⁹¹⁾ The tiny chart below shows the performance of various alliances in the 15th Lok Sabha elections of 2009.⁽⁹²⁾

Results of General Elections 2009 (543/543)	
Alliance	Seats Won
NDA	160
UPA	262
Third Front	79
Fourth Front	28
Others	14

Source Adapted: <http://electionaffairs.com/results/ge2009/trends_partywise.html>.

Narendra Modi: A multilayered persona

"I am nationalist. I am a patriot. Nothing is wrong."⁽⁹³⁾ Narendra Modi appears to be both a complex and a simple man. But it is clear that his stage-presence and message during the campaign was a major factor in the BJP victory, as is evident in frequent references to the "Modi wave". Rather than identifying Modi with BJP, the public came to identify BJP with Modi. Modi's popularity surpasses that of the BJP. As in the United States, these recent elections were not between parties but between the leaders.⁽⁹⁴⁾ He is viewed as a true representative of quick-decision making while his combative personality has also captivated the Indian public. He has come to represent the "change" which the Indian public apparently craves. Equally important, as compared to the traditional leaders who are born and groomed in elite families, Modi's story represents the journey of a common man. Time and again, he has identified himself as a common man⁽⁹⁵⁾ and repeatedly recounted the tale of his life's journey to inspire his supporters. He himself seems to believe that it is probably a story that relates to every common man of India.

Modi's past in the RSS adds more spice to his image as a somewhat controversial nationalistic leader. Since his boyhood, he was raised in the nationalist RSS and remained a Sangh *pracharak*⁽⁹⁶⁾ for most of his life. As narrated earlier, the RSS was formed in 1925 mainly for promoting a revival of Hindu civilization. It espouses the philosophy of Hindutva,⁽⁹⁷⁾ according to which being Indian means being Hindu,⁽⁹⁸⁾ and it stresses the need to preserve a common Hindu cultural heritage and identity.⁽⁹⁹⁾ During the 2014 campaign, the way in which volunteers from RSS worked selflessly for Modi was truly impressive. Of course, at second thought this service may not have been all that selfless since, in turn, the RSS expects Modi to work not only for India, but also for the RSS.⁽¹⁰⁰⁾ Although the latter does not ostensibly impose its aggressive nationalistic program upon Modi, its goals are expected to weigh heavily in his

decision-making. Firstly, top and experienced members of the RSS would likely advise him and secondly, the RSS mentality may well have a bearing on his policies. Although the BJP leadership has warned RSS volunteers against expecting personal advantages,⁽¹⁰¹⁾ the extent to which the BJP will seek to please leaders of the RSS leadership may still not remain a moot question.

While the decisions of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi were almost always influenced by their personal advisers and lobbyists, Modi's style is clearly autocratic.⁽¹⁰²⁾ He cares little for lobbyists and more for talent and merit — or so his supporters, at least, believe. If such is the case, the impact of red-tape and bureaucratic privilege may be significantly diminished⁽¹⁰³⁾ since the prospect of Modi's government stands as a potential one-man show.⁽¹⁰⁴⁾

Gujarat: A determining factor in Modi's politics

*The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all convictions, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*⁽¹⁰⁵⁾ (W. B. Yeats)

For many, the carnage of the Gujarat riots of February 2002 have left gory handprints on the page of history, and the downing cries of many, when the frail shrieks of despairing Muslims were choked and mercilessly silenced forever, still echo in their consciousness. Their reactions are epitomized by the following comments on the poignant episode of Gujarat and the emerging mindset of Hindutva:

A spectre is haunting the nation. The spectre of communalism. The rough beast, its hour come round at last, has been unleashed and slouches its way across the land. Even those who turn away cannot escape its breath, now slowly poisoning the air. As the curtain begins to descend on the first phase of the saffron regime, they watch in disbelief, realisation dawning that what has been witnessed thus far is merely an overture, a prologue to the tragedy of history repeating itself.⁽¹⁰⁶⁾

Upendra Baxi poignantly explicates Gujarat riots that how majoritarian democratically elected government owes concrete duties to devise ways and means that facilitate communal revenge:

Gujarat brings home to us with poignant intensity the consummation of the practices of communalisation of governance. These manifold practices reach, at the end of the day, the same ends: minority communities may exercise and enjoy only those basic human rights that the ideology of Hindutva may justify.⁽¹⁰⁷⁾

Over 2,000 people, mainly Muslims, perished in the Gujarat riots, and more than 150,000 people were forced into refugee camps. This bleeding of Muslims continued in over twenty-one cities and sixty-eight provinces throughout Gujarat. Ostensibly, the motive was to take revenge for the accused

killing that resulted from the torching of two train coaches of the Sabarmati Express, by a Muslim mob, at the Godhra Train station on 27 February 2002. In that violence some 57 passengers, including Sangh Parivar activists, were burnt by fire.⁽¹⁰⁸⁾ These activists or *kar sevaks* (volunteers) were returning from Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, where they had supported a campaign led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) or VHP for constructing a temple for the Hindu god Ram on the site of the sixteenth-century mosque that militants had destroyed in 1992. That mosque, the VHP claims, had been built on a site regarded as the birthplace of Ram. As a consequence of the Hindu-Muslim violence that followed the mosque's destruction, thousands of lives were lost in the city of Bombay and elsewhere during 1992 and 1993. Thereafter the "Ayodhya campaign", which had the effective backing of the BJP and its allies, had continued to raise the spectre of further violence.

The three-day vengeful killing spree by Hindus — between 28 February and 2 March 2002 — left hundreds dead and tens of thousands dispossessed and homeless as a result of the widespread looting and burning of Muslim homes, shops, restaurants, and places of worship. Tragically consistent with the longstanding pattern of attacks on minorities and Dalits (or so-called untouchables), and with previous episodes of large-scale communal violence, in Gujarat scores of Muslim girls and women were brutally raped before being burnt to death in what proved to be the country's worst religious bloodletting in a decade. Nonetheless, the immediate reaction of Narendra Modi, then the BJP's chief minister of the state of Gujarat, was to charge that these heinous events were being orchestrated by Pakistan's ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence agency), although he could provide no evidence for such a highly inflammatory proposition.⁽¹⁰⁹⁾

K.N. Panikkar states that communal politics, "is essentially the manipulation of social consciousness based on religion for political purposes."⁽¹¹⁰⁾ This view is widely shared and supported by other major scholars such as Brass Paul and Steven Wilkinson. In fact, BJP's crucial role in orchestrating the violence in Gujarat is demonstrated by the "Wilkinson Model" (see figures 2-4 below), which clearly indicates that surprisingly, the level of violence appeared to be lowest in the constituencies or districts where the BJP had won majority votes in 1998, and highest in those in which the BJP could expect to face the most intense competition in the forthcoming elections. The BJP's grip on the state had begun to fade; the party's performance appeared in the civic and district panchayat elections in 2000. After widespread criticism of its response to a massive earthquake, the BJP lost two by-elections in September 2001: one for the State Assembly, and one for the Parliament in Delhi. This led to the resignation of the Chief Minister, to be replaced by Modi. Under Modi, however, the BJP lost two further Assembly seats in three by-elections in February 2002. In those four by-elections for the State Assembly, its vote fell on an average by 14 percentage points from 1998. A complete revival of the BJP in Gujarat was clearly vital, particularly for the future career of the new Chief Minister, before the state balloting scheduled for the end of 2002.⁽¹¹¹⁾

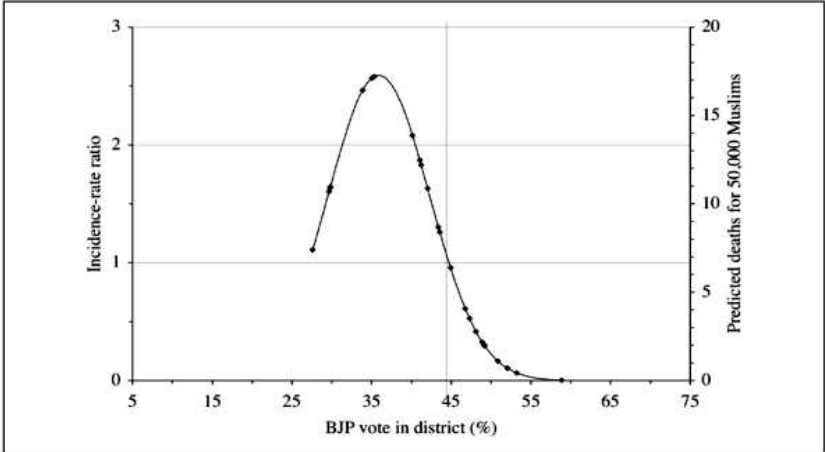


Figure 2. Association between BJP vote and killings (Model 2)

Model 2 aggregates BJP vote at the district level constituencies.

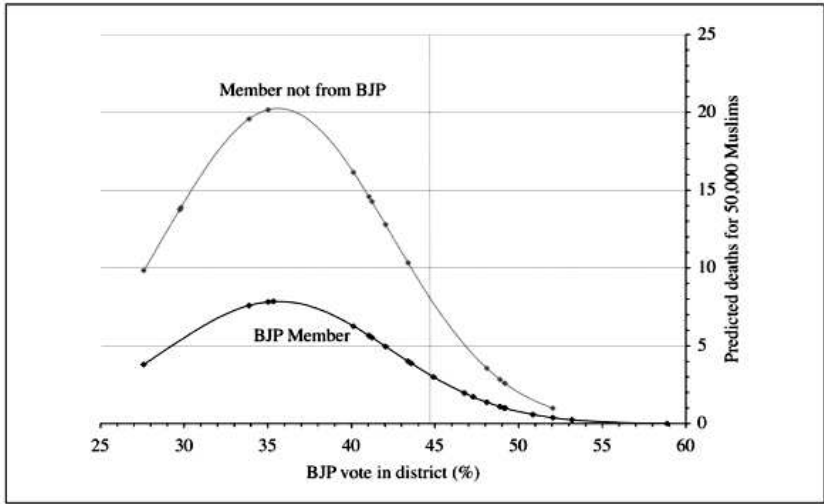


Figure 3. Association between BJP vote and killings (Model 3)

Figure 4 below clearly indicates that how the BJP's vote share changed from 1998 to 2002. The unit of analysis is the district. Although thousands of Muslims had not returned to their homes by December, they generally remained within the same district, and thus electoral results should not have been affected by the exodus of refugees. The independent variable is the total number of killings expressed as death rate per 1,000 Muslim populations. In short, there is strong quantitative evidence that violence did in fact yield electoral rewards for the BJP.

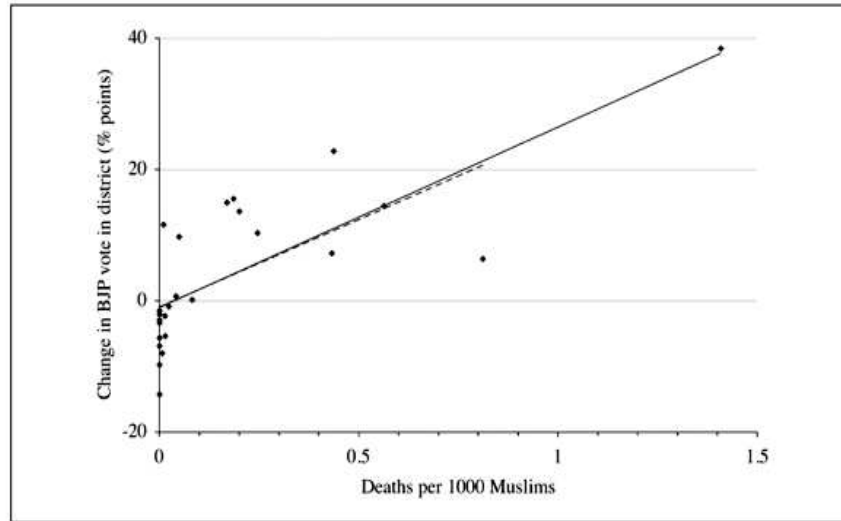


Figure 4 - Association between killings and change in BJP vote, 1998 to 2002

Source: Raheel Dhattiwala and Michael Biggs, *The Political Logic of Ethnic Violence: The Anti-Muslim Pogrom in Gujarat*, 2002. ⁽¹¹²⁾

Others are not so cynical regarding the involvement and motives of the BJP and Modi. For example, Madhu Purnima Kishwar writes that:

When BJP in general and Modi in particular, began to be singled out for attacks and demonised as no other politician before or after in known history, one felt an instinctive uneasiness about [the] Hate and Oust Modi campaign. This uneasiness grew as it became obvious over the years that most of the NGOs, activists, journalists, [and] academics involved in Modi's demonization enjoyed[the] active patronage of the Congress Party and some even got huge financial support for carrying out a sustained campaign against Modi. ⁽¹¹³⁾

Even so, one can only wonder how Modi, after having been labelled as culpable and the manipulator of Gujarat pogrom by most media outlets, Human Rights Watch, umpteen groups of NGO's and activists from all over the world, retained his position. Yet being a credible politician, Modi aptly defended himself and portrayed this entire episode as having been fabricated by the Congress or "alien hands" for the sole purpose of defaming him and hindering his political ascendance. His aggressive propaganda campaign against the opposition parties, media and civil institutions worked. The slogan of "Gaurav Yatra" became a corner stone of his campaign, through which he provided 50 million Gujarati's with a sense of "unity" and "self-respect." The election results showed that this propaganda campaign had paid high dividends in terms of votes. The BJP obtained more than two-thirds of the seats in the Legislative Assembly (and 49.85 per cent of the votes). This is a clear testimony that his aggressive propaganda, which he based on two forms of identity — religious

and cultural — had reached wide sections of the electorate, both rural and urban.⁽¹¹⁴⁾

This communal issue aside, the more general “Gujarat Model” also provided strength for Modi’s campaign. The economic development and quick decision-making that marked his tenure as Gujarat’s chief minister undoubtedly was decisive. He gave infrastructure to Gujarat by building thousand miles of highways, he provided the state with a vastly improved infrastructure while his promotion of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) took Gujarat to a whole new level of progress and prosperity. Modi’s model was based on supply-side economics which stipulate that if the government fulfils the needs of individual citizens, the economy will flourish.⁽¹¹⁵⁾ When he raised the slogan of “India first,” he actually meant the implementation of Gujarat Model in the whole India, and this is what appealed to the public. Modi called his model a “pro-people governance” model and by it, he converted Gujarat from an arid backwater into a hub of economic activity.⁽¹¹⁶⁾ After the Gujarat holocaust, the acceptance of Modi was either a result of his controversial character, or the popularity of the Gujarat governance model.⁽¹¹⁷⁾

Since coming to power in 1995, the BJP government in Gujarat developed a specific Gujarati cultural ethos around the issue of development. The party adopted a neo-liberal approach to economic liberalization while wrapping its policies in ethno-nationalist garb.⁽¹¹⁸⁾ Modi has further advanced these policies. India is no doubt a predominantly Hindu country, but that does not necessarily entail others being subjected to violence like that of the Gujarat Inferno.⁽¹¹⁹⁾ As a matter of fact religious politics can also invite infiltration from the near neighbours⁽¹²⁰⁾ while such as that of Gujarat 2002 will cast Modi a tyrant bent on eroding individual equality.⁽¹²¹⁾ The vision of a Gujarat in which people have always lived unitedly in a communal sense, with programs for creating wealth and eradicating poverty served as the top-most priority during the general electoral campaign of 2014⁽¹²²⁾ and Modi recurrently used slogans like “One India” and “Excellent India.”⁽¹²³⁾ A range of slogans political tactics and involvement of Gujarat played a pivotal role in Modi’s recent victory.

The Modinama

The BJP’s massive victory of 2014 is no overnight, accidental sensation. As already indicated, it is backed by a long history. Likewise, it will have long-lasting impacts on the outlook of India, as well as on future political patterns in South Asia. The BJP’s recent political trajectory is inseparable from the rise of Modi, not only because he became Premier but also because he was himself a major factor in his party’s victory. This “personality factor” is a necessary element in any explanation of this whole development: the style and character of a political leader largely determines the prestige and reliability of a government.⁽¹²⁴⁾ Modi’s personality had an immense influence on the elections results, and some have gone so far as to speak of Modi’s “Unstoppable Wave.”⁽¹²⁵⁾

Modi’s appointment as a member of the BJP parliamentary board on 31 March 2013, and as chairman of the BJP Election Campaign Committee on 9

June 2013, forced Advani, despite his status as “the patriarch of the BJP,”⁽¹²⁶⁾ to resign from all his posts. After Modi became the prime ministerial candidate, he attended more than 5800 rallies and travelled more than three lakh kilometres around India.⁽¹²⁷⁾ Ironically, Modi’s experience in Gujarat also exists as a double-edged sword: while the BJP became branded with the stigma of the Gujarat pogrom and at the same time Modi entered in the limelight as an efficient, progressive and substantial leader. At the end of the day, the latter prevailed and the BJP seems to have gained from Modi’s leadership rather than have been harmed by the association. Then, having mustered an outright majority in the Lok Sabha,⁽¹²⁸⁾ on 16 May 2014 Modi emerged as the victor, and his strength in the Parliament points to a future of robust policy initiatives. The *Times of India* and *Asian Age* hailed Modi’s victory as the beginning of the “Modi era,” and it is likely that Modi, backed by his majority in the 16th Lok Sabha, will be unprecedentedly independent in his decision-making.

In his discussion of the ways in which Modi benefited from the BJP and his own prime ministerial candidacy of 2014, the words of Sandeep Shastri hold true because they delineate general ambience of Indian politics. “The issues which define and determine voter choice, even in parliamentary elections,” he wrote, “are what are relevant and specific to a particular state.”⁽¹²⁹⁾ With regard to Modi’s political career in particular, the Brookings Institution “sees him as a necessary evil, more necessary than evil.” Even so, elements within the BJP regard him as a “hot potato” and would happily queer his pitch. Similarly, a whole array of small protest movements, ranging from the *boat yatras* to those battling against the Nirma plant, betrays unease with his development policies. Most important still is the fact that the shadow of the pogroms of 2002 still hangs over him, and no amount of cover-up by the SIT (Special Investigation Team) has been able to cleanse the blood on his hands. Nonetheless, the future and Modi appear to be intertwined in the minds of India’s middle class. So the question is just how a simple, lower middle class *pracharak*, once diagnosed as a fanatic and fascist by the political psychologist Ashis Nandy, succeeded in changing his image. However one may view him, he is clearly a shrewd politician who rose from *chai wala* (tea person) to Prime Minister of the world’s largest democracy.⁽¹³⁰⁾

Meanwhile, *Time Magazine* and *Brookings* have gone out of the way to award him certificates of good governance, and the corporates pine their hopes of multiplying their conglomerations through him. Thus his dependence upon economic progress and a re-invigorated Hindutva ideology probably proved to be a ladder of success and glory for the new leader of India.

The BJP comes to power

Election manifesto and domestic policies

A party’s election manifesto serves a mirror in which we can see what the leaders promise to do, if and when they form the government. A political party provides a logical articulation of the party’s views on current political issues, along with a summary of the public notion.⁽¹³¹⁾ Manifesto of the BJP is

very clear and comprehensive, and it covered almost all the issues facing the country. A party's priorities also can be determined by its declared political agenda. In this regard, the BJP boldly places corruption and the paralysis in decision and policy-making under the heading "Attend the Imminent."⁽¹³²⁾ In one article, Tisha Shrivastav writes about "30 smart ideas from BJP's manifesto 2014". Among other things, she praises the BJP leadership's innovation in carving out specific policies on the most important issues. In this writer's view, this manifesto can be divided broadly into two main categories: domestic and foreign. On examining this document, it becomes more than obvious that domestic issues are more focused upon. Although it does very pointedly highlight issues of foreign relations, this section is not as comprehensive as the domestic. The party's tilt in priorities is clearly domestic.

One unique aspect of this BJP manifesto is that the leadership's promises are followed by clear plans for realizing them in practice. Some of the main points are as follows:

- The BJP will attend to the most critical issues first.
- It will strengthen the framework of the existing political system. It is important to note that the BJP does not talk of changing the framework of the system, but merely pledges to strengthen the present system.
- It also chalks out the ways to reform the system as well. Yet this pledge should not be taken as referring to measures that will change the system, but merely to those aimed at removing such noxious elements as unaccountability, inefficiency, and so on. The BJP seeks to establish ease of use, openness, efficiency, transparency, and fairness.
- The BJP talks of inclusion, which here means prioritizing the downtrodden sections of the society, and bringing equality and opportunity to all including the backward or lower castes.
- The BJP has made youth the base of its plan for the progress of India. It has promised of social security and old-age care, as well as the promotion of women through education. Its agenda covers areas ranging from tourism, the preservation of natural resources, technological development, and Foreign Direct Investment, to ecological security.⁽¹³³⁾

Modi has tried to convince the Indian public that his policies hinge upon the development and progress of the whole India. He seeks to take an inclusive line of thought when he says that his policies will be for all of India, and not just for BJP voters. In his view, his policies are ones that aim at a resurgent India. Modi's promise to push for the Hindi language, after he has been sworn in as the prime minister, also points in this direction.⁽¹³⁴⁾ The Gujarat Model is said to have been one that increased governance by decreasing government through lower tax rates and by facilitating private enterprises. Modi wants to extend these policies to the whole India.

Finally, by reiterating that Kashmir is an integral part of India and that it will not adopt a conciliatory policy on this issue, the BJP is attempting to

domesticate the problem in the same way as was done by previous Indian governments.⁽¹³⁵⁾

The 16th Lok Sabha elections: Methods, ways and means

Modi's campaign was one of the most successful in India's electoral history, and it stunned the leaders of other democracies around the world. He made a deft use of the social media to reach out to people. His tweets depicting his self-life repeatedly went viral, and he used 3D technology to penetrate the remote areas of India. The volunteers dispatched to knock at the doors of houses across the country were another innovative technique employed to win votes. Another strategy used by the BJP was the *Chai pay Charcha* (popularity through Tea). Through this program Modi took questions from public and responded to them. This had the added benefit of keeping him informed of the pulse of the people and their concerns. On top of that he was innovative enough to change and mould his policies on the basis of such public feedback. His skills as a good and clear conversationalist gave him another advantage and added to his charisma. Modi himself has described his campaign as being "extensive, innovative and satisfying"⁽¹³⁶⁾ and in the end, of course, it is undeniable that his effectiveness resulted not only in the victory of the BJP, but in a revolution in India's electoral politics. The BJP has subtly exploited the scheduled castes⁽¹³⁷⁾ card in order to muster its electoral strength, and then based its campaign on employment, development and economic progress.⁽¹³⁸⁾

On 22 April 2014, a roundtable conference on the "Indian General Election" was held at Institute of Regional studies Islamabad. On this occasion H.E. Dr. T.C.A. Raghavan, the High Commissioner of India to Pakistan, pointed out that the scale of the upcoming elections of 2014 was enormous. With over 800 million voters, they required massive administrative arrangements. Largely based on the experience of the fifteen previous general and four hundred state assembly elections, the Indian electoral commission had come a long way with the present polls involving over one million administrative personnel. Furthermore, there are some 1,600 registered political parties in India although, because of the enormous size of the country and its electorate, only between 200 and 300 actually participate in general elections. Dr. Raghavan agreed that economic growth and governance were important concerns for Indian voter, and added that social media had emerged as a significant element on the Indian socio-political scene. He also opined that regardless of the outcome, the elections would have little impact on Indian-Pakistani relations, but cautioned that if the BJP came to power, any cross-border terrorist act might well evoke a robust response aimed at Pakistan.⁽¹³⁹⁾

Challenges in campaign

When the BJP was preparing for the recent electoral campaign during 2013, ideological rifts arose among the senior leaders over the party's proper functions, with Advani leading an internal opposition to proposed innovations. However, those issues then were resolved by consensus. Later, the NDA faced new challenges during the selection of electoral candidates, especially in the

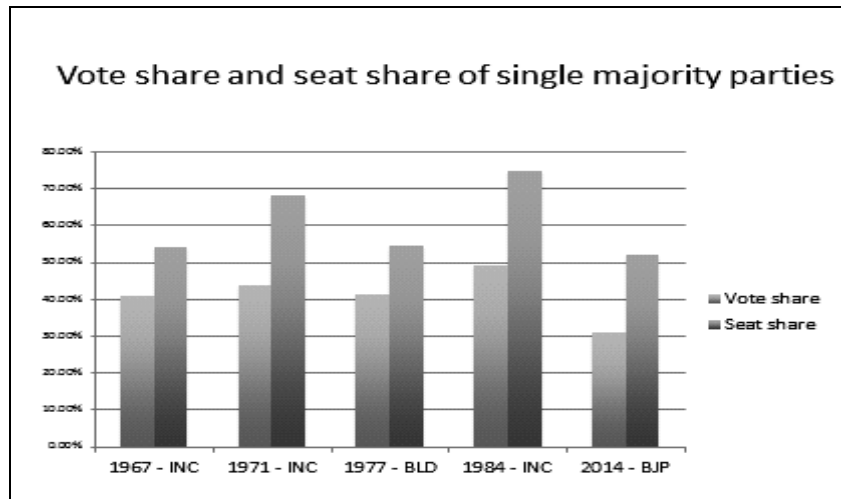
cases of Advani, Joshi and Jaswant Singh. In order to open a seat for Modi, Joshi was moved out of Varanasi while, despite his preference for standing for Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh, L. K. Advani was forced to run from Gandhinagar in Gujarat. Similarly Jaswant Singh hoped to contest the seat of Barmer in Rajasthan and, when his appeal was rejected, ran instead as an independent candidate (only to be defeated). Meanwhile, Sushma Swaraj's list of preferred candidates, Jaswant Singh included, was rejected as well. Taken together, these cases were considered to be an insult and highly humiliating for the former senior leadership by the new power brokers of the Bharatiya Janata Party, now led by Rajnath Singh and Modi. Stories circulated of deception and mistrust within the party leadership, poisoning relations with its ranks during election.⁽¹⁴⁰⁾

Results

The effective outcomes of this strategy were explicitly evident in the results in Uttar Pradesh (71/80), Andhra Pradesh (17/25), Bihar (31/40), and West Bengal (18 per cent vote share compared to earlier 6 per cent). Otherwise, in Tamil Nadu the BJP attracted for the first time, an unprecedented number of allies, including the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), the Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK) and the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK). Despite this, the NDA failed to win a seat there to the Lok Sabha in 2014, although the PMK managed to secure one seat and the BJP one other.⁽¹⁴¹⁾

After more than a decade, the BJP succeeded in having the Telegu Desam Party (TDP) reinstated within the NDA and this alliance brought the coalition 16 seats in Andhra Pradesh. Also in the state of Andhra Pradesh, another regional actor (a former film actor), Pawan Kalyan, along with his Jana Sena Party, ended his alliance with the Congress and joined hands with the BJP and the NDA; however, he too was unsuccessful in acquiring a seat for the NDA in the federal house.⁽¹⁴²⁾ In West Bengal, meanwhile, the BJP was expecting to achieve an all-time increased percentage of votes, but couldn't win a single seat. In general, this forecast proved to be accurate enough since Bengal is a region strongly held by the Trinamool Party, although the BJP did manage to score two Lok Sabha seats from West Bengal.⁽¹⁴³⁾ Otherwise, in Bihar, where Nitish Kumar, a long time big supporter and ally of NDA had left the scene,⁽¹⁴⁴⁾ the NDA still lost only one seat and so retained almost all of the 32 seats in the Lok Sabha it had won in 2009.⁽¹⁴⁵⁾ In Odisha, too, the BJP was expecting to emerge as the second largest party behind the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), which held 20 out of 21 seats.⁽¹⁴⁶⁾

The BJP's landslide: Critical observations



Source: Adapted from ECI data

Even a cursory look at the graph above prompts a question: are the results of the polling in 2014 really a national verdict of the party system? A series of interesting observations can be made, in terms of vote share. That of 2014 is the lowest share ever needed to obtain a majority of seats – 31 per cent. In other words, 31 per cent of the 66.994 per cent of eligible voters, or some 139.5 million voters, represent only 17 per cent of the total voting population. In comparison to previous four single majority elections, 31 per cent is the smallest majority obtained by a single party.⁽¹⁴⁷⁾

New terrain conquered by the BJP

On 12 August, at a roundtable conference convened at the Institute of Regional Studies in Islamabad Christophe Jafferlot, a former French diplomat who now is a professor at Kings College London, made an interesting observation. He pointed out that although the BJP had won the bulk of seats in the Hindi heartland and Gujarat, it also had managed to increase its vote in less likely states. This ripple effect is most evident in the states of Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala and West Bengal, where the BJP secured an exceptional 16.8 per cent share of the votes cast.⁽¹⁴⁸⁾

New Terrain for the BJP in General Elections 2014
 Source: Adapted from ECI data by Young India Fellowship Election Data Unit

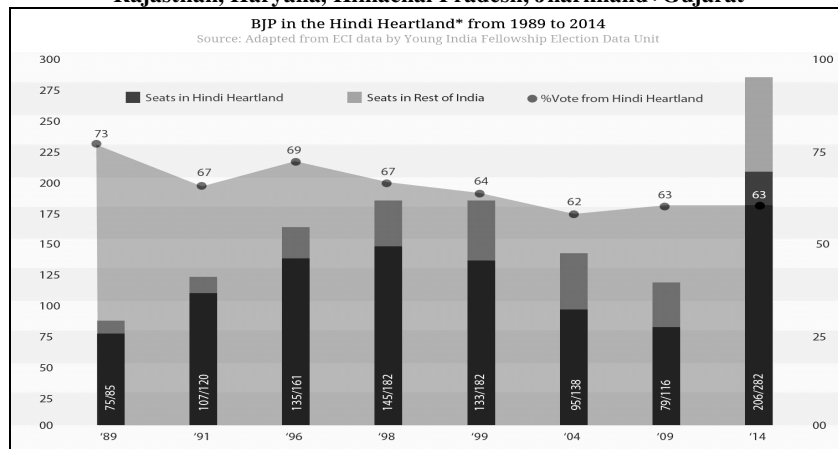
State	Vote Share 2009	Vote Share 2014
Assam	17.2%	36.5%
J&K	18.6%	32.4%
W.B.	6.10%	16.8%
Kerala	6.30%	10.3%

scroll.in

BJP remains a Hindi belt party

In spite of BJP's astounding performance across India, it remains a party based predominantly in the Hindi-belt. Of the 282 seats won by the BJP, 206 are located in the nine Hindi heartland states and Gujarat. This is the party's best performance so far. Historically, since 1990 the major share of the BJP's votes and seats have always come from these ten states, which also served as a ground for the religious mobilisations that helped bring it to power. For example, the BJP's vote share in the Hindi belt has consistently been above 60 per cent of the total votes it has polled across all of India, and this trend was confirmed in the 2014 elections. A combination of the promises of development, voter polarisation on religious lines and caste politics remained at the heart of the BJP's strategy. ⁽¹⁴⁹⁾

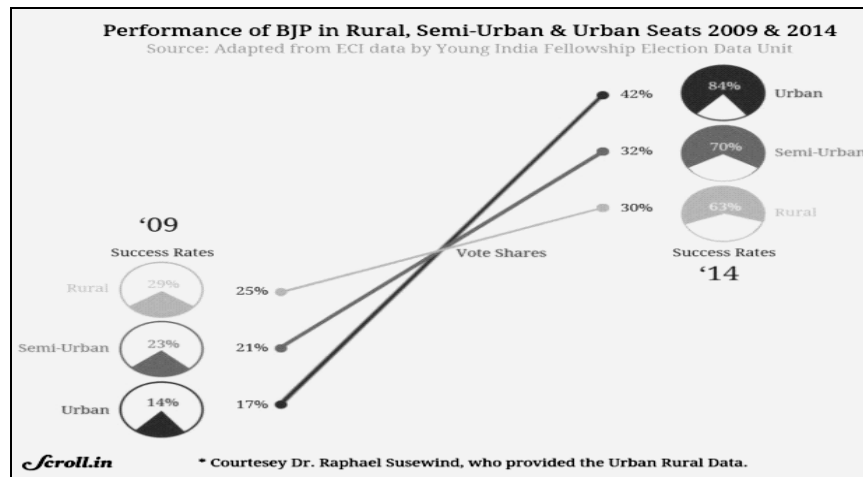
***Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand+Gujarat**



Urban support for the BJP rises

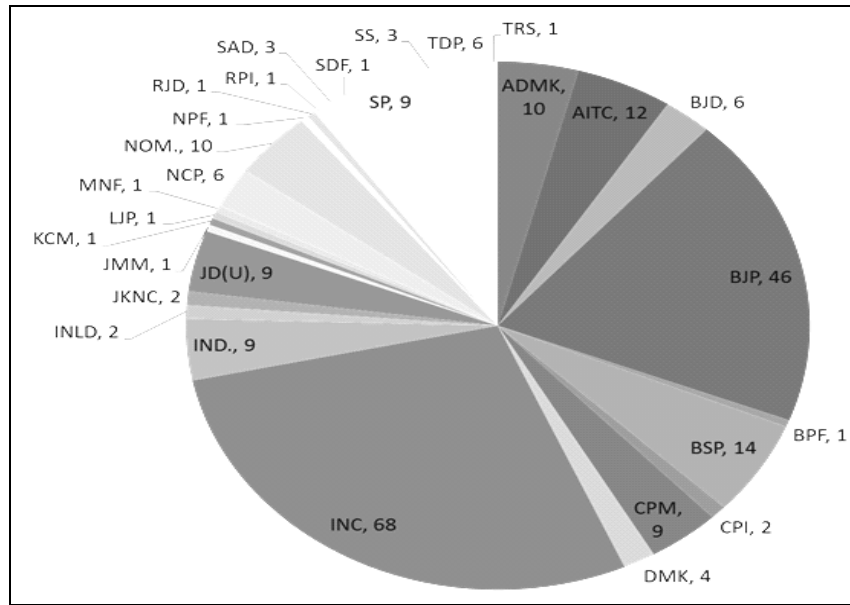
Bearing the BJP's hefty victory in mind, one might suspect that the urban-rural divide would not have been of consequence. In fact, however, the opposite was the case, and in a very interesting way. As the following graph

clearly illustrates, the party's share of urban ballots escalated from 14 per cent in the previous election of 2009 to 84 per cent in 2014, which confirms the pro-BJP inclination among urban voters.⁽¹⁵⁰⁾



Party composition of the Rajya Sabha

When examining the composition of the Rajya Sabha, Christophe Jafferlot points out that the BJP does not hold a majority in the upper house, which usually is considered to be a parking lot for retired politicians, past sports heroes and past singing stars. Even so, the Rajya Sabha can serve to obstruct legislation, and this could create obstruct the BJP's legislative program. To begin with, the BJP has less than a fifth of the seats. Indeed, even taken together, the Congress and BJP do not make up a majority. Then, secondly, only three parties have ten MPs or more, which means the BJP has to make deals with a range of other parties to obtain a majority. For Instance, if Jayalalithaa and Mamata Bannerjee can combine their efforts with the Congress on an issue-by-issue basis, they can create problems for the BJP government. Jafferlot then added in such situation the BJP may have several possible options: it can take the ordinance route, which Modi will use as much and as often as he can; it can make its own bargains, also on a case-by-case basis, by making concessions to the regional parties and possibly convincing one or two of the most important of these to join the coalition. This confused situation will prevail until the next biennial election, which is due in 2016.⁽¹⁵¹⁾ The below pie diagram would assist the readers about the party composition in Rajya Sabha.



Source: Adapted from <http://rajyasabha.inc.in>

The anti-incumbency factor: A BJP advantage

The BJP seems to have capitalized not only on its own strengths, but also on the weaknesses of the Congress. Under the latter, the decade-long slump in India's economic growth had created unprecedented discontent among Indians while the indecision of the Congress was unfavourably contrasted with the slogans aiding Modi's ability to make rapid decisions.⁽¹⁵²⁾ Indeed, Modi almost became a symbol of a strong and decisive leader. Again, although the Congress had throughout its history benefited from alliances with regional parties, by 2014 elections these seem to be failing.⁽¹⁵³⁾ And finally, the perceived rampant corruption, for which the Congress leadership was held responsible, made Rahul Gandhi's prospects bleak.⁽¹⁵⁴⁾ Meanwhile, the role of cyber system also gained great significance in 2014 for involving the Hindu diaspora. This was particularly true in the United States where there were 3.2 million Indians, most of whom voted for the Sang Parivar and for India.⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ In this manner the overseas Indian Hindus contributed to the BJP's victory. Put simply, then, the continuing corruption, inefficient policies and other tribulations of the Congress were used to a great advantage by the BJP against the Congress. With Modi at its head, the BJP presented itself to the public as a serious alternative option to the dynastic politics of the congress. The public's craving to get rid of the Gandhi dynasty and with it, the rule of the Congress, naturally added to the strength of the BJP.

Discernible trends and future

Will Modi follow the footprints of Vajpayee?

It is noteworthy here that domestically, even in its 1999 election manifesto, the BJP built its policies upon the rhetoric of transparent governance.⁽¹⁵⁶⁾ This is a theme that Modi inherited from his predecessor like Vajpayee. Equally notable is the fact that both Modi and Vajpayee have benefited from this rhetoric. It also speaks of the public temperament of contemporary India: the people are as much concerned with corruption in 2014 as they were in 1999. Yet the corruption had not abated in the period between the two campaigns but, if anything, it probably had soared considerably.⁽¹⁵⁷⁾ As for Hindutva, in 2000, after the BJP had lost 2 per cent of its public supporters, some argued that that ideology has lost its power to unite Indian people.⁽¹⁵⁸⁾ When the BJP suffered from its fiasco of 2004, their clamour for diluting the party's traditional adherence to Hindutva grew stronger. Even so, L. K. Advani insisted that party should not keep its members as prisoner of its ideology, but still some were of the view that self-negation is important for the party's endurance.⁽¹⁵⁹⁾

It is pertinent to mention that Vajpayee's significance cannot be overlooked in the present Indian political context. This is because Modi has pledged to follow his predecessor's policies on Kashmir, an issue that obviously has great significance in the politics of India. If Modi does so, this will have a long-lasting impact because it will mean a repetition of the policies set by Vajpayee. Yet times have changed and the politics of South Asia has evolved, a resurrection of out-dated policies may well prove to be detrimental. Nevertheless, if Vajpayee's composite dialogue is followed and further pursued, this could prove fruitful.

To the rest of the world, Vajpayee was considered as an iconoclast regarding his nuclear tests. One of the contentious objectives of Indian foreign policy in the testing time of Vajpayee was nuclear weapons. Under his government India transformed from a state of nuclear power usage to one with a nuclear weapons capability. Discerning Modi's intentions on this question is important because reports have surfaced that his government will revise the policy of "No First Use Option" *vis-à-vis* Pakistan.⁽¹⁶⁰⁾ If Modi follows Vajpayee's example, it can be expected that the former can take a tougher stance on nuclear issues. Yet Modi has repeatedly and publicly reassured the region that he indeed is committed to rejecting any *First Use Policy*.⁽¹⁶¹⁾ Nevertheless, Modi's tenure in office is only a few months old and it is too early to make confident predictions in this regard.

The politics of 'decisionism'

Modi's epic victory makes necessary an enquiry about the ideology of "Decisionism,"⁽¹⁶²⁾ which now ranks high among the "isms" of modern Indian politics. In some ways Indian "Decisionism" today can be compared to the attitudes of those German intellectuals who defended the Third Reich⁽¹⁶³⁾ during the 1930s. This aside, the reiteration of the mantra that Modi would "set

everything right” was the bedrock of the new “Decisionist” hopes of the Indian electorate. Shortly after the elections, one newspaper commentary noted:

Two decades of coalition politics and self-effacing leaders [who were] seen as men without [a] real mandate seem to have triggered nostalgia for strong leaders. Modi, Jaya [lalithaa], Mamata (Banerjee) and Naveen (Patnaik) exploited this to the hilt.⁽¹⁶⁴⁾

It has to be noted, however, that in case of Modi's government, “Decisionism” could become a one way street. The central plank of Decisionist messianism has always been a type of utopian hope and wild desperation; and it seems that time will prove to be the best decision-maker as to how well the Modi government will do in meeting the voter's expectations and in constructing the prosperous India it has promised in the future.

The economic accelerator

India seems on the cusp of new era. The past few years have seen the economy, in part because power struggles among coalition partners have locked and dramatically stunted economic growth, and simultaneously hamstrung foreign investments. Now the landslide victory of Modi's BJP has provided a cabinet backed by an absolute majority, and this may mark a paradigm shift on the Indian political scene. Signs of the expectations provoked by Modi's assumption of power are the fact that foreign investment has already added more than 16 billion dollars and bonds into the Indian stock market. At the same time, the international Wal-Mart chain, whose struggles over spread of business were publicized in India, now plans to open up fifty new stores around the country to expand its business.

The right-wing BJP and its broader centre-right coalition of the NDA are expected to drive a pro-business policy agenda. The government will certainly have to deal with macroeconomic indicators like the rupee, the current accounts deficits and inflation and, with the help of foreign investment, seek to bring these variables back on track. Mumbai based Managing Director Reshmi Khurana, head of Kroll's India operations and Senior Director Probal DasGupta, while responding to a question in a seminar in May, 2014, optimistically pointed out about India's economy:

India has a tremendous economic engine in its youthful demographics —65 per cent of its population is under the age of 35. That's a working population of over 500 million people, similar to China in the early 1980s when its economy really took off. If India can accelerate growth now and put this population to productive work (preferably in the organized sector), the country can leverage this demographic dividend before the 2020s when it wanes away.⁽¹⁶⁵⁾

So, we can expect that the next five years will be critical in determining whether or not India can reap the potential benefits of this work force from a demographical viewpoint.

The BJP and Pakistan

According to a study of 2013 by one anti-nuclear group, if the South Asian rivals India and Pakistan engage in a nuclear warfare, this would trigger a global famine and the immediate deaths of some two billion people around the globe.⁽¹⁶⁶⁾ Not surprisingly, political pundits and the people of Pakistan have not welcomed BJP's victory as they still perceive Modi to be a demagogue and the "butcher of Gujarat." Even so, retired Air-Vice Marshal and journalist Shahzad Chauhdry believes that Modi is adaptive and will certainly play a different role as a national premier than he played in Gujarat. Whatever our apprehensions, he most certainly would not seek a war with Pakistan, but would focus on seeing that his own military gains an assured level of readiness. He could then use the Indian armed forces with effect if another situation arose like that of Mumbai in 2008. Pakistan should have no doubts on this score. But barring another Mumbai, the worst-case scenario, relations should remain smooth enough for both nations. Nonetheless, it is better for Islamabad to be prepared than to be surprised, and the best way for Pakistan to manage Modi is simply by being better at doing what Modi does than he is.⁽¹⁶⁷⁾

Meanwhile, concern is mounting about the impact on the Indo-Pakistani relations of the international troop drawdown in Afghanistan, and about whether or not the Kashmir issue might reignite. Indian officials have reported an increase in militant infiltration from Pakistani into Indian Kashmir during 2013. In August 2013, military tensions there escalated briefly after a series of incidents occurred along the Line of Control (LOC). When innocent civilians were killed on the Pakistani territory, the Pakistan military killed five Indian soldiers and the rhetoric became more highly charged on both sides.⁽¹⁶⁸⁾

These issues were examined extensively during a roundtable held on "India's Foreign Policy towards Pakistan" with Trivedish Singh Maini of India's Jindal School of International Affairs, Haryana, in the Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad. At this session Maini took the view that the "basics of India's foreign policy towards Pakistan would remain the same after coming to power of the BJP." He argued that the slogans raised during the elections should not be regarded as policy statements. In his view, the lack of mutual understanding is the core problem between the two nations and is the pivotal reason for the lack of progress. Referring to the Mumbai attack of 2008 (an alleged terrorist attack from Pakistan) as a setback to the peace process, he reiterated the opinion that it is difficult for India to move ahead in the dialogue with Pakistan until the latter conducts a substantial follow up investigation of the Mumbai tragedy. "The mantra that Pakistan is also target of terrorism no longer cuts ice in India," he stated. "Pakistan would need to do the doables", and that this would be an important step towards regional peace. Moreover, Pakistan would gain considerably from freeing up of trade with India under the banner of a "most favoured nation" (MFN). Similarly, effective confidence-building measures (CBMs) would only be achieved by improving and simplifying the procedural inefficiencies that exist between Indian and Pakistan.⁽¹⁶⁹⁾

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan has hailed Modi's "impressive victory" and was the first foreign leader to call and congratulate him

and this even before the counting of votes was complete. Modi responded by inviting Sharif to visit New Delhi, a move that Aziz Ahmed Khan, a retired diplomat and one-time Pakistani High Commissioner to India, described as “really very shrewd.” Sharif’s announced intention to accept the invitation of Modi was reportedly highly appreciated by both India’s politicians and public. However Tariq Azeem, a governing party Senator and close confidante of Sharif, told the *Guardian* that although Sharif was very keen on building ties with India, others in the government were wary of moving too quickly to embrace Modi. Sharif’s visit of India also created tensions within powerful military circles in Pakistan. According to the *Express Tribune*, the army’s chief Raheel Sharif recommended Islamabad to send a high-powered delegation to India rather than the Prime Minister. Commentators in New Delhi, meanwhile, fully recognized the problems facing both Prime Ministers. “Each leader,” observed Siddarth Varadarajan of the Centre for Public Affairs and Critical Theory at Shiv Nadar University, “is trying to break free of his shackles – Modi needs to demonstrate he is not a prisoner of his Hindutva ideology, Sharif that he is not completely tied down by his military.”

In a nutshell, Nawaz Sharif’s bold decision to accept a friendly hand to the BJP government is congenial to progress in bilateral trades for both nations, while Modi’s position as outlined in a major speech of 2013 seems to offer the best way to look ahead. “Bombs, guns and pistols,” he said, “have failed to do any good for the people of Pakistan.... If Pakistan or India has to fight a war, it should be a war on poverty, illiteracy and superstition.”⁽¹⁷⁰⁾ Modi’s friendly gestures and the concurrent protocol, potentialities and pledges between the two were all regarded as a promising package the government had for a peaceful Pak-India relations towards Sharif on the inauguration as PM at Varanasi. But Modi’s unpredictable character was epitomised in his harshest statement against Pakistan to date in his recent visit to Ladakh (a border town near Kargil) which echoed vociferously that “[Pakistan] has lost the strength to fight a conventional war but continues to engage in the proxy war of terrorism.” The statement popped up as a reaction against the lately frequent violations of 2003 cease-fire along the Line of Control (LOC) in Kashmir from both sides. This led the political rhetoric to grow more strident between the two neighbours. In addition, tensions have further boiled up when the BJP government halted the Foreign-Secretaries peace talks, the first in two years which were to be held on 28 August 2014 in Islamabad. The proximate cause was India’s anger over a meeting that Pakistan’s Ambassador to India held with separatist leaders from Kashmir. Reaction from New Delhi is an unexpected one, as over the years Pakistan has had always regular contacts with the Kashmiri Separatist leaders. All the previous Prime Ministers including the BJP’s Atal Bihar Vajpayee too, lived with the same practice.⁽¹⁷¹⁾ In response, Pakistan said on August 28 August, 2014, that peace talks with India cannot take place without addressing the long-standing dispute of Jammu and Kashmir. Adviser to Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz, while talking to Voice of America, alleged that Indian attempts to sideline the issue of Jammu and Kashmir is “unrealistic”. He added further:

All we are doing is appealing to the international community that dialogue between India and Pakistan is necessary for peace in the region, and therefore they should take notice and share our disappointment that these talks have been suspended on very flimsy grounds.⁽¹⁷²⁾

The BJP's first budget (2014)

For the politician, a budget is an opportunity to score political points. It is a chance to show people the generosity of their government, and how concerned their rulers are about the welfare of the less fortunate. Of course, it is the people's money that the government has collected and now is spending. However, it still sounds marvellously philanthropic to announce, "we will spend thousands of crores for women and education."⁽¹⁷³⁾ Regarding the recent budget, it is one of many issues that merit for an analysis showing how governments, once in power, spin the pledges and promises made before coming to power. When Modi ordered a steep hike in the diesel prices, someone — quite possibly a critic — pulled out an election poster and put it on the web. On this, the prime minister-to-be lamented: "Bahut hua petrol aur diesel ka atyachar, ab ki baar Modi Sarkar." (Enough of the pain inflicted by petrol and diesel prices. Vote for a Modi government). His supporters claim that the turbulence in Iraq is the real cause for the inflation of diesel prices, whereas the media masters do not bother to remind their audience that it was Manmohan Singh — a star Finance Minister — who in 1991 performed exceptionally well when a similar situation existed in Iraq.⁽¹⁷⁴⁾

Any analysis of the Budget 2014-2015 is plagued by a multiplicity of interpretations. One view points out that the BJP presented its budget within a mere sixty days of assuming power, and that it looks remarkably like the one that might have been drawn up by the defeated UPA. Minister of Finance Arun Jaitley, however, could be complimented for taking the budget back to the basics. Major policy departures seemed postponed for later in the year. It is believed in some quarters that the hype and hoopla associated with the budget is a peculiarly Indian phenomenon, that the budget should be stripped of its frivolities, and that it should be regarded as little more than the annual income-expenditure statement of the union government. Over the years, annual budgets in India have become media events by which governments seek to legitimize and publicize policy announcements. In this respect Budget 2014 also is no exception. The important point to note is that by advocating the necessity of instituting a "modern monetary policy" for an "increasingly complex economy", Budget 2014 effectively shrouds the future operations of monetary policy in mystery. Going forward, it remains to be seen just how far these mysteries will be revealed.⁽¹⁷⁵⁾

A strong international presence

"The strategic interactions and security concerns of the vast majority of states," write Robert Stewart-Ingersoll and Derrick V. Frazier, "are focused upon their immediate neighbourhood."⁽¹⁷⁶⁾ For India, Bhutan is a case in point.

In this buffer state in the Himalayas China has a potential to undercut Indian security. Thanks to India's strong economic presence there, any aggression against Bhutan would be seen as directed against India.⁽¹⁷⁷⁾ In accord with a policy of "Neighbours First," Modi's first official abroad was made to that small mountain state and served to emphasize the strong historical and cultural ties between the two countries. Modi's assurances of continued support for Bhutan's future development were more than welcome.⁽¹⁷⁸⁾ Since that state is landlocked, shares three of its borders with India, has access to the sea only through India, and shares about 80 per cent of its trade with India, it is very unlikely that Bhutan will jeopardize its relations with New Delhi.⁽¹⁷⁹⁾

Nepal is a second Himalayan state with close economic and cultural ties to India. Apart from being Hindu, Nepal shares (1000 mile) of porous border with India. India always considered Nepal as its "subordinate partner and northern backyard."⁽¹⁸⁰⁾ Modi's recent state visit there was the first by an Indian Prime Minister in seventeen years and regarded as a milestone. Nepal's National Council publicly expressed its thanks to Modi of having taken steps that have greatly enhanced the already close Indian-Nepalese relationship.⁽¹⁸¹⁾

Relations with Bangladesh on the Bay of Bengal are more complex. "Thanks to the great increase in social violence and separatist movements in [the] Indian northeast," explains Stephen Cohen, and adds that "Bangladesh's location and geography have also assumed strategic importance."⁽¹⁸²⁾ New Delhi has always been anxious over the possible security threats posed by the entry of illegal migrants from Bangladesh, who are mostly economically deprived, along with anti-Indian radicals and insurgents, into the Northeastern India.⁽¹⁸³⁾ Bangladesh and India share a boundary, along which the border killings by Indian forces continue while issues of final demarcation and enclaves have yet to be settled. According to a report from Human Rights Watch in 2010, around 10,000 Bangladeshis were killed over a decade by the Indian border guards. At the same time, the magazine *Silicon India* reported in May 2013 that some 500,000 Indians from West Bengal, Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura, and Mizoram were working illegally in Bangladesh, and so remitting considerable sums to India. The border is porous in both directions and economic migration is not confined to poor Bangladeshis alone.⁽¹⁸⁴⁾ Recently, Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj of the BJP made a three-day visit to Bangladesh. Returning on 27 June 2014, she announced that she and the Bangladesh authorities have made an "excellent beginning" in addressing each other's concerns in the spirit of good neighbourliness. During her meetings, Swaraj gave a commitment that New Delhi would address Bangladesh's concerns over sharing of Teesta waters and implementing the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) "in a manner that improves the welfare and well-being of both nations."⁽¹⁸⁵⁾ Both countries now are looking for a better understanding over economic ties, including the border issues and the water crisis.

On the broader world stage, India has gained prestige as a participant in the BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa) conference. It was Modi who proposed the name for New Development Bank established by that body, and although that institution will have its headquarters will be in Shanghai, its

first Chairman will be from India. Although China wanted a larger share in this bank, Beijing had to agree on accepting India's proposal that each BRICS member receive an equal share. As a result, the National Council congratulated Prime Minister Modi for his diplomatic success.

Finally, India's international stature has increased due to a newly emerging global balance. Russia, China and the United States have all made efforts to improve relations with New Delhi. Indeed, the American Secretary of State has personally expressed his appreciation Modi's mantra of *Sabka sath-sabka vikas* (inclusion and development for all) and assured the new government that Washington has a similar policy and shares Modi's way of thinking. This is particularly the case with regard to naval policy, and both nations have expressed their concern over China's possible maritime power projection into the Indian Ocean. ⁽¹⁸⁶⁾

Conclusion

The political discourse of India is vibrant, diverse, multidimensional, and complex, and an understanding of that country's political chemistry requires long, careful and persistent study. An attempt has been made above to unravel the knotted intricacies of the intertwined multi-ethnic and multicultural relationships and conflicts that lay behind the BJP's striking victory in 2014, which has ushered in a new era of expectations for the people of India. So the time has passed for mulling over BJP's success, and we must now turn to assessing the likely policies and political future of the Modi government.

As the defeat of the Congress demonstrates, no political dynasty can sustain its power over time and new interests and claimants to power repeatedly emerge. Throughout, however, this cycle remains subordinate to the urge for the acquisition of power, which lies at the very core of human nature. Yet while this impetus to power is now usually pursued in the name of particular social groups, communities or societies, the so-called "game changers" mostly come from recognized leadership elite. Meanwhile, the rapid Hinduization of society in India could result from two main factors. Firstly, the Hindutva ideology, which is portrayed as the true representation of the Hindu society and, presented as a panacea that needs to be embraced before the vision wanes. And secondly, the use and politicization of religion and its concurrent relevance implanted in the minds of the collective society by power mongers so to attain political positions. It seems undeniable that the politicians in India, like those in any other state, are equipped with a range of fiery slogans, promises and pledges. Yet these are hardly ever translated into reality after these leaders succeed in attaining power.

In the end, therefore, India's recent political conflicts are all about power politics. Otherwise, one decisive factor behind the BJP landslide was the multiplicity of media communications which became a juggernaut that crushed its rivals. It is, of course, part and parcel of the campaign that political stakeholders advertise themselves as the most suitable candidate for office but the media, as the architect of opinion, should be responsible for digging into exposing the negative behaviour and misleading statements of a government once it has taken power. Even so, an uninterrupted process of democratization

and incremental progress in India not only is ameliorating the inefficiencies of governments, but it also providing platforms for unheard voices to be heard such as the members of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) or "Lay Men Party." In this way democracy does make a difference, regardless of its flaws and loopholes.

Moreover, both the BJP and Modi as its protagonist were offspring of the RSS. He in particular had been feathered and weathered by its ideology, and it will be interesting to observe how long he remains a prisoner of Hindutva. If he breaks the shackles of this bondage, what might the implications be for the BJP-RSS link and, in case of a backlash, how might Modi react? At the same time, what consequences could this have for the Indian polity and its voters? In addressing these issues, it is important to remember that over 60 per cent of BJP's office-holders at the centre and in the states are either former *pracharaks* (full time RSS workers) or have bonded with the RSS. Amit Shah, for example, is now a close confidant and aide of Narendra Modi, as well as the current BJP President. He, too, was nurtured in the RSS nursery, and in the recent elections, took the BJP from its nadir to its apex in Uttar Pradesh (UP) by winning 71 seats out of 80. Despite being notorious in connection with the Gujarat arson of 2002, and with the more recent Muzafarnagar riots, his old comradeship with Modi bore fruit for him and the party. Any face-off between the RSS and BJP is thus unlikely to occur as both would avoid stiff relations and Modi in particular is unlikely allow his support base out of his hands.

We have yet to see with what magnitude the RSS will attempt to intrude and influence BJP's policies in the way it used to interfere in the past. At the same time, the RSS will always expect that the Hindu Swaraj should have first priority in the BJP's policies. But given Modi's fluid and whimsical character, he can always adapt and is in the best position to afford "the road not taken". The real test of the policies, leadership and political cadres will come if and when the BJP arrives at some critical juncture, whether it be because of domestic, national or international reasons, and this will then clarify the nature of the recent victory.

Domestically, India is passing through a transitional phase. Having emerged from an egalitarian and majoritarian encounter, the contemporary Hindu nationalist forces have managed to eclipse their secular foes by their rise to hegemonic power. This has been achieved but it is as yet unclear whether or not this means secular India is defeated once and for all. Questions that still linger are: will Dalits ever live like the Brahmins? Will India's large Muslim minority ever receive their legitimate rights of liberty of religious practice, be freed from prejudice and racism, and have full freedom of expression? Will India's downtrodden masses ever be freed from poverty, and will solutions ever be devised to deal with the endemic plagues of bribery, embezzlement, public plundering, corruption, and crimes against women? Communal and caste politics will pose mounting challenges for those hoping to bring the whole of Indian society under one roof despite boundaries of caste, religion, colour, creed, and race. If the same hackneyed and surreal tactics continue to haunt and hound the unfortunate Indian people for the sake of the political ambitions of the few, segregation and isolation will continue to disrupt social harmony, and the

violence provoked by sectarianism, extremism, communal and caste violence will be an ever-present danger.

Notes and References

1. The literal meaning is Hinduness. Politically it connotes that India being a Hindu majority nation, its nationalism must find its essential sustenance from Hindu social and religious ideology. The term was first used as the title of a book written in 1922 by V. D. Savarkar. See Sumanta Banerjee, 'Hindutva' — Ideology and Social Psychology,' *Economic and Political Weekly*, 19 January 1991, pp.97–101.
2. Irfan Engineer, *Current Domestic Policy Challenges and Prospects in South Asia* (Islamabad: IRS Publications, 2003), p.46.
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