



**COMMUNALISATION
OF POLITICS
AND
10TH LOK SABHA
ELECTIONS**

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

Co-Editor

PRADEEP NAYAK

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Asghar Ali Engineer
Pradeep Nayak

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OVERVIEW

1

Introduction

Elections are expressions of democratic processes in any parliamentary or presidential form of democracy. India also has had a proud record of holding parliamentary elections from time to time. All elections were held on time right upto mid-eighties since independence. Only 10th elections were held in a crisis situation within one and a half year of 9th Lok Sabha elections as Mr. V.P. Singh resigned as Prime Minister and the Chandra Shekhar Government which took over could not last for more than a few months.

The crisis was essentially political but it found expression in what I choose to call religio-political form. The BJP which is not only a rightist but also a Hindu communal party, chose to use the Ramjanmabhoomi controversy for political ends i.e. to capture power at the Centre and in some states in the Hindi heartland. However, the political crisis precipitated by the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report, in August 1990, by the V.P. Singh Government was much deeper than it was realised.

The country had never faced such deep economic crisis since independence as it is facing today. This crisis is bound to generate one political crisis after the other. No wonder then that it has become increasingly difficult for any single party to obtain absolute majority in Parliament. The Congress Party which talked of stability was deceiving the people no less than the BJP which was promising the Ramjanmabhoomi temple to the Hindus and economic prosperity to the people of India.

The problems facing the country are truly gigantic. To retain nation state and its unity in view of near insurrection conditions

in Punjab, Assam and Kashmir, itself has become problematic. The increasing democratic consciousness of the people due to deepening of democratic processes is throwing up difficult problems of power-sharing on one hand, and, of equitable distribution of economic resources, on the other.

Even at best of times it would not be easy to govern a country of gigantic proportions like India. Its sheer diversity is mind-boggling and this diversity creates its own strains as economic crisis mounts. Many social and political analysts have begun to question the very frame-work of a nation state for a country like India. It may be an extreme reaction to what is happening but it does pose an uncomfortable problem. One might aver is feasible to have a state on the basis of uniform ethnicity or single religion? The experience of Pakistan is not very encouraging. It not only broke into two despite one religion, it is facing great deal of trouble on ethnic lines even after its bifurcation. Moreover, no modern state can be based on single ethnic or religious group. Ethnic and religious plurality is inevitable in view of modern transport and communication system.

Pluralism is not always a liability; it can also be an asset. What is needed is sense of justice and fairness towards all. Pluralism appears to be a liability to the majority (ethnic or religious) group only if there is acute economic crisis and resources crunch and also when the majority community, or a section of it, refuses to do justice to minority ethnic or religious groups. All the ethnic, religious and caste movements in modern India are essentially struggling for the just share in political power and economic sources or retention of privileges already enjoyed.

The crisis generated by the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report by the V.P. Singh Government should be seen in this light. So far 18% of upper caste Hindus (of course and elite among them) had controlled 75% top Government jobs and nearly all the resources in private sector. The Mandal Report, in view of increased democratic pressures from dalits and backward castes, for the first time, sought to do justice to them in history. The upper castes, who had been enjoying these privileges all these years naturally expressed strong resentment and students from upper castes were used to launch an agitation against it.

It may be pointed out here that V.P. Singh may have had his own political motive while implementing the report as no politi-

cian can be above such consideration. Politicians are not saints or prophets after all. However, it cannot be denied that implementation of the Mandal report changed the very shape of politics in India. While it imparted tremendous consciousness among a section of backward castes and dalits, it also produced a strong urge for 'Hindu unity' and found its political expression in the concept of 'Hindutva' advocated by the BJP which is a strong contender for power. Advani, the then President of the BJP, announced its Rath Yatra in order to forge this unity. But the BJP did not care if this Hindu unity, its political necessity, created fear in the minds of non-Hindu minorities and caused severe strain to the national unity.

As pointed out by many, the Ramjanmabhoomi controversy was, religiously speaking, a non-issue. Still it had great potential for becoming a most explosive political issue. The Punjab, Kashmir and Assam problems on one hand, and implementation of the Mandal report on the other, had already created a strong urge for Hindu unity to 'save' the situation. Thus the BJP propaganda became far more convincing for a section of upper caste Hindus. During the 10th Lok Sabha elections the entire *Sangh Parivar* (the BJP, VHP, RSS, Bajrang Dal) busied itself with propaganda for the BJP victory in the elections. Some Sadhvis like Rithambara were also thrown into this electoral war — the BJP did fight this election on war footing. Sadhvi Rithambara used not only communal but most foul language against minorities, especially against Muslims. Her cassettes were also played especially in the Hindi belt to arouse raw emotions among the Hindus and encash these religious sentiments in terms of votes.

Thus it will be seen that elections are now far from expressing the genuine feelings of common citizenry of the country. They are being manipulated more and more by the power elites in the country for their own ends. It would be interesting to throw some light on the concept of vote banks. These power elites are using certain castes and communities as vote banks. Not that earlier on such calculations were not made but now it is being done more openly, even flagrantly. For years the Congress had depended on Muslim and Dalit votes on one hand, and Brahmin votes, on the other. But it was rather subtle and was done with a poise. However, Mrs. Gandhi, since early eighties, desperate to retain power, began open manipulations of Hindu and Muslim votes.

Slowly, the concept of vote banks became widely acceptable and no party except those on the left, desisted from using it. Thus the very secular spirit of our polity was gravely damaged. The BJP had never accepted secularism, but now because of gross misuse of the concept of secularism by Centrist parties like the Congress it got a chance to dub the Nehruvian concept of secularism as 'pseudo-secularism'. In fact there was nothing wrong with the Nehruvian concept as such but it was its misuse which ought to have been questioned. However, the BJP, in the prevailing political atmosphere in the country could successfully convince a section of upper caste Hindus that the Congress, the Janata Dal and the Communists were promoting pseudo-secularism and that it amounted, in essence, to appeasing the minorities. The BJP, thus sought to create its own vote bank among the upper caste Hindus.

It must be pointed out here that the power elite among Muslims also sought to use Indian secularism for their own power games. They resolutely opposed any change or progressive measure in the name of right to practice their own religion and whenever it politically suited them they aroused Muslim sentiments thus communalising ever larger number of Hindus in the process. The Shah Bano movement was very crucial in this respect. The Muslim leaders mounted pressure on the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to change the law in favour of Muslims. The ruling party could hardly resist such pressure and buckled under and changed the law and passed the Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill in 1986.

This had very adverse effect on an average Hindu mind. It convinced them that Muslim leaders are a fanatic lot and, secondly that the Congress indulges in appeasement of Muslims and treats them as its vote bank. The Muslim leaders did nothing to erase this growing impression. They, on the other hand, did everything to reinforce it in handling the Babri Masjid-Ramjan-mabhoomi controversy. Syed Shahabuddin's call for boycott of the Republic Day was most unfortunate in this respect. The Muslim leadership once again sought to arouse Muslim religious sentiments in a rash manner.

In view of these developments the BJP propaganda of pseudo-secularism and appeasement of minorities appeared quite convincing to a large section of Hindus, even those who can hardly be accused of being communal. The power elite among

Muslims sought to play the game rather recklessly. They never devised any proper strategy for fighting for Muslims' right. The result was that the Hindu communalism got more and more legitimacy and more and more Muslims suffered loss of lives and properties in the communal riots. It ultimately went to the BJP's advantage. Also, the way the Congress and the Janata Dal knelt before the so called Shahi Imam did even greater damage to the cause of Muslims.

It is necessary to point out here that the Congress and the Janata Dal leaders had no faith in the Muslim masses. They thought — and even think today — that Muslims are at the beck and call of obscurantists like the Shahi Imam. He issues a fatwa and every Muslim rushes to vote for the party the Shahi Imam wants them to vote for. This is, at best a gross exaggeration of the Imam's political significance. It is some political leaders and the print media which has given such uncalled for importance to him. The fact is that Muslims make their own decision in keeping with the local situation. There is enough evidence from the field data to show that Muslims cannot be induced to vote for any particular party by any fatwa by any Imam whatever his religious status.

The Independent published from Bombay carried out a survey of Muslim opinion from states like U.P., Maharashtra and West Bengal which clearly showed that Muslim voters were not swayed by the Imam's appeal issued on the eve of tenth Lok Sabha elections to vote for the Janata Dal. *The Independent* in its issue of May 1, 1991 said, "Reports from our correspondents show that (V.P.) Singh need not have bothered to pursue the Imam to such great lengths (he is deciding on the Janata Dal candidates) to win the Muslim vote (and alienate a section of Hindus), because the Imam's word does not count outside Delhi and parts of Uttar Pradesh; and even there, many question his right to issue directives on political matters. Second, even as a religious leader, he does not command much respect among Muslims outside Delhi, thanks to his past record."

It is doubtful even within Delhi he is respected as a religious leader. In fact he has no credentials as a religious leader. He is nothing more than the Imam of a mosque and such Imams hardly rank among the 'ulama'. The fact that political leaders rush to him for support shows that they have no faith in democracy. The results of 10th Lok Sabha elections also show that Mus-

lims everywhere did not vote for the Janata Dal. In U.P. it was trifurcated between the Janta Dal, the Janata Dal (S) and the Congress (I). In Maharashtra, the Muslims voted by and large for the Congress(I) and hardly for the Janata Dal. In Southern States too they voted for the Congress. In Gujarat, the Muslim votes were caste for the Janata Dal(G) of Chimanbhai Patel-Congress(I) combination. In Rajasthan, the Muslim votes were split between the Congress and the J.D., the Congress getting the major chunk. It was only in Bihar that Muslims voted by and large for the Janata Dal but it would be wrong to conclude that it was on account of the Imam's appeal. It was the Bihar situation that compelled Muslims to vote for the J.D.

It would thus be seen that Muslims do not follow any *fatwa* blindly but calculate as intelligently as any other voter before exercising their franchise. Those politicians who rush to the Imam or any other Muslim leader for issuing an appeal are no friends of Muslims. The Muslims may or may not vote according to the *fatwa* or the appeal, it does serve the purpose of communalising the average Hindu mind. It is ultimately the BJP which benefits from such appeals. However, those who are desperate for the Muslim votes do not think in these terms and go and touch the feet of the Imam for getting the appeal issued. The print media also project such appeals in a way which exacerbates the Hindu communal feelings. Before the 10th Lok Sabha elections when the Shahi Imam asked the Muslims to vote for the Janata Dal, he had used the word 'appeal' but most of the papers described it as '*fatwa*' which is a highly loaded religious term.

The Muslims have several genuine grievances. They are comparatively more backward both economically as well as educationally. Their representation in government and public and private sector services is far from satisfactory. Also, being in minority they have their own apprehensions regarding loss of religious identity. Increasing communal violence has made them quite insecure. In such circumstances, their own power-hungry unscrupulous leadership can easily exploit Muslim religious sentiments. It is also to be borne in mind that often projection of genuine Muslim grievances can also arouse communal passions among a section of the Hindus. A wise and thoughtful Muslim leadership should have devised a proper strategy to project these grievances so as to avoid gross communalisation of these issues. However, the Muslim leadership proved quite rash and unmind-

ful of consequences. Take for example, the Babri Masjid controversy which became the focal point in the 10th Lok Sabha elections as far as the BJP was concerned. The Muslim leadership got almost hysterical, issuing emotional statements providing ever more legitimacy to majority communalism.

A thoughtful Muslim leadership would have issued not only more sober statements but also would have taken initiative in arranging dialogues with various sections of the Hindu community on the issue. They would have thus appeared more reasonable to the Hindu masses and intelligentsia. They would have left the issue to the secular parties like the Janata Dal and the Congress(I) to fight it out with the BJP. The Babri Masjid would not have been harmed and secular parties would have fought it out with the BJP without giving it a chance to communalise the issue. However, the Muslim leadership was tactless; not only that it too wanted to encash Muslim religious sentiments at the ballot box.

The secular parties like the Congress and the Janata Dal are more interested in Muslim votes rather than solving their genuine problems. They make promises to the Muslim leadership on the eve of the election showing their 'concern' for Muslim problems, thus inducing Muslims to vote and these promises are forgotten in no time. Moreover, these party leaders do not touch real issues which are mainly economic and educational but touch upon emotional issues like the Muslim personal law etc. thus attracting the charge of reducing the Muslims to a vote-bank. This vote-bank politics is not only harmful to the Muslims themselves, but also provides legitimacy to majority communalism. The Muslim intelligentsia should raise its voice against it.

This vote-bank politics also gives some credibility to the BJP when it dubs the Nehruvian secularism as 'pseudo-secularism' which it certainly is not. The Nehruvian secular model is very much valid and is the only genuine guarantee of the protection of religious identity of the minorities and their security and well-being. What is needed is its proper implementation, not opportunistic lip-service to it as most of the leaders do. If the leaders of secular political parties attend to the genuine economic and educational grievances of the Muslims in a balanced way, the Muslims will not only gain confidence in the secular-democratic

polity of India but would also be persuaded to accept certain much needed changes and reforms.

Earlier the Congress Government and later the Janata Dal, announced a 15-point programme for the economic and educational well-being of minorities and dalits. Certain districts with concentration of Muslim population (20% to 40%) were identified for providing certain economic and educational facilities. But there is no regular monitoring of the scheme and no significant results are visible. It is difficult to obtain the data also. Mrs. Indira Gandhi had announced the appointment of a high powered Gopal Singh Commission on the eve of the 1980 elections. It was constituted in 1981 and submitted its report in 1983 but it was never tabled in Parliament, let alone implement it. The V.P. Singh Government tabled it after this writer and several other Muslim leaders raised the issue in a meeting of minority leaders and intellectuals. But soon thereafter his government resigned and its fate is not known ever since.

If these genuine grievances of the Muslims are not solved and they continue to face insecurity it would be quite difficult to pursue them to accept reforms and non-acceptance of the same would continue to provide legitimacy to the BJP propaganda that the Muslims do not reform and behave fanatically. The demand for common civil code also acquires sharper edge in these circumstances. It is in these circumstances that the BJP has been thriving and increasing its appeals to the Hindus. It was not the Ramjanmabhoomi alone which fetched votes to the BJP in the 10th Lok Sabha elections. It was the aggressive projection of pseudo-secularism and appeasement of the minorities that also appealed to the middle-class Hindus.

Here it would also be worth examining the limitations of religious and communal appeal in a democracy. No doubt religion has a powerful appeal on Indian masses. But it would be simplistic to assume that it has limitless potentiality for winning votes. Electoral behaviour, like other human behaviour, is an admixture of interests, beliefs and consciousness. One does not cast one's vote purely on religious considerations except a fanatic fringe. An average voter considers his/her interests as much, if not more, as his/her religious feelings. The BJP will understand this. No wonder then that it thought of *insaf* and *roti*

(justice and bread) along with Ram. It cleverly raised the slogan of "Ram, Roti and Insaf" in its election campaign.

Ghanshyam Shah, in his article, "Tenth Lok Sabha Elections And the BJP's Victory in Gujarat" argues that it would be wrong to think that the BJP won only on the slogan of Ram. He says, "The BJP's victory is, more often than not, attributed to the Ram-Janmabhoomi issue, which has communalised the Hindu votes. In the absence of a systematic study, one may tend to agree with this observation. But it is too simplistic to deduct from this that the Hindus voted for the BJP primarily because of the Ayodhya issue and that they consider other problems of their life so trivial that they put all their weight behind the construction of the Ram Mandir in place of the Babri Masjid. The victory of the BJP in Gujarat is not an overnight event, attributable only to the Ram-Janmabhoomi issue."

It would be no less simplistic to assume that in U.P. also the BJP owed its victory to the Ramjanmabhoomi issue. One should not forget that the Janata Dal votes got divided due to its split. The combined votes of the J.D. and the J.D.(S) compare favourably with those of the BJP. Also, the highly aggressive campaign for secularism conducted by Mulayam Singh Yadav to serve his own political interests proved no less counter-productive. And, to add fuel to the fire, certain excesses were committed by the police on Kar Sevaks on 30th October to 2nd November, 1990, which were highly aggressively projected by the BJP in an exaggerated form. The BJP capitalised on all this and won a large number of votes.

It will thus be seen that the BJP tried all tricks up its sleeves to maximise its electoral appeal. Even then it got about one-third of the total votes cast by the electorate in the 10th Lok Sabha elections which was certainly an increase of about 10% over what it had secured in the 1989 elections in alliance with the Janata Dal and other parties of the National Front. This was, in a way, considerable gain although it certainly fell short of capturing power at the Centre. It has at least tried to project itself as an alternative to the Congress. However, in Bihar, it failed to garner any significant support. Only a detailed study can bring out the causes of its failure but one can certainly draw some rough inferences.

Firstly, the Janata Dal remained united in Bihar under the leadership of Laloo Prasad Yadav and thus presented a solid front to the BJP. Secondly, Laloo Prasad proved to be more ma-

ture in propagating the cause of secularism and the Mandal Commission. Being overaggressive does not pay. He desisted from antagonising the Hindus. Thirdly, the alliance between Backwards and minorities worked more satisfactorily in Bihar. But it should also be noted that it was an alliance of interests rather than of ideals. It can come under strain in the changed circumstances.

The tenth Lok Sabha elections were thus quite significant for more than one reason. Communalisation overreached itself during this election. It was used to its critical limits. Despite this, it must be admitted with certain qualifications that Hindutva could not establish its political hegemony at the Centre. Secularism, in a way, emerged victorious. A developing and modernising society can and does face ethnic and communal convulsions for obvious reasons but it cannot provide guiding ideology for a developing society. Communalism and fundamentalism can, in certain circumstances, become easy channels of protest against unsatisfactory conditions, injustices and corruption, but it cannot effectively become a stable ruling ideology in the modern society. Even if it does it creates irreconcilable contradictions.

Bombay
15-1-1992

Asghar Ali Engineer

2

Lok Sabha Elections, 1991 and Communalisation of Politics

Asghar Ali Engineer

The 1991 Lok Sabha elections were not normal in ways more than one. Firstly they were held within two years of the last elections which were held in November, 1989. Secondly, the elections were in fact precipitated not merely because of the withdrawal of support of the Chandra Shekhar Government by the Congress(I) but in fact because of the withdrawal of support of the V.P. Singh Government by the BJP on the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy in October, 1990. As a matter of fact elections should have taken place somewhere in December, 1990 itself after the withdrawal of the BJP's support of V.P. Singh Government but the Congress(I) was least prepared to face elections and hence decided to prop up the minority government led by Chandra Shekhar. Thus technically elections were precipitated by the withdrawal of the Congress(I) support to the Chandra Shekhar Government in March, 1991 itself when the BJP decided to withdraw its support to the V.P. Singh Government on a religious controversy.

I am emphasising this because a democratically elected government fell not on a major national issue but on a sectarian religious issue and the BJP saw in this unfortunate controversy a unique chance to come to power. The natural corollary of this unfortunate controversy was unparalleled communalisation of Indian polity in the post-independence period. This communal-

zation nearly shook the very foundation of Indian secularism. We would also like to emphasise here that it is not merely a political phenomenon; we must try to appreciate its social, economic, religious and cultural dimensions. It should also make us aware of the fact that in countries like India, despite our resolve to secularise society and polity, religion shall continue to play a major role. Religious appeal cannot be trifled with.

Also, the mandir-masjid controversy should be seen not only in its immediate context of implementation of the Mandal Commission Report in August 1990 but also in the earlier context beginning from the early eighties. As such the danger of communalisation of Indian polity has always been present in Indian society but it assumed more serious proportions when the Congress(I) leaders themselves began to play the communal card for their survival in power. Mrs. Gandhi's confidence to come to power on her own or her party's merit had been shaken after the emergency. Muslims and dalits, her traditional supporters had been alienated from her leadership. She began to search for support elsewhere and she found it in the politically emerging Hindu middle castes. First she used the Meenakshipuram conversions in 1981 and the political storm raised by it to win the Hindu support. She also cleverly manipulated the Punjab problem and fully exploited the concern generated among the average Hindus by the militancy shown by Bhindranwale. Operation Blue Star contributed in its own way in further communalising Indian polity. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi also opened his regime with communal holocaust under his very nose in Delhi in which hundreds of Sikhs perished. He also gave in to the Muslim fundamentalists by changing the law on Muslim women and also tried to please the Hindu fundamentalists by allowing the shilanyas ceremony in Ayodhya.

These background events are necessary to be mentioned if we want to understand the recent developments leading to the most blatant use of communalism by the BJP in the 1991 elections. When the Congress party resorted to play the Hindu card to survive in political power, the BJP felt threatened on its own ground. Until then the Congress had depended on the Muslim and dalit support and the BJP on some middle caste Hindus like Baniyas in urban areas. While the Congress used to talk about

secularism and protection to minorities and dalits the then Jan Sangh and its latter incarnation, the BJP, carried on propaganda for the Hindu interests and there was, in a way, a division of votes between these parties. However, this apple-cart was upset when Mrs. Indira Gandhi and later Rajiv Gandhi began to encroach upon the traditional BJP votes. This competition for the Hindu votes resulted in competitive communalism between the two major parties.

Whereas for the Congress(I), traditionally a secular party, there was a limit to which it could go resorting to communal card, there was no such limit for the BJP as it was professedly a Hindu party and never shied away from using Hindu interests as it had its political base among the Hindus only. Thus pitted against the Congress on the same grounds the BJP had to make more shrill propaganda and woo more Hindu castes for the political survival and also increasing its strength. Thus it would be no exaggeration to say that it was use of the Hindu card by the Congress that compelled the BJP to resort to a more blatant form of communalism and to cast its political net much wider. Also, it tasted more power in the 1989 elections by increasing its strength in the Lok Sabha from two to eighty eight with the support of the Janata Dal. As such it was a tremendous boost for it. But its dream seemed to be shattering with the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report in August 1990.

The BJP, in response to the challenge posed by the Congress, had cast its net wider and tried to bring various castes under its political domain. It had used the Ramjanmabhoomi controversy as a powerful religious symbol to create a sense of unity among the divergent Hindu castes and it had succeeded in this venture to some extent. Many Hinduvaids often complain that whereas minorities like the Muslims, Sikhs and Christians are united the Hindus are not. Hinduism was thus sought to be 'semitised'. But this was a most frustrating exercise as the caste hierarchy, apart from diverse and open nature of its theology, was the most powerful obstacle on the way to unity. The BJP used Ram as a symbol to rally round all the castes under its banner. It used all the devices for the political use of Ram: it drew up a plan to construct Ram Mandir where the Babri mosque stands today; then it gave a call for donation of bricks from all five lakh villages of India; then it drew up plans to take out these donated bricks in

the form of processions from villages, towns and cities and it also planned, with the help of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, to mobilise lakhs of *kar sevaks* on an auspicious day fixed by Dharm Sammelan in Hardwar.

Thus it would be seen that all possible means were employed by the BJP to strengthen and consolidate its Hindu constituency. But it thought all this was suddenly brought to naught through the implementation of the Mandal Commission by Mr. V.P. Singh as its implementation created a permanent rift in the Hindu Society. The report was thus seen as a major obstacle for the Hindu unity. The backward castes and dalits would now never unite with the upper caste Hindus and Hinduism could not be 'semitised'. The BJP's gameplan for further increasing its strength in the Lok Sabha, if not capture actual power at the Centre was thus foiled, as it could not have made any headway without the support of the backward castes. Thus Shri L.K. Advani, the then President of the BJP announced Rathayatra in the third week of August, 1990. Thus it would be seen that the Rathayatra was announced after and not before the implementation of the Mandal Commission which took place in the first week of August.

The Rath, mounted on a Toyota truck, carried the BJP party symbol most prominently thus making the BJP's political intentions unmistakably clear. Many other parties strongly objected to such gross exploitation of religion for political purposes, but Shri Advani quietly ignored such objections and protestations. Shri Advani repeatedly claimed that the Rathayatra was undertaken to strengthen national unity and that it is wrong to say that it caused communal bloodshed. He claimed that not a single riot took place on its route and that he, in all his speeches, pleaded for caution and moderation. These claims can hardly stand scrutiny. Firstly, no religious figure, however revered it may be, can be claimed to symbolise national unity, specially in a multi-religious nation like India. If a religious symbol of one religious community is used, other religious communities would but resent it. It is one thing to show respect and reverence for a religious figure and quite another thing to claim it to be a symbol of national unity. A national symbol to bring about national unity must be a secular symbol irrespective of the fact whether it

evokes powerful emotions or not. In India it is true that a sacred, as opposed to a secular, object would evoke much more powerful sentiments but national unity is any time more important than militant religious sentiments of one religious community.

Secondly, it is far from true that the Rathayatra did not cause communal bloodshed. It would only be indulging in technicalities to claim that no riot took place along the route of the *yatra*. The *yatra* evoked very militant religious sentiments among the Hindus and there was show of unprecedented aggressiveness by the cadres of the BJP, VHP, Bajrang Dal and the Shiv Sena in different places and communal violence broke out in a number of places in Gujarat, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, U.P. and Bihar. And after the arrest of Shri Advani in Bihar on 23rd October hell broke loose in Jaipur, Jodhpur, Ahmedabad, Baroda, Hyderabad and several other places in which hundreds of innocent people perished and properties worth crores of rupees destroyed or looted. In Jaipur alone which otherwise had a unique record of communal peace, more than 130 persons died in the last week of October, 1990. When the *yatra* began from Dwarka in Gujarat, a bowl of blood was offered to Shri Advani, his head smeared with blood and hundreds of trishuls and swords loaded on the rath. Minorities could only hold their breath. How can such a rath, evoking powerful Hindu symbolism and inducing unprecedented religious aggressiveness, claim to be a journey in national unity? It was a *yatra* for national disintegration.

II

We have traced the background to the 1991 elections so that we can grasp the real significance of the later events. Though the Congress, the Janata Dal and the BJP itself published manifestoes raising important issues like poverty, unemployment, price rise, economic development etc., the Ramjanmabhoomi issue was looming large on India's political horizon. The BJP was bent upon exploiting it for its electoral success. It launched a propaganda blitz on these lines. Even though in the meanwhile the Bombay high court judgement came unseating the Shiv Sena MLA for having used religious appeal for soliciting votes, it hardly sobered down the BJP and the Shiv Sena. Other strategies were drawn up and posters showing the Ram Mandir and using

slogans for Ramjanmabhoomi were now printed in the name of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad claiming that it was a separate and non-political organisation. However, it could hardly deceive anyone. The message was loud and clear. Also, the BJP was flushed with funds during the election. Its propaganda blitz left even the Congress far behind. Apart from the VHP's contributions, it was far easier for the BJP to mobilise funds this time. The bourgeois as well as the petty bourgeois poured out money into the BJP election kitty not only because of devotion to Ram but also because of the perception that it is bound to emerge much stronger in the election or who knows it might capture power at the centre. The BJP leadership was also exuding confidence.

There was one more reason for exploiting the Ramjanmabhoomi issue to the hilt during this election. The BJP can hardly compete with other political parties as far as secular issues are concerned. It is too far to the right to appeal to the masses as far as its economic programme is concerned. Moreover, it is always under pressure from traders not to advocate radical economic policies and even if it does as a tactical move, the left parties, the J.D. and the Congress can do so more convincingly. Also, it can never carry conviction with the Muslims, other minorities and dalits, even if it makes a mild attempt to woo them. Thus the only alternative left for it is to exploit the religious sentiments of the Hindus. There, until recently the main problem was that it was very difficult for it to forge unity among different conflicting sections of Hindu society there being no unifying dogma or theology also. The Ramjanmabhoomi controversy, however, came as a political gift from the Congress (opening the lock of the masjid, in 1986, at the instance of someone close to Mr. Gandhi). It was this controversy which enabled the BJP to penetrate the rural areas. It no longer remained, only the party of the banias in urban areas. It kept on intensifying this controversy to strike deeper and deeper roots in the hearts and minds of the Hindus. It saw in this controversy a historical chance for coming to power. If it misses the bus this time, it probably thought, it might miss it for much longer time in future and hence it, unabashedly mixed religion with politics.

It is really ironical that the leaders of the Jansangh and then the BJP often used to exhort Muslims for being fanatics and for

mixing religion with politics. There was a great deal of truth in this especially in the pre-independent India when the Muslim League, under the leadership of Jinnah, used religion with vengeance to win 'homeland for Muslims'. He aroused strong and militant sentiments among Indian Muslims, especially in the north, and thus won their hearts and minds and whereas the Muslim League had performed very poorly in the 1937 elections, it performed handsomely, in the fall of 1945 when elections were held to the Constituent Assembly. The Muslim League would perhaps have never carved out a political niche for itself had it not exploited religion to the hilt. Thus it shows that communal parties can win only on their grounds and they tend to perform very poorly when they try to fight on 'alien' grounds. Thus the Muslim League lost heavily when it fought elections in alliance with the Congress in 1937. Similarly the BJP performed extremely poorly when it tried to adopt Gandhian socialism and integral humanism. It soon had to give up that pretence. In fact it registered a great success in terms of seats, and also in terms of percentage of votes caste to some extent, in the 1989 and the 1991 elections, only after it adopted the militant form of Hinduism.

In the post-independent India the Muslims as a minority soon realised the value of secularism and gave up, in their own interest, the communal form of politics though there were some exceptions to this rule. They voted, by and large for secular parties, chiefly the Congress. And whenever there was an anti-Congress wave in the country, they voted, alongwith others for other parties like the Janata Party in 1977 and the Janata Dal in 1989 and again in the tenth Lok Sabha elections. But in the tenth Lok Sabha elections the pattern of Muslim voting was more complex. We will throw some light on this a little later. Thus we see that the Muslims did not show much religious militancy in the post-independence period, except during the Shah Bano agitation. The Muslim leadership, it must be noted, did great damage to the Muslim cause by exhibiting religious militancy during that phase, in as much as, it further strengthened Hindu communalism. Also, on the Babri Masjid issue, a section of Muslim leadership manifested rigid position and gave call for Marching to Ayodhya and offering Friday prayers there and the then Presi-

dent of Babri Masjid Action Committee, Mr. Shahabuddin urged upon Muslims to boycott Government functions on the Republic Day. This too was wrong morally, strategically and politically. It was exploited by the BJP leaders. Except in these instances the Muslims have not shown organised religious militancy in post-independent India. Yet they come in for strong criticism for mixing religion with politics and manifesting religious fanaticism. Such propaganda had great political value for the BJP as it could convince the Hindus that they have no other way but to retaliate in the same manner.

III

The BJP, apart from the Ramjanmabhoomi controversy, used two other things to gain political legitimacy among the middle and upper caste Hindus: non-organised nature of Hinduism and the concept of pseudo-secularism. Both these paid rich dividend to the BJP in terms of votes, especially among urban areas. It is necessary to examine both these concepts. It is maintained, not only by the BJP but by many other well-meaning Hindus that semitic religions like Christianity and Islam are not only highly organised religions but are also closed theologically and encourage dogmatism and fanaticism. Hinduism, on the other hand, is neither an organised religion nor does it encourage dogmatism, much less fanaticism.

However, such sweeping statements do not make much social sense. Religion cannot be seen in isolation from society. Fanaticism and liberalism are more social rather than religious phenomena. It is social conditions which raise or lower the degree of fanaticism and not religion *per se*. A religious community (other communities like cultural, regional or linguistic too) tends to be liberal, progressive and non-dogmatic if materially it is prospering, making economic gains, is confident of itself and has sense of security. However, it tends to be intolerant, dogmatic and even fanatic if it is passing through a low ebb, losing its privileges or threatened with loss of privileges it is enjoying (though it may be in control of commanding heights of economy) and develops a sense of insecurity. Such dogmatism and fanaticism is also experienced in political sense during a revolutionary period also.

The Muslim community in India has passed through various phases of liberalism and fanaticism depending on their socio-political conditions. The Hindus too, have been no exception to this rule. Fanaticism and militancy among a section of Hindus, especially among upper castes in urban areas on the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid controversy, can be understood only if seen in the above perspective. Though the upper caste Hindus command economic heights, political power and key government jobs, they are perceiving threats to their privileges from dalits and backward castes on one hand, and, Muslims, Sikhs and other minorities, on the other. These upper caste Hindus, therefore, have begun to feel that their liberalism is proving to be their weakness, and Muslims, Sikhs and Christians are highly 'organised' and 'militant' and hence able to exert pressure on the political system. They therefore, feel that since Hinduism is non-organised, non-dogmatic, they are at a disadvantage and hence, in order to exert pressure on the system they too, should become organised, dogmatic and militant. This is why the BJP appeals on these lines to these upper caste Hindus. Thus it was not Ram but threats to their own privileges which made them and their Hinduism so militant. It is their interest which mobilised the sadhus and religious leaders of various Hindu sects on such a gigantic scale, never seen before in the modern history of Hinduism. In fact in a number of constituencies in U.P. the sadhus, who never used to involve themselves in politics, campaigned for the BJP candidates. We thus witnessed an unprecedented use of religion for political purposes by these upper caste Hindus. The Shiv Sena and the VHP even distributed trishuls in Bombay and elsewhere, during election campaign to create more religious fervour.

The BJP also very aggressively carried on propaganda about what it called pseudo-secularism of the Congress, the Janata Dal and the Communist parties. It maintained that these 'pseudo-secularists' were following the policy of appeasement of minorities in order to exploit them as their vote-banks. This propaganda too had great appeal for middle class Hindus in urban areas. The media also gave great publicity to these views. It is unfortunate that in major dailies Advani's interviews and statements, talking about pseudo-secularism, appeared every now and then during

election campaign but no serious articles analysing the hollowness of Advani's 'pseudo-secularism' appeared. Through the concept of pseudo-secularism of Nehru, Advani intended to send strong political signals to Muslims and other minorities that they must live in this country on terms dictated by the Hindus.

According to Advani, Nehru's 'pseudo-secularism' did not protect the Hindu interests. It only took care of minority interests. India can genuinely be a secular country only if it opts to be a Hindu Rashtra and only Hindus genuinely can be secular; all others are either communal or pseudo secular. They did not even see the obvious contradiction in terms like 'Hindu secularism', 'Muslim secularism' etc. Secularism must be understood in its own terms. It cannot be hooked to any religion or religious community in order to be genuine. But this is what precisely the BJP leaders did. There can of course be a debate whether secularism, in purely western sense or as defined in dictionaries, can apply to India or not and whether it has to be creatively applied, keeping in view the concrete conditions in our country. Thus one may hold that the Nehruvian concept of secularism was too western to apply to Indian situation but to describe it as 'pseudo-secularism' is not only injustice with Nehru but utter ignorance of secularism and its philosophy. In fact it is Advani's secularism which eminently qualifies to be pseudo-secularism. Much more so as he equates it with Hinduism. What else could be 'pseudeness of secularism' if not equating it with a particular religion or religious community.

Appeasement of minorities, on closer examination, would also be found as much hollow. All that Mr. Advani is able to cite, to prove appeasement of Muslims, is that Muslims are allowed to practice their personal law under which they can marry four wives. The Hindus, on the other hand, have to be content with one wife alone. In modern world with women becoming more and more conscious of their rights even bigamy, let alone polygamy, is becoming more and more problematic to practice. A number of surveys have also established that it is much less prevalent among Muslims than among Hindus, though among Hindus it is done illegally. Among Muslims it is about 4 to 4.5 per cent whereas among Hindus and Jains it is 5 to 7 per cent. Moreover, among Muslims the male-female ratio is more adverse than among the Hindus. For every 1000 Muslim males

there are no more than 925 females in India. How can then Muslim males marry more than one woman when there are not sufficient females even for each Muslim male to have one wife?

The Muslim personal law has been permitted not so much for the appeasement of Muslims as to respect their religious sensibility and sense of security. The world over minorities are allowed certain measures—though they may be socially outdated—in order to give them a sense of security and religious identity. Many changes are overdue but they must be brought about in a persuasive, rather than in a coercive way. The former course can be politically less problematic for a democratic society. Social changes can hardly be imposed from above. An attempt should be made, through sustained educational campaigns, to bring them about from within.

As for the Muslims being vote banks for a party, each political party tries to create its own vote banks. If the Congress or lately the Janata Dal tried to treat Muslims as a vote bank, the BJP tried hard to create, among upper caste Hindus, its own vote bank. This is a sort of political tactics each party has to follow, in order to win. If the Congress used personal law and the Janata Dal the Babari Masjid issue to have the Muslims as their vote bank, the BJP, with much more vigour used all possible tactics and strategies—Ramjanmabhoomi, appeasement of Muslims, pseudo-secularism—to entice upper caste urban Hindus, as its vote bank and it considerably succeeded in this attempt.

Some parties may have treated Muslims as vote banks or Muslim leadership may also have traded with this or that party to sell Muslim votes, but Muslim masses have voted quite intelligently both in keeping with their interests as well as the country's interests as a whole along with others. If they voted for the Congress others were also voting for the Congress in the country. If others voted for the Janata Party or the Janata Dal during anti-Congress waves, Muslims also voted for the Janata Party and the Janata Dal respectively in 1977 and 1989 when anti-Congress waves prevailed. Some Muslim leaders like the Shahi Imam do try to sell Muslim votes to this or that party which must be strongly condemned. Even the BJP leader Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee tried to woo the Shahi Imam in 1977 to campaign for the Janata Party. But it should be borne in mind that Muslim

masses vote according to their own perception of situation and not because the Shahi Imam tells them to vote for a particular party.

For the 1991 elections the Imam had appealed to the Muslims for the Janata Dal. This appeal was quite superfluous as the Muslims were already determined to vote for the Janata Dal in general. But this determination was also qualified. Their main intention was to defeat the BJP even if they have to vote for the Congress or any other secular party. The election results do not bear out that they blindly voted for the Janata Dal. In certain constituencies like Rampur in U.P., the BJP won because their votes were divided among the Janata Dal, SJP and the Congress. In Rampur, Muslim voters were 47% and yet because of this division among three parties the BJP candidate could win. Same thing happened in the Domariaganj constituency in U.P. from where Mohsina Qidwai, a senior Congress leader, and Seema Mustafa, a SJP candidate were contesting. In this constituency though the Muslim votes were about 35%, their votes got divided and the BJP won. In Balrampur too the BJP won because the Muslim votes, though considerable, were divided among the SJP, the Congress and the Janata Dal.

It would be interesting to examine the Assam results. In Assam, Muslims are 26% and they wield considerable political clout. In the last Assembly elections they had voted mostly for the Muslim Front and it had won 30 seats. However, this time they nearly ignored the Muslim Front and voted for the Congress and thus the Congress could win a large number of seats and gained majority. The Front got very few seats. In West Bengal the Muslims voted by and large for the Left Front. Even in those constituencies where the Left Front was pitted against the Congress Muslim candidates, the Muslims ignored Congress and voted for the Left Front.

In Bihar of course, the Muslims massively voted for the Janata Dal and its allies as a result of which the Congress had to face ignominious defeat. In this state even political greenhorns who contested on the JD ticket won against the senior Congress leaders. In Darbhanga, Ali Ashraf Fatimi, a political novice defeated Prof. Nagendra Jha, a senior Congressman with margin of 1 lakh 47 thousand votes. In Kishanganj, Syed Shahabuddin won

with 80 thousand votes defeating M.J. Akbar of the Congress. M.J. Akbar had won from Kishanganj last time.

All this shows that it is wrong to say that Muslims are a vote bank for a particular party, as alleged by the BJP, in its election propaganda and this also shows that Muslims do not vote on orders from leaders like the Shahi Imam, who trade in their votes. Also, the massive victory of BJP in U.P. shows that the ruling party should not completely identify itself with any minority or any other religious community. The militant advocacy of 'secularism' by Shri Mulayam Singh Yadav did more harm to the cause of secularism and cause of minorities. It produced a strong reaction in the Hindu minds. Of course there are other factors which are no less important for the defeat of the SJP and the Congress but militant advocacy of secularism and using secularism, not as a political philosophy but for partisan ends can become counter-productive. Both SJP and the Congress which supported the Mulayam Singh Yadav Government, were wiped out in the Lok Sabha elections and got very limited seats in the Assembly elections.

Another important lesson to be drawn from this election is that it is extremely dangerous for the unity and integrity of the country to play communal politics to its extreme as the BJP did with a view to capture power at any cost. Of course it could not capture power at the Centre despite such unabashed use of communalism, it has done great disservice to the cause of communal peace in the country. It has sown the seeds of communal hatred and created religious bigotry among a sizeable section of Hindus which would be very harmful for the future of country. A multi-religious society can stay together only if there is tolerance and respect for others' religious beliefs and politics is completely separated from religion. The BJP, in this election not only threw caution to the wind, it deliberately, with an intention to capture power, weakened religious tolerance and raised to white, heat and communal temperature in the country. It seems our country had a close brush with fascism.

The Tenth Lok Sabha Elections and Hindu Communalism

Achin Vanaik

The Rise of the BJP

The results of the tenth Lok Sabha elections were deeply disturbing. Though the Congress Party formed the government, it was the BJP that emerged as the real victors. Fighting on their own, they amassed more seats than ever before, made inroads into areas where they were never previously any kind of force, and perhaps most important of all, enhanced their image as a viable future alternative to centrist parties for national leadership at the Centre. It would be tempting but wrong to attribute the BJP's remarkable advances simply and straightforwardly to the strength of their Hindu nationalist appeal or more specifically to its campaign for building the Ram Mandir at the site of the Babri Masjid at Ayodhya.

The dramatic growth in their electoral appeal in states like West Bengal and Karnataka and their increase in the percentage of votes secured, in comparison to their performance, in the Ninth Lok Sabha Elections, in almost all states of the Union was an indication that many more voters than ever before perceive the BJP to be a party that can be entrusted with the responsibility of general governance. It was really in the north, northwest and west (Gujarat) that the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue

could be said to have been a decisive factor in mobilising votes for the BJP. In Karnataka, the collapse of the Janata Dal and the BJP's emergence as the alternative to the Congress had much more to do with relative disillusionment with the Congress, internal decay and disorganisation in the Janata Dal, the resentments of those upper and backward castes left out of the spoils of office, as well as the appealing image of BJP as a stable, highly organised and as yet 'untried' alternative. In short, local state level dissatisfactions were added on to the more limited appeal that the BJP's Hindu nationalism may have had for the Hindu urban middle classes. Similarly, in West Bengal, the BJP's jump to ten per cent of all votes cast reflected its growing appeal not only in those regions, most hit by the tensions of Muslim migration from Bangladesh via the northeast but also among large sections of the rural poor in areas far removed from such tensions, who have been disillusioned by the CPM's performance.

If the BJP does its post election homework—and it can be expected to do so—then it has reason to be both pleased about its political strategy to date and yet be cautious about its future expectations. Pleased, because its aggressive Hindu nationalism, as embodied in the temple campaign, has paid substantial dividends. It has acted as an emollient for the identity crisis of the middle class/upper bourgeoisie, enabling the BJP to extend its urban appeal beyond the trading community to the more westernised professionals of the petty bourgeoisie, to many more managers and owners in the corporate sector and to the higher echelons of the civilian bureaucracy. Given the exceptionally 'national' character of the defence services, the BJP's appeal among senior officers has been more limited. There is a significant gap between its appeal among senior servicemen who are retired and those on active duty who are naturally much more sensitive to the havoc that the growth of communal and regional chauvinism can play within the substantially secularised armed forces.

But the BJP has also extended its support beyond the urban middle class. In Gujarat and U.P. such a conclusion is unavoidable, given the sheer size and geographical distribution of its vote percentage. Rural India with its folklorist conceptions of religion and culture has not been immune to the religio-cultural drives of essentially Brahminised forces like the RSS, the VHP

and other offshoots nor to the appeal of the BJP, the most important political expression of Brahminical Hinduism. This is contrary to what many have thought and raises fundamental questions about the efficacy of politics of religious identity and about its ability to bridge the undeniable gulfs between urban and rural India, between elite and folk culture, between Brahminical and non or anti-Brahminical forms of Hinduism. To be sure, matters must not be exaggerated. The BJP remains a Brahmin-Bania dominated party. Its Hindu nationalist plank is not enough to secure it a stable, longer term base: witness its failures in Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. But it can no longer be denied that it has made inroads among significant sections of the OBCs and to a much more limited extent, even among Dalits and tribals.

The problem of identity construction, of its unifying potential and possibilities can no longer be dodged by confident references to the 'innate' acumenism of 'lived Hinduism' or 'popular religion'. The segmented character of Indian society and the multiplicity of practices and beliefs that continue to characterise religious life in India are still major resources with which to confront the forces pushing for religious uniformity. But the totalising imperatives of capitalist accumulation and modernisation and the stimulus provided by mass communications towards the 'mediatisation of culture' are factors whose importance must not be minimised.

The BJP must also be cautious in its assessment of future prospects. Hindu nationalism is not a magic wand that will sweep it to power at the Centre. There are many reasons why this is the case. It is true that there is a strong plebiscitary character to the functioning of Indian democracy which at election times has expressed itself in the referendum-like nature of party appeal. The five Lok Sabha elections before the last one were focussed on a single issue of slogan—*Garibi Hatao* (1971), *Emergency Hatao* (1977), *Kamzor Sarkar/Janta Hatao* (1980), *Desh Bachao* (1984), *Corruption Hatao* (1989). However, each of these single issues also implicitly represented the deeper and wider principle of general governance in a way that the Ram Temple issue or Hindu nationalism for all its emotive resonance does not. That the BJP can attract supporters by the promise of providing better or more

stable governance testifies to its organisational coherence and to the vacuum created by the long-term decline of Congress of which it has been able to take advantage. It is not embodied in the programme or central perspectives it was an offer. When in power at the state level the BJP's performance has been unimpressive and it is quite unable to convince the electorate that it is a better, long-term better, than its political rivals.

The last Lok Sabha elections differed from the five previous to it in that, no single issue dominated the terms of discourse. Each of the major claimants to power had a distinct message of its own. The NF-Left Front stressed social justice and equity, with the JD emphasising its commitment to implementing the Mandal Commission Report, for reservation of central government jobs for OBCs. The BJP had the Mandir as its plank, and the Congress projected itself as the party of stability. Revealingly, the BJP switched its central electoral plank from the Mandir to the issue of stability immediately after Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated.

Certain new patterns are emerging in Indian democracy and these provide the BJP with obstacles as well as opportunities. From the 1971 elections to those in 1985, the endemic instability of the Indian polity—connected to the historic decline of the Congress and the absence of any adequate centrist replacement—expressed itself through 'wave' elections and wide swings in voting. The last two elections have suggested that a new phase may have been reached in this continuing and prolonged process of political crisis. Since 1989, instability also expresses itself in a parliamentary instability and we seem to have entered a period in which minority governments or coalition politics becomes more frequent and more important. Indian democracy is still plebiscitary but in a more qualified and complex way. In one respect the basic mould of Indian politics since independence has been cracked. A party like the BJP which is clearly not a centrist party has become a serious claimant for power at the Centre. But where does it go from here? How does it translate possibility into reality?

Neither the left nor the Congress is about to collapse in the next ten years. Congress-like formations will continue to float around the Congress even if the Janata Dal breaks up, providing the basis for an alternative centrist formation or strengthening

the Congress itself through periodic realignments with it. Non-Congress regional parties will generally prefer association with centrist forces than with the BJP in its present incarnation. Unless the BJP believes that the Congress is much closer to collapse than appears and that the BJP is itself on the brink of further very dramatic and rapid electoral advances, the logic of coalitional politics will push the BJP to moderate rather than harden its stances. Unless it believes it can achieve an absolute majority (or close enough to it) by the time the next Lok Sabha elections are called, the BJP (unlike the RSS/VHP) is under greater pressure to shift towards the centre than to move further to the right or even remain where it is on the political spectrum.

This flexibility of Indian centrism, where centrism is to be understood as the dominant political space in the country, means it both exercises an important gravitational pull on aspirants to Centre rule and can itself be pulled to the right or left. This centrism is rooted in the nature of Indian society. If mass poverty and the realities of caste oppression have provided something of an objective foundation for a successful left of centre appeal or for a dominant left-centrist alliance, the Indian middle classes and upper elite have always played a disproportionately important role in setting the actual terms of political discourse. Thus it is that the new centre of gravity or fulcrum of the mainstream consensus has itself shifted towards the right; very substantially so in respect of economic perspectives, less dramatically so (for the moment) in regard to foreign policy or the domestic social/secular consensus.

It is quite unclear whether the BJP will be able to benefit from this. Any analysis of the future evolution of Indian politics must now factor in the epochal global implications of 1989 as well as the end of dynastic leadership within the Congress. The last, paradoxically, presents the Congress with an opportunity to reorganise and transform itself to emerge as a more attractive political force with greater sensitivity to pressures from below. The Congress has to try and become a more federalist and democratic yet national party. But on past record one cannot be optimistic that it can make this transition. The effects of the end of the Cold War and of the collapse of the Soviet Union and Communism in the former East bloc are also likely to be profound. The

dramatic turn in the economic policy carried out by a minority Congress government headed by Narasimha Rao would not have been conceivable before 1989. This turn has won widespread approval of the urban middle class and of the industrial bourgeoisie. The agrarian bourgeoisie has been disturbed by certain aspects of the turn and the shift in the relationship of forces that this implies between itself and the industrial bourgeoisie. But the BJP is hardly likely to be the beneficiary of such discontent. That earlier space where the BJP could outflank centrist parties by pursuing a more rightwing economic programme has clearly shrunk. Resistance to the rightward shift in economic policy and to the new path of greater dependence of India's economy on the West and Japan, will be led by the left. The BJP will have great difficulty in establishing a defined role for itself in respect of the new economic turn which is a serious lacuna since the effects of this turn on Indian society and public are going to be quite profound.

In foreign policy the country is probably on the brink of equally momentous changes and will almost certainly move towards qualitatively greater accommodation with the U.S. especially since the later has shown clear signs of reassessing its hitherto strategic relationship with Pakistan. With the United States more able than ever before to influence internal policy-making in India, the question of Washington's attitude towards religious fundamentalism and Hindu nationalism becomes of rather more significance than in the past. It is by no means obvious that the U.S. will prefer a Hindu nationalist regime to a more secularised one. The growing strength of Kashmiri separatist sentiment does provide the BJP with a potentially important new focus for mobilisation. But whatever the political solutions it might offer these could well be pre-empted by the Congress through a significant reorientation in the country's foreign policy i.e. a significant break with the non-aligned perspectives of the last forty years and, therefore, in the triangular India-Pakistan-U.S. relationship.

The larger point is that domestic and international contours have so sharply altered that the BJP cannot assume that it has already charted the route to future success. It has been argued by many in and around the BJP that it should try and transform

itself into the Indian equivalent of a Christian Democratic Party. But though this is still the most likely and paying strategy for it, it is no assurance of achieving the kind of success and political prosperity desired by the BJP.

The Question of Fascism

There are other scenarios for the future. The prospects for Hindu nationalism should not be linked simply to the fate of the BJP. There is the RSS and its other offshoots. The total membership of the RSS and its affiliates, of the BJP and its mass student, women, trade union and other fronts now numbers close to ten million. Whatever the ups and downs of the BJP, the RSS and its affiliates have had uninterrupted linear growth since 1948-49. The rapid growth of the VHP in the eighties for example has been remarkable. True, this is a largely urban phenomenon but urban expansion must now include the smaller towns which have an organic connection to the countryside and whose proliferation has been one of the more important features of socio-economic development over the last two decades.

Along with the processes of dogmatisation and historicisation of Hinduism, there has also been its ruralisation. Prospering sections of the backward castes, have sought identification with a pan-Indian 'Hinduness' as a way of psychologically transcending the cultural limitations of their caste status. They have been a major force behind the new Hindu self-assertiveness. However, these rural castes have not as yet flocked to organisations like the RSS/VHP which have a clear Brahminical and urban bias. Nevertheless the wider cultural-religious developments have made the ground more fertile for Hindu nationalism and the politics of religious identity.

It is in this general framework of the rise of Hindu self-assertion, of the growth of the political-cultural expressions of a Hinduism redefining itself that one must insert the question of fascism. Is the rise of Hindu communalism more or less synonymous with the rise of fascism? Does the growth of BJP-RSS-VHP combine represent the growth of fascist or semi-fascist forces? Is not Indian democracy under graver threat than generally presumed? What lessons can be derived from the experiences of

prewar European (Germany, Italy, Spain) and Asian (Japan) fascism or from post-war third world semi-fascism (post-Allende Chile)?

From a Marxist perspective, fascism is the response of a capitalist society not in mere crisis but in *acute* crisis. It involves an extreme centralisation of power, so extreme that the ruling classes are willing to concede exceptional autonomy and power to its class-state because its own survival is at stake or because this is the only way it can hope to develop. Typically then, fascism/semi-fascism emerges in a context when social challenges from below to ruling class domination are themselves exceptionally strong and must be brutally crushed. This was the case in Germany, Spain and Chile. Alternatively or in addition it is linked to militaristic expansionism since this is the only way for the dominant bourgeoisie to prosper independently — the cases of Japan and Italy, and again, Germany. While the door to fascism is opened by the collapse of prior democratic arrangements (the populist character of fascism would suggest that democratic or quasi-democratic structures are something of a precondition for the emergence of fascism) the path is not always direct. In the case of Japan, for example, there was something of a continuum from quasi-democracy to progressively stronger forms of authoritarianism to fascism.

The common elements of fascism would seem to be (1) culmination in overt and highly centralised military rule; (2) a strong populist and mass base in the petty bourgeoisie, especially during the period of its rise; (3) as a concomitant of this, an ideology that both reflects the interests and concerns of this intermediate stratum subjected to pressure from above and below, and which can also transcend this by appealing to other strata through some form of cultural nationalism; (4) which has as its most vital function on coming to power, the ruthless prevention of independent organisation by the working class movement. The objective purpose of fascism is after all to dramatically revise the relationship of forces between the dominant classes and the dominated ones in favour of the former.

Barrington Moore Jr. 's fundamental thesis about fascism in peasant societies was that it was linked to the preservation and perpetuation of labour repressive agrarian systems since such a

system required exceptional political coercion or the threat of such coercion as embodied in a centralised militarised state¹. In largely peasant societies undergoing industrialisation, it is the relationship between the upper landed peasantry and the rural labour force that becomes particularly crucial. Furthermore, the nature of the ruling class coalition is also very important, in particular the relationship between the agrarian elite and the industrial-commercial class, and of both to the apex of the state bureaucracy. The closer the nexus between the agrarian elite and the state bureaucracy and the weaker the industrial-commercial bourgeoisie in relation to this nexus, the more likely is a fascist trajectory in largely peasant societies.

By such criteria the likelihood of fascism in India is much less than elsewhere in third world peasant societies. All the more so because of the existence of a very substantial layer of family farmers whose extraction of surplus is not primarily based on exploitation of a rural proletariat and which does not have a powerful commitment to the preservation of a labour repressive agrarian system. Moreover, this social category aspires to capitalist prosperity. It is not a vacillating stratum susceptible to a plebeian radicalism which ideologically castigates both socialism and capitalism. The 'Bharat versus India' slogan is a perspective aimed at ensuring that the state does not lean too far in favour of the industrial bourgeoisie in setting the terms of the agriculture-industry relationship. It is not the basis for a mass mobilisation of a supposedly discontented rural petty bourgeoisie against the capitalism of the big bourgeoisie.

The ideological ascendancy of capitalism after 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union has itself substantially reduced the appeal of any kind of anti-capitalist populism among the Indian petty bourgeoisie, particularly the urban component. The BJP's self-appointed nationalist mantle and its status as an opposition party means it expresses dismay over the growing subordination of New Delhi to IMF/WB-market and anti-statist and more and more geared to winning support from the big bourgeoisie. It is for this reason among others that there is pressure from within to transform itself into the Indian equivalent of Christian Democracy, albeit with a significantly diminished commitment to secularism.

What also of the Indian military? The evolution of Chile in modern times is a reminder that the durability of democratic constitutions in a third world country (Chile's experience of democracy was much longer than that of India) is no guarantee against the emergence of semi-fascism. But the Chilean example also confirmed that the semi-fascist extreme militarist solution is resorted to precisely when the balance of class forces is most precarious, when the rise of the left and of the working class movement creates a highly polarised situation in which the class rule of dominant elites is threatened as never before. Ironically, the very weakness of the left and the very diffuseness of challenges from below in India's segmented society makes the possibility of a fascist resolution to existing or future social tensions more, rather than less, remote. Furthermore, the sheer sub-continental scale of India and its ethnic, religious and cultural diversities make centralised military rule far more difficult (though not impossible) here than in the countries that have experienced fascism/semi-fascism.

Any judgement about the imminence or otherwise of fascism, about the growth or decline of fascism and fascist forces must start from an investigation of the interplay of basic classes and social forces in India, not from the performances of politico-cultural organisations possessing certain fascist characteristics. Fascism creates the fascist political party either by throwing up its own political vehicle or by coopting and transforming an existing party whose characteristics make such cooptation easy and feasible. While fascism in India would necessarily mean Hindu nationalism, Hindu nationalism would not necessarily mean or imply fascism. The BJP is best understood as a *potentially* fascist party not as an already fascist or semi-fascist one.

Similarly the RSS and its affiliates are better understood as potential bearers of a fascist onslaught than proto-fascist forces about to become full-fledged ones. Their trajectory and that of the BJP is more open-ended and allows for other combinations of Hindu chauvinism and other more conventional bourgeois perspectives. There is a lesson to be learnt about the complexity of possible political formations from the contemporary reality of numerous Islamic states which vary substantially in the degree of democratic institutionalisation allowed, as well as in the degree of secularity practised and endorsed. None of the existing

Islamic states, incidentally, could justifiably be considered semi-fascist, let alone fascist. Iraq under Saddam Hussein, more secular than most other Arab-Islamic regimes would appear to be a stronger candidate for such an invidious status.

In short, it would be unjustified to stipulate any simple correlations between religious fundamentalism, anti-secularist religious chauvinism and fascism. The principal reason why the fascist or semi-fascist label might plausibly be appended to the RSS-VHP-BJP combine is because of the nature of its ideology. However, there is a distinction here between the BJP and the RSS. The former has traversed much ground from Gandhian Socialism to Integral Humanism to Positive Secularism and its related diatribes against 'pseudo secularism'. The latter has, of course, consistently adhered to an uncompromising Hindu nationalism. The steady politicisation of the RSS mission has been a post-independence phenomenon but there remains a certain ambiguity about its goals which reflects itself in the tension between its cultural and political projects and therefore in its choice of political vehicles to back. In the past the Congress has at times been preferred to the BJP. Even today there is a conflict with the BJP. There are those who stress the necessity of deepening the linkages between the BJP and the RSS i.e. enhancing the latter's control over the former and sustaining the BJP's cadre-based character. There are others who are for diluting this control and becoming a more conventional mass electoral party of the right with a corresponding dilution of its cadre-based character since the RSS hold on the BJP is exercised precisely through its cadre organisation.

The RSS ideological goal is Hindu Rashtra or the Hindu Nation. Over a period of time its leadership has become more convinced than ever that the cultural-psychological 'rejuvenation' of Hindus which has been its long stated objective is inseparable from the construction of a Hindu State. But it is not all clear just what kind or how much of a dismantling of the current state is desired. The reluctance of the RSS and the BJP to spell this out rather than simply focus for the purposes of popular mobilisation on issues like the Ram Temple, Shah Bano, Article 370, banning cow slaughter etc. which can be projected as examples of 'minorityism' almost surely reflects their own uncertainty or lack of clarity as to ultimate political objectives rather than a

calculated connivance to cover up objectives already well laid out. The religious cultural exclusivism of the RSS does not as yet translate into a rigorously worked politico-legal exclusivism with respect to the non-Hindu minorities.

This may be one point of contrast with the ideologies of fascist-type forces expressing more clear-cut political perspectives. There is another. All fascist ideologies link race, nation, culture in an exclusivist way. At first sight the RSS commitment to Aryavarta and its emphasis on the Vedas would seem to stress a similar exclusivity. In actual fact, the racial dimension in contrast to say, Nazism, is in RSS and Hindu nationalist hands, inclusivist rather than exclusivist. It has to be if the Dravidian South is to be incorporated in its Hindu pan-Indian vision. Thus the South with its Dravidian language groups is not to be counterposed to the Aryan North. On the contrary, there is supposed to have been such racial intermingling that Aryanness is not the preserve of any particular section of the Indian population. Even Muslims by race and origin are part of Hindu India. The crucial ideological chain here, is not of race, nation and culture but of religion, nation and culture. It is religious not racial exclusivism that lies at the heart of the RSS ideology.

This is hardly consolation for India's religious minorities but it does indicate some of the differences between the ideologies of acknowledged fascist formations and that of the RSS. The proper characterisation of the BJP, the RSS and its other affiliates, the affinities and disaffinities between the processes of communalisation in India and the varieties of fascism that have emerged elsewhere, are clearly issues of great import. The answers that one arrives at will determine one's assessments about the durability of Indian bourgeois democracy, the strength and resilience of its constitutional structures. They will determine the strategy that progressive forces should adopt to confront the rising tide of communalism. The dangers posed by this growing communalism and by the forces of Hindu nationalism in particular are serious enough in themselves. They do not require us to make more problematic connections with some other supposedly imminent threat such as fascism. The strategies for confronting communalism are not the same as those for confronting fascism. Centrist parties, for example, can be seen with greater confidence as allies in an anti-fascist struggle. Their anti-communal creden-

tials are much weaker. To effectively combat the forces of Hindu nationalism it is necessary neither to minimise nor exaggerate the dangers posed by them.

To predict an increasingly fascist evolution of the BJP or the RSS/VHP etc. and to posit one's strategy for combat on that projection can play into opposing hands if it should turn out to be a misrepresentation of their behaviour and direction. False accusations, false arguments and false expectations are rarely if ever good grounds from which to launch one's own counter-offensive. However, the other danger — of ignoring the rise of fascism when it is taking place — carries even graver consequences. What has been offered here should not be seen for other than what it is — reflections by one writer so far unconvinced by those who see behind the rising curve of communalism the face or faces of fascism. But there is always room for revision and reassessment on *both* sides of this debate in the light of new evidence, new developments and new or just better and more convincing arguments.

1. By labour repressive agrarian systems Moore means either the traditional peasant society in which surplus is squeezed out by the landed peasantry from 'servile or semiservice labour on large units of cultivation' or the institution of new arrangements by the landed upper class, such as plantation slavery. These are his two general types. American style family farming or a situation where agricultural workers can move about relatively freely in search of better paid work do not qualify as labour repressive systems. Nor do pre-industrial societies where there is a 'rough balance' between what the landlord provides in respect of justice and security and what the direct producer provides by way of surplus.

[Barrington Moore Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Penguin University Books, 1966, pp 433-4.]

4

Politics of Caste and Communal Mobilization

C.P. Bhambhri

The Lok Sabha elections of 1991 were contested under a specific socio-political content and the electoral performance of major political parties was determined and decided on the basis of issues around which political parties had launched their electoral campaigns and mobilizations. The votes polled by the major political parties during the tenth Lok Sabha elections of 1991 reveal the electoral strength of political parties which is a reflection of their mobilizational capacities around issues and ideas.

Table
Electoral Performance of Major Parties in 1991

<i>Party</i>	<i>Votes Polled</i>
Congress Party	36%
Bhartiya Janata Party	20%
Janata Dal	11.3%
Samajvadi Janata Party	3.2%
Communist Party of India	2.4%
Communist Party of India (Marxist)	6.2%

Note: Source : Seminar, Delhi, September 1991: p.66

The above Table reveals that the all India performance of major political parties is limited because none of the major political parties has crossed even 40 per cent of the voters' support. The Table also reveals that the Congress and the BJP have a higher position in terms of votes polled than the combined votes of the two Janata and the two Communist parties. The first significant feature of the tenth Lok Sabha elections is that the Indian voter has not given a clear mandate to any party or a combination of parties to rule over India. Its meaning can be appreciated by linking it with the story of the Ninth Lok Sabha elections of 1989. During 1989 elections, the voter did not express full faith in any party or a combination of parties to form the Central Government of India.

What is the explanation for the voters' peculiar response during the Ninth and the Tenth Lok Sabha elections? Can this phenomenon be explained on the basis of emerging caste and communal polarisation in Indian politics? Religion based politics and caste as a factor in politics have always been a factor in Indian elections but a qualitative change has taken place and caste and communalism have assumed the status of an agenda in politics. The issue is: what have been the electoral responses and strategies of major political parties to deal with the agenda of caste and communal politics? Many acts of omission and commission of the major political parties are responsible for the growth of communalism and casteism in politics.

First, the BJP has grown in strength on the basis of anti-Congressism of all major secular parties in India. The BJP performance in the Lok Sabha elections of 1977 and 1989 was determined by its anti-Emergency and anti-Congressism politics. Other secular parties along with the BJP formed alliances to contest the Lok Sabha elections of 1977 and 1989 and such alliances gave strength and political legitimacy to the BJP. It is in the logic of competitive politics that political parties gain in strength on the basis of their own mobilization and also on the basis of support or weakness of other contestants in elections. The story of BJP proves this point. The left parties, the National Front and the BJP formed alliances and they made electoral adjustments during the elections of 1989 with a view to defeat the Congress party. All major political parties combined together to defeat

their main political opponent i.e. the Congress party. This political strategy paid dividends to the BJP and a determined BJP extended its agenda during 1989-91. Second, the BJP used anti-Congressism in 1989 elections but it created a separate space for itself by raising the issue of Temple-Mosque at Ayodhya. The BJP started its mobilization through *Shilapujan* and concluded it by *Shilanyas* on the eve of the 1989 Lok Sabha elections. The BJP operationalized a dual strategy to participate in 1989 elections. Its one pillar was anti-congressism and alliances with democratic opposition parties, and its second pillar was to project its own identity and individuality as a party of Hindutva. All secular parties should have been alerted by the BJP's strategy of *Shilanyas* and *Shilapujan* but they ignored it in the name of anti-congressism. While the Ninth Lok Sabha of 1989 had fractured political representation, the BJP formed stable governments in Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, and coalition governments in Rajasthan and Gujarat. The Centre had become unstable in 1989, the BJP was strengthened during the elections of 1989. Third, the political developments in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir came quite handy to the BJP to extend its communal appeal during 1989-91. Fourth, Mr. L.K. Advani began his Rathyatra from Somnath to reach Ayodhya on October 30, 1990, but the Central government in Uttar Pradesh could not evolve an effective political and administrative strategy to tackle the politics of Advani's Rathyatra. The undercurrents of deep suspicion among the Janata Dal leaders like Mr. V.P. Singh and Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav contributed to the confused signals given by the Central Government on the issue of Rathyatra.

The above discussion clearly shows that the rising tide of BJP communalism was ineffectively dealt with by secular and democratic parties in India.

The Lok Sabha elections of 1991 were contested by the congress, the BJP and the National Front-Left Parties Alliance. This was a change from the situation of 1989 because the BJP could not manipulate any support from any secular and democratic party in India. It had to stand on its own during the Lok Sabha elections of 1991. The BJP contested against all other parties by characterising them as pseudo-secularists, the promoters of minorityism and weaklings in dealing with the issues of national

unity and integrity. It played on the emotions of voters by raising the issues of the Temple, Punjab and J&K.

The Janata Dal as the main constituent of the National Front and the two communist parties made secularism as the main plank of their election campaign. The National Front - Left parties Alliance was unambiguously secular in its beliefs and pronouncements, but the electoral strategy of the Janata Dal revealed serious weaknesses in countering the politics of communalism. First, the Janata Dal failed to form an electoral alliance with the SJP and Mulayam Singh in Uttar Pradesh. When the BJP was consolidating itself, at that moment the Janata Dal was fragmented and in the process weakened. During the elections of 1991, the Janata Dal could not match the BJP in Uttar Pradesh, and the Janata Dal leadership made no serious effort to set their house in order to face the BJP. An alliance with Mulayam Singh's SJP was a necessary pre-requisite for the Janata Dal to challenge the BJP in U.P.. The Janata Dal failed on this front. Second, the Janata Dal committed a blunder by seeking support of the Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid who issued a *Fatwa* in favour of the Janata Dal. The left parties showed their awareness and they warned the Janata Dal against such a strategy to fight elections in a communally surcharged atmosphere in the country. The BJP got a big handle to politically confront the Janata Dal, and the BJP campaigned on the basis of *Imam Raj* versus *Ram Raj*. The Hindu vote was consolidated by the BJP in a big way by projecting the Janata Dal as a promoter of minorityism under the patronage of the *Fatwa* of the Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid. The BJP strategy of extending Hindu-Muslim divide was facilitated by its own actions and also by the acts of serious omission and commission of the Janata Dal. These two factors determined the electoral fortunes of the BJP and the Janata Dal alliance in Uttar Pradesh. A fragmented Janata Dal and a vacillating and compromising secularism could not stand against the onward march of BJP communal politics during the Lok Sabha and U.P. State Assembly elections of 1991.

Every action and pronouncement of the BJP from 1989 to 1991 was directed towards the establishment of communal hegemony and the National Front and the left parties could not bring in the agenda of secularism to the centre stage of electoral

politics in North India during 1991. The split of the Janata Dal and its ideological and tactical confusions helped the BJP to mount a highly emotive offensive during the elections.

The Janata Dal brought an alternative agenda of social justice and equity on the basis of the Mandal Commission report on reservations in public services for the backward castes. The Janata Dal's alternative to the politics of Mandir was the politics of Mandal and it was assumed that the secular agenda of social justice will effectively counter the religious agenda of Mandir. Mandal proved unequal to the appeal of Mandir during the 1991 elections. The BJP won the Lok Sabha elections in every region from North to North East and South of India. The BJP got victories in Karnataka and in West Bengal it polled 11.7 per cent votes in the Lok Sabha elections of 1991. The Mandal impact was confined to Bihar and parts of Uttar Pradesh.

The Mandal issue created controversies and confusions from the day of its announcement by the V.P. Singh government. First, within the Janata Dal, many leaders expressed reservations and even opposition to the Mandal Commission's implementation and Biju Patnaik was quite open on this issue. Second, the CPI(M), an ally of the Janata Dal, was for modification of the V.P. Singh government's formula on reservations in public services. Third, Jyoti Basu maintained that the West Bengal government did not have any list of the backward castes. Thus, neither the Janata Dal nor its major allies were united on the new policy of reservations announced by the V.P. Singh government. A policy cannot become an important agenda of politics if it creates conflicts and confusions among the members of the ruling party and its alliance partners.

Further, the consequences of Mandir and Mandal encouraged the acceleration of communalisation and casteisation of politics. The supporters and opponents of Mandal were polarised on caste basis and casteism in India is divisive in politics. An essential feature of castes in India is their "oppositional" relationship. Caste versus caste is a reality of Indian social structure and this oppositional relationship was sharpened by the new policy of reservations announced by the V.P. Singh government. The policy was tested during the Lok Sabha elections of 1991 and its electoral validation and support was limited to Bihar

only. Further, in opposition to Mandir, Mandal could not emerge as an all-India agenda of politics. The real politics of Mandir is to hegemonise and unify all Hindus, the Mandal in politics accentuated caste fragmentation and caste cleavages.

Communalism is an ideology and secular parties should never make any overt and covert compromise with communal parties and forces. Otherwise, struggle for secularism would be reduced to a tactical approach in politics. It is very unfortunate that the BJP has compelled the secular parties to limit the struggle for secularism around Mandir and Masjid or majority - minority relationship. Secularism is linked with the whole enterprise of modernisation, rationality, social justice, equality and emancipation of women. Secular agenda of politics is comprehensive and the BJP is restricting it to a limited emotive issue to win elections. The Janata Dal, the Left parties and all secular forces in India should alter the terms of political discourse determined by the BJP. Secularism is a contest for an alternative humanistic and egalitarian social order and the BJP world - view is quite limited. The BJP has gained in strength because of the weaknesses of the secular forces in India and the lessons of the 1991 elections are quite clear. Caste politics cannot stop the rising tide of communal politics. A broad secular agenda based on socio-economic transformation of India is required to confront communal forces in Indian politics. The Janata Dal politics was based on short cuts to deal with the immediate political situation created by the BJP. The ideology of communalism cannot be challenged by adopting short-cuts based on compromises.

5

Making Sense of the Election

Javeed Alam

One of the key features of the elections in India, at least up to 1984, has been their tendency to insulate the political system from the contradictions existing in society. The popular struggles, the agitations of mass and class organizations of various radical political parties and other mass movements which were propelled by the social and economic contradictions specific to Indian society had a parallel political existence as against the aggregated forms of institutionalized political power via electoral outcomes.

The insulation of the political system from electoral outcomes was clearly reflected in the period between any two elections when people who had voted a party to power would struggle against their own chosen government with no holds barred. The size of victory or the depth of electoral support had no relation with the intensity of the popular agitations. The landslide victory of Indira Gandhi in 1971 on the populist *Garibi Hatao* slogan saw the most massive assault on the organized power of the Indian state resulting in the imposition of the Emergency.

The decisive defeat of the authoritarian regime and the unequivocal support to the Janata Party and its allies on the slogan of the restoration of democracy soon saw society and polity on a collision course once again. The parallel existence of these two levels of policies and their antagonistic relationship had two consequences. First, it was the source of an incongruence be-

tween the institutionalized nature of power resulting from elections vis-a-vis the social processes of politics. Electoral outcomes got mediated by modes of standardization of the individual voting preferences of ordinary people which were marked by an urge to see things changing for the better—a little here and a little there—in the conditions of their social existence; electoral outcomes thus reflected a deflection of popular preferences into confirmation of existing arrangements of power.

This also gave rise, secondly, to a high degree of stability at the apex of the political system coexisting with chronic instability at various micro levels of society; the butchery of Harijans, the assault on women, the disenfranchisement of the other vulnerable sections together with the pervasiveness of popular struggles were all a part of the stable political order; the ultra-stable democratic political system, by third world standards, was marked by this feature.

The significance of the 10th Lok Sabha elections lies precisely in the fact that they have destroyed this insularity of the political system; and, I believe, in a terminal way. Indications towards this were already visible in the outcome of the 1989 polls. But the developments between August and November 1990, the Mandal and Mandir-Rath Yatra between them spelled the doom of the system as we had till then known it. They posed irreconcilable issues in such stark antagonism that the political system as perfected by Nehru was not capable of coping with it.

The system is immediately faced with totally incompatible postures adopted by political parties and formations. There also is the situation of a minority Congress(I) government without assured outside support and the fact that the governmental power exercised by this government has little relation to the ground realities existing in the society. All these are perhaps going to characterize the system in the coming period. It does not seem likely that any political party will be able to command the kind of majority to which we had become used. It also does not seem likely that anything akin to the anti-Congress(I) electoral arrangement, as in 1989, will be possible against the BJP or the communalization of politics. All these are going to remain important features but are not the most important changes in the wake of the last parliamentary elections in 1991.

Crucial to what is happening today are the deep disturbances in the ground equations existing in Indian society; these are by far the most significant grass root developments following on the announcement about the implementation of the Mandal Report and the chauvinistic reactions against it of the upper castes. By disturbances in ground equations I do not mean the traumatic change in the relations between the Swarans and the Other Backward Castes (OBC). Rather, and with radical implications, I mean that the equation of *power and domination* which kept people subservient was shaken pretty drastically in the Indo-Gangetic belt, with varying potential for the rest of the country. How it will get actualized is as yet unclear.

It will come to the other consequences later, but we can here see what happened within the Muslim communities. There was a rapid change in the political orientation of the Muslims from one of *security* to that of *dignity* as the prime motivation in the voting preferences. Dignity also implies that one would like to view oneself as an equal while relating with others. The only sections of Muslims who remained partially immune to this change were those who had made themselves securely a part of the established middle class or the social elites. Therefore, in spite of the unanimity of predictions by the journalists and pollsters, Muslims did not go in for what has been popularised as 'tactical voting'. They knowingly voted for the Janata Dal (JD) even if it meant defeat; in other words, a victory for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Something worrisome did not worry them in the mood they were in. It seems to me tenable to argue that having gone through threats and actual loss of life and limb to the extent that they have, this fear did not matter any more as a key factor in their electoral choice. A change of this nature among the Muslim masses and a split within the Muslim community as between the ordinary people and the elites (who had carried the community as a 'bloc' for the Congress) may also, incidentally, be of some importance for the secularization of Muslims in politics. The transformation of community consciousness into communalism in India has generally been the result of interventions from above, which, in other words, means elite manipulation of dormant sensibilities, fears and apprehensions. Anyway, the change

in Muslim voting preferences is itself a result conditioned by the loosening of the equations of power and domination.

Let us look at this problem from another angle. How were the pre-poll surveys looking at the electoral chances? I do not intend any critique of their methodology but by catching on to an aspect of their analysis, I shall try to situate the reading of the electoral issues into the changing political context. Even before the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, the pollsters were predicting a *near* victory for the Congress(I) on the ground that the non-Congress(I) vote would be divided. The basis for making such a prediction was what is called the *index of opposition unity*; the lower it is the higher is the prospect of the Congress victory.

This kind of political certainty is based on the persistence of the previous pattern of standardization of individual voting preferences. The pattern had held on earlier but the poll pundits never asked: why does such a pattern work? They simply treated the pattern as if it were a causal law. The fact of the matter, on the contrary, is that the division of votes among the opposition secured for the Congress victories simply because the Congress had a secure base varying from a quarter to a third of the electorate. If this gets knocked off then the absence of opposition unity obviously cannot be of advantage to the Congress(I). On the other hand, the division of votes among various parties would equally obviously work in favour of any political party or combination which is assured of, by whatever recombination of dispersing blocks, of this minimum based within the electorate.

The rupture in the equations of power and domination, existing hitherto like a solid mass, created an uncertain atmosphere of shifting loyalties and allegiances among the voters, and given the cross-cutting pressures to which the voter was subjected, there was no way of ascertaining how preferences would stabilize. Moreover, when a split, however partial, between the elites and the masses occurs, the voter tends to become more and more inscrutable. Hence the BJP in UP with less than a third of the votes polled, could garner the lion's share of seats whereas in Karnataka, with a slightly lower percentage of voters, it could get only five of the 28 seats. Likewise, with around 40% of the votes, the JD and its allies in Bihar ended up with three-fourths of the seats.

What has been happening on the ground due to the changing equations of power and domination is the setting free of blocks of

voters previously attached in terms of allegiances to certain political parties. Now varying recombinations of these are taking place in terms of either perceptions of the possibilities of *empowerment* or concern with questions of *identity*. Empowerment and identity are now assuming an overlap with secular or communal as the basic orientation in politics.

Rapid movement of voters' blocs in terms of castes and communities, with implications of a radical nature for class questions, had already started taking place since August 1990, but they had not crystallized by the time of the 10th Lok Sabha elections. This was partly because there was little time for people to gather their experiences and calculations and partly because, at another level of movement, the near-complete organizational vacuum in places where inclinations were shaping up prevented these inclinations from being transformed into intentions.

Now let us look at a further repercussion of the disturbance in the power-domination relationship on the behaviour of Harijan voters. Briefly, wherever there was a powerful and united OBC upsurge, the Harijan voter tended to desert the Congress (I) and moved over freely to the JD or even the BJP. Contrariwise, in the absence of such a movement, the Harijan, being vulnerable as he is and finding no outside support to lean on, preferred to stay on with the Congress(I). But within this overall context of behaviour, there was significant variation among the Harijans. Those attached to land as tenants or share-croppers or farm servants, showed a greater propensity to support the Congress (I) than those engaged in handicrafts, who tended to float freely as voters but who had a stronger sense of identification with the JD.

Here we have a case not simply of community voting behaviour *per se*, in spite of community identification being quite strong, but the perceived relations of differentiated groups to the structures of power and domination and the possibility of breaking away from their constraints. It also provides us with a revealing contrast to the behaviour of Muslim voters. Whereas with the Muslims, given the persistence of their previous allegiance to the Congress (I), it was class position or socio-economic status that was the deciding factor, with the Harijans this factor was of little significance. What seems to have counted with the latter was the lack of dependence on others through occupational independence.

Large numbers of the Muslim masses may be rather poor and culturally backward but historically they have not been tied up in bonds of dependence in the way the harijans are even today. The shift from concerns of security to those of dignity and self-respect could therefore easily bring about changes in political allegiances among the Muslims.

The causal chains emanating from certain generic factors are far too complex and get mediated in different ways to allow for simple, unidirectional inferences about voting behaviour. It is not simply the complexity of the social structure but the history behind that complexity that comes into play in determining whether class or community variables will come to the fore.

Now let us round off this part of the discussion by taking a brief look at the OBC consolidation or the lack of it. It has been pointed out in numerous newspapers reports and confirmed by election results that, outside Bihar, the JD could not consolidate the OBC vote except that of the Yadav-Ahirs and the Kurmis, and that too, in UP, got divided between the JD and the SJP. It is well known that these castes are economically the most powerful among the OBCs. Whatever differentiation emerged among the OBCs, it was largely because 10% or so of the Yadavas and Kurmis have been upwardly mobile and have succeeded in making it to the class of rich peasants. Even then there are not many landlords among them—certainly statistically negligible. In this sense, even the most prosperous of the OBCs are quite unlike Jats. It should not, therefore, be surprising that if contradictions exist among the OBCs, they may have varied political implications.

But it is also of some importance to note that during the last two elections, symbolic issues could generate large voter solidarities. Hindutva and the empowerment of the backwards are precisely such issues. Just as Hindutva has created a solid block cutting across material interests and caste groupings, especially when the legitimacy of the state in India as the provider of solutions to problems of social existence of the poor is declining, so too can the theme of empowerment create powerful solidarities across differentiations among the OBCs. What led to the failure of the OBCs to come together was the absence of JD organization in most parts of the country including Bihar. But in

Bihar this absence was more than compensated by Laloo Prasad Yadav's astute sense of the rules of the game and his use of governmental intervention to mobilize the OBCs.

Moreover, it is important to realize that people who are oppressed, as most OBCs are, are not capable of self-mobilization (or self-articulation). They can rebel when pushed against the wall, but in the parliamentary arena, they need organizational support and some outside help to achieve clarity of purpose and unity. This is amply demonstrated by the experience of popular movements in different parts of the country.

If what I have argued is tenable as a set of observations and propositions, then the 10th Lok Sabha election represents a radical break with the past. Like never before, it has opened up the political space for new kinds of political contentions and confrontations. Old issues like secularism or communalism, democracy, rights of states vis-a-vis the centre, questions of national identity or nationalism will now have to be fought and sorted out on a different terrain. Old grounds of justification will no longer be available as viable modes of argumentation.

In this sense, even in defeat, this election belonged to V.P. Singh and the JD; this would be so even if the JD does not emerge as a powerful force in the near future since there is no way we can calculate the longterm future of any of the existing centrist parties. V.P. Singh opened up the political space by the shrewd way he posed questions of empowerment, equity, and social justice. These, in turn, provided the motivation for the mobility of the political forces within the new space.

To those used to stability of the old type, this may be an ominous development. But to those who can with hope and optimism struggle in unsettled conditions for some time, this space represents an opening up of new possibilities, of actualizing potentialities which have for long remained dormant in the Indian society. It is significant that this space opened up without any major advance by the left forces or new revolutionary gains. Revolutionary gain does not necessarily mean the capture of state power. In the present context, it has to be seen more in terms of hegemonic advances by revolutionary forces resulting in emancipatory consciousness seizing the masses when alterations in how power is structured become inevitable.

This clearly shows that the initiative for effecting democratic advances still lies with forces representing the bourgeois transformation of society. Within the stagnant, non-performing stability of Congress rule, catering to the material interests of the affluent and the psychological needs of the middle classes, the despondency the people has been broken. The credit for this must once again go to V.P. Singh. Whatever the initial motivations, the intentions of individual actors cannot be the basis of judgement, as they have been taken to be in this case. We have to take a consequentialist view of the situation. Singh has shown that in the parliamentary rule of the bourgeoisie over a society dominated by the landlords and authoritarian social practices, and dead-end created by Congress rule can be broken, limits can be extended and a vastly enlarged potential of social reforms can be postulated as feasible.

From those active in the left movement, a radical reassessment of possibilities is called for. Communists have for long believed that the system in India has almost exhausted itself and only a revolutionary breakthrough can release popular energies. Without going into the question of revolution, the consequences of the moves made by V.P. Singh show that the system as it exists today, in terms of its structural limits, can be filled with some new potential and hope. In this sense, the recent changes pose a challenge for all political forces: as much for the left as for the fascism represented by the BJP.

Here, a brief look at the prospects of various parties and their combinations is in order, for the shape of politics in the near future will be determined by the use parties make of this space. The Left Front has shown an amazing capacity to hold on to the ground it has politically conquered. It has not made any rapid advances anywhere outside its traditional strongholds, although there have been incremental gains here and there with the CPI recapturing a few of its earlier bases which it had lost while collaborating with the Congress in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Under the present conditions any major electoral breakthrough for the left seems difficult. The changes in the global political correlations with the collapse of the socialist system have put the left in a defensive position. Nor is there any chance of social and economic contradictions in Indian society taking a

turn towards class-based politics. But within these limitations the left does have an opportunity, though of a very uncertain kind. It can try to radicalize the space that has opened up. How can it do so?

It seems to me that the left—especially the CPI(M) as the leading party within the left force—its cadre and organizational set-up, has to overcome a disability displayed most pronouncedly during the anti-Mandal agitation. Wherever counter-movements of the OBCs or the Scheduled Castes came up as a reaction to anti-Mandal hooliganism, the left was conspicuous by its absence. The 'casteist' slogans of pro-Mandalites were obviously a political and psychological constraint for left cadres, trained as they are in the class idiom. But what is worrying was the systematic inability of the left parties to intervene in the situation on the terms set by the OBCs.

The left has shown itself adept at mobilizing people on its own terms. But during the Mandal phase it became quite clear that the organized left is not psychologically or intellectually equipped to enter into political activity when the terms of intervention — language, debate and activity are not set by them but by the oppressed themselves. This is particularly so when the idiom and language of discourse is fundamentally of a non-class nature. It shows an inability to enter into prolonged dialogue with the oppressed within the framework of received cultural categories and the related attitudes and predispositions of these people.

While such an intervention may not have a direct political gain, it will be of immense importance in bringing about an attitudinal and psychological change of a radical nature and thus take democratic participation to a higher level even when the institutional set-up of society remains unaltered. Together with the known form of left activity, this is one possible way of radicalizing the new space within which the left is inactively standing.

In terms of gains, the biggest beneficiary of this election has been the BJP. This is so in two senses, each of varying salience. There is, first, the fact that the BJP increased its strength from 86 to 119 and was second in other 128 constituencies. This is not insignificant because it conveys the message of its ability to be a ruling party. Secondly, in a longer perspective, the real gain for

the BJP is that for the first time it succeeded in establishing live contact with the masses. The other parties, through their front organizations and programmes of economic relief and popular agitations, have had a direct, day-to-day link with the people. The BJP had so far not shown any marked preference for this kind of politics.

Now for the first time since 1985-86, it has succeeded, through religion, in relating to people directly. Although it has always had a religious platform, it was too abstract until now. Appropriating Ram, the most popular folk hero, and identifying him with bricks and temple, blood and ashes (of Kar Sevaks), and chariots and yatras, the BJP has made religion highly visible and given it immediate public presence. This aspect of Hindutva may be highly potent but it can also be fragile. What, however, lends it lasting meaning and long-term significance is its equation with nationalism of a particular pedigree.

The BJP is trying, in a twisted and restrictive manner, to go back to the initial phase of the formation of nationalist thought in the 1880s and 1890s. I am not referring to the beginning of the freedom movement and the INC but both before and after that there was a parallel trend which tried to imbue nationalist thought with cultural content. This cultural meaning was distinctly Hindu, and of a restrictive kind: it tried to see the Muslims and the Islam as an alien presence in the Indian social and cultural milieu and, as such, politically hostile. This is the trend represented in the writings of Bankim Chatterjee and Vivekananda and later on in Aurobindo and Tilak and Lajpat Rai et-cetera.

Here, it is sufficient to point out that the BJP, while firmly grounded in the ideology of Savarkar and Hedgewar, is, in fact, trying to project its heritage backward into a more respectable pedigree. Given that Khalistan (Sikhs), Kashmir (Muslims) and the north-eastern border states (Christian) are challenging the unity of India and keeping in mind the historical memories of Muslim separatism, it is easy to see the emotional load of this side of Hindutva. With the declining fate of the Indian state, the crisis-ridden nature of society and the hopelessness of ordinary people, we have the right combination of elements to which the BJP can extend its appeal.

Over and above all this, there is a newly-found acceptance by the ruling classes and sections of dominant elites of the BJP as an alternative to the Congress (I). Large sections of those who dominate society have been joining the BJP, partly as a strategic move to tone down the shrill voice of communal hatred. This trend is strengthened by the influx of the Swarans into the BJP and away from the Congress (I). The BJP's unequivocal opposition to Mandal has, of course, facilitated this. But it is also noteworthy that privilege under threat is prepared to turn full circle into reaction to protect itself. Without overestimating its gains and chances, it will be foolish to write off the danger of an Indian version of fascism looming large over our society and polity after the 10th Lok Sabha election.

The Congress (I) has by now become, at least in north India, a party simply mobilizing negative sentiments against other political forces. If the BJP has not done quite as well as was expected then it is not that the Congress (I) has done any better but, that the BJP needed to be punished; or, if the JD is going too far in its identification with the OBCs or Muslims, then it has to be restrained: this seems to be the refrain of the voter to the advantage of the Congress (I). It is only in south India and Maharashtra that it has a somewhat positive acceptance, although even that is fragile and crumbling. This is because, in these regions, the political character of society is quite different due to the anti-Brahmin movements and prolonged reform activities, within the backward and intermediate castes. As a result, the non-Swaran castes have slowly but surely come to the centre-stage and the Congress (I) has been quick to gather their sentiments around itself.

Even its more positive acceptance in south India should not be exaggerated. It may well have lost Andhra, and possibly even Kerala had it not been for the sympathy wave due to Rajiv Gandhi's untimely death. The kind of sympathy for the dead leader, while inexplicable, was too strong a factor in its favour-a gain perhaps of 50 to 60 seats. Despite this, its decline in Karnataka, its strongest base in south India, was quite pronounced in terms of the votes polled. It is difficult to imagine how, with its all-round equivocation-'soft pro-Mandal' and 'soft anti-Mandal' postures, to borrow a term from Yogesh Puri-the Congress (I) can rebuild itself as an all-India political force.

Now, with the liberalization of economy, more so vis-a-vis international finance capital, and IMF conditionalities, the state will find it more and more difficult to provide relief to the people. Discontent within the peasantry due to the reduction in subsidies and among the youth due to the contraction of job opportunities, may become pronounced. Incidentally, the decline in the electoral fortunes of the Congress (I) began in 1980 with the first phase of liberalization. In a third world country with widespread poverty the state must control a large part of the surplus if social problems are to be handled democratically. And this is something which the Congress is bartering away in great haste.

Lastly, the Congress (I) is in no position to fight communalism. A mere ideological offensive against communalism is unlikely to succeed when the Hindutva ideological appeal has acquired a strong social basis in nationalism. What is needed is a social base on which a struggle against communalism can be materially grounded. This can only be provided by certain classes and social strata like the working class or the toiling sections of the peasantry and certain social groups, even if amorphous as compared to castes like the OBCs or the Scheduled Castes or Tribes who can be made to see the threat Hindutva poses to them.

It is precisely in this respect that the JD in alliance with the left parties is much more socially grounded. But this only provides an initial condition for a move forward and not a guarantee of success. The Janta Dal today suffers from four basic infirmities: it is organizationally weak; in terms of factional balance it is prone to dissensions and splits; it has yet to develop a decision-making procedure within the party which is conducive to internal unity; and above all, it has yet to evolve a stable set of policies and programme which can provide a long-term basis of support across classes and communities. In fact, between the 1989 and 1991 electoral platforms, the JD became two different parties; in the movement from anti-corruption to anti-elitism there was not even a link. It has to widen its platform. With the Congress now a part of the market, there is a need for a centrist party which can speak at the national level for the poor and those rendered vulnerable by the market. While Mandal will have to continue to provide a stable basis for organizing the oppressed, it has to be so

presented that it does not seem to be a card in the hands of the better-off among the OBCs. It should also serve to unify the oppressed among all the castes as well as mobilize the imagination of all radicals. The Janata Dal will also have to think about how to appeal to the working classes—these cannot be won over simply by anti-elitism—and women, the specificity of whose oppression, irrespective of the class to which they belong, has to be specially handled.

All in all, the political situation in India today is one of great uncertainty. Except for the likely persistence of a relatively strong support base for the BJP and the hold of the left front in areas where they are politically strong, very little can be said for the large area hitherto occupied by centrist politics. At this juncture, in the way forces are ranged against one another, it is difficult to conceive of democracy in India without a secure position for centrist politics.

In terms of parliamentary politics too, the national scene is rather deceptive. What we have in parliament is an aggregation of rather diverse regional party systems, each with its own peculiarities and discontinuities from previous patterns. If we deconstruct the pan-Indian reality, then in many states we have a two-party system or a polarized coalitional pattern. There are also a number of states where a third party has a presence which varies from sizeable to marginal.

The question is, how long can the present party situation cope with the kind of strains being generated within this continental polity? The signals emanating from the Cauvery water dispute do not seem to be very encouraging. The states, as they are constituted today, are becoming more and more important. They are acquiring a distinct political identity. They have more or less superseded the cultural belts like the Bhojpuri area or the Jat belt: unlike earlier, when these cultural belts had a certain similarity in electoral outcomes, the results in Haryana are different from those in western UP, or those in eastern UP from western Bihar. The state boundaries as gate-keepers of the interests and identities of nationalities that make up India are going to put a crushing burden on the all-India political parties and therefore on the system that is dependent on their ability to mediate these strains.

(Courtesy: *Seminar*)

6

Forces of Change Versus Forces of Status Quo

V.P. Singh

This is an article presenting the National Front-Left perspective in the coming elections. It is written by Vishwanath Pratap Singh, our former Prime Minister.

You will remember that I told you this government (led by Chandra Shekhar) would not last long. It could not last. It was a political oddity. A miniscule government was being backed by a party that had a larger number of MPs but was not accountable to the people at all. It was an unstable arrangement and had to collapse—and collapsed sooner rather than later. There was constant pressure from the outside on the government and the Janata Dal-S Government had to make a number of compromises during its tenure.

Now, the only way out of the political mess is to go to the people again. The people should express themselves once more. That is the only way out. Any other arrangement that may be contrived will further vitiate the atmosphere, opening the way to defection and horse trading.

The crisis has a political basis. Ever since I was elected in 1989 I have repeatedly maintained that we are going through a period of political fluidity and a re-crystallisation of forces is taking place. The Congress, which keeps boasting that it provides stability, is fossilized and is cracking up. It may not be apparent from the surface, but its base is breaking up. What kind

of stability will it provide? Stability cannot be provided only by numbers. The party had over 400 MPs in the Lok Sabha. Did that give it stability?

What we are seeing instead, is that new forces are emerging at the ground level and around us. These forces are exerting pressures on their leadership whether it is in Bihar or in Kerala, whether it is the BJP or the Muslim League which broke its relations with the UDF and the Congress. The situation is still fluid but there is growing pressure on every party that the deprived sections should also be accommodated. All this will create a situation of instability, there will be shifts and realignments and new equations will emerge to meet the demands of new situations until things come into sharper and clearer focus. All these changes are taking place at the subterranean level. Until it is politically expressed, many people would not even realise that such changes are occurring. The dynamics and the focus have moved to the masses although attention is still paid to what individuals or parties do.

What I am trying is to create a much broader platform than the party so that it ultimately builds no matter who is running the government. Whichever government is in power, it would have to address itself to the question of equity. It would no longer be linked to just electoral fortunes. What I am stressing is that the people have to be considered in their own right. They have to be taken as an entity. That is the correction I want to make.

The 60 per cent reservation has received the support from the rank and file of the party and is closely related to the party's thinking on equity. In the Janata Dal, there were many streams. People with a socialist background supported this cause. The Lok Dal has stood for the backwards. The Congress stream which joined the Janata Dal has supported the SC, ST and the minorities. And when they came together in one party, there was a commonality among them. It was the historical logic of the party. It is a recognition of the party's own historical identity. There is an integrative factor in our policy. Backwards and the minorities who clashed earlier do not do so now.

Our platform is positive. During my campaigns I saw people, particularly the poorer sections, come to our platform. It

is not out of curiosity that they come. Why would a poor man come and lose out on a day's wage? If he comes, it is because he identifies himself with it. The sacrifice that he makes in giving up his day's wage is the basis of our support. That is why I say that we are on a positive platform.

Take what we did on the Mandal Report. The media made it out as if we wanted a confrontation. But the fact that we said, even at that time, that we wanted to accommodate the poor among the upper castes also into it, was not paid attention to. There was a deep political game behind it. There were agitations in Haryana. There were agitations in Delhi. The boys from Bihar who were close to our political opponents kept the agitation on. Then there was the reaction of the media.

Today, almost every party is swearing by the Mandal Commission. Those who, one year earlier, never mentioned the name of Dr Ambedkar are now eager to have themselves photographed besides his picture and see to it that it is published in the newspapers. The various political parties have woken up to the reality that these sections were neglected in the organisations and they are trying to accommodate them. I see this as a measure of success of the stands that we had taken. This has happened because of the pressure that we exerted by raising the issue of social justice.

Now in the coming election, our basic plank will be the unity of the country, secularism, equity and social justice. The National Front and the Left parties have come together and they are spearheading the forces of change for those sections of society which have been deprived; while the BJP and the Congress represent the forces of status quo. The Congress represents the forces of political status quo and the BJP that of social and economic status quo.

But what is more important is what is happening at the ground level. Wherever I have travelled, the poorer and the socially deprived sections are coming together and uniting. I am sure this is going to express itself politically in the coming election. That will be the basis of victory for the National Front and the Left parties.

In between, various individuals will take their own decisions according to their subjective views that may make much news

and people will analyse its impact. This will give an impression of instability as shifts take place from one party to the other. But what these analysts are missing here is the most important dimension: the people. If you add all the leaders and all the political parties they do not make the country. There is a consolidation taking place at the lower levels.

Ours is a much broader concept of equity. It includes political equity, economic equity, social equity and cultural equity. Now what happens to a citizen after he casts his vote is that he becomes redundant for five years. It is a situation similar to that when you put the sugar-cane in the expeller. Once the juice is extracted, the cane is used only for burning. Similarly, a citizen is of no consequence after he has voted. Politically, this is a highly frustrating experience for the citizens. This is a part of our equity plan.

In the Indian context the federal structure is an equity structure. Now this is sought to be destroyed. Therefore, strengthening this structure is part of our political equity. Similarly, freedom of the press and the electronic media, the judicial reforms and electoral reforms are on the agenda as part of political equity.

In economic equity the most important thing is unemployment. We will have to have a whole economic package so that idle hands get work—not necessarily government jobs, for that is not possible. Also, doles cannot be given. Then, 70 per cent of our population still lives in villages and resources have to be directed there. Today, the distribution of resources is not equitable.

As far as social equity is concerned, women have to be put on the top of the agenda. The whole system is very unfair to them. Therefore, we suggested that in Panchayat Raj they should have a share. They should have a greater share in the decision making. Of course the condition of women in the society as such is very bad. Then, the youth have to be involved. It is a productive social force and it is the next generation. In the decision-making process we hardly involve them. We use them for political purposes. We tried to change this when we started the National Youth Council. Then again, on social equity we have to take steps to give respect to the Dalits. Similarly, Mandal is one aspect of the major concept of social equity.

Where cultural equity is concerned, the most significant point will be secularism—giving respect to all religions. We also have to remove the inequity in the education system.

Everyone has spoken about all this earlier but things have not percolated to the deprived sections of the society. It is because of the lack of political will of those who are in command. Now the question is: who will have the political will? The answer is: the affected people will have the genuine political will. Therefore, it is necessary to bring into the command system those who are affected and if we cannot bring them into the system, they should at least be able to have a major share.

Then, what is the command system? It is not only the Ministers, MPs and MLAs but also the bureaucracy which is the institutional power, and the political parties which are the vehicles of power. Therefore, the affected should have a share in all this. It is in this context that the Puri proposals have come. These proposals are not new. People have struggled and gone to jail for this. So this is going to be the main thrust of our argument in the coming election.

We are going to fight both the Congress and the BJP. Both are our adversaries. In the South, it will essentially be the Congress. In the North, where both the Congress and the BJP are present, we will fight both. In Bihar there will be no competition. In Uttar Pradesh again we will do much better than what we did last time when we got 51 out of 85 seats. But in States like Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh there will be triangular contests.

I have always believed that there should be two Centrist options before the people—the Left-of-the-Centre option and the Centrist option. If these two choices are available to the people then they do not have to look to forces like the BJP. And if a Centrist option is destroyed, people start looking at extremes. I think the Congress is going to be mauled very badly. I can't help it. But, as I said, there will be realignment, re-crystallisation and polarisation. And preceding that will be a period of turbulence.

After independence, the Congress was at the very centre of politics and the Opposition at the periphery. Maybe that was needed for a new country, a developing country that had just acquired freedom. But as the years passed, the country realised that it does not have real political options. It had to either sup-

port the Congress or allow power to pass on to some splinter or breakaway group or the other. The Congress on its part seized the opportunity and tried to build a myth that there was no alternative to it. Since this myth persisted for a long time, it led to a degeneration of the democratic process. The ground was laid for personalised politics, which bred an authoritarian style of functioning. This had an impact on the whole political process and the country since the Congress was the dominant party. The country had to pay a heavy price for that.

In this context the emergence of the National Front, the Janata Dal and the Centrist forces was of great importance to our democratic functioning. It helped to shift the political equilibrium.

(Courtesy: The Illustrated Weekly of India)

7

The Tenth General Election: Some Reflections

Jaswant Singh

I wonder where those two prowling policemen of Haryana Constabulary are these days? After all they were the guilty catalysts that caused the country to be launched prematurely on the tenth general election. That, we need to reflect, was the near farcical origin of this momentous event. Is there a moral there somewhere about great historical developments often having trivial beginnings?

The campaign for the Tenth Lok Sabha was slow to start. Parliament was dissolved on March 12. It was not until the third week of May that the first-round votes were cast. Political parties and candidates had, therefore, plenty of time to reflect, to prepare and to join battle.

The BJP was early off the mark, whereafter, in sheer campaign management, it could never be caught. Respective party planks also got established early. And, they remained largely unaltered, at least for the first round of electioneering.

After, however, the horrifying tragedy of the assassination of the leader of the Congress party the tenth general election got fractured. That traumatic event had an inherent political autonomy; it influenced subsequent rounds and no political party could really counter that.

With predictable tastelessness the Congress(I) tried to exploit the tragedy. It was pitifully inadequate even in this ques-

tionable venture, as it had been about its principal electoral planks: Of "stability" and the charismatic personality of its late leader. It became apparent early in the campaign, (what is now clear in retrospect) that these two ideas did not really gel.

Lack of Conviction

In any case, immediately after May 21, the promise of stability and firm governance escaped the Congress(I), like perfume; the pitiful wailings of its spokesmen, about "stealing" etc. being of little avail. But the sheer horror of televised and pictorialised violence accrued to the electoral benefit of the Congress(I); some call it "sympathy vote." I do not know and cannot tell.

The Janata Dal punched hard at "social equity": an alluring thought, flawed nevertheless by its inherent divisiveness, but more by a debilitating lack of conviction about the underlying motives and sincerity.

The flood waters of social equality, alas! for JD, didn't really inundate the great plains of the "Aryavrata." Tributary rivers in Bihar certainly overflowed their banks, but what got drowned in the process was again the Congress(I).

Other constituents of the National Front ploughed their lonely provincial furrows and fought this great battle for India within the precincts of their respective parishes. The Communists lost Tripura, the second time running; lost Kerala too, but held tenaciously on to West Bengal.

And what of the "Samajwadi" JP? A nomenclature adopted late by a party that was largely an illusion. Ironic, but perhaps not without delicious justice that this rump of ministers of a dissolved parliament at that, ought to have lost their security deposits, so wholesale in the polls.

The most bizarre, inevitably, was the conduct of the Vice-President of this party who, in the midst of electioneering in Gujarat, abandoned his own party candidate and went unabashedly about asking for votes for a rival. "The very bassoprofundo of political bathos," a wag commented.

But then this tenth general election was after all a very strange election. The Chief Election Commissioner, fired by the zeal of his great administrative experience, was determined to conduct it in the manner and style of a no-nonsense referee. He blew the whistle long, and often, sidelined many.

Jammu and Kashmir was shown the red card even before the game had started. Bihar frequently got shown the "yellow" and shrill warning whistles emanated regularly from the dusty CEC office on Ashoka Road.

A Cruel Act

In his unrestrained zeal the CEC publicly, and wrongly, ticked off the Speaker, an act of marked impropriety I thought. The President of the Republic, most unusually, also got involved and broadcast some wholly unneeded homilies on the virtues of a free and fair poll. All very perplexing.

Punjab, tragically, was sent off the ground, in the dying moments, a heart-breaking tale: of administrative duplicity and pussilanimity; of ill-judgement, and of arrogance born out of an absence of public accountability.

Just when this tortured State and its people were about to conclude the election, in a cruel act of unforgivable cynicism and whimsicality, the game itself was called off; just when it appeared that Punjab and India might after all win.

Early during the JD government of 1989, it blundered on a kidnapping in Kashmir; its ultimate nemesis originated from this one great foot-fault. The Congress(I) Government of 1991 has, I believe, sown a similar seed, this time in the context of Punjab, and also as its first political act of great unwisdom.

The other unusual features of the tenth general election are by now almost all cliches. Of course it was the longest election. It was also a "fractured" election: The only election in our democratic history that was contested as two different games, (not just extra time); two campaigns pretending to be one.

In which context what is to be marvelled at is the great stamina of our electorate; they put up with all the political she-nanigans and trauma, and fear and disappointments, and yet turned out, in burning heat or pouring rain, in mid-May and mid-June to exercise their franchise. Reflect for a moment on the 70 per cent turnout in Kerala, in the monsoon of that State; or Assam for its 65 per cent in its torrents: All very humbling.

I am also struck by the thought that no commentary has so far reflected on the absurdity of our election law; on the particular dishonesty of the current one, in which candidates having al-

ready spent their permitted amounts were required to fight a second election without any corresponding hike in the expenditure limits. Or is that a native reflection?

The tenth general election was without doubt the most violent ever. Need one catalogue all the horrors yet again? Not really, except to observe how coarsened our sensibilities have become. How casually we took the great train killings of Punjab; or the foul murder of the gentle, genial and four-term MP, Ishwar Chaudhury, the BJP candidate in Gaya.

Common wisdom terms it as a "hung Parliament", this tenth one; the election itself is called "indecisive." I disagree about the latter. Conceptually, it was an election of significant clarity and decision. It has turned the ship of state in a different direction, perhaps irrevocably.

It was an historic election, though as yet we do not entirely recognise it to be so, largely because great events in history do not necessarily get delivered as tidy, packaged bundles. It was a "high-tech" election. Aeroplanes and helicopters criss-crossed our air space with reckless abandon, the supposed prime-ministerial advantage of sole use of IAF aircraft finally blown.

The competent team of BJP politico-technocrats, from their Delhi office, stole not only the Congress(I) plank of stability but also of election publicity, of management techniques and of efficiency. It beat the richest political party of the land at the latter's own specialisation, and at a fraction of the cost. Rightly, one of the architects of this success asserted, "We are currently the market leaders."

Long Marathon

The high-tech of this election came to its epitome in the Pranoy Roy-Vinod Dua team's detailed analysis as results began to pour in. That brought out vividly the totality of this exciting experiment with our own version of democracy. On everyone's doorstep, even as winsome ladies, of this duo lanced dusty warriors of the campaign with shafts of questions, the flavour, the dust, the excitement, the heat, disappointment and of course the exultation of victory reached all.

It was an exciting election until the game was called off in May. Thereafter it became an apathetic election; candidates got

fatigued, their teams weary, the voter tired, if not often revolted. "The second election" therefore became a test of stamina, of resources, of flagging wind.

It became a very long marathon in the heat of high summer where temperatures in constituencies like Chittorgarh went up to 50°C. And what a very great achievement (and relief) that it all finally got concluded. India, on the shoulders of its great electorate, as it always does, bumbled through.

Who are the winners and who are the losers? I think *The Economist* has got it better than most others: It reports it as the "Winner Came Second." That really quite sums it up. The only true winner of this election is the BJP.

Rather than supplementing that statement with by now unnecessary statistics, let us recognise the core; the great conceptual change that the BJP leadership has already brought about in the country. Future commentary on this election will no doubt reflect that this event changed the strategic parameters of political debate, and political activism, within the country.

The BJP achieved success through a positive vote, on the strength of its political agenda. Of course, that generated heat and controversy, but that is altogether a different point. However much of media, including the venerable "Beeb", continue to call the BJP as a "right-wing Hindu party", "fundamentalist", etc., etc. The essence of the debate has got transformed; the constituency of the BJP established.

The Great Divide

Conceptually, the BJP questioned the entire Nehruvian legacy, openly and boldly; and for the first time. This entire inherited package of "centralised" polity, of centralised planning, the economic control, of the sheer irrelevance of the illusory grandeur of non-alignment, and this blind unreasoning subscription to "Hindu" being a dirty word.

In that sense the tenth general election is a great divide. "Ram, Roti and Insaaf", to BJP's detractors was a communal plank. Doughtily, the BJP rejected the slur; asserting instead of renascent Hindu nationalism. What after all is this Indian, Hindu Bhartiya, nationalism? This question has come to the forefront of our political debate.

In consequence, the BJP has taken the leadership of ideas in the country; it is setting the political agenda of the future. It has demonstrated its geographical spread from Jammu to Mangalore and from Somnath to Kamakhyamata. That is the measure and extent of its political success. Numbers, thereafter, are a mere arithmetical exercise in tabulation.

That is why the present Parliament has yawning faults of concept and structure. The arithmetic of its internal arrangements is inherently unstable, primarily because it is not in harmony with the broad conceptual flow of the mainstream (yes, the mainstream) of current Indian political thought.

That is also why the present "government" comes across as being a team of such improbables: an uninspiring lot; of sad, weary faces, of the day before yesterday, pretending as if nothing has changed, merely a two-year gap from office, chair and files. This is a catatonic state of self-delusion.

Monsoon clouds already thunder over India. Will the cracks in the structural edifice of this arrangement, both inside Parliament and out, hold against the impending rain of events? I cannot, in any honesty, say that I am sanguine.

(Courtesy: *Indian Express*)

Why BJP Has Become Respectable

Prem Shankar Jha

Newspaper reports from correspondents who often have difficulty in distinguishing fact from wishful fancy, are not the best mirror in which to study the prospects of various political parties in a general election. But the consensus in the press is so overwhelming that it is difficult to deny the existence of a mounting wave of support for the Bhartiya Janata Party. Nowhere is this more marked than in the middle class of the country and nowhere is its presence more surprising than in what might be termed the 'old' middle class—higher civil servants, officers of the armed forces, professionals, managers of business concerns, and the first generation owner-managers of Indian industry, the Tatas, Birlas, Wadias and others, who are not communal in their outlook and often are not even Hindus.

The shift in the loyalty of the elite is surprising because most of its members are aware, or can easily deduce, if they do wish, the fatal flaw in the BJP's vision of India's future.

In brief it is this: While the BJP invites all Indians to free themselves, individually, from the shackles of caste, and religion, and join the greater, homogenised, modern society, represented by 'Hindu Rashtra,' it has no alternative vision for India that can accommodate the minorities and, for that matter, the lower

castes if, perversely, they insist on clinging to their old identities. Its only prescription to cope with this eventuality is coercion. The unenlightened must be forced to be free. It does not need much imagination to see that this road ends in authoritarianism, the death of democracy and, given the ethnic diversity of the Indian State, to its disintegration.

The behaviour of the elite is all the more surprising because of its passionate commitment to Gandhian-Nehruvian ideals in the past. But this anomaly serves to highlight the fact that the BJP does not owe its sudden rise in popularity to the way it has exploited Hindu communal sentiments over the Rama Janmabhoomi dispute, or to the appeal of its seemingly modern, albeit unattainable, vision of India. A third, important, force is clearly at work.

Result of Disenchantment

The clue to its nature is given by the very strength of the old former attachment of the middle class to the Gandhian-Nehruvian ideals. Its abrupt change of heart is the result of a profound, growing disappointment with it, and a creeping despair about the future of India. In short, the third force is nationalism — not the stupid jingoism of the urban lower middle class, but the enlightened national aspirations of the elite and the intelligentsia.

At the time of Independence, and for about two decades thereafter, this was the only class with a sufficiently all-India character to identify itself with the concept of 'India' as distinct from the casteist, ethnic, linguistic and religious groups of which it was made up. Being itself a product of Western education, it recognised in Gandhiji's egalitarianism and Nehru's secularism, the imprint of the West. These then, were the modernising ideals, enshrined in our democracy, that the old middle class made its own, in the belief that they would take the nation forward, and enable it to hold its head high in the councils of the world. But over 43 years of independence this dream has soured. To them the India that has actually come into being, appears riddled with corruption, inward-looking and inefficient; its people self-seeking, unprincipled, and undisciplined.

Tentacles of Corruption

Corruption has reached such staggering proportions that most people no longer even notice it. Whether you wish to sell a new weapon system to the Ministry of Defence or collect your pension, money must change hands first. There is almost no one left, from politicians and civil servants to judges and policemen, who is 'not for sale.' Justice has been delayed to the point where it has ceased to exist. Convicted murderers walk the streets, out on bail pending the hearing of an unending series of appeals till they die comfortably of old age. Civil suits take as long as a generation to settle and copyrights are flouted at will not because laws to protect them do not exist, but because there is no way of enforcing them within a meaningful period of time.

In the rising din of battle between sectional interests, the voice of the nation, and of the poor, goes unheard. Farmers insist on higher procurement prices, but refuse to repay their loans; the organised working class secures increases in real wages unrelated to productivity; employers concede these demands because they know that in an economy of permanent shortages, they can pass the cost increases on to the helpless consumer. Subsidies on exports, on higher education, on electricity, on petroleum products and so on, have reached astronomical levels. The beneficiaries are mostly the better off, who have the influence or the muscle power to get a soft, eminently corruptible, government to do its bidding.

Over the years, the networks of graft have interlocked themselves to create a single overarching web of corruption that spans the whole of society and is strangling it to death. Its members are the middlemen who have made the siphoning of government funds into private pockets a fine art. To this new class no rules apply — everything from embezzlement to murder can be condoned. More and more of its members are now valued members of the main political parties — Robin Hood characters who use a fraction of their ill-gotten gains to do 'social work' and win the grudging endorsement of the voters.

Enormous fortunes have been made out of poor society. Black money abounds and the vulgar, ostentatious life style it has given rise to offends the sensibilities of the upper middle class,

the intelligentsia, most of all. In all this confusion, the modernising impulse imparted to society by Gandhiji and Nehru has been lost. The economy is inward looking and inefficient and, therefore, remains poor. In the global race for development, India is falling inexorably further behind.

Finally, the political system built in the last four decades has failed to cope with the challenges of secession and insurgency, and is, therefore, seen as incapable of ensuring the nation's unity. There is thus very little to be proud of in the country's record since Independence.

What has pushed the upper middle class over the brink, and made it reject the Gandhiji-Nehru model, is its loss of faith in the Indian political system's capacity to reform itself. For two decades it had looked to new leaders — Indira Gandhi in 1971, the Janata party in 1977, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi in 1984 and Mr. V.P. Singh in 1989 — to reform the system, introduce a modicum of accountability in the bureaucracy and law courts, reduce corruption to bearable limits, and give the economy a more outward looking face. But it has been severely disappointed each time. The middle class is therefore convinced that the system is stronger than the individuals who try to reform it, and must, therefore, be changed.

Changing the System

Its growing disillusionment was reflected in increasingly frequent calls to replace the parliamentary with a presidential form of government and a barely suppressed hankering for a spell of military rule to 'set things right'. When the BJP, with its disciplined RSS core, its relative incorruptibility, and its seductive offer of another, seemingly modern vision for India, appeared as an alternative, a large segment of the middle class opted for it.

But its disenchantment with the present system has blunted its perceptions and opened the way to self-delusion. There is, in fact, more than a passing resemblance between the way that the Indian upper middle class is convincing itself of the virtues of the BJP today and the way in which large segments of the German upper middle class bought Hitler's dream of national resurgence in the Thirties.

To take corruption first, the elite has blinded itself to the fact, revealed by the mammoth VHP rally in Delhi and the seemingly inexhaustible funds at the BJP's disposal in the election campaign, that the BJP is financed overwhelmingly by the trading community of the country — a community that pays very few taxes and operates to a great extent in the parallel black economy. When the party's financial backbone is corrupt and can only sustain itself by bribing thousands of sales tax and income tax officers, how long will the party as a whole remain free of the all pervading tentacles of corruption?

Marx's Pointer

For that matter, how will a party that draws most of its active members from small business and trade adopt liberal economic policies that encourage competition and efficiency? As Marx pointed out more than a century ago the small manufacturers and traders will be the first to succumb to the onslaught of the large integrated multi-product enterprises and supermarket chains. In Hitler's Germany, where the Nazi party drew most of its strength from the same stratum of society, its first action after seizing power was to impose a comprehensive system of licensing and permits on industry and trade, whose explicit aim was to protect the small man against the big. Precisely the same sentiments were echoed by the BJP spokesman, Mr. V.K. Malhotra, to this writer in June, 1990, when he sought to justify the BJP's attack on the new Industrial Policy announced by the V.P. Singh Government on May 31.

The BJP's model will not end conflict; it will only replace conflicts that lead to political accommodation with more bitter conflicts that lead to political disintegration.

Fortunately for the nation, the BJP's authoritarian challenge has come at a point in time where although it will increase its strength in the Lok Sabha, it will not come within striking distance of forming a government on its own. Thus one of the two main parties — the National Front-Left coalition or the Congress(I) will have to form the Government, possibly with the help of a splinter group from the other. Such a government will

be weak, but will nevertheless have to face the tremendous challenge that the BJP will continue to pose. The only way it will be able to contain the challenge is by showing that the Gandhiji-Nehru model of democracy can make the future better for India. It will have to make the bureaucracy accountable to the public, reduce corruption drastically, and take the economy forward at a rapid pace. It will do this only if it takes bold decisions, instead of finding reasons for shirking them.

(Courtesy: *The Hindu*)

9

Diverse Responses to Party Planks

Madhu Limaye

It is difficult to discern a uniform pattern in the results of election to the Tenth Lok Sabha. Three issues came to be projected in the pre-election period. The BJP raised the emotional question of the construction of the Ram temple and the so-called appeasement of the minorities. The NF-Left plank was social justice. And the Congress put stability in the forefront of its campaign. In the second and third round of polling the sympathy factor emerged with the stability slogan.

However, the results showed that the impact of these appeals, individually, was not consistently effective throughout the country. In the beginning the Opposition denied outright that the sympathy factor would play a role. But the results showed that the sympathy factor was quite potent in parts of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan and Orissa, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. But for special reasons it had no effect in Gujarat, U.P. and Bihar. The religious issue had its greatest impact in Gujarat and U.P. and there the sympathy wave made the least impression.

To find a similar example we have to go to the case of Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal in the 1985 Lok Sabha poll.

The sympathy wave generated by the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her own security guards enabled the Congress to win

an unprecedented victory, but this made no difference to West Bengal where the CPI(M)-led Left Front was a formidable force. Nor did it produce any victory in Andhra Pradesh where the popular resentment against the misbehaviour of the Congress was still running high.

BJP's Performance

The Janata Dal's social justice plank and its largely sectional appeal proved to be inconsequential except in Bihar. It could have helped in U.P. to some extent if the Janata Dal had not badly split in that State. It lost its base also in Haryana, Rajasthan and Gujarat as a result of this division. The decline of the Janata Dal and the dazzling performance of the BJP are the two most noteworthy features of this election. The Janata Dal had captured 144 seats in the 1989 elections; in this poll it has secured 53 on date. The BJP has not only maintained its strength, but has improved upon it.

The resentment of the Hindus had been fanned into a veritable frenzy in U.P. and Gujarat. The Hindu psyche has been pierced by the outbreak of terrorism in Punjab (of which both Hindus and Sikhs — but Hindus even more have been the victims) as also the happenings in the Kashmir valley from where the Hindu minority was forced to migrate. The Congress(I)'s *volte face* on the Shah Bano case and the U.P. Chief Minister, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav's excessive use of force in the Ayodhya region definitely hurt the ordinary Hindus. All this spelt the ruin of the Congress.

To find another such disaster in the history of electoral policies we have to go back to the election of 1926 when the whole country was shaken by communal violence. Of course, the elections then were held on the basis of a very narrow franchise. But the same factor was operative in U.P. and Punjab then as has been operative in the 1991 election in U.P. and Gujarat. It was the slogan of ban on cow slaughter in 1926; this time, it was construction of Ram Mandir. Motilal Nehru wrote to his son — who was abroad — on December 2, 1926, about the election. The U.P. results had been "nothing short of a disaster," and as to the Punjab, he feared that the Swaraj Party was likely to lose all the

seats. The Congress again met the same fate in the Central Assembly elections in Bengal on the issue of the communal award in 1934. On both the occasions it was Madan Mohan Malaviya who articulated the Hindu protest.

Shifting Allegiance

Another State where the Janata Dal has been displaced as the main non-Congress party is Karnataka where the BJP has won only four seats, but secured around 32 per cent vote. Here there was no excuse of a split in the Janata Dal, for an understanding had been reached with Mr. Deva Gowda. The fact of the matter is that the people of Karnataka have deserted the Janata Dal and have transferred their allegiance to the BJP. The factional fight between Mr. Hegde and Mr. Deva Gowda and the scandals in which the Hedge Ministry was mired have disgusted the voters.

Magnetic Hold in South

As far as the southern States are concerned the Congress and its allies continue to exercise a magnetic hold over the people. There was a virtual repetition of 1989 except in Andhra Pradesh where the Telugu Desam revival was washed away by the sympathy wave in the second round of elections.

While the BJP made a tremendous headway in U.P., Gujarat, Karnataka and Assam, it lost ground in Himachal Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh. In Maharashtra, too, its strength was reduced. Mr. Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, an adroit politician, was able to hold his fort against the Congress onslaught in Rajasthan. The vacuum created by the disintegration of the Janata Dal was filled by the Congress(I) capturing part of the spoils and the BJP in rest. In Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan the BJP has secured over 40 per cent vote and this is a good enough foundation for its future success.

The BJP spokesmen advance, from time to time, the theory that triangular contests always help the BJP. But when they are in alliance with other non-Congress parties; they seem to believe that the non-splitting of the Opposition vote helps defeat the Congress. What is the correct view? Triangular contests do not always go in favour of the BJP. It is true that the weak Janata Dal

intervention helped the BJP winsome seats in Delhi, but it ensured its defeat in M.P. and Maharashtra. Similarly, the feeble BJP intervention helped the Congress(I) in Kerala and Andhra Pradesh and the Left Front in West Bengal.

Miracle of Sorts in U.P.

In U.P. a miracle of sorts has happened. But it was due to an unusual combination of circumstances. First was the split in the Janata Dal, both factions relying on the same segments of the population. The second circumstance was the almost total repudiation of the Congress by the powerful upper castes of U.P. (They constitute nearly 20 per cent of the population in the State and wield a tremendous influence). The third factor was the exclusion of the Jats, Sainis and other castes, who have practically no representation in the Services, by the Mandal Commission from the backward class category. The fourth factor was the BSP, which took away some Scheduled Castes vote from the Janata Dal. In this peculiar concatenation of circumstances the most decisive element was the split in the Janata Dal.

Although official figures are not available, the voting percentages in U.P. in 1991 are like this: Congress(I) 18; the BJP 33; the JD 28; and the SJP 8. If Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav had not broken away and the Janata Dal had remained united, the miracle of a sweeping victory would have been performed not by the BJP, but by the Janata Dal. It would have definitely bettered its 1989 record of 54 seats and Bihar would have been repeated in U.P. But the personal feud between the U.P. Chief Minister and Mr. V.P. Singh and Mr. Ajit Singh ruined the Janata Dal prospects. In Bihar, however, there was no split in the Janata Dal. The Janata Dal-Jharkhand-Left Alliance held together practically in all constituencies. Further, the upper caste vote was divided between the Congress and the BJP. This ensured the complete victory of the Janata Dal-led front. The BJP could win only five seats — in some areas of south Bihar where the Janata Dal is weak.

The details of the popular votes have not been published. But it is believed that the Congress share of the votes in U.P. has fallen to 18 per cent from 31.8 in 1989 and the BJP's has risen to

33 per cent from less than eight per cent in 1989. Only in a politically deeply fractured State can a party win 50 seats on the basis of only 33 per cent vote as the BJP has managed to do in U.P. To give only two examples: in 1967 in U.P. the Congress captured 47 seats on a 33.4 per cent vote when the Opposition was sharply split between the Jan Sangh and the SSP-led front, giving tremendous advantage to the Congress. The same situation arose in Tamil Nadu after MGR's death, when cracks developed in the AIADMK and the Congress(I) refused to ally with Ms. Jayalalitha's party in the Assembly elections in 1989.

Shrinking Mainstream

What then is the future of the Indian party system? I had written after the Ninth Lok Sabha poll in this newspaper that in a badly divided society like ours, with its vast diversities, it is not possible to sustain two credible mainstream parties. After Independence, by slow degrees, the mainstream base has been shrinking. To maintain in the face of this unpleasant fact that there could be a healthy competition between two viable middle-of-the road parties — such as the Congress and the Janata Dal combine — is to delude ourselves. The Janata Dal combine has not fared well and this election has proved that there cannot be two strong centrist parties. Whether the Congress will be able to re-establish its supremacy — an uphill task in view of its debacle in U.P., Gujarat and Bihar which together elect 165 members — will depend upon how Mr. Narasimha Rao's Government and the Congress(I)'s organisational leadership conduct themselves.

Unstable Situation

The general elections have again produced a hung Parliament, the only difference being a much weaker presence of the Janata Dal. The Congress(I) can manage to have a working majority with the help of its allies and other assorted elements. Nobody wants another election immediately, not even the BJP, which does not lack the material means to fight it. Nevertheless, the situation will remain unstable. In the Assembly polls, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Pondicherry and Haryana had plumped for

the Congress(I) and its allies. The Left-Front retains its supremacy in West Bengal.

The absolute majority won by the BJP in U.P. casts on it a special responsibility. Will it seek to lower communal tensions and solve the Mandir problem through negotiations? Or will it adopt an aggressive stance and plunge the State into a conflict? If the BJP falls in UP and the Congress(I) falters at the Centre, I am afraid, the future of India itself might be imperilled.

(Courtesy: The Hindu)

10

Analysing the Mandate

Praful Bidwai

In some ways, the verdict is as confusing as the: interplay of issues in these painful elections. The results have proved psephologists wrong, thrown political parties off balance, and generated more analytical platitudes than any other election in the past two decades.

However, the deluge of figures and words should not be allowed to obscure a few major trends:

First and foremost, despite the incompleteness of its electoral mandate and the extraordinarily uneven regional composition of its vote, the Congress-I has clearly returned to centre-stage of Indian politics, albeit as a weaker force. The party is once again at the centre of gravity of normal, democratic contentious politics.

The BJP, the most potent threat ever to the democratic-pluralist-secular foundations of the Indian state, has been contained in a substantial fashion. True, the BJP has improved on its 1989 national score, done very well in Uttar Pradesh, even opened its account in Karnataka and Andhra, and emerged as the biggest single Opposition party in the Lok Sabha. But the party's performance has put paid to its fond hope of joining the big league, indeed its relative political weight has declined, as its isolation has become formalised.

The Janata Dal and the Left parties have shrunk in size — particularly the Dal, which is now confined mainly to Bihar and

UP — but their platforms remain relevant and will influence the Congress-I. This signifies some increase in the LF-Dal's political weight, despite their electoral performance.

Barring the more obvious, broad North-South differences, there is an extraordinarily strong State-level pattern in the vote which overwhelms most trans-State or regional patterns. UP and Bihar, MP and UP, UP and Haryana, Haryana and Rajasthan, Rajasthan and Gujarat, Gujarat and Maharashtra have all voted differently. And so has Tamil Nadu from neighbouring Andhra, Andhra from Karnataka or Karnataka from Kerala. These differences are not just stark; they are unique, and suggest a significant interplay of local or State level, and broader, national considerations in the voter's choice.

This election has clearly had a basically nonplebiscitary character, nationally and in many States. Not only has a binary, yes-no choice not been the principal opinion before the voter, the voter also exercised his or her franchise to achieve more than one objective, as it were. To the extent there was anything like a plebiscite leading to a consensus, it centred on rejecting the BJP's communalism. This is so despite the party's impressive performance in UP and Gujarat.

This should help establish one proposition fairly certainly: the election was based not so much on contention over Mandal, Mandir and stability issues — or the mascots or symbolic platforms of the principal contenders — as on their transformation, incorporation and (in some ways) subsumption into and under other choices or "real options".

For instance, the BJP probably did as well as it has done in UP not so much because its Ram Janmabhoomi campaign converted large numbers of people to its communal-political point of view, as because the BJP emerged as a vigorous political force in a situation marked by the virtual collapse of the Congress, the discrediting and marginalisation of Mulayam Singh Yadav's SJP, and the growing hostility to the Janata Dal from upper caste Hindus thanks to Mandal.

This is not to argue that the BJP's appeal was not communal or that the Janmabhoomi campaign did not help it strike roots at the semi-urban or *kasba*-level. It certainly did. But large gains in votes would not have ensued had the Congress-I, under a pusil-

lanimous leadership, not beaten an ignominious retreat in the face of the *shilanyas* of 1989 and capitulated ideologically to the BJP, while vacillating politically between Mulayam Singh Yadav and the BJP.

The BJP capitalised on the singular conjunction of circumstances provided by the virtual decimation of the SJP and the Congress; it became the most vocal critic of the Mandal platform and promoter of Hindu triumphalist bigotry. Its communal appeal — no doubt considerable among the urban and to a certain extent semi-urban upper and middle caste Hindus — alone would not have sufficed in the absence of that conjunction. When considered in the light of the fact that the BJP probably received no support whatsoever from the Harijans and Muslims, and probably the truly backward among the OBCs, the point should assume even greater significance.

Equally noteworthy is the simultaneity of Assembly and Lok Sabha elections in UP which probably served to enhance the importance of the State-level political vacuum which the BJP could claim to fill because of its display of self-confidence ("the winning side" factor). A similar reason has probably been locally operative on a much smaller scale in parts of Karnataka, which have witnessed a similar exhaustion of the Janata Dal and enfeeblement of the Congress.

The BJP has, again, done well in Gujarat not so much because of a *Hindutva* wave as because it reaped benefits from the collapse and dissolution of the Janata Dal in the JD-G and the latter's alliance with the Congress. More important, the BJP worked out its caste equations with the Patidars so comprehensively that it was better placed than anyone else to gain from the disintegration of the Congress-I's original KHAM base and the dispersal of other vocal caste votes, especially the Bania and OBC (Bakshi community) votes.

The BJP's rout in MP and big losses in Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh constitute a phenomenon of some interest. Together, they represent a severe reproach to the party from the electorate of all the three States it rules. The rebuke is particularly harsh in MP where the BJP has run an exceptionally venal, inefficient, philistine and corrupt government which sought to undo every policy of its predecessor that might have benefitted the

poor (a case in point is the nationalisation of tendu leaf trade), thus alienating its own supporters (in this instance, tribals, amongst whom it has built a base since the sixties). This is, of course, nothing new in the BJP's—rather poorly known—history. When in power, as in the Union Territory in Delhi, it has vied with every other party in corruption, skuduggery, factionalism and gross opportunism. At any rate the popular rebuke to the BJP is a fact.

The electorate has chosen to dispose of the DMK in Tamil Nadu and the SJP in Haryana in an even more contemptuous way. The fate of the AGP in Assam and the SJP in UP is scarcely better. Given the precarious electoral balances of Kerala, it is impossible to read rejection in a small vote shift (probably around two per cent) in favour of the Congress-I. In West Bengal, the electorate has solidly reaffirmed its faith in the Left Front. In Maharashtra too, the ruling party has won an impressive victory, but in this instance, Rajiv Gandhi's assassination has definitely played a role in raising its vote. The most spectacular affirmative vote for the Congress has of course been in Tamil Nadu, although the "sympathy factor" should not be underestimated in Assam and Andhra Pradesh either.

The Congress' victory clearly lacks mass. In only four States does the party's vote have a "bulk" character. Bihar and UP are not among them. The Congress has not yet been able either to rebuild its original base (upper caste Hindus plus core minorities), or to create a new one. Base erosion is an affliction that goes back a decade, if not longer. Rajiv Gandhi could avoid facing the problem in the exceptional election of 1984 and the Bofors issue obscured the phenomenon in 1989. It is only in the last few months that the Congress leadership has shown any awareness of the need to repair and restore its party's social base.

At any rate, the Congress party with its allies has formed a government which is about 20 short of a clear majority in the Lok Sabha. At the moment, it is difficult to see any legitimate accretions to the Congress from other parties. Such groups in the Janata Dal as might be willing to cross over do not seem to be able to command the requisite numbers. The BJP remains a political pariah. And the Left cannot oblige the Congress beyond a point.

Here it is tempting to see tactical shifts in the Left's stands as signs of "softness" and to argue that the CPM could go through a virtual reversal of its earlier role and end up supporting the Congress as an ally, much in the way that the CPI used to do till 1978. However, this is a rather sterile line of inquiry. There are severe limitations on how close the CPM can get to the Congress without damaging its own secure bulwark in West Bengal and alienating its cadres on a large scale. It is also not apparent why it should want to do so at this stage at all.

There are significant differences between the Left and the Congress on issues and policies—sharper than those between, say, the Congress and the JD. These are liable to come to a head on the question of the IMF loan. Equally important, the Left is bound to feel reluctant to extend unconditional support to a government not sure of its footing, but one which is to steer the country through turbulent economic waters.

The next year is likely to witness considerable economic strain and hardship, growing social unrest, harsh austerity measures under IMF advice and hence more unrest. It is doubtful if the Left parties will want to risk close association with a regime that presides over this. The likeliest course for the Left would then be to maintain some distance from the Congress and support the government from the outside for a definite purpose that is mutually beneficial, indeed, in the long-term interest of Indian democracy itself.

This consists in a programme to redemocratised the Indian political system by making it much more federal and open to popular aspirations and concerns; to resecularise society and to delegitimise communal politics while protecting pluralism and the minorities; to add a measure of equity to a pattern of distribution that is increasingly becoming perverse; and to undertake systematic reform of major institutions so as to restore integrity and credibility to them.

Such a common programme could become the fulcrum of a big reform project and the focus of cooperation between the Left, the Congress and the Janata Dal as well. Both the Centre and the Left have a stake in furthering the isolation of the BJP and inflicting a decisive defeat upon communalism so that healthy, serious,

normal democratic politics that addresses the real issues before the country can be fully resumed.

The present conjuncture provides a historic opportunity to make a beginning in that direction. To retreat from it would leave the field open to the Right—with disastrous consequences for the society, and for the Congress too. To the Congress, survival, then, should mean more than stasis and entail reform, progress, steady movement forward.

(Courtesy: *The Economic Times*)

BJP's Hindutva Ploy Gets Limited Results

Harbans Mukhia

The most striking feature of the 1991 elections is the regional variation of each party's support-base. Though the Congress has enhanced its tally from the ninth Lok Sabha, the increase in its strength from Tamil Nadu, Haryana and Madhya Pradesh has been offset by its virtual elimination from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Though the Left Front has created history of sorts in West Bengal by romping home with a thumping majority for the fourth successive time, it has fared very badly in Kerala where, on all accounts, it appeared to have been doing rather well and was expecting a comfortable majority. The Janata Dal has lost many of its Lok Sabha seats, yet it has done creditably in Bihar and even Uttar Pradesh.

It is evident then that no slogan or party or combination of parties was able to move the electorate uniformly across the length and breadth of the country, and that the regional image of each party determined the voting behaviour.

Killer Instinct

Paradoxical as it may seem in this hour of BJP's glory, this party appears to have lost out most. More than any other party, the BJP had sought to carve out one single, massive Hindu vote bank

across the country through a no-holds-barred campaign on the Ram Janmabhoomi issue. Almost every kind of resource was mobilised for this struggle carried out with the "killer instinct": from the moderate Mr. L.K. Advani and Mr. A.B. Vajpayee to the vituperative Sadhvi Ritambhara and Uma Bharati, from the enormous organisational acumen of the RSS to the VHP and the lumpen Bajrang Dal, not to speak of the thousands of *sadhus*.

This was clearly a do-or-die campaign with a far more sanguine expectation of forming the government than the normal overstatement of electoral rhetoric. Yet the results demonstrate not only the failure of such a pan-Indian vote bank to materialise, but the restriction of the appeal of the Ram Janmabhoomi issue, as a mode of political mobilisation, even in the Hindi belt mainly to Uttar Pradesh.

Indeed, virtually the entire Hindi belt outside that state has turned its back on this issue as a vote catcher for the BJP though perhaps not as a religious issue in its own right it follows then that it is the specific Uttar Pradesh situation, in the overall Indian context, that explains the electoral encashment of this issue by the BJP. Even in Uttar Pradesh it is not the Janata Dal, the original antagonist of the BJP in the mandir-Mandal dichotomy, that has paid the heaviest price but the Congress. In Bihar too it is the Congress that has lost out in the Mandal vs Mandir contest.

What seems to have set the BJP on the course of upward mobility is its expectations and their realisation, predominantly in Uttar Pradesh, is its almost unwriting emergence as virtually the only opposition to the V.P. Singh regime.

The opposition acquired political legitimacy as the regime in general and Mr V.P. Singh in particular began increasingly to be perceived as hiding the lacklustre performance and spinelessness vis-a-vis political rivals within the ruling party behind pettifogging clothed in high-sounding principles. The Congress was then lying so low as almost to have become politically invisible; the Left parties were going all out in support of the government. The announcement of Mandal by Mr V.P. Singh was clever in that no party could publicly oppose it; nor did they. Yet if implemented, the BJP would be the one party losing the most ground. It was only when the BJP's home constituency, the urban middle and lower middle class, began to express its enormous, though

unorganised anger at Mandalisation that the BJP woke up to the possibilities of channelising this anger by positing an alternative to it.

Indeed, the decision on the rathayatra came very late, towards late September and then hesitantly, for even on October 20, at the height of the yatra's success, Mr Advani showed willingness to suspend the agitation following the government's ordinance acquiring the disputed land and property at Ayodhya. Clearly he was unsure how much dividend could be derived from Ram. It is when Mr. V.P. Singh succumbed to the Shahi Imam's pressure and withdrew the ordinance within 24 hours that Mr Advani was left with no choice but to press on with the temple issue. The withdrawal of the BJP support to the government following Mr Advani's arrest on October 22 set up the party firmly as the only functioning opposition which had brought down a government that was seen by the urban intelligentsia to have greatly exceeded its mandate.

This image as the opposition came into sharp focus when the roles of the government and its chief adversary were being played out at Ayodhya throughout October but particularly on October 30 and November 2. Uttar Pradesh had become the battleground for what was on both sides purely manipulative politics. In this battleground the Mulayam Singh Yadav government was perceived as having committed many excesses where a softer handling of the situation might have carried greater popular support. These perceptions were no doubt magnified many times over by a hostile press and by the propaganda machine at the command of the BJP-VHP-Bajrang Dal-*sadhus* combine who were, in any case, operating in an atmosphere receptive to the wildest rumours.

Positive Profile

It is in this context that the BJP has benefited most in Uttar Pradesh though it has partially gained elsewhere too as the only organised political opposition. Once again the electorate, and the antipathy of other parties have assigned this role to it, though it was hoping for a more positive profile; once again, it might benefit from this role as the new government addresses itself to

awesome tasks on the basis of an undecisive verdict. But it seems evident that the strategy of creating a pan-Indian solidarity for electoral purposes has not worked and is unlikely to work as several commentators had warned before the elections.

Meanwhile, the Indian electorate, politically astute as ever, has for the tenth time sent out the message that it will not be taken for granted on any count; caste, community, religion, political allegiance or whatever, and that it prefers straight political alternatives to religious or caste identities while making political choices.

(Courtesy: *Times of India*)

The Reshaping of India's Polity

Bashiruddin Ahmed

With the completion of the elections, the process of reshaping the Indian polity has moved a step forward. There are clearer intimations of the nature and direction of change in the system this time than was the case at the end of the 1989 elections. The latter had simply undermined whatever certainties were associated with the configuration of political forces at the time, aggravating our concerns and anxieties about the country's political future in the process. These will continue to exist to some extent till there are unmistakable signs of the emergence of some durable systemic parameters and above all of a more enduring party configuration.

We are probably still in the penultimate phase in this regard. But the broad contours are now discernible. The party system that is taking shape will, more likely than not, be characterised by a more balanced distribution of political weight among and between the political formations not only in the States, where in many cases it already exists, but also in the competition for power at the Centre.

The failure of the Congress in two consecutive elections to obtain a majority of seats in Parliament and to reverse the decline in its overall share of votes is a significant pointer in this regard. If there were any doubts earlier that the phase of Congress dominance is over, the elections have produced some more telling

evidence of the change in the position of the Congress. In both UP and Bihar where the process of Congress enfeeblement has now been apace for quite some time, the party has ultimately been reduced to a dire state. The Mandal and Mandir issues have produced a realignment of support in the electorate in these two States at the expense of the Congress. The Congress may fare better in a future election in both States than it has this time. The electorate remains volatile in its loyalties. But even so a substantial and enduring improvement in the electoral fortunes of the Congress will not be easy till it regains its support among the Upper Castes, the Muslims and elements of its vote bank in both UP and Bihar.

While the overall diminution of the Congress strength is difficult to ignore, it is equally important to recognise that the Congress is here to stay now that it has turned in a better performance than it had in the 1989 elections. A failure to do so would have, in all likelihood, proved fatal. And, though the Congress now is no longer the dominant party it will continue, because of its persisting size and social spread, to be the first among equals in our party-system as the latter moves into a new phase. However, what could change this scenario is the failure of the leadership in the post-Rajiv period to maintain the internal cohesion of the party by properly balancing the different groupings and interests in it. Doing so will be particularly critical now when no one leader in the party is greater in stature than another, nor are the mechanisms of democratic functioning of the party yet in operation or fully in place. But should no internal upheaval occur within the party the favourable scenario sketched above should hold.

Another element of change relates to a more rational structuring of the party-space at the national level. There is the Congress, with some of its strength pared off, in the Centre flanked on the right by the BJP and on the left by the National Front / Left Front alliance. Between them, the three political formations now represent virtually the totality of all major and minor political groups and tendencies in the country's politics. This process, of course, has been afoot for a long time. With anti-Congressism as its mainspring, it has passed through different phases. The primary focus in the initial stages was on preventing the division of

non-Congress votes and then on an agenda of institutional reforms, with the Centre-State relations at its core, basically to protect the positions of power the various parties had obtained in the States. *And now, following the sharp divisions that emerged within the ranks of non-Congress parties on the issues of social equity and secularism in the last quarter of 1990, a sorting out of the non-Congress parties on the ideological lines noted above has taken place.*

It is too early in the day to regard the new configuration of the party-space as an enduring aspect of the reshaping of India's polity. Should this configuration persist over the next election or two then, of course, it will be appropriate to do so. But whether the emergent configuration remains the same or changes in the next few years, the distribution of power involved in the system now can be expected to have a salutary impact on both the micro and macro levels of politics and governance in the country. Given the possibility of easy entry and exit from power, because of the growing competitiveness in the political system, it is now in the interest of all major formations to act with restraint and enlightened self-interest. *The new-found eagerness of the two non-Congress formations to sit in the Opposition, their readiness to allow a Congress Party which is short of a majority to form the Government and the absence of a desire to curtail its tenure and the related willingness not to engage in political shenanigans are all unmistakable signs of the desired change of style in our politics.*

Systematic changes in a democratic polity do not take place in one grand sweep. They are almost always incremental, with one type of change in one part of the system triggering of some other change or changes in another part of the system. But till the desired change in the polity occurs in all its fullness there always remains in the system just enough free play for political expressions that are inconsistent with the larger systemic interests to manifest themselves. This is a possibility which should not be left out of reckoning by all those who mean well to the system.

Two additional features of the electoral outcome deserve attention. One of these relates to the BJP and the other to the Janata Dal. The BJP has moved from strength to strength in the last two elections. The dramatic increase in its votes and seats in the 1989 elections was partly

under its own steam and partly due to the seat adjustments it had with the other Opposition parties. But, contesting without the benefit of any seat adjustments this time, except for those with the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, the BJP has catapulted itself into the second position at the national level by more than doubling its votes and increasing its tally of seats in Parliament from 86 in 1989 to 120 this time.

However, the BJP's victory has not been a story of unalloyed success in the 1991 polls. It dropped seats in the States under its rule. The most substantial setback in this regard was in Madhya Pradesh, the largest of the three States controlled by the BJP at the time of the last polls. It also belied expectations of making headway in Maharashtra, instead it dropped seats there too. On the other hand, it registered spectacular success in both the parliamentary and the State Assembly elections in UP and swept the parliamentary polls in Gujarat. This was topped up by a major breakthrough in Karnataka, where the BJP is now the second largest party, and by the respectable gains it registered in other States like Assam and Orissa.

Such a mix of loss and success does not lend itself to any simple explanations. It calls for a separate and detailed analysis. *But it will be safe to argue that the Mandir/Hindutva factor worked, though obviously not with equal force everywhere. And, the party was also able to tap the concern in large sections of the middle class for clean politics and purposive governance. That is also, probably, why the party suffered the reverses it has especially in the States under its control.*

Given the size and spread of its electoral gains, *the BJP now appears to be well poised to emerge as another centrist pan-Indian party in the system. While the party is now likely to abandon its Mandir/Hindutva planks, its newly acquired position and the promise of further gains in the future are likely to invite moderation both in language and action on its part.*

The Janata Dal, in contrast, has come out of this election with *diminished strength and a rather narrow base, both socially and territorially. This result is largely due to the split in its ranks and the fall of its Government at the Centre towards the end of 1990. In fact, given these circumstances, the party's performance has indeed been commendable. Its leaders have shown wisdom by fashioning the*

National Front-Left Front alliance which has enabled their party to retain a degree of importance in national politics that its number in Parliament do not warrant.

But if the party is to emerge in its own right as a power in Indian politics then it needs to fully tap the potential of the Backward Caste vote, or gain the capacity to mobilise support among all sections of society. To do either it needs access to power at the national level. The possibility that it will gain this in the alliance in the next elections is on present reckoning rather remote. The more rational thing for the Janata Dal to do in terms of its long-term interests is to go in for a coalition with the Congress in the first instance and then work towards finding a more durable solution and could link-up the social forces it represents with those that are at present reresented by the Congress. This will also be of advantage to the latter, for the Congress can only regain the ground it has lost in the Hindi-heartland by incorporating into its fold the sizable constituency which the Janata Dal has acquired for itself there. Such a denouncement could become the final act in the reshaping of India's polity.

(Courtesy: *The Hindustan Times*)

The BJP's Dramatic Rise

K.R. Malkani

Some people are surprised that the BJP has got as many seats as it has. Some others are surprised that it should not have got more.

Interestingly enough, nobody is asking why the communists have lost both, seats and votes, in the Lok Sabha election, and forfeited the whole state of Kerala. Obviously this is because the Left parties have never been a major factor in Indian politics. On the other hand the dramatic rise of the BJP in some areas and its marginal decline in some others, interests the whole country. So everybody is asking what is the reality about the BJP performance.

The reality here is that the BJP expected to get around 150 seats — and, with luck, even 200. And in that situation, the Congress would have also oscillated between 150 and 200. What changed this situation was Rajiv's assassination.

The assassination was not followed by the 1984 type violence. It was, therefore, thought that there was little or no wave. But evidently the wave was strong enough to give the Congress almost twice as many seats as the BJP — most of them at the cost of the BJP. The Rajiv 'ashes' and the Rajiv 'jyoti', led by the Congress candidates from booth to booth, obviously had their impact, particularly on rural women.

A few facts will make the wave situation clear. In the first phase of polling, the Congress vote in UP had declined by 14 per

cent, in the second phase the decline was down to only 4 per cent. In the first phase, the BJP vote in Madhya Pradesh had declined by 1.5 per cent. In the second phase, this decline was as high as 7 per cent. The BJP wave was too high in Gujarat and UP to be topped by the sympathy wave. But in many others, the other wave proved stronger. And so, in Rajasthan, in the first phase, the BJP got 10 seats out of 15; in the second, it got only 2 out of 10. But for the Rajiv incident, the B.J.P. would have very probably got 25 seats out of 25 in Gujarat. It would have got at least half a dozen more in Karnataka and a dozen more in Maharashtra. The cumulative BJP loss of 40-50 seats — and a corresponding gain by the Congress, made all the difference.

And yet, in spite of this, the BJP performance stands out as very good. In Bengal and Orissa, where the BJP did not get a single seat, its popular vote was as high as 10 per cent. Even in battered Bihar, it rose to 23 per cent. In Karnataka, it shot up from 2 to 30 per cent. And in Gujarat, it topped 51 per cent. Why, even in MP and Rajasthan, the popular vote rose. It was only because much of the old JD vote drifted to the Congress that the latter made a better showing.

A second question is: why did the BJP not do well in the three states it has been ruling for more than a year now? The party will no doubt go deep into the matter and take the necessary remedial action. But some of the reasons are clear enough. For one thing, a year or so is much-too short a period to make the necessary impact. For another, it was a disturbed year, marked by Mandal agitation, Mandir movement and the fall of two governments at the Centre. Thirdly, beneficial schemes like loan waiver and Antyodaya help only some people. But high prices hurt everybody. And although prices rise because of Central policies, the common people are not aware of this fact; they blame the government they see, the local government. For them, all government is one.

A bigger matter for the whole country to worry about is poll violence. During the poll period there were generally hundreds of poll-related murders. And then there was non-physical violence — things that violated the spirit of a fair election.

Here, Bihar of course was the obvious champion. Chief Minister Laloo Prasad had said he would not left a single BJP or

Congress man to get elected. He added that every winning candidate needed a certificate of the success from the returning officer and these officers were his men. Laloo was as 'good' as his word. He did not allow a single Congress candidate to win — though, in a free poll, Congress party would certainly have got 10 seats. Laloo's men broke open the safe room holding ballot boxes in Sasaram, the traditional seat of the late Babu Jagjivan Ram, replaced the ballots, and got his daughter Mira Kumar 'defeated.'

The BJP could get five seats only because some officers in Chhota Nagpur area stood their ground and refused to rig elections at Laloo's bidding. And honour to them. They are the salt of the administration.

However, in the rest of the state Laloo had his way. Here most of the staff appointed as returning officers were Laloo's men, either Yadavs or Muslims. In Bettaih, all cars of the BJP candidate were 'requisitioned' by the authorities and he was left only with cycles to do the canvassing! In Gaya, Ishwar Chaudhary, 3-times a BJP MP, was done to death as per Laloo's threats. And V.P. Singh, the synthetic saint, did not utter one word to reproof of his protegee Laloo's crimes.

Bihar of course was the limit. But even a law-abiding state like Gujarat witnessed violence under the scrupulous Chiman. Six BJP workers were murdered. Over 200 criminals were paroled — obviously to campaign for the Congress. And so when the poll was postponed, the paroles were also extended! In a scheduled Rithambhara meeting, 'a time-bomb' was planted. As good luck would have it, she fell ill and did not attend the meeting. But the police found the bomb. And when they destroyed it, the impact was felt ten miles away!

In Hyderabad, 203 booths recorded anything between 90 per cent and 102 per cent vote, obviously cases of rigging. And yet, these votes were counted for Qwaisi, and the Muslim Majlis man declared 'elected'.

Democracy is a political system for gentlemen. And infusion of goondism into it can only poison the system and discredit it. Our parties and leaders seem to be blissfully unaware of this lethal threat to the system.

(Courtesy: *The Daily Bombay*)

Battle for Ram: Issue is the Denial of the Temple

Swapan Dasgupta

At a time when passions have again been aroused by the dramatic revival of the Ram Janmabhoomi controversy, this time as an election issue, it may be instructive to recall Mohammed Ali Jinnah's admonition of Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan. Encountering the philosopher-statesman on a train in the early-1940s, the Qaid-e-Azam declaimed: "Radhakrishnan you are one of my major enemies... Because you have made Hinduism respectable."

It would hardly be undermining Radhakrishnan's sterling contribution to Hinduism to suggest that the mantle of restoring the self-esteem of an entire community has now passed to a politician. But if the events of the past six months are any indication, Mr Lal Krishna Advani has most definitely emerged as the natural inheritor of Jinnah's poignant back-handed compliment. Whereas Radhakrishnan (and others before him) succeeded in extricating the rich heritage of an ancient civilisation from the throes of the west's intellectual condescension and imperial disdain, Mr Advani has enabled Hindus to assert proudly that they, as a community, have a decisive stake in the governance of India. The BJP leader has, in a sense, made Hindu nationalism "respectable".

Saffron Resurgence

Not that such a radical and unexpected assertion has been without its share of spirited opposition. From the articulate, westernised intelligentsia who have correctly diagnosed this saffron resurgence as a fundamental challenge to its cultural hegemonism, to the centre-left political parties who apprehend their vote banks being turned upside down, the Advani challenge has been subjected to ridicule and abuse. Ironically, these have proved woefully counter-productive and the appeal of Hindu nationalism has grown in direct proportion to the amount of secularist vitriol. A political phenomenon that was, at best, marginal a decade ago, has today turned into a serious offensive for political power.

Opinion polls, carried out before the Vishwa Hindu Parishad effected its staggering show of strength in the Capital on April 4, confirm the stirring in society. According to the Times-MARG opinion poll, 42 per cent of Hindus in northern and western India endorse Mr Advani's indictment of "minorityism" by suggesting that non-Hindus are singled out for exceptional treatment. This response cuts across cast barriers. The same poll also suggests that 32 per cent of Hindus favour the construction of a Ram temple on the disputed site, with another 11 per cent favouring the status quo. However, an MRAS-Burke poll published in the *Indian Express* puts the all-India Hindu support for the BJP stand on the Ayodhya dispute at 54 per cent. Most significant, this poll suggests that the support is strongest in the rural Ganga belt, and extends even up to Karnataka.

It would be disingenuous to attribute this escalating support for Hindu nationalism to blind anti-Muslim prejudice. No doubt, there have been localised reactions to Muslim assertiveness over issues such as the Shah Bano judgement, the insurgency in Kashmir and the Gulf war, but none of these has by itself been significant enough to precipitate a counter discovery of faith among the Hindus. Mr Advani's incessant critique of "pseudo-secularism" has, at best, enabled a large section of the middle classes to become more vocal in their opposition to double standards and the unprincipled courting of minority votes. But far from being manifestations of obscurantism, the

demands for a uniform civil code and the abrogation of Article 370 are completely in line with modernist aspirations. By secularism, the critics of *Hindutva* have unwittingly added to the BJP's appeal.

Nor is it entirely accurate to attribute the growing popularity of Hindu nationalism to the widespread veneration for Lord Ram. True, the epic hero, in his role as *maryada purushottam* (ideal man), provided a vibrant national symbol with which to unite divergent Hindu sects in a common endeavour. But even as late as the *shilanyas* of 1989, the temple issue was not emotive enough to dominate the political agenda. The Ramshila pujas that were conducted throughout the Hindi heartland in the election year, enhanced popular participation in the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and enlarged the organisational scope of the VHP. But nowhere was it remotely suggested that voting intentions should be governed by the attitude of the parties to the Ayodhya dispute. The movement was by no means powerful enough to warrant such an intervention.

Indeed, the VHP leadership then pursued a policy of keeping the temple movement above partisan politics, a reason why Mr Rajiv Gandhi attempted aggressively to court the votes of Ram *bhaktas*. Reports from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar during the election also pointed to a considerable overlap between support for the Congress and the BJP. That Mr Gandhi's efforts failed to pay dividends does not alter the fact that as late as November 1989, the Hindu vote was not perceived as the exclusive domain of the BJP. The Congress remained an important claimant.

Basic Change

That the situation has undergone a fundamental transformation is obvious. At the *sant sammelan* in Delhi and at the subsequent Boat Club rally, the VHP leadership discarded its political neutrality and endorsed the BJP. It called upon its followers to elect a government of Ram *bhaktas* that would guarantee a Ram Janmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya.

The VHP's audacious gamble appears to be motivated by two assumptions. First, that the euphoria generated by the movement is strong enough to have a decisive influence on the

final verdict, in north and west India at least. Secondly, that the BJP and its allies are now in the position to make an effective bid for power at the centre.

What, in the past 16 months has contributed to this marked shift? The role of Mr Advani's *rath yatra*, particularly in the aftermath of the Mandal commission controversy, is undoubtedly an important factor. By undertaking a highly symbolic campaign at a moment of great social tension, the BJP leader created an unprecedented Hindu consolidation, the like of which has not been witnessed since the struggle for independence. The tremors of the *rath yatra* and the subsequent *kar seva* in Ayodhya are still being felt in the country.

However, while Mr Advani and the *kar sevaks* gave a definite focus to the Hindu resurgence, what tilted the scales decisively in favour of *Hindutva* was the nature of the opposition to the temple. Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav's gauche handling of the agitation is too well known to merit mention. But what needs to be highlighted is that the chief minister's adventurism was actively promoted and encouraged by the country's "secular" elite who have traditionally shared an aesthetic disdain for popular Hinduism. It is, for example, no accident that contemporary criticisms of Hindu nationalism have invariably invoked the authority of the Upanishads. The contrast between elite Hinduism based on abstruse spiritualism and popular religion centred on devotion to what a historian of Jawaharlal Nehru University dismisses as "rather primitive images of deities" in Ayodhya could not have been more stark.

Brazen Assertions

What appears to have compromised the "secular" offensive further is the underlying belief that the temple movement is illegitimate *per se*. Had the anxiety over the VHP movement been rooted in a concern for a 15th century shrine, it may have carried greater conviction. However, ritual declarations that "the mosque must be protected at all costs" are invariably followed by brazen and uncorroborated assertions that "no temple ever existed on the site".

The thrust of the enterprise is only too clear: the temple has to be denied at all costs. Mr V.P. Singh was at least clear on this

count. But Mr Rajiv Gandhi has shifted his stance from permitting *shilanyas* to admitting in a recent interview that *shilanyas* was a "mistake". There are also reports that, following an agreement with the Muslim League, the Congress manifesto will contain a categorical assurance that the status of all shrines will be that which prevailed on August 15, 1947. This implies that the contentious shrine in Ayodhya will cease to be a temple and revert to being a mosque.

If that happens, the temple movement will receive its biggest fillip. For, what has made Ram an election issue is not merely the cultural presumptuousness of an alienated elite, but the profound disquiet of Hindu India at having been denied the temple. It is this anger of deprivation that will be reflected in the elections.

BJP's Rise as a Mass Force

Ajit Roy

In electoral terms the rise of the BJP helped the Left Front by splitting the Congress vote, but in terms of more fundamental political interests it is a serious danger signal to Left and progressive forces.

The fact that the West Bengal polls, held before the Sripurambudur tragedy, were free from any impact of the so-called sympathy wave enabled the electorate to give an undistorted picture of the political layout of the State. A turnout of 70 per cent of the voters in what was by any standards a free and fair poll also contributed to bringing out a truthful reflection of the political preference of the State's people. After taking everything into consideration, the West Bengal Left Front's, and its leader the CPI(M)'s, performance in these elections has been quite impressive. As for the Front, it has retained the same number of seats in the Lok Sabha as in the previous house, that is, 37 out of 42. In the State assembly, it has once again secured a three-fourths majority with 244 seats out of 294, although compared with the previous house it has lost half a dozen seats. The CPI(M)'s tally also follows the same pattern. With 27 Lok Sabha seats, the position remains unchanged and with 182 assembly seats — five less than its tally in 1987 — the party as before enjoys nearly a two-thirds majority of its own.

The Congress has increased its strength marginally from 40 to 43 in the assembly and by one in the Lok Sabha from four to

five (only by lending its symbol to the GNLF candidate from Darjeeling — the same old imported nominee, Inderjit, the journalist from Delhi).

The BJP which contested every Lok Sabha and assembly seat failed to bag any. The Muslim League has lost the lone seat it had in the last assembly. Indeed, indications would suggest that the Left Front may have regained the allegiance of the small section of the Muslims that it appeared to have lost in the last assembly elections: it has wrested the Entally and Kavitirtha constituencies in Calcutta which it had lost in 1987. These areas have large Muslim concentrations. With the gains in these two, the Front has also improved its position in Calcutta city proper.

Most importantly, the Left Front have regained their supremacy in regions with a preponderance of industrial workers. This they had lost in the 1984 Lok Sabha elections and failed to regain appreciably in the 1987 assembly and 1989 Lok Sabha polls. They have now fully recovered their supremacy in the industrial belts in the districts of Bardhaman, Howrah, Hooghly and North 24 Parganas.

Among the major Left Front parties, the Forward Bloc has improved its strength in the assembly from 27 to 29, the RSP's position remains unchanged at 18, and both the CPI(M) and the CPI have lost five seats each. In the CPI's case it means a reduction from 11 to six, almost by one-half.

All ministers except four have returned to the house. Of the losing four, two belonged to the CPI(M) and one each to the CPI and the FB.

All these distinctions notwithstanding, the CPI(M) and the Left Front have really fallen behind the BJP in terms of relative performance. Indeed, from a different perspective it may be said that the Left is really indebted to the BJP, as quite a number of seats in the Lok Sabha as well as the State assembly have accrued to them only because the BJP has split the opposition votes.

Although, as mentioned before, the BJP has not been able to secure a single seat from this State, it has increased its share of aggregate votes in West Bengal from 5.3 lakh in 1989 to 35 lakh this time or from 1.7 per cent of the total to about 12 per cent. Since the size of the participating electorate has increased, the rise of the number of votes received by each candidate on aver-

age may not bring out the real dimension of the BJP's advance which is better revealed by the figures of the comparable depth of support in terms of average percentage of votes per candidate.

In 1989, the BJP polled an aggregate of 1.7 per cent of the total votes cast by fielding only 19 candidates. In other words, it secured 0.089 per cent of votes per candidate. This time it has got 12 per cent of votes by setting up 42 candidates or 0.285 per cent candidate. In other words, it has increased the depth of support by about 320 per cent. On the other side, the aggregate shares of total votes of the Left Front and the CPI(M) declined from about 51 per cent and 38 per cent in 1989 to about 46 per cent and 35 per cent respectively, with the number of candidates remaining largely the same.

The BJP polled over a lakh votes in 15 Lok Sabha constituencies, thus radically changing the bipolar character of West Bengal politics. Electorally of course of the CPI(M) and the Left Front can only gain from this development; it makes them practically unbeatable in this State, as a complete or near complete coalescence of the Congress and the BJP votes in the foreseeable future is practically impossible. Hence, this division of opposition votes makes the Lefts' electoral position very secure.

But in terms of more fundamental political interests, the BJP's rise as a mass force is a very serious danger signal to the Left and progressive forces, not only because its banner of militant Hindutva is a grave threat to communal harmony and peace, but also, and more importantly, as many discerning newspaper reporters have noted in their analysis of the West Bengal electoral scene, the BJP in the countryside has been able to establish linkages with rural social forces who have been adversely affected by the Left Front's not so radical agrarian reforms. It has, thus, become the focus of combined social and political reactions.

(Courtesy: Economic and Political Weekly)

The Power-Shift

Bhabani Sen Gupta

The aftermath of the election has left all parties, except the BJP, exhausted in body and mind. The Congress(I) is ready to fade away as the leading political force between now and the next election which is probably only three years away. The leaders of the Janata Dal are torn between Mandal and the middle class. The Left too is passing through a spiritual crisis. But in great contrast to the dilemmas in the camps of the secular parties is the climate in the BJP which, after scanning the election results, has come to the conclusion that the mood of the people is with it.

The tenth general election, the longest, the most expensive and the most traumatic in India's history since independence, is conspicuous for the contradictions and warning signals it has delivered. First, there is a minority Congress(I) government in Delhi which does not represent the ground realities of political power thrown up by the poll. It governs only one State in the north, Haryana, two in the south, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, Maharashtra in the West, and Kerala in coalition with a gaggle of other parties, and Assam in the east together with the cluster of six mini-States.

The Congress(I) power base in the entire Gangetic valley has been virtually wiped out. Its unrealistic strength in the Lok Sabha is the gift of an assassinated Rajiv Gandhi who, alive, could hardly have shored up as many seats. As Indira Gandhi gifted to her son, Rajiv, a Lok Sabha with an over two-thirds majority by

dying at the hands of two Sikh assassins, so did Rajiv Gandhi bestow on his party a near-win in the election by getting killed by a suspected LTTE assassin.

Rajiv Gandhi's gift is much smaller than what he had received from his departed mother. Even with that brute majority in the Lok Sabha, he could not press the political-economic system to desirable change, and lost the poll of November 1989. The Congress(I) is ready to fade away or collapse as the leading political force between now and the next election which is probably only three years away.

The winner in the tenth general election was the BJP, though it came second. In a matter of just two elections, the BJP has spread its saffron wings over vast expanses of the country, from north to south, east to west. It is the principal ruling party in northern India while, on the west coast, it has Gujarat in its net. Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh — one-half of India in territory and more than that in population — lie in the grip of the BJP political power.

Down south, the BJP got 29 per cent of the votes cast in Karnataka compared to a mere 3 per cent in 1989, while in Andhra Pradesh, where it had formidable rivals in the Congress(I) and the TDP, it snatched away 9 per cent of the votes. Even in West Bengal, the Marxist citadel, the BJP collected 12 per cent of the votes though without winning any seat. There is hardly a State or territory in India where the BJP is not seen as the party of the future. It has snatched away the government of Uttar Pradesh with 23 per cent of the votes, as against just 11 in November 1989. With 119 MPs in the Lok Sabha, the BJP is the main opposition party. But when you note that in as many as 128 constituencies the party came second, you are compelled to concede that there is a lot of reality in the BJP claim that it is 'the government-in-waiting'.

The Janata Dal defended Bihar stubbornly and well and came up second in the Uttar Pradesh, while it also held Orissa. But its rout in the rest of the country, in Gujarat and Karnataka particularly, showed that the cry of equity and social justice, holding aloft the flag of the Mandal report, did not draw the voters in most of India to vote for its candidates. The Left Front lost Kerala. Its fourth time running win in West Bengal was

remarkable, but there was a drop in its popular vote, and even four CPI(M) ministers were crushed. Among the regional parties, AIADMK triumphed in Tamil Nadu, cashing in fully on the sympathy wave, the TDP showed an impressive recovery in Andhra Pradesh and might have come out on top if Rajiv Gandhi had not been killed, but the Asom Ganatantra Parishad, split as a result of internal strife, lost miserably to the Congress(I) and will find it hard to bounce back to power.

Gloomy Prospect

It is the state of the Congress(I) that provokes gloom about the future of traditional Nehruvian secular politics. Organisationally it is still in the grip of the coterie whose current slogan is 'the dynasty is dead, long live the dynasty'. By succeeding in installing P V Narasimha Rao, who is more sickly than 70 and has been a faithful loyalist all through his shineless political career, as both party president and Prime Minister, the coterie has ensured that there is no significant change either in the party organisation or in the policies and programmes of the government. Therefore, of course, rumblings of discontent, fear and infantile protest in the Congress(I) leadership. Sharad Pawar's challenge to the coterie lost its breath in no time, but he has cleverly installed himself as the alternative central power in the Congress(I) apparatus in Delhi, while the resignation of Shiv Shankar as leader of the party in the Rajya Sabha has revealed only the tip of an iceberg of potential rebellion against the coterie-Rao leadership.

However, the history of the Congress Party is not exactly littered with instances of rebellion, and there has been perhaps only a single successful rebellion in its 100-odd years of history when Chittaranjan Das and Motilal Nehru broke away from the party in the 1920s to form the Swarajya Party. It required a man like Mohandas K Gandhi to acknowledge his defeat and woo Das and Motilal back into the Party. In the late 1930s, Gandhi ruthlessly broke the back of the rebellion of Subhas Chandra Bose, with the backing of Jawaharlal Nehru. The Congress(I), as the inheritor of the Indian National Congress tradition, is steeped in the party body's culture of open submission and secret conspiracy.

The aftermath of the election has left all parties except the BJP exhausted in body and mind. The Prime Minister is busy car-

penting a government that can win the Lok Sabha's vote of confidence and survive the political turmoil that will inevitably follow the acceptance of a large IMF loan with all its conditionalities. He has not taken the country into confidence until now about anything that is really important: whether he is anxious to build, and is capable of building, a consensus with the opposition parties on how to handle the grave foreign exchange crisis, how he is going to live with the minority status of his government, what his perceptions of India's political future are, whether the Congress(I) will be willing to work with the National Front and the Left Front to keep the BJP at bay at the next poll. There are no answers to these questions from Rao or any other authoritative source in his party, nor to the question whether the party is to be rebuilt through organisational election and, if so, how soon.

The coterie continues to plumb for Sonia Gandhi as party president, in which case there will be a situation of the *status quo* reinforced. The Prime Minister, never known for conceptual clarity or political initiatives, and for long politically homeless in his own State, has adopted the policy of enigmatic silence and passivity, which may be caused by unsound health, poverty of ideas and the large debt he owes to the coterie for making him what he is today in the twilight of his life.

The Janata Dal has taken painful stock of the post-election scenario. Its leaders are torn between Mandal and middle class as if there were a basic contradiction between the two. Holding Bihar was nice, but Laloo Prasad Yadav believes more in Yadav power than in the power of the OBCs, has done nothing to redress the pitiful condition of the poor and the deprived nor for Bihar's economic uplift, and so Bihar is not a State you can hold up to the country as a model of your political philosophy. Besides, the Janata Dal is the epitome of the lust for power of Indian political leaders; it can never be certain that its major factions will stay together under a single flag. It was broken and thrown out of office by the desertions of Devi Lal and Chandra Shekhar. Even now, Delhi is agog with rumours that Ajit Singh may any time swallow the bait held up to him by the plumbers of the Congress(I): the industry ministry, if you can defect with a full third of JD's strength in the Lok Sabha.

This move, if true, also betrays the total poverty of political leadership in the post-dynasty Congress(I). Once it begins to play

the dirty and corrosive game of defection, it will lose whatever little credibility there is now in the Prime Minister as a political leader, and throw its own flanks open to similar moves by party dissenters. In any case, if the government determines that it can survive only with the defection of a faction in the Janata Dal, it will shut the door on future collaboration among the secular parties to hold the saffron tide and to roll it back when the country goes to the poll again well before 1995.

The Left Front too is passing through a spiritual crisis. The loss of Kerala reduces the Left Front to an entity that rules only one State, West Bengal, in which the State CPI(M) leaders are not always in tune with the central committee and politbeauro leaders in Delhi. The CPI has not been able to expand its electoral base in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and must live like a junior partner of the CPI(M). The CPI(M) is tantalised by opportunities of finding an ally in the Congress(I), which was its long-time objective, but it is wary about giving up its linkages with the National Front. On the whole, however the CPI(M) and the CPI are the only two groups who will try to persuade the Congress(I) and the National Front in the months to come that in the new powershift in India the three groups must work together to save and protect Nehruvian socialism and secularism. The Marxists have pipelines both to the coterie and the dissenters in the Congress(I) as well as to Narasimha Rao who stands somewhere in between, his kurta-tails clutched strongly by members of the coterie so that he may not get out of their grip.

The Contrast

In great contrast to the dilemmas and despondencies in the camps of the secular political parties; there is a different climate in the BJP. The BJP leaders have scanned the election results most carefully and come out with the strong as well as weak points of their party's performance. They have come to the central conclusion: the mood of the people is with them. Not just because the BJP built a big agitation for the Ram temple, but because the voters all over the country see it as a well-knit political party, with clear and candid policies which often promise an entirely new direction to Indian polity. Its leaders are seen as united in political will and strategy and quite serious about what they say.

The BJP leaders are not unhappy that the party has not done even better. In private conversation, they concede that they are not ready at this time to govern India. They must erase from the people's mind the image of a Hindu chauvinist party determined to turn India into a Hindu 'rashtra' and reduce the 100 million Muslims to the status of second-rate citizens. They declare that elected to power they will not try to dissolve the first republic and set up a second republic with Hinduism as the State religion. "We will maintain the republic as it is crafted by the Constitution. We will not set up a theocratic State", asserted a BJP leader in a recent conversation. "We will give the Muslims security and equal status as citizens, with no special privileges and no particular disadvantages".

The BJP leaders know that two years of atavistic agitation have darkened the minds of its many supporters with rabid anti-Muslim sentiments. The use of obscene political cassettes in the election and the role played by such lumpen bodies as the Bajarang Dal and to a lesser extent the VHP are the leftovers of the election which the BJP will want to garbage in the years between now and the next poll.

A team of young men who managed the BJP election campaign with ruthless efficiency from the central office in Delhi have found that the party received the support of all segments of Indian society — from the affluent to the poor, brahmins to sudras and tribals, urban as well as rural folk. This broad acceptability of the voters has kindled confidence in the minds of the BJP leaders that the next election will catapult it to the centre of national power.

Meanwhile, it must govern Uttar Pradesh well and do better in Madhya Pradesh. The BJP leaders add, "We have to give better performance as administrators and developers of the economy. We have to show that the Muslims are safe in States we govern — particularly Uttar Pradesh, which is almost impossible to govern".

It will take the BJP leaders time to convince the mainstream of the Indian population that it does not stand for a Hindu 'rashtra' nor for politicised Hindu nationalism. The BJP's principal capital is the poor state of its political opponents, above all the bleak future of the Congress(I). Released finally from the domination of the dynasty, Congressmen and women should

grasp new opportunities to rejuvenate the party through organisational election and churn out new ideas to deal with the new social and political realities in India and the world in the 1990s. Even if many party leaders recognise the need, few are capable of summoning the political courage to demand constructive change. The 20-year old mind-set, spanning an entire generation, of supine subservience to a supreme leader has drained the spirit of democracy from the arteries of most Congressmen and women. They have been hugely diminished as political actors by Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. Few leaders have secured support bases of their own; those who stood on their own support bases were pulled down by the supreme leader. Now the Congress(I) is a prisoner of the binds created by its leaders since 1969. If its leaders cannot cast away those binds, the party will be reduced to a pitiful minority in the next poll and then one day it will fall apart into many mutually warring pieces.

The kind of leadership, gifted with strength and vision, that can rescue the party from its present paralysis is not in sight, Sharad Pawar notwithstanding. This aspirant to the prime ministership is still to show that he has a vision of a go ahead India, that he understands global change, and can mobilise manpower and other resources within and outside the party to build an India which is at peace with itself and on friendly terms with the neighbours and other foreign countries.

The Janata Dal is the first centrist party to commit itself to the backward castes' and classes' entry into the power structure and to make equity and social justice its main political planks. Since caste and class mean in India almost the same thing, the Janata Dal might have broken the resistance of the power structure to significant social change. In the post-election meetings of the national executive of the party, it rightly decided not to depart from its basic political ideology but to make additional efforts to win the confidence of the middle and lower middle classes which it lost almost entirely as a result of the huge hue and cry that followed V P Singh's announcement of 27 per cent reservation of jobs in the Central government and its industrial and other economic undertakings for the OBCs. North Indian Hindu society will not easily allow political power at the national level to be meaningfully shared by the sudras and the tribals; this society's

value milieu is still governed by brahmins who deserted the Congress(I) in the last poll along with significant segments of other high castes; in Uttar Pradesh, the Janata Dal was let down by its own constituency which it had to share with Mulayam Singh. The Dal and its Mulayam Singh break-away faction together polled more votes than the BJP. The BJP, then, can be contained in UP only if the other parties come together in a vote-sharing coalitional bandobast.

This will probably happen on a national scale at the time of the next election if, as noted, the Congress(I) takes no attempt to break the Janata Dal but determines to work with it and the Left Front to resolve the pressing political and economic problems.

Economic Crisis

The country has been debating economic policy issues for many years, but little has been done to make the structural reforms that are essential to impart growth wings to the economy. Two alternative approaches have been debated, neither has been undertaken. In the result, the Left-democratic solvents have lost ground in view of the collapse of Left ideas on a global scale and the triumph of the new god called Market. The political economy remains frozen in the barren middle between the two as corrupt politicians and a politicised bureaucracy join hands with rapacious capitalists to plunder the wealth and resources of the nation. We have arrived at a stage when the political leadership can summon the courage neither to work for the Market nor for the People. Reckless spending of foreign exchange began during the Rajiv Gandhi years; in the brief National Front interlude, it was compounded by populist ideas like loan waivers. Now the country stands dangerously close to the debt trap and *The Economist* of London gleefully forecasts that India's economy will soon be in the "safe hands of the IMF".

Since the economic crisis is part of the larger structural crises in the entire political economy, even a big IMF loan in itself will not be a solvent. The Congress(I) government will have to swallow many a stiff IMF conditionality. Implemented, some of these conditionalities will trigger social and political unrest. The minority government will try to backtrack from the reforms which will make the economic confusion only worse confounded. The solutions suggested by Left-democratic schools, like land

reforms, a determined expedition against the black economy, taxing the rich more vigorously and introducing a tax on agricultural income will not be acceptable to the government, and it will probably never be that a Left-democratic government will be in saddle in Delhi to give the political economy a Left-democratic direction.

It will therefore be futile to expect a national consensus to pilot India to a safer and better managed economic shores. The government will have to come out with its policies and come out it will gingerly in the budget and in subsequent coping measures. The opposition parties will not vote it out for two years. But the BJP can be depended upon for formulating its political battles for the next poll even as the country scrapes through its current economic tests and tribulations. It will not whip up strikes. It will not encourage agrarian unrest. Its main thrust will be to further the alienation of the middle class from the Congress(I).

The BJP leaders realise that working class and peasants do not determine the course of Indian politics; the middle classes do. In the various central bureaucracies today one can hear a lot of support for the BJP. Dozens of former military officers and retired ambassadors have joined the party. More will as time passes. More and more business houses are now veering towards the BJP. More and more of the educated youth of the country too are inclining towards the BJP as the party of the future. Among the intellectuals, the baggage of Nehruvian political philosophy has almost completely lost ground; the Market is becoming the Mantra.

The total mobilisation of all democratic and secular forces alone can contain the BJP wave. But there is no sign that such mobilisation will happen. The Congress(I) alone can take the lead. There is little sign of new life and stirrings in that effete and aged animal. Under the BJP, India will be a very different political economy from the one the founding fathers contemplated, and which Nehru and his successors wanted to build but have painfully failed in their job.

(Courtesy: Economic and Political Weekly)

V P's Silent Support

Radhika Ramaseshan

Much to the surprise of pollsters, the performance of the Janata Dal (JD) both in the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls in Uttar Pradesh has vindicated its leader V.P. Singh's repeated assertions that the silent voter "with us". Ridiculed and ignored by the regional press, which has never quite forgiven him for the stands he took on the Mandal issue, the "Raja saheb" nonetheless had the last laugh. The Janata Dal bagged 22 seats in the Lok Sabha and 90 in the Assembly to emerge as the largest Opposition party.

The figures represent a drop from the 52 Lok Sabha and 204 Assembly seats the party had won in the last elections. In absolute terms, the JD's performance compares poorly to that in 1989. But three factors must be noted here. one, UP was in the grip of a saffron wave, and the Hindus were likely to vote en bloc for the Bharatiya Janata Party. It was almost a foregone conclusion that no amount of wooing of the Muslim voter would have given any other party an edge over the BJP, destined to be the victor from the start.

Second, the JD was severely hit by the split in the party in last December after V.P. Singh resigned as the Prime Minister. When Mulayam Singh Yadav took away with him 14 MPs and 124 MLAs in UP, the JD was left with virtually no base in the east and central parts of the state, and had to survive on the crumbs left with Ajit Singh in one part of West UP. The Party

had to start from scratch, and it was handicapped by the lack of a full-fledged organisation, resources, and grassroot workers. In fact, this was amply reflected in the JD's electioneering.

Third, the JD was tarnished with the stigma of having been an utter failure in running a government at the Centre. "A non-functioning government, characterised by internal squabbles, power play, and chaos" was the image it was associated with, and these memories were fresh in the public consciousness.

Further, uncertainty arose on the question of the Muslim vote, which went almost en bloc to the JD in the last election, after the Congress-I had bungled on the *shilanyas* issue in Ayodhya. The Muslims were always uncomfortable about the JD being supported by the BJP but the party could meet this objection by claiming that the Left Front too had backed it.

The passing of the ordinance by the National Front Government, empowering the Centre to take over the undisputed land in and around the site of the Babri Masjid in a bid to resolve the Ayodhya issue before the VHP began construction of the Ram temple, was another disconcerting factor for the Muslims, although the legislation was subsequently revoked.

But what balanced the scales in favour of the JD was the arrest of L.K. Advani, who had set out on his rath yatra, in Bihar by its Chief Minister, Laloo Prasad Yadav, even though many Muslims feel V.P. Singh ought to have been more firm and done this in Delhi itself, and most important was the resignation of V.P. Singh when the BJP withdrew its support over the Ayodhya dispute.

Although it was Mulayam Singh Yadav who had executed elaborate security measures in the twin towns of Faizabad and Ayodhya, and though the measures were far from successful for the Muslims, V.P. Singh was the hero of the episode. He gave up his gaddi for the cause of communal harmony unlike so many of the "poors" was the refrain of the Muslims. Mulayam Singh's credibility among them nose-dived further when communal riots rocked UP throughout December last year and January this year.

The last straw was the Congress-I support given to the Yadav Government. In the 18 months the party had been out of power, it had done nothing to regain the confidence of the Mus-

lims it had so completely lost during the last elections. Even today most Muslims hold the Congress-I responsible for sowing the seeds of the Ayodhya issue by having the gates of the shrine unlocked for the Hindus to offer their prayers and by allowing the VHP to perform shilanyas on the disputed site. Mulayam Singh was seen as a "renegade who compromised the interests of Muslims in order to protect his chair".

The contrast between him and V.P. Singh emerged stark and clear. It was these two factors, that of V.P. Singh having sacrificed an august office and the exemplary courage shown by Laloo Prasad Yadav in the midst of a saffron upsurge in arresting Advani that were most played up in the JD's campaign directed towards the Muslims and which appear to have convinced them that their salvation lay by the media, the appeal issued by Abdullah Bukhari on behalf of the JD has also played its role in influencing the Muslim voting.

Local leadership, however, has determined the direction of voting in certain places. For examples, in Lucknow, because Zafereyab Jilani, the convenor of the Babri Masjid Action Committee and a leader of some local clout, threw in his lot with the SJP, most of the Muslim votes went to this party. Since the main criterion was to vote for the candidate who was most likely to defeat the BJP the State over, the JD could not garner the en bloc Muslim vote this time round.

In Bareilly, for instance, the JD had fielded a lightweight in Rashid Alvi, although most Muslims agreed that with his education and professional standing (as a Supreme Court lawyer) he was more "acceptable" than Akbar Ahmed Dumpy of the Congress. Dumpy, by no stretch of imagination, is a leader of any standing among the Muslims. But because of a high profile campaign, run entirely on the strength of the bulk of the Muslim votes went to him.

In places where riots had occurred shortly before the elections-Kanpur and Varanasi-the Muslim turnout especially in the urban segments was lower than the Hindu one. The threat of renewed attacks and violence was said to have prevented many Muslims, especially women, from coming out to cast their votes. This reason is being cited as a major one, for the defeat of Raj Kishore of the CPI-M from Naranani by the BJP's S.C. Dixit,

by a high margin although until a week before the polls, even the BJP functionaries admitted that the fight was bound to be a close one.

This phenomenon also partly accounts for the amazingly high disparity between the votes polled by the victor in Kanpur—nearly two lakhs for the BJP's Drona—as against some 80,000 for his nearest rival, R.N. Pathak of the Congress-I although Kanpur has two lakh Muslim voters.

The JD's most spectacular gains both in the Lok Sabha and the Assembly have been in the South-east region stretching from Fatehpur (V.P. Singh's constituency) to Deori through Allahabad, Pratapgarh, Phulpur, Ghazipur, and Azamgarh. The roots V.P. Singh has been able to strike in Fatehpur, as also the base the JD leaders, Reoti Raman Singh and Chandrajit Yadav, have in and around Allahabad and Azamgarh respectively account for the JD's performance. Ghazipur is a left stronghold.

Indeed the wresting of the prestigious Allahabad Lok Sabha seat from the saffron grip by the JD is being treated as a highlight. But this is partially attributed to the moderate stance adopted by Reoti Raman Singh on the Ayodhya issue, despite the fact that he was a senior minister in the Mulayam Singh Yadav Cabinet then, and subsequently fell out with him. It is being talked that the Hindus in his stretch did not react as antagonistically towards the JD as in most other places.

The Mandal issue too has had an impact on this belt, where the backward castes still remain economically, socially and politically depressed as compared to their counterparts in central or west UP. The JD's promise of a large share of bureaucratic power to the backward classes has touched a powerful chord. The Harijan votes have been split between the JD and the BSP.

The Congress-I route is not a surprise to close watchers of the State's political scene. The Party was a non-starter throughout. Riven with factions and infighting—a major cause for the party's debacle in the last elections—the Congress-I was never a strong force in UP. Its leader, Narayan Dutt Tiwari, who had to suffer the ignominy of being trounced at the hands of an unknown candidate from the BJP in the Nainital parliamentary seat, was always accused of encouraging "lobbing" in order to keep his own base intact.

Critics say he never really had a base, they allege that although Tiwari was the chief minister four times, he never enlarged his base the state over the way Mulayam Singh has. He chose to concentrate his resources and energies on the development of the hills, and even this didn't pay off. The former UPCC-I President, Rajendra Kumari Bajpai, who lost the Sitapur Lok Sabha seat, was dismissed as a "spent force". The State unit of the party has no worthy leader today to resurrect its fortunes.

The Congress-I also lost out because this was an issue-based election in UP, and the party had no issues to offer. Its initial plank of "stability" did not take off for two reasons: it was seen to have no ideological base or implications like the temple or Mandal issues, and second, the Congress-I was perceived as being largely instrumental for destabilising both the V.P. Singh and the Chandra Shekhar Governments.

The Congress-I never committed itself on either the Mandal or the Mandir issue. In fact, the stance adopted by the State leaders Rajendra Kumari Bajpai and N.D. Tiwari on Ram Janmabhoomi demanded that a commission of inquiry be appointed to probe the alleged police killing of kar sevaks, while no mention was made of a similar one to look into the communal riots further distanced the Muslims from the party.

History repeated itself as a farce for the Congress-I. Just as it had alienated both the Hindus and the Muslims over the shilanyas issue, by supporting the Mulayam Yadav Government to stave off caste Hindus to the BJP.

The Samajwadi Janata Party too was written-off from the beginning. It hardly figures in the fray anywhere. The few seats the party has rustled up in isolated patches were due primarily to the credibility and performance of the concerned candidates. Mulayam Singh Yadav's image as the leader of the backward caste votes went to the JD and not the SJP because both Devi Lal and Chandra Shekhar had publicly expressed their dissatisfaction with the Mandal Commission's recommendations in order to keep their upper caste vote base intact.

The other party to have registered its presence once again is the Kanshi Ram-led Bahujan Samaj Party. It has secured 12 seats in the Assembly while losing the lone Lok Sabha seat it had held in Bijnore to the BJP. But the percentage of votes polled com-

pared favourably to that in the last elections. The Harijans have symbolically come to identify themselves with the BSP. If a Left-of-Centre party like the JD wishes to further consolidate its hold over UP, it would do well to consider an alliance with the BSP.

(Courtesy: *The Independent*)

STATE-WISE ELECTION ANALYSIS

U.P.: Saffron Triumphs by Default

S.M. Menon

Soon after taking office, the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Kalyan Singh, made a visit to Ayodhya with his entire cabinet in train. Redefining the parameters of political propriety, they raised rousing slogans in the name of Rama, whom the BJP had adopted as a mascot for its recent election campaign. The pledge to build a temple to Rama — and on that very spot where the Babri Masjid stands — was reaffirmed. In attendance the BJP's national president, Murli Manohar Joshi, shedding all reticence in full-throated cries of "*Jai Sri Ram*"

Yet, despite all the seeming conviction behind this display of religious fervour, the sounds emanating from the BJP headquarters in Delhi were distinctly equivocal. Senior leader L.K. Advani explained that his party had asked for in Lucknow, so that it could proceed with the temple building project. It had, however, got only one half of its wish list — and that too, the lesser half. Advani blandly disavowed any intention of setting a deadline for the construction of the temple. The BJP had never set any deadline in the past, and would not do so in the future, he declared.

The BJP leader's claim rests on a technicality. His motorcade from Somnath to Ayodhya last year (though interrupted at

Samastipur) was undertaken with the specific intention of offering Kar Seva at the site of the Babri Masjid. As an effort to preempt the judicial proceedings on the issue and undercut the negotiating process, this was clearly tantamount to setting a deadline. That apart, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) — which in the recent past has shed all pretences of being a non-political entity and made common cause with the BJP — has on several occasions in the last four years undertaken ceremonial marches to Ayodhya, that have sought to force the hand of duly constituted governments at the Centre and in the State.

The BJP now has good reasons for equivocation, since the verdict in U.P. does not entitle it to claim any mandate to put into practice its ideas on secularism — whether of the “pseudo” or the supposedly authentic variety. And this is not only for the reason that it has failed to win a mandate at the Centre. The heavy losses the party suffered in the States where it has been running the administration for the last year-and-a-half, have undoubtedly had a sobering influence. And when all the shouting is done, even the triumph in U.P. is a highly qualified one.

At the time of writing, the full details of the U.P. results had not been released by the Election Commission. These were, however, available from the National Informatics Centre. The flow of Assembly results from U.P. is still rather catchy and sporadic. An analysis of the Lok Sabha results would, however, be a reasonable guidepost to the results of the Assembly election.

Results from 82 constituencies for which voting is complete show that the BJP's share in the total popular vote in the State was around 32.8 per cent. The Janata Dal got 22.3 per cent, while the Congress got 18.6 per cent, and the Samajwadi Janata Party (SJP) 10 per cent (Table 1).

Assessing the Swing Factor

A comparison with the vote shares obtained in 1989 shows there was a swing in favour of the BJP of just over 24 per cent, and a swing against the Congress of 12.6 per cent. Combining the shares of the Janata Dal and the SJP to ensure comparability with 1989, the swing against this erstwhile combine could be worked out to be of the order of 4.6 per cent. The BJP's gains have thus

come largely at the expense of the Congress(I), and secondarily at the expense of the Janata Dal-SJP. But it also seems to have cut into the vote shares of other smaller parties, and also perhaps independent candidates, in significant measure.

1. Assessment of swing factors

	Year	Janata Dal	Congress	BJP	SJP
Vote share in State	1991	22.3	18.6	32.8	10.0
	1989	36.9	31.2	8.1	—
Vote share in seats contested	1989	42.8	31.2	21.5	—
Vote share in straight fights	1989	44.4	32.6	33.9	—
Vote share in multi-cornered fights	1989	31.3	29.3	19.5	—

These preliminary estimates of the swing factor could, however, be misleading, and could detract from an understanding of the ground realities behind the BJP sweep. The party contested only 31 U.P. seats in 1989, and its share in the popular vote should be expected to increase merely by virtue of the larger number of seats contested this time around. This inflationary factor must be isolated if a more precise estimate of the swing is to be made.

In the 31 seats it contested in 1989, the BJP won 21.5 per cent of the popular vote. If this is to be used as the data, then the swing in its favour in 1991 could be estimated at just over 11 per cent. However, this too could be an unwarranted comparison, since some of the seats contested in 1989 were covered by an electoral understanding with the Janata Dal.

In five of the 31 seats that it contested in 1989, the BJP had no opposition from any major political party save the Congress. The remaining 26 witnessed triangular or even quadrangular contests against the Janata Dal, the Congress, and one of the Communist parties.

The BJP's vote share in the 26 seats where it encountered multicornered contests in 1989 was 19.5 per cent. The Janata

Dal took 31.3 per cent of the votes in these constituencies, while the Congress had to be content with 29.3 per cent. If these figures were to be used as the data for comparison — and they are perhaps a more authentic base for computing swings in voter preferences — then the BJP would appear to have gained by just over 13 per cent of the popular vote in 1991. The Congress has lost to the extent of 10.7 per cent of the vote, while the combined Janata Dal-SJP vote in 1991 actually seems to have shown a gain of a percentage point (Table 1).

These comparisons must be qualified by certain considerations of a qualitative nature. The mere fact that the BJP could enlarge its horizons, and actually contest almost three times the number of seats as in 1989, speaks of both growing self-confidence, and some degree of organisational muscle. These factors cannot be assessed on any quantitative scale.

But the rapid growth of the party across Uttar Pradesh — as indeed across the country — could also take a toll of internal cohesion and discipline, to whatever degree they exist. What implications the party's rapid expansion and its dramatic accession to power in India's most populous State will have for the established norms of democratic governance remains to be seen. With its strident advocacy of a view of nationality that excludes large religious minorities, and its comparison rhetoric on faith being non-negotiable, the BJP has perhaps attracted to its ranks elements that are unamenable to democratic procedures of functioning, and naturally prone to authoritarian tendencies.

Yet, if there is still an element of restraint in the BJP leaders' utterances today, then the reasons are fairly clear: the election victory in U.P. has been by default, partly on account of the Congress's vacillatory attitude on major issues before the electorate, and partly because of the split in the ranks of the Janata Dal.

The figures here are fairly clear. If the Janata Dal and the SJP vote shares were to be combined, then they would stand just marginally below the BJP in terms of popular allegiance. And this would have been in essence because of fewer seats contested. If an exhaustive survey of results were to be made seatwise, then the consequences of a non-split Janata Dal vote would be as follows: 15 seats more in the aggregate, of which 12 would have been at the expense of the BJP, and three at the expense of the

Congress. As against their combined strength of 26, the Janata Dal-SJP combine would have had 41 seats in the Lok Sabha from U.P; the BJP would have had 38, and the Congress would have ended up in complete penury with two seats. An electoral ally of the Janata Dal, the CPI would have bagged the other seat.

This assumes, of course, that Janata Dal and SJP votes are mutually transferrable. Given their common commitments on such issues as the Mandal Commission report and the protection of the rights of religious minorities, such an assumption may not be wholly unwarranted. And speaking of the SJP, it must be added the recent elections have shown that the party's true strengths lie in the power base of Mulayam Singh Yadav, who committed himself on both these issues. Former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar, who took upon himself the role of the artful dodger and refused to commit himself, has come out very much the poorer in terms of political allegiances at the grassroots.

Marginal Sympathy Factor

The erosion of Congress votes seems to be the result of a malaise much deeper than mere disunity within the ranks. The trauma of the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi may have had a significant impact on voting behaviour elsewhere in the country, but not in U.P. In fact, between the constituencies that went to the polls in May, and those that went in June, there is a difference in the Congress's share in popular vote of a mere three percentage points (Table 2).

2. Assessment of Sympathy Factor

	Year	Janata Dal	Congress	BJP	SJP
<i>Seats polled in May</i>					
Vote share	1991	26.5	17.1	33.0	5.6
Vote share	1989	39.5	31.4	6.7	—
<i>Seats polled in June</i>					
Vote share	1991	18.4	20.1	32.7	14.1
Vote share	1989	34.3	31.0	9.5	—

For purposes of comparison, the vote shares of the major parties in these two sets of constituencies is given for 1989. It is apparent that voter preference for the Congress tended to be relatively homogenous between these two halves of the State in 1989. However, voter preference for the Janata Dal in 1989 tended to be markedly lower in that half of the State which went to the polls in June 1991 -- preference for the BJP tended to be correspondingly higher.

The marginal shift towards the Congress in the constituencies that had polling in June could hence, in large measure, be attributed to the sympathy factor. This could have been won equally from the BJP and the Janata Dal-SJP. However, it is unlikely that the sympathy factor made much difference to the results, except possibly in the eastern constituency of Ghosi, where Kalpnath Rai of the Congress won, though narrowly, against a Janata Dal rival.

The Regional Pattern

This assessment of the "sympathy factor" throws up the rather piquant fact that the party that really enhanced its votes share between the first and second rounds of polling was the SJP — a party that cannot by any stretch of imagination be considered a claimant to Rajiv Gandhi's political legacy. This is a statistical quirk arising from a rather interesting feature of U.P.'s political geography — the constituencies that went to the polls in June included many where Mulayam Singh Yadav wields great influence. Indeed, the regional variations in voting behaviour display some interesting patterns. Political priorities tend to vary across the many regions of a vast State like U.P. For analytical purposes, a five-fold categorisation of regions may be adopted. The borders between these regions tend to be rather fuzzy, and there is a degree of arbitrariness involved in demarcating them. But the procedure may still serve a somewhat useful purpose.

In the hill tracts of the State, comprising four constituencies, the BJP has made an enormous gain in terms of the popular vote, and a large part of this seems to have at the expense of the Janata Dal-SJP (Table 3). The Congress too has lost ground, but not very significantly in comparison to its performance in the State as a whole.

3. Regional variations in vote swings

	Janata Dal	Congress	BJP	SJP
<i>Hill tracts</i> (4 constituencies)				
Vote share: 1991	12.11 (0/4)	33.4 (0/4)	40.3 (4.4)	2.8 (0/4)
Vote share: 1989	21.1 (2/2)	38.5 (2/4)	5.0 (0/3)	—
<i>Western region</i> (20 constituencies)				
Vote share: 1991	32.5 (6/18)	16.5 (0/18)	37.7 (12/18)	4.9 (0/18)
Vote share: 1989	50.0 (19/19)	33.0 (1/20)	1.9 (0/5)	—
<i>Upper plains</i> (16 constituencies)				
Vote share: 1991	13.7 (1/14)	23.9 (1/16)	37.2 (14/16)	11.2 (0/16)
Vote share: 1989	29.9 (6/13)	31.6 (5/16)	14.2 (3/8)	—
<i>Central lower plains</i> (18 constituencies)				
Vote share: 1991	16.0 (1/16)	19.2 (2/17)	30.3 (11/17)	18.3 (3/17)
Vote share: 1989	35.7 (14/16)	31.1 (1/16)	12.8 (1/10)	—
<i>Eastern lower plains</i> (27 constituencies)				
Vote share: 1991	24.6 (14/22)	14.9 (2/27)	27.2 (9/27)	6.2 (1/26)
Vote share: 1989	32.4 (16/21)	29.6 (5/27)	6.7 (3/7)	—

Note: (1) Figures in brackets give success rate in terms of total seats won/contested.

(2) Elections to two constituencies in western region and one seat in central lower plains have been countermanded in 1991

The Mandal Factor

The Janata Dal, in fact, would trail in third position in all the hill constituencies even if its votes were to be combined with that of the SJP. This is a far cry from 1989, when it contested two seats and won both, with a total vote share of 21.1 per cent in the region. It appears that the Janata Dal's Mandal plank has back-fired badly in the hill tracts, where the numerically preponderant communities are those that are, by a quirk of officialdom, classified uniformly as "forward".

The western region too has been a major loss for the Janata Dal. From a commanding 50 per cent of the popular vote in 1989, and a 100 per cent success rate in seats contested, the Janata Dal-

SJP has slipped to 37.4 per cent of the popular vote and a success rate of just a third. The Janata Dal-SJP popular vote falls short of the BJP even in combination. It is from the intermediate agrarian classes of western U.P. that Charan Singh fashioned a succession of parties — such as the Bhartiya Kranti Dal and the Lok Dal with much of its backbone in U.P. The Janata Dal has reason to be concerned about the losses in this region, especially since the major gainer has been the BJP. The strongly-entrenched peasant communities of this region have generally tended to look with disfavour upon the BJP — their economic tensions with the urban trader being crystallised in a political antipathy towards the party seen to be representing the traders.

Again, the Mandal factor seems to have been decisive in the alienation of the dominant Jat community of western U.P. The Janata Dal leader, Ajit Singh, said as much in a post-election assessment of his party's performance in the State. For the son of Charan Singh, the loss of western U.P. is a personal setback. But he could perhaps take solace from the fact that in no other region has the Janata Dal's share of the total vote come close to that in western U.P.

The Mulayam Singh Factor

The upper plains of U.P. (the terai region) have also been a loss for the Janata Dal. Even in combination with the SJP, its vote share in this region would fall well short of the BJP's. The story from the other two regions of the State — the central lower plains and the eastern lower plains — is however, different. Here, the Janata Dal has clearly lost a large number of seats purely on account of the split within its ranks since 1989.

The Mulayam Singh factor, in fact, is most apparent in the central lower plains, where the SJP's share of total votes actually exceeds the Janata Dal's and in combination, the Janata Dal-SJP votes exceed the BJP's by a clear four percentage points. Three of the four seats won by the SJP fall within this region. Clearly, this is the only region of the State — perhaps even of the country — where the Janata Dal split has left the balance of advantage with the SJP.

This has certain very obvious implications for the strategic thinkers within the Janata Dal, as they set about the task of

retrieving the lost ground. However, it is yet unclear whether Mulayam Singh would be amenable to re-entering the folds of the party that he deserted in a moment of crisis last November. Whether the prickly personalities within the Janata Dal would really like him back is another imponderable. And there is further uncertainty over Mulayam Singh's political longevity and influence once out of office.

The eastern lower plains are where the Janata Dal has been most able to hold its own against the BJP. The personal influence of the Janata Dal leader, Vishwanath Pratap Singh, is in some measure responsible for the party's triumph in several seats in and around Allahabad. The BJP performance, in contrast, has been indifferent, despite of the presence of Chandra Shekhar in the region.

Fourteen of the 22 Janata Dal seats in the State were won from the eastern lower plains of U.P. One other seat was won by the CPI, an electoral ally. Chandra Shekhar retained his seat from Ballia, but could do little else for his party in the region. Thus, the man who went through a turbulent phase of the Janata Dal's history without taking a stand on either Meham, Mandal or Masjid, has been reduced to something of a cipher in the area of his supposed political influence.

Congress Bites the Dust

Perhaps the single most important feature of this election in U.P. is the sharpness of the emerging polarisation. It is a context that is absolutely ruthless towards those who opportunistically seek out the middle ground. Chandra Shekhar as an individual, and the Congress as a party, have bitten the dust in U.P. for their unprincipled waffling on most vital issues before the electorate.

U.P. has been a communal battleground since 1986, when the troika of Rajiv Gandhi, Arun Nehru and Bir Bahadur Singh threw open the Babri Masjid to the Ram *bhakts*, in a misbegotten attempt to preempt criticism of the Muslim Women's Bill from communalists of the other camp. Ever since, the Congress's position on the dispute has been characterised by a degree of cynicism.

The nadir of this policy of wanton neglect came in October-November 1989 when town after town in the North was flaring

up in communal violence following the VHP's aggressive sponsorship of the bizarre ritual of brick worship across the region. Yet, Rajiv Gandhi saw nothing wrong in travelling to Ayodhya and launching his campaign from there, with the promise to usher in a Ram rajya if re-elected. He followed this up with the preposterous claim — after the shilanyas puja had been concluded on a part of the disputed land — that the "credit" for the "peaceful passage" of the ceremony should go to his party and its Government.

But by then, the game was up. The BJP had snatched the communal card from the faltering grasp of the Congress, through the conspicuous participation of high party functionaries in the brick worship ritual. It was to press home this advantage ruthlessly in the 1989 elections. When it was threatened with a loss of political initiative as a result of the agitation against the Mandal Commission, it decided to relaunch the mandir programme through Advani's rath yatra.

The rath was a diversionary move that, with its emphasis on a putative "Hindu" unity, cleverly harnessed the anti-Mandal sentiment, without seeming to articulate it specifically. And as the Congress waffled and came increasingly to be perceived as flabby and effete, the BJP marched on to another famous electoral triumph.

But an election victory fashioned on a foundation of mythology, rather than practical politics, could prove a transient phenomenon. Some of this is already manifest in the preference of the electorate in States ruled by the party, for a non-BJP dispensation. It is also apparent in the actual electoral record of the BJP in the State of U.P.

In 1980, the BJP did not have a separate existence. But the Janata Party in U.P. after the defection of the socialists and the camp followers of Charan Singh, was essentially manned by BJP hands. It did, however, have Jagjivan Ram as Prime Minister-designate, to dilute some of the associations with the old Jan Sangh.

By 1984, the BJP had established a distinct existence. But in the 50 seats it contested, it earned a mere 6.4 per cent of the popular vote, and drew a blank in terms of seats. Again, Charan Singh's Lok Dal proved the more stable political entity.

The social base of the Janata Dal has obviously proven much more stable over the years than that of the BJP. As a party, the Janata Dal has a time-tested association with the rising peasant and artisan classes of U.P., that should give it a natural advantage in future electoral contests. However, the Dalits, an important section whose allegiance it has been seeking to win, seem by and large to have remained outside its orbit. The Bahujan Samaj Party, which claims to represent this section, has actually maintained its share of the total vote in U.P., at a fairly stable figure since 1989.

The problem is a very real one. The ground reality in U.P. is one of very real social and economic tension between the classes that make up the Janata Dal and the Dalit communities. This tension cannot obviously be resolved through mere rhetoric. Whether it will indeed be resolved within the terms of an overarching political paradigm, remains to be seen. But on such a resolution would hinge the political future of the Janata Dal and its associated formations in U.P., as also in the rest of the Hindi heartland.

The Bihar Champions : A Clear Consistent Story

Abhijit Sen
C.P. Chandrasekhar

If any State in India captures the quintessence of Indian politics in all its turbulence and vibrancy, it is Bihar. Paradoxically, the State, which has for long been one of the most economically and socially backward in the country, may be the one that points the way to the future. The recent elections had most urban pundits stumped by the sheer momentum of the sweep by the National Front-Left Front combine, and by much else. Despite the highly publicised accounts in the media of violence before and during the elections, they were neither more violent nor (in all probability) more undemocratic than any in the past. The State was also remarkable in that it seemed unfazed by both the other major tendencies which dramatically affected electoral results everywhere else: the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, and the emergence of the BJP as a major electoral force. Clearly, there are important lessons to be had from considering the election results in Bihar.

The first obvious conclusion is that Bihar has emerged as the flagship State of the National Front, particularly the Janata Dal, much the same way as West Bengal has been for the Left Front. Much of the credit for this goes to the effectiveness of the Laloo

Prasad Yadav Ministry, which in less than one and a half years has managed to alter dramatically the discourse of politics in the State. Of course, the much-cited Mandal magic had an important role to play in this, but there is much more to the change in the political scene than simply the promise of some reservations for a small and declining number of Government jobs. The Laloo Prasad Yadav Ministry has been notable on two counts: first, the strong stand in favour of secularism and against the communalisation of politics as exemplified by the halting of L. K. Advani's rath yatra which indeed heralded the fall of V. P. Singh's Government at the Centre. Secondly, it has emerged as the champion of the socially and economically weaker sections of society in a period when there are few effective champions left in the mainstream of Indian politics.

Indeed, it is likely that the people of Bihar need such a champion more than the citizens of any other State. Bihar is the poorest State in India, with a per capita income less than half the national average. Nearly half of the rural population lives below the poverty line defined in terms of minimum calorific requirements. While four-fifths of the labour force is engaged in agriculture, growth rates in agriculture have been stagnant or negative in the past decade. Nearly half of the rural labour force consists of rural labourers, who face insecure contracts and severe conditions of work. Social deprivation and oppression of the weak are also widespread, with the infamous caste armies operating to enforce rules of terror, and multifarious forms of social control and hierarchy affecting the mass of the society. In such a context, it is not remarkable that a regime which provides some semblance of security to the weak, which can undo to however limited extent the endemic corruption in public life, and, most important, which can hold out the hope of a better future, should have found such widespread appeal among the people.

For there can be no doubt of the popular basis for the National Front-Left's electoral victory. In this election, the combine won 42 out of the 47 seats for which results were declared, secured nearly half of the votes cast, and showed significant and compelling margins of victory in almost all the constituencies where it was successful. This represents an improvement from its position even in the 1989 elections when it was largely successful in much of the State.

This kind of result cannot be explained away by complaints of rigging indeed: the rather lower voter turnout this time suggests that such control over booths and ballot boxes may have been lower than in the past. This assessment is backed by reports that the number of people killed and injured in election related clashes has actually declined since the last election. It is true that electoral politics in Bihar has always been characterised by some amount of violence and booth capturing: however, shocked middle class opinion responding to dramatic media accounts should bear in mind that this violence has been significant in past elections too, when it went largely unreported because of its highly organised form which was consistent with the rural power structure. The greater militancy of hitherto passive, dominated groups goes some way in explaining the observations of greater violence.

Another notable feature was that the Janata Dal in many places in Bihar was able to commandeer the undivided vote of backward groups which got splintered in other States such as Uttar Pradesh. The squeezing out of the Indian People's Front and the Bahujan Samaj Party could occur because the National Front-Left was able to make a plausible appeal to the very groups which had provided support to the smaller parties in the past.

The rise of the BJP, which was so marked across the country, was not entirely absent in Bihar either. The BJP was able to increase its share of the vote from 12 per cent in 1989 to 18 per cent this time, largely at the expense of the Congress whose share fell from 28 per cent to 23 per cent. The BJP was thus posing a challenge for the second position, which it nearly managed to secure, since in many constituencies its candidates came second. Also, as the accompanying graphics indicate, the BJP won seats largely at the expense of the Congress in south Bihar.

The disintegration of the Congress in Bihar has thus left the space for the BJP as the oppositional force to the backward based politics of the National Front-Left combine. However, the combined vote share of the BJP and the Congress, at 40 per cent, is still well below that of the National Front-Left combine at 47 per cent. In south Bihar, where the BJP has gained three seats at the expense of the National Front, the BJP was the runner-up with around one third of the vote in the past election, and already had

a significant presence. Personal factors also played a role, such as the candidature of Rita Verma, wife of the slain Indian Police Service Officer, who defeated the veteran A.K. Roy in Dhanbad.

The graphic of actual results in 1991 also indicates one extraordinary aspect of the latest election, which might be termed "the Seshan effect." Despite much countervailing evidence, elections in no less than five constituencies were countermanded and results withheld in three. These seats were all National Front-Left strongholds, and victories were expected in all eight seats by this combine. This suggests that the criticism of overreaction, conscious or otherwise, on the part of the Chief Election Commissioner, is warranted.

These "blemishes" on a map otherwise dominated by the National Front-Left victories should not obscure the major conclusion that emerges from the Bihar results. In a fractured polity characterised by confusion and cynicism in much of the country, the Bihar story is much more clear and consistent. Unlike the rest of the country, real issues which affect people on the ground have dominated the campaign and its result, rather than ephemeral "sympathy waves" and illusory obsessions with places of worship. And the success of the National Front-Left grouping, and its regional leader Laloo Prasad Yadav, strongly underlines the need for consistency and commitment to stated causes. There is a definite and expanding space for such politics, which avoids compromising on basic issues affecting the material and social positions of the deprived groups. This is an important message for politicians in the rest of the country.

The U.P. Results

Prakash Karat

The election results in Uttar Pradesh have confirmed the apprehensions that the BJP would be making big gains. This was evident even during the election campaign to most observers because of the visible collapse of the Congress(I), the SJP and the BSP. What was probably unexpected was the scale and scope of the BJP success, with it getting 50 seats in the Lok Sabha and an absolute majority in the State Assembly.

A proper review of the U.P. election results will have to await a study of the detailed results and the discussions in the U.P. State Committee of the Party. However, certain broad features are clear from a preliminary study of the results.

BJP Gains

The BJP was able to consolidate the influence acquired through the joint campaign with the VHP on the Ram temple issue before October 30, 1990 and after the police action in Ayodhya. The inflammatory propaganda which was devised to bring about a communal polarisation was sharpened and sustained by the spate of communal riots which engulfed the State in November and December, 1990. The BJP succeeded in harnessing both the anti-Mandal sentiments and the religious emotions to woo the upper caste base of the Congress(I). Even after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, the Congress(I) could not retrieve its base except in a marginal way.

The BJP has made serious inroads in Western U.P. among the Jat community which has traditionally been with the Lok Dal, and later in 1989, with the united Janata Dal. Similarly, the BJP made significant gains in the hill districts where the Mandal appeal was negligible and by its opportunist raising of the slogan of separate State of Uttaranchal for the hill areas.

The BJP was also able to make inroads, to a lesser extent, among the backward classes in western U.P. and in the central and Avadh region.

The most dangerous feature of the U.P. results is that the communal offensive has met with success by its naked Hindu chauvinist appeal and its resort to open Muslim-baiting. This was a marked feature of the campaign which was run parallel to the BJP campaign, through the use of the VHP platform and the speeches of Rithambara and other rabid sectarian elements.

It should be noted that wherever major riots took place in the dark period of November-December 1990—Agra, Khurja, Ali-garh, Gonda, Kanpur, Varanasi and so on, the BJP has defeated the Janata Dal-Left combination. The vicious circle of incendiary propaganda, riots, killings and curfew has been used to imprint the communal appeal on a disturbingly large section of the Hindu population.

Congress(I) Collapse

The Congress(I) could poll only around 18 percent of the total votes. This marks a steep drop of 12 percent compared to the 1989 election. The BJP was able to take away a substantial section of the upper caste votes, particularly Brahmin vote, away from the Congress(I). On the other hand the minority rejected the Congress(I) who paid a heavy price for its opportunistic and unprincipled position taken on the Ayodhya dispute site, culminating in the stance of supporting the demand for Kar Seva to be permitted at the site.

Its belated attempt through its election manifesto and its campaign to win back the minorities failed, and they were decisively rebuffed by the Muslim community.

In the case of the Scheduled Castes, already the 1989 elections had shown serious erosion in the traditional Congress

support base among this oppressed community, with the BSP taking away a large chunk of the electoral support. This trend was maintained in the present elections, and led to an almost total collapse of the Congress(I) support base, resulting in a performance worse than in 1989. The Congress(I) could win only 5 seats in the Lok Sabha as compared to 15 last time, and 46 in the Assembly as compared to 94 in 1989.

The extent of the inroads made by the BJP into the Congress(I) support base is striking to be seen in Amethi. Here the late Rajiv Gandhi has been elected to the Lok Sabha, while three out of the five assembly seats of the constituency have gone to the BJP.

In the rest of the country, the post-assassination period saw a swing of votes in favour of the Congress(I) to the extent of nearly 10 percent. But this was not sufficient to help it win more seats in the second round of polling, as its vote had dwindled too low for it to make a comeback.

The Janata Dal was the only force which put up a stiff resistance to the BJP and was able to win 22 Lok Sabha seats and 91 Assembly seats. In most places it was the Janata Dal or Left parties' candidates who came a close second to the BJP. This shows that the BJP has not been able to eat into the Janata Dal base in a big way.

Disruption by Mulayam Singh

The Janata Dal would have done much better and overcome the BJP challenge had it remained a united party. The split was created by the defection of Mulayam Singh to Chandra Shekhar, and their Party, the SJP, put up candidates in practically all constituencies for Parliament and Assembly. The results show that the SJP candidates only served to divide the votes which would have gone to the Janata Dal. In Central U.P. in particular, but also in other areas Mulayam Singh was able to get a section of Muslim and backward class votes, which harmed the JD-Left prospects. It was this division of the anti-communal and secular vote which paved the way for the BJP to win a large number of seats with only a minority of the votes.

The BJP factor must be seen in perspective. Though it has won an absolute majority in the Assembly, it has done so with only 33 percent of the votes, and 67 percent of the electorate which voted, rejected the BJP's stance. This includes the BSP also, which polled eight percent of the votes. As pointed out earlier, with the splintering of the anti-BJP vote, in five-cornered contests, the BJP was able to win many seats with barely 30 percent of the votes.

This holds an important lesson for all the Left, democratic and secular forces in Uttar Pradesh. The BJP will not be able to either advance, or consolidate, its position if the unity of the democratic and secular forces is reforged and strengthened.

The central issue here will be the Babri Masjid / Ram-Janmabhoomi dispute. The BJP is committed to building the temple at the disputed site in its election manifesto. The BJP was carried forward by the VHP, the Bajrang Dal and other Hindu chauvinist elements, with this platform in the election. A number of VHP and Bajrang Dal men are amongst those elected, including their leaders like S.C.Dixit, Mahant A vaidyanath, Vinay Kathiyar and Swami Chinmayananda. The BJP Government will find it difficult to back out from its commitment, and pressures will build up to go ahead with the temple construction. Understandably the minorities, who have suffered terribly in the recent months, are feeling insecure and apprehensive.

The Left and secular forces must closely watch the direction of the BJP Government in tackling this dispute. The Congress(I) Government at the Centre also has to announce its intentions. All the non-BJP parties are for the adoption of a law maintaining the status quo of all religious places of worship as on August 15, 1947. The Left and secular forces will insist that the Ayodhya dispute should be solved either by negotiations, or by the acceptance of the court verdict.

If the BJP government in U.P. fails to go on these lines, and goes ahead with the temple construction, an explosive situation will develop in the State and in the country.

Class Character of BJP

Knowing the class character of the BJP and its record in states like Madhya Pradesh, the people of Uttar Pradesh can expect a government which will be openly in favour of big capitalists and landlords. The BJP's election manifesto has committed it to greater privatisation, and concessions to big business. Already the working class of U.P. is in the midst of a bitter struggle against privatisation and the brutal police repression at the Dalla Cement factory. The CPI(M), the Left and other secular forces must take the lead in mobilising the people to oppose all the anti-people policies which are inherent in the BJP's policy framework.

This struggle, alongside the central mobilisation and ideological work to check the communal ideology, and defend the rights of the minorities, will provide the basis for the fightback to isolate the BJP. The two-thirds of the people who have firmly rejected the blatantly communal appeal must be united and mobilised, and those sections who have fallen prey temporarily to the religious sectarian appeal can be won back in the coming days with the stepping up of the mass struggles of all sections of the working people.

(Courtesy: *The People's Democracy*)

When the Show is Over

Radhika Ramaseshan

Although the saffron in Uttar Pradesh was in sharp contrast to the election results in most other parts of the country, the phenomenon was far from unexpected. The genesis of the Bharatiya Janata Party sweep can be traced to the rath yatra launched by L K Advani in October last year, which saw the beginnings of a concerted Hindu hostility against Uttar Pradesh chief minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav.

The BJP considered Yadav not merely another "pseudo secularist" (to quote Advani's disparaging term), but an enemy of the community, determined to deny its members their fundamental right to enter and offer prayers at their place of worship. Yadav had repeatedly threatened to arrest Advani if his rath yatra entered UP, and elaborate arrangements were made to execute this exercise in Deoria on the UP-Bihar border, from where Advani was supposed to enter. But Yadav's Bihar counterpart, Laloo Prasad Yadav, beat him to it.

This incident explains, to a large extent, why the Janata Dal, more than any other party, still carries the most credibility among UP's Muslims. But the initiative taken by Laloo Prasad hardly mitigated Hindu passions against Mulayam Singh. If anything, the feelings grew sharper with the approach of October 30, the day on which the Vishwa Hindu Parishad was to begin construction of the Ram temple on the site where the Babri Masjid stands in Ayodhya.

Particular moves on the part of the Chief Minister sealed his doom. These included his efforts to take communal harmony to the masses through a series of *sadbhavana* rallies held the state over, culminating in a massive one in Lucknow on October 12, which was addressed by several senior leaders of the Janata Dal; the elaborate, multi-tier security arrangements made in the twin towns of Faizabad and Ayodhya to thwart the entry of BJP and VHP activists; and the large scale preventive arrests of both.

Although throughout its election campaign, the BJP has piously maintained that the party and the VHP are independent entities, functioning autonomously, albeit towards the same goal, the fact is that the two become almost interchangeable. Several kar sevaks who were in Ayodhya on October 30 were BJP members, and many of the party's senior leaders who had embarked on the same purpose, like Atal Behari Vajpayee, Vijaya Raje Scindia and the prospective chief minister of UP, Kalyan Singh, were nabbed by the Yadav administration.

And while the VHP's leadership denied having any political aspirations, quite a few fought and won the elections on BJP tickets. These include the VHP vice president, Shirish Chandra Dixit, Bajrang Dal convenor, Vinay Katiyar, Swami Chinmayanand of the Ram-Janmabhoomi Mukti Nyas, and Mahant A vaidyanath of the Ram-Janmabhoomi Mukti Yagya Samiti.

At Ayodhya in October last year, Yadav's "planners and strategists" failed to feel the Hindu pulse. Hindus, cutting across caste and regional lines, as well as Yadav's own security forces co-operated with the kar sevaks in the storming of the Babri Masjid.

Distortions of history and a biased reading of mythology, which served to rekindle baseless but hidden fears in the Hindu subconscious about centuries of Islamic rule and the demolition of their temples and charges of "Muslim anti-nationalism" and the attempts of successive governments to pander to the minorities and, most significant, the government's refusal to resolve the Ayodhya dispute in favour of the VHP — factors on which the Ayodhya controversy was based — fuelled the historical animosity and hatred UP Hindus have had towards Muslims into a determination to symbolically avenge Muslims by "capturing the Masjid."

Queered to a venomous pitch, these feelings manifested themselves in a series of attacks against Muslims all over UP in December last year and this January. Documentary evidence has shown that the incidents were not communal riots but one-sided attacks by Hindus, who were provoked by the BJP-VHP combine and abetted by the security forces. The majority of the victims were Muslims, the administration collapsed in the face of a near total revolt by the police, who by then were emboldened enough to publicly raise slogans against the Muslims. As far as the BJP was concerned, the die was cast: the process of polarisation was complete. And if the momentum of the "temple agitation" was maintained, the Hindu votes were the party's for the asking.

The momentum was kept up with the backing of the VHP. Shedding all pretensions of being an "apolitical outfit," the VHP supremo, Ashok Singhal announced at a press conference in Lucknow last January that "the VHP will support the BJP because it is the only party which wants the Ram temple to be built in Ayodhya." The crowds that the VHP drew in Allahabad in January when it organised a massive function to immerse the ashes of those allegedly killed in police firing in Ayodhya were a sufficient indication that the "Ram wave" had captured UP.

No matter how insistent the BJP leadership is about its "Ram, roti, insaf" plank, in UP it was the dual symbols of rath and Ram that did the trick. The first few days of electioneering made it obvious that the BJP had realised that it was on fertile ground and it had better concentrate its resources and energies here.

The party was way ahead of the others in propaganda, much of which highlighted the Mandal issue. Gory images were conjured in the party's spiel: the JD was attacked for "devouring innocent children in the lava that erupted from the Mandal volcano," while Yadav was shown up as the "arch villain who roasted alive innocent, unarmed devotees of Ram."

The SJP made one feeble effort to counter the BJP's propaganda by trying to disprove that all those kar sevaks the VHP claimed had been killed in UP were, in fact, alive on the basis of evidence unearthed by two journalists of an English fortnightly, but it cut no ice. Much less did the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi.

It was the blood-splattered posters of the "martyred kar sevaks," and the poisonous speeches of Sadhvi Rithambhara

freely played by BJP offices in townships and villages that captured the popular imagination.

Only Ram can justify the quantum leaps that the BJP has made in this politically critical state by having notched up 191 seats in the assembly to secure an absolute majority, and 50 seats in the Lok Sabha as compared to the last elections, when it secured only 58 seats in the assembly and eight in Parliament. The BJP's most substantial gains have been in the hill districts of Tehri Garhwal and Kumaon, traditionally Congress-I strongholds, the Rohilkhand belt comprising Moradabad, Rampur, Pilibhit, Bareilly and Badaun, Lucknow and Faizabad in the Avadh region, the districts along the Indo-Nepal border, the Varanasi belt in east UP, and the whole of western UP.

The hill districts have a large brahmin population. With some of the most important pilgrim centres here, where the VHP has reportedly been building a base for the last four or five years, the temple issue was bound to have an impact. That apart, the BJP pulled out another card from its pack: the promise to create a separate hill state called Uttaranchal if elected to power. In the bargain, it touched a sensitive chord. Successive state governments have ignored the development of these districts, choosing to concentrate their resources only on tourist centres.

The BJP's contention is that if such an attitude persists, the hill districts might grow volatile and pose a threat to the country, the more dangerous since they share a border with China. Therefore, the party has envisaged statehood as the only answer. The BJP's success in the hills is especially significant because even Congress-I stalwarts like N D Tiwari and Brahm Dutt, who have never lost an election, were forced to bite the dust by unknowns from the BJP.

The Rohilkhand belt is a classic example of almost en bloc voting by Hindus for the BJP. A backward and Muslim-dominated region, the results here demonstrated that no party can hope to win on the strength of the Muslim vote alone. The three non-BJP victors in the Lok Sabha from this belt — Haji Ghulam Mohammad from Moradabad, Shripal Singh Yadav from Sambhal and Satyapal Singh Yadav from Shahjahanpur, all Janata Dal candidates — also managed to capitalise on the backward votes. But the presence of two JD heavyweights in western

UP, Sharad Yadav who lost from Badaun to the BJP's Swami Chinmayanand and Ajit Singh who won from Baghpat, could not contain the BJP sweep.

What tilted the scales in the BJP's favour was the harijan vote, which traditionally went to the Congress-I, but was up for grabs this time. The Bahujan Samaj Party has vitually made no inroads here except in Bijnore. The JD, with its Mandal plank and Ajit Singh's personality is too closely identified with the backward classes and the jats, both of who are historically antagonistic to the harijans. Identifying this lacuna, the BJP, its upper and backward caste candidates notwithstanding, made a concrete bid to woo the harijans and it paid off.

Will the honeymoon last, and if yes, for how long? UP is fraught with a host of sensitive problems, not least of them being the Ayodhya issue which vaulted the BJP to power. But the path to the "temple" is strewn with complexities, and the state leaders are only too willing to concede this point privately.

A top BJP leader of UP, who sought anonymity, had confided to this correspondent that the party was bargaining for a majority at the centre too, so that the Ayodhya controversy could be "resolved" through an ordinance. "Once this headache is over, I assure you, we will not touch the rest — Kashi Vishwanath, Mathura and so on. We have had enough," said this leader. But with a Congress-I government in Delhi, the BJP is deliberating other strategies.

The first, its leaders said, was to thrash it out across the table on the basis of "historical and other evidence unearthed so far." The catch is that exercises of this sort have been attempted time and again in the past, and borne no fruit. However, BJP leaders said, this time round they would invite only "secular minded liberal" Muslims, "Shia leaders," who they are confident will be "convinced of our arguments and, in turn, win over other Muslims too." Obviously, this is wishful thinking, since Shias are in a minority anyway, and the leaders the BJP has in mind have no clout within the community.

But construct of the temple by the BJP will have to, since the question on every Hindu's lips in UP today is, how soon will I see a temple in Ayodhya? The party has modified its stance from the assurance of construction to "removing the obstacles from

the path" (of the VHP). If the state government does give the green signal to the VHP, what will the possible ramifications be?

One, the centre steps in firmly and ruthlessly, since a Muslim reaction is inevitable. "We are prepared to face their bullets again," said a BJP leader. The other option is for the centre to throw the ball in the state government's court and allow it to handle it the way it deems best.

This will be a litmus test for the BJP. Its leaders boast that their regimes in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan have not been marred by any communal riot, but if the VHP is determined to build the temple, how will the BJP contend with the Muslim reaction? Whatever be the option, it is reasonably certain that, with the battlelines so clearly demarcated, either the central government or the BJP government in UP will take a beating over the Ayodhya issue in a matter of time.

The BJP in UP has also to contend with the fact that, for the first time, the party has expanded its base from being one of Banias and a section of the backward classes to include Brahmins, Kayasthas and Thakurs in its fold. The implications of this factor impinge primarily on the leadership question. The near unanimous choice is Kalyan Singh who has been elected from Atraula in western U.P. A backward caste lodh, Kalyan Singh can use this opportunity to emerge as a backward class leader, with Mulayam Singh Yadav's temporary eclipse and the failure of both Ajit Singh and Kailash Nath Yadav of the JD to contain the BJP sweep in their respective areas in west and east UP.

Kalyan Singh, who was the health minister in the Janata Party regime in UP, is reputed to be a clean and efficient administrator. His claim to this post is further enhanced by the leading role he played in sustaining the temple agitation after the events of October and by the party's remarkable performance in western UP where he is the acknowledged leader. In taking up the cause of a separate hill state, the BJP is up against another formidable challenge. Although a genuine demand, no plains dweller will want to lose the hills, which are renowned for their tourist resorts and pilgrim centres. Other parties will strongly oppose the bifurcation of the state on the grounds of "pandering to regionalism." So ultimately, the BJP might have to settle for an autonomous hill districts' development council.

Last but not the least of the party's problems is a mild paranoia that has overtaken people here, because of the dismal performance of the BJP in neighbouring Madhya Pradesh. "Why did the Ram wave fail there? After all there are devout Hindus there too. And what have we let ourselves in for?" are some of the questions bothering them. More than in any other state, it is in UP that the BJP will come in for the closest scrutiny, and will have much to answer for.

(Courtesy: *Independent*)

Electoral Politics and Strategy of Communal Mobilisation

Kiran Saxena

The unprecedented success which the B.J.P. achieved in 1991 State elections in Uttar Pradesh has given it a tremendous boost. The euphoria has been expressed by its leaders who, now have been talking of emerging on the national scene not in the capacity of an opposition party, but as government. Lucknow, therefore, has been looked upon as a stepping stone to Delhi.

Uttar Pradesh is the fourth biggest state of the Indian Union, its northern boundary, running along the Himalayas, touches Tibet and Nepal. Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, Delhi and Rajasthan are on its western and south western fringes. Madhya Pradesh joins it in the south and Bihar in the east. Amongst the Indian Union, Uttar Pradesh is a state which does not have specific identity as some other states of India have. Different regions of Uttar Pradesh share the cultural moorings of the adjacent states. It is a state which inhabits different religious communities. Politically, it is one of the very important states of the country because it sends maximum number of members to parliament — 85. Therefore, the state becomes a very strong determinant factor in national politics. No doubt that the meteoric rise of the Bhartiya Janata Party in the 1991 election, that enabled it to form a government of its own has boosted the morale of the party.

Uttar Pradesh cannot only be considered an important state of the country in terms of its largest population but also in terms of its composite culture. Its composite culture not only imbibes the cultural moorings of the neighbouring states but also a synthesis of Hindu Muslim culture. The state could be considered the birth place of Hinduism as Hindu Gods Rama and Krishna were born here in Ayodhya and Mathura according to the believed mythologies. Varanasi, Haridwar, Allahabad are the important pilgrimage centres for the Hindus. Similarly the Muslims who constitute the biggest religious minority have contributed in the social and cultural life of the state. Besides, Christians, Sikhs and Jains also are integral part of cultural matrix of the state. The different communities have been living peacefully. The communal politics has been only an aberration which erupts here and there. Nevertheless there are some communally sensitive areas also which have been a perennial problem to the secular forces of the state.

The R.S.S./B.J.P. and B.J.S. (Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh, Bhartiya Janata Party, Bhartiya Jan Sangh,) although have been in the political arena since independence, however they have not secured much success. The Bhartiya Janata Party (earlier Bhartiya Jan Sangh) had emerged as a political force in the neighbouring states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh, but in Uttar Pradesh its rise is recent. In 1989 elections it improved its position tremendously and in the 1991 election U.P. became the fourth state run by the B.J.P.

What caused the sudden rise of the B.J.P. in this state? This is an important issue which this paper attempts to study. An effort is made to analyse the strategy and the success of the party in this state. For this, the past performance of the party in the state is also dealt so that a comparison could be made and how this party has been constantly evolving its strategy to achieve success.

The success of the B.J.P. is nevertheless the success of Hindu communal politics which so far, in terms of electoral success, had been a marginal force. It is true that Hindu communalism has been trying to capture the mind of the majority but had not succeeded. Before independence, there were two major groups, who represented Hindu communalism — the Hindu Maha Sabha and the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh.¹ In spite of injecting communal poison they remained a marginal force. The

dominant Indian National Movement had not given any scope to them to make a dent on national politics. The majority was always with the national mainstream — secular liberal democratic ideals. The little success they achieved on the eve of independence which followed the partition of the country was on communal lines. Like their counterpart, Muslim communalism in Pakistan, Hindu communalism wanted India to declare itself a theocratic state—a Hindu state.

However, inspite of communal holocaust as a consequence of partition, the designs of Hindu communalists failed in spreading their tentacles. They were rejected by the people. The martyrdom of Gandhi by the bullet of a Hindu fanatic gave a great setback to them.

To salvage their image, which was sullied because of their links with Gandhi's murder, the Hindu communal forces had to evolve a strategy to gain respectability.² The R.S.S. always projected itself to be a non political, cultural organisation. It had supported the Hindu Maha Sabha, but now the Hindu Maha Sabha was unable to play the role the R.S.S. wanted it to play.³ (Because the Hindu Maha Sabha became so isolated that it could not survive). Therefore the R.S.S. had to transform itself into a political party with a different label and thus the Jan Sangh was born. The first general election in 1952 saw the competition among three communal parties vying for supermacy. The Hindu Maha Sabha, the Ram Rajya Parishad and the newly formed Bhartiya Jan Sangh. The Maha Sabha and the Ram Rajya Parishad fared very badly in this election and it became evident that the Bhartiya Jan Sangh would take up the mantle of Hindu communal forces.

The strategy of Hindu communal forces at this level was to form a party of the like minded persons not necessarily belonging to the R.S.S. cadre.⁴ The first president of the Bhartiya Jan Sangh, Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, had joined politics as a Congressman. In 1939 he joined the Hindu Maha Sabha, but resigned from the Maha Sabha because of the allegation of Gandhi's murder against it. Beside Mukherjee there were a few of non R.S.S. persons in the Jan Sangh. However the strings of the party were in the hands of the R.S.S.⁵ It has been pointed out by a scholar that in the R.S.S. circles "there was a feeling on the part of R.S.S. leaders and rank and file that they needed a party of their

own which would be guided by a tightly knit organisation of the R.S.S. members.⁶

The stigma of the murder of Gandhi and large scale participation in communal riots attached to the R.S.S. had to be washed off. The change of nomenclature of the Jan Sangh would not be enough to create a new image of the party; in the changing circumstances, projecting itself as party of staunch nationalism it enrolled some non descript Muslims also. However, Hinduisation remained the creed of the party which was championed vehemently by Balraj Madhok.⁷ Interestingly the brand of Hinduism preached by it has nothing to do with the Hindu religion.⁸ In fact as a communal party the Jan sangh used religion for political purposes.

Hindu communalism, therefore, had been made the ideological plank, on which the Bhartiya Jan Sangh asserted, it would be able to gain power. However, it was rejected by Hindus, what to say by the Indians at large. It will be interesting to see the performance of the Bhartiya Jan Sangh in Uttar Pradesh in the first three elections.

Election Results for U.P. Assembly, B.J.S.

1952	Votes polled in per cent	6.5
	Candidates	211
	Elected	2
	Elected By 50% +	—
	Lost Deposit	152
1957	Votes polled	9.8
	Candidates	235
	Elected	17
	Elected By 50% +	3
	Lost Deposit	143
1962	Votes polled	16.3
	Candidates	377
	Elected	49
	Elected By 50% +	10
	Lost Deposit	192

Source: V.B. Singh and Shankar Bose, *State Elections in India, Data Handbook on Vidhan Sabha Elections, Vol. 4, The North, Part II.*

The progress of the Jan Sangh on virulent communal propaganda was not very encouraging. However, the 1962 Indo-China war, and the 1965 Indo-Pak war had provided the opportunity which would boost the Bhartiya Jan Sangh in the state. The deterioration on the economic front, increasing prices and disappearance of essential commodities from the market created discontent in the masses. There was indeed disillusionment against the Congress Party. However, there was no secular alternative to it. The Jan Sangh had tried to manipulate this discontent in its favour. It tried to mobilise Hindu support by raising the slogan against cow slaughter. The ban on cow slaughter was the slogan in the 1967 election which was made to harness communal support. However, the slogan gave limited success. Following is the record of Jan Sangh's performance in the election.

1967 Assembly Election in Uttar Pradesh, B.J.S.

Votes polled	21.7%
Candidates	401
Elected	98
Elected by 50% +	2
Lost Deposit	151

Source: V.B.Singh and Shankar Bose, State Elections in India, Data Handbook on Vidhan Sabha Elections, vol. 4, The North, Part II.

The limited success of the Jan Sangh was an expression of disillusionment of the people with the Congress, rather than the success of its communal politics. It did emerge as the second largest party in the assembly but the combined support of the other non Jan Sangh, non-Congress opposition parties was much larger as they polled 46.1% votes against the Bhartiya Jan Sangh's 21.7%. The other non-Congress parties nevertheless had been weak in terms of their resources. While the Jan Sangh neither lacked money nor organisation. In the 1967 elections it contested 401 seats and spent a large amount of money in electioneering.

Thus in spite of raising communal bogey the success of the Jan Sangh was negligible even in 1967. There was a further decline in the popularity of the Jan Sangh with the emergence of the Bhartiya Kranti Dal (B.K.D.) which had been considered the party of rich peasants.⁸ The emergence of this opposition party gave a serious blow to the Bhartiya Jan Sangh because though the B.K.D. might be the party of rich peasants but it had secular

credentials. The performance of the Bhartiya Jan Sangh shows its decline.

1969 U.P. Assembly Elections, B.J.S.

Votes polled	17.9%
Candidates	397
Elected	49
Elected by 50% +	5
Lost Deposit	178

1974 U.P. Assembly Elections, B.J.S.

Votes polled	17.1%
Candidates	401
Elected	61
Elected by 50% +	4
Lost Deposit	197

Source: V.B. Singh and Shankar Bose, *State Elections in India, Data Handbook on Vidhan Sabha Elections*, vol. 4 The North, Part II.

Thus the Jan Sangh contested large number of seats and spent huge amount of money and also lost large number of deposits.⁹ It had to work out a new strategy.

The Evolution of New Strategy: Coalition with other Non-Congress Secular Parties

After 1967, the non-Congress opposition parties entered in coalition politics to dislodge the Congress government. The Jan Sangh did not want to lose its identity.¹⁰ However, it also realised that the communal politics of the Bhartiya Jan Sangh will not take it far. It would have to shed its unmitigated communal platform. The Jan Sangh joined the movement launched by Jaya Prakash Narayan. The Jan Sangh wanted to make use of this movement to expand its support, besides cleaning off its image of a communal party. In 1975, when emergency was declared and a ban was imposed on the R.S.S., Bala Saheb Deoras, its President, showed his willingness to cooperate with the Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi.¹¹

The Jan Sangh which always showed reluctance to lose its identity in the name of opposition unity against the Congress

party, merged itself in the Janata Party. For the first time the Jan Sangh was able to capture 89 seats in the parliament in the garb of the Janata Party. In Uttar Pradesh, its strength was estimated as 97.¹² While other parties as factions in Janata Party were fighting for immediate gains, the Jan Sangh had long term interests — i.e. to consolidate its position through the Janata platform. Nanaji Deshmukh, instead of accepting any ministerial position announced his plan to build the party from the grass-roots. His launching of 'Antyodaya'¹³ programme at Gonda, in Uttar Pradesh was indeed the strategy of strengthening of R.S.S. - B.J.S. in the name of the Janata Party. During this time the R.S.S. spread its tentacles wider which created suspicion among the other factions of the Janata Party. The Bhartiya Jan Sangh became the target of attack by other constituents of the Janata Party especially by the socialists. The spate of communal riots in Aligarh, Moradabad and Ranchi and involvement of hardcore R.S.S. Jan Sangh members in these riots made clear the designs of the Jan Sangh faction. Ultimately the Janata Party got split and the Jan Sangh faction also came out of it in 1979.

It adopted a new nomenclature — the Bhartiya Janata Party. Referring to the new nomenclature S.C. Jha writes, "when the B.J.S. people came out of the Janata Party coalition (in 1979), they revived their old organisation, but under a new name, the Bhartiya Janata Party. There were specific reasons for adopting the new nomenclature. They had merged, as other parties, with the Janata Party in 1977, after burning their home and signboard. The old house(B.J.P.) with its signboard was burnt with great enthusiasm and full confidence that they would never enter the old house of that old name plate. But inside the Janata Party when the charge of dual membership was started being brandished against them they were pushed to the wall and they found themselves in a suffocating situation by remaining in the Janata combine".¹⁴ They retained the word 'Janata' in their new incarnation as 'Bhartiya Janata' as they had an association with the Janata Party. Jha says, "the people in general were in the process of forgetting that they ever belonged to some organisation which used to be communal."¹⁵ Besides, the Janata Party was founded under the supervision of Jaya Prakash Narayan whose credentials about secularism and democracy cannot be challenged.

Thus when out of the Janata coalition, if any lurking charge of communalism is repeated against them, they can produce the certificate of their association with a party whose foundation was laid by one whose life was a saga of secularism to nullify that charge.¹⁶

The party at this juncture wanted to show its secular credentials and the 'Sangh' suffix was reminiscent of the Sangh of the R.S.S., therefore, it preferred the word 'party' to 'sangh'. The word 'Janata' was nevertheless 'modern' term. Thus writes Jha, "they decided to jettison the old name and carry the new name the Bhartiya Janata Party, when out of the Janata merger in 1980. But in reality only the label and the bottle have changed while contents are the same."¹⁷

The B.J.P., inspite of its new name, remained an outcaste from the mainstream of Indian politics for its communal ideology. So it adopted its new aim — 'Gandhian socialism', to misguide people, as if it had either faith in Gandhi's broad concept of religion or egalitarian socialism. That the cloak which it wore, 'Gandhian socialism', did not fit it became evident within the short period of its new birth.¹⁸ The BJP soon returned to its earlier ideal of 'Integrated Humanism'¹⁹ as was propounded by its late leader Deen Dayal Upadhyaya, a dedicated R.S.S. person.

These political aerobics did not help the Bhartiya Janata Party much. As a component of the Janata Party government it had made use of its power to expand its base tremendously.²⁰ However, inspite of this advantage which occurred during the short term of the Janata rule, it could not succeed in gaining power during the next elections. It contested election alone and fared very badly at the central level. Its performance in Uttar Pradesh was quite dismal. Although the R.S.S. had increased its branches (Shakhas) through women, students and labour fronts, its percentage of vote had fallen. The 1980, and 1985 results show this fact.

Election Results for Uttar Pradesh Assembly, the B.J.P.

1980	Votes polled in percentage	10.8
	Candidates	400
	Elected	11
	Elected by 50%	nil
	Lost deposit	283

1985	Votes polled in percentage	9.0
	Candidates	347
	Elected	16
	Lost deposit	249

Source: V.B. Singh and Shankar Bose, State Elections in India Data Handbook on Vidhan Sabha election.

The election results had been disappointing for the B.J.P. It had to evolve a policy which could help to pull it up. The most important feature of its new policy is dual talk and two faces. On political front it takes a liberal democratic and secular posture, on the social level blatantly aggressive communal.

The blatant communal politics is against the very fundamentals of Indian political culture. The B.J.P. has to work within the parameters of the law of the land, therefore, it evolved this dual policy. In face of the challenge L.K. Advani made to other parties to fight elections on the twin issues of nationalism and secularism, on December 1, 1990, A.G. Noorani posed a question to B.J.P. to define these concepts in its manifesto. But the B.J.P. has been discreetly silent on an issue on which the party has doggedly campaigned since its fourth plenary session at Agra in April 1988 till the toppling of the National Front government in November 1990. Whether this is due to legal advice, in the light of the Bombay High Court rulings that the Hindutva slogan violates the law, or not, the importance of the B.J.P.'s campaign far transcends the law.²² Apart from the legal aspect, the B.J.P. had a political motive in showing in its documents its liberal facade so that it could spread its tentacles, and rope liberal democratic persons, having standing in social and political life. The Bhartiya Janata Party manifesto of 1989 presents the B.J.P. in an entirely different complexion which says "India is one country, and all Indians irrespective of caste, creed or language are one people, one nation."

It went on to say that the idea of a theocratic state is an anathema to Indian mind and the B.J.P. believes that the state in India has always been a civil institution which respects all religions equally and makes no discrimination between one citizen and the other on the grounds of language, gender, caste or religion. It is the duty of the state to guarantee justice and security to all

minorities — linguistic, religious or ethnic. The B.J.P. considers that it is also imperative for national integration that minorities do not develop a minority complex.²³

Thus apparently the B.J.P. tried to project itself as a liberal democratic party, but in reality it was continuously encouraging most vicious communal propaganda against all religious communities and calling them 'anti national'. It launched an 'Ekamata' movement, as a movement uniting the Hindus. Behind that movement the clear motive was to address majority Hindu making them feel as if a great injustice was being done to them. Lal Krishna Advani replaced Atal Behari Vajpai who was considered a liberal and had avoided blatantly communal propaganda. Advani changed the tone of the B.J.P. through constant irrational propaganda. He tried to show that the Hindus have been suffering because of the minorities. Most irrational demagoguery was used to incite the gullible. The speeches of B.J.P. leaders and the articles in 'Organiser', an R.S.S. journal have been the best example of Goebelmism during this time. All efforts were made to create an atmosphere of communal tension which resulted in communal riots in different parts of the country. The Bhagalpur riots in Bihar and intermittent riots in Gujarat were engineered to whip up communal emotions. In Uttar Pradesh, Meerut, Aligarh, Moradabad and in some other places, a spate of communal riots resulted in large scale loss of human lives and property. The Maliana tragedy and the blatant murder of women passengers in a bus in Meerut were nothing but examples of the worst type of savagery. The Bhartiya Jan Sangh in 1967, in the S.V.D. government and in 1977 in the Janata Party used its political clout to communalise the P.A.C. and it has been playing an extremely communal role in riots, butchering poor Muslim population indiscriminately. The victory of communal ideology should not be assessed only in terms of electoral success but in their capacity to vitiate the atmosphere that people stop thinking in rational and sensible manner.

The R.S.S. and the B.J.P. painted the slogans all over the walls in the entire Hindi speaking areas 'Garv Se Kaho Hum Hindu Hain' (Say with pride that we are Hindus) or 'Jo Hindu Hit Ki Bat Karega Wohi Desh Main Rajya Karega' (only those will be ruling the country who protect the interests of the Hindus).

Needless to say these slogans express stark aggressiveness and are intimidating in their expression.

The B.J.P. and the R.S.S. had floated an organisation, the Vishva Hindu Parishad to expand their support. The Bajrang Dal is an organisation of lumpens which have been indulging in all kinds of nefarious anti-social activities. As a political party the B.J.P. has a limitation — it has to work within a constitutional framework, to win an election it could not depend only on lumpen elements but it has to project itself as a political party of integrity and maturity. Therefore these organisations fulfil its extra constitutional job. Similarly, the R.S.S. also shows to the world as an organised disciplined organisation the membership of which is very close. Thus besides other mass fronts these two organisations came very handy for the B.J.P. and the R.S.S. to communalise politics in favour of the B.J.P.

Communal historiography²⁴ had always been one of the instruments through which R.S.S./B.J.P./B.J.S. have been distorting history. The Hindu communalism has been projecting history in the gamut of outsiders and insiders.²⁵ The insider Hindus had fought Muslim invaders, who had committed large scale atrocities on the Hindus and the Hindus had to take the revenge now, because they are now in power as majority community in the country, is the perverse logic behind this historiography. The complexity of historical events has been reduced to Hindu-Muslim conflict. The purpose indeed is very heinous i.e. to create hatred against minorities, calling them outsiders, invaders and perpetrators of cruelty and exhorting the Hindus to pay back the treatment they had suffered.²⁶ This kind of propagation of history through different sources of media, and education, the Goebalism of R.S.S./B.J.P. in this regard, is nothing but out and out fascism,²⁷ to call minorities as dogs, giving them a bad name. Following Nazi dictum that through constant propaganda people begin to accept a blatant lie as truth, the B.J.P. has been indulging in a campaign of disinformation about history. For this it has been using symbols, provocative slogans to provoke the susceptibilities of the gullible people so that they behave in an aggressive manner.

The Ram Mandir/Babri Masjid issue which erupted suddenly, nevertheless had been one of the very important ploys, the B.J.P. used politically for securing votes in the 1990 election. Ayodhya is the birthplace of Lord Rama and there was legal controversy over the Ram Temple and the Babri Masjid. After the issue of 'Ban on Cow Slaughter', the Jan Sangh/B.J.P. has been trying to project its secular image. However, beneath that secular image it could not cover its communal reality, and it was not taken seriously by the masses in the 1980, and the 1984 elections. The Ram Temple/Babri Masjid issue was seized by the Vishva Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal who were fully supported by the B.J.P.²⁸ Interestingly, the litigation and the question which had been going on for very long, suddenly ignited emotions.²⁹ The entire Uttar Pradesh became the hotbed of the communal controversy. On pan shops, cinemas and crossings in the cities people started discussing the same issue. It is true 'that the sentiments aroused by the movement are not 'primordial' but that they are fragmented and depend on developments in the political arena'.³⁰ The 'issue' indeed was blown up to communalise politics so that the focus of election, instead of being on economic and political issues, should get digressed. There should be religious polarisation which will facilitate the B.J.P. to capture power. Peter Van Der Veer rightly says, "It is, however, clear enough that the movement aroused sentiments which had been virtually dormant since 1950. Between 1950 and 1984, there had been no action, no movement to demand Hindu occupation of the place of Ram's birth except for legal actions".³¹ The concept of Rama indeed is important in social and cultural life of Uttar Pradesh and a large number of Hindus worship Him as God but it never had been provocative or anti-Muslim.

The B.J.P. got an opportunity to unleash communal propaganda on the pretext of the Ram Janma Bhoomi issue on the eve of the 1989 election.

The 1989 Assembly Election, National Front and the B.J.P.

On the last two occasions, the B.J.P. had contested the elections alone and did not fare well. It had to initiate a new strategy now.

It agreed to make seat adjustment with the National Front parties, which were a combination of almost all of the non-Congress parties barring the Left and the Communist parties and the B.J.P. Seat adjustments were also made in Uttar Pradesh, however, there were large number of seats where the National Front and the B.J.P. could not reach agreement on seat. They contested³² election against each other in around 220 seats and B.J.P. was able to secure 60 seats, 30 seats out of these seats it won on its own. This gave confidence to the B.J.P. as it had improved its position from the 1985 elections when it had secured only 16 seats. There were many seats where it contested against the Janata Dal and lost by a narrow margin. This boosted the morale of the B.J.P. that its use of Mandir/Masjid controversy paid it dividends in electoral successes. The election results at the central level also favoured its position as no party secured a majority. The B.J.P. extended its support to the National Front government. The Babri Masjid/Mandir issue it wanted to use to the maximum so that if mid-term election takes place, it got all the advantages.³³ During this time the B.J.P. made maximum use of this extraordinary situation.³¹ It refused to join the Front in forming the government because it did not want to fall in the same situation as it was in 1977. However, it would be better for it to blackmail and pull the strings from outside and eschew as many concessions as can be possible and expand its base for future elections.

The B.J.P. nevertheless was not interested in the solution of the Ram Janma Bhoomi-Babri Masjid issue. It adopted adamancy along with the V.H.P. and the Bajrang Dal to construct the temple on the disputed site. Not only this, the B.J.P. and others had been threatening that they would also take up the issue of Mosque/Temple in Mathura and Varanasi besides 3000 other mosques. The threatening tone of the B.J.P. and the Vishva Hindu Parishad resulted in large scale riots and violence in Muzaffarnagar, Khatauli and Aligarh before the 1989 elections. After the election, the environment in the country remained tense. The victory of the National Front and B.J.P. combine was celebrated in Rajasthan with a communal riot in Jaipur, the place where communal riots were unheard of. Afterwards in the entire year, prior to the June 1991 election, the country had witnessed a series of riots. The delicate position which the National Front government found itself was used to the maximum by the B.J.P. Threat-

ening postures became bolder day by day and the last straw came as the Toyota Rath Yatra started by the B.J.P. leader Mr. L.K. Advani from Somnath to Ayodhya.

The communally surcharged atmosphere, the short-sighted policies of Prime Minister, V.P. Singh and the U.P. Chief Minister, Mulayam Singh Yadav to deal with the situation gave a fillip to the success of the Hindu communalists. The self immolation of students over Mandal recommendation alienated uppercaste middle class from the Janata Dal. This is true that inspite of communalism of the B.J.P. the Ayodhya seat was not won, by either the Congress or the B.J.P. but by a communist member, Mitra Sen Yadav. However, in the 1991 election, because of mishandling at Ayodhya - 'removal of the canopy over the shilanyas spot, mass arrests, restoration on restriction of movement on Parikrama and worship in Ayodhya, video cassettes gory posters of killed Kar Sevaks all gave the thrust to the B.J.P. campaign. The video cassettes prepared by them were shown all over the state. The ashes of the martyrs were taken to other places of the country to incite the people. The aftermath of the Rathyatra combined with vicious communal propaganda was followed by unprecedented communal riots.

It is also interesting to see how communalists influence each other. The Hindu communalists had learnt their lessons to misuse religious places from the Sikh extremist communalists. The phrase for religious work 'Kar Seva' generally used by the Sikhs has been adopted by the former. The Sikh extremists and communalists chose the Golden Temple as the centre of activity. Any harm to the temple would hurt the feelings of the ordinary Sikh which could be utilised to incite the communal feelings. Before Operation Blue Star the ordinary Sikhs were apathetic to the extremists, communal politics. Audio cassettes of Bhindernwale were used to provoke the Sikhs' hurt feelings. Similarly, the temple area became a contentious issue. The strategy of confrontation, would result in the killing of the people, which ultimately could be utilised for further aggravating the surcharged atmosphere. The propaganda blitz had shown the misuse of modern technology to the hilt. It was not the temple/mosque issue but a display of intimidating tactics on the Part of Hindu communalists, and showing of separatist tendencies on the part of "Muslim communalists".

Rath Yatra and Communal Riots

The Rathyatra, in the name of Hinduism, was an extravaganza and a vulgar show of money. Nevertheless the Rathyatra left behind a trail of unprecedented communal riots.

The Yatra had to be stopped. The Central Government headed by Prime Minister V.P. Singh fell because the B.J.P. withdrew its support. The S.J.P.(Samajwadi Janata Party) government with Congress support did not have strength to contain communal onslaught unleashed by the communal forces. The Mulayam Singh government, which decided to associate itself with the S.J.P. government was also unable to face the challenges posed by the communal forces. The following record of communal riots after the Rathyatra explains the real motive of the Yatra.

Riots after 25 September 1990 in Uttar Pradesh

1. Meerut, November 2, 3, 1990.
2. Ayodhya, Faizabad, 2 November, 1990.
3. Bahraich, November 3, 4, 1990.
4. Bijnore, 30 November, 1990
5. Aligarh, December 7, 1990.
6. Kanpur, December 10, 1990.
7. Janningour, December 14, 1990. Bulandshahar
8. Muzaffarnagar, December 12, 13, 1990.
9. Varanasi, December 12, 13, 1990.
10. Khurja, December 18, 1990 and January 21, 1991.
11. Gang Dundhwara (neighbouring village of Etah District) December 8, 1990.
12. Ghaziabad, January 27, 1991:
13. Lucknow, January 15, 1991.
14. Agra, January 15, 1991.
15. Gonda, September 30, 1991.

Tension and Curfew

1. Raikhand, December 22, 1990.
2. Mirzapur, December 22, 1990.

3. Saharanpur, December 22, 1990.
4. PilaKhwa, January 4, 1991.
5. Kashganj, December 13 to 15, 1990.
6. Govindpur,
7. Colonelgunj,
8. Rampur,
9. Sitapur,
10. Gorakhpur

(The information about these riots has been collected from the newspapers).

After the fall of the S.J.P. government and declaration of mid-term elections, the communal riots flared up like wild fire in Uttar Pradesh. The riots serve a very important purpose for the communalists, because they create an atmosphere of extreme emotional out-burst which blurs the rational thinking of common person. The rumours add fuel to fire. Needless to say that the atmosphere gets so vitiated it evaporates goodwill and amicable relations. It creates suspicion and hatred against the other community. The riots give a chance to self-styled communal leaders to pose as saviours of the community. The community starts looking towards them. They (the communalists) inflict injury from the backdoor and appear as healers from the front door to fool the people.

The Hindi Press especially the newspapers 'Aaj', 'Jagran' and 'Amar Ujala' sensationalised the already surcharged atmosphere of the State. The reportings were not only exaggerated but also extremely communally inflammable. For this kind of reporting the Press Council admonished these newspapers. The height of irresponsible reporting was the planting of the false story of killing of patients in Jawaharlal Medical College, Aligarh by the doctors on duty.³⁵

Communal Riots and the Backward and Scheduled Castes

The poor people of the country, workers and peasants who irrespective of caste and creed live side by side have always been Achilles heel for the B.J.S./B.J.P. So far the B.J.S./B.J.P.'s support base by and large, had been confined to urban-middle classes mainly traders.³⁶ The B.J.P. had to penetrate in the poor section of

the people to secure votes. Therefore to mobilise support it had to divide people on the basis of community. Specially to counter the Janata Dal mobilisation of the backward class on the basis of the Mandal report, the riots came quite handy for the B.J.P. The B.J.P. had succeeded in its endeavour to divide people communally. It made its maximum effort to woo the backward castes.

During this period in the rural areas also which were earlier untouched by communal violence, the B.J.P. had made inroads.³⁷

The Ideological Attack on Liberal, Secular Democratic Ideals

With the B.J.S. as its predecessor the B.J.P. has been identified as a communal party and communalism has its two limitations in the social reality of India. (1) Communalism is an epithet which has been against the ethos of Indian culture. The national movement has given strength to this ethos. (2) India is a multireligious multi-cultural society, no political power basing itself on a particular communal interest can get legitimacy in the system. The B.J.P.'s dilemma is its opposition to this ethos of the country. To resolve this contradiction, the B.J.P. has been employing different tactics. First by attacking the ideal of secularism. The 'Organiser' the R.S.S./B.J.P. paper writes, "Today secularism has become a profitable business. It has attracted all kinds of shady characters. Even more than patriotism, it has become the last refuge of scoundrels of all descriptions, used by ambitious politicians for vote catching, by communal intellectuals for giving themselves a progressive image and by aggressive minorities for self-aggrandisement."

However, this blatant attack on the ideal did not help them and they followed the another tactic to fight against their detractors, that is, attacking those who believe in liberal democratic, and secular ideals calling them as pseudo-secularists and projecting their own party as a unifying nationalist force. Here is a specimen of this attack which is nothing but an exercise full of falsehood as L.K. Advani says, "secularism has come to mean a premium on belonging to a minority, and sometimes, in the the case of some perverse politicians, a euphemism for Hindu Baiting"³⁸.

After attacking secularism, B.J.P. instead of the throwing away the concept, rather takes a third turn calling themselves as genuine secularists. The B.J.P. plays a trick making a synonym of this Hindu communalism with religion itself. Advani pleads that the Hindu can never be communal. The amorphous and variegated Hinduism is nevertheless different from the Hindu communalism propagated by the B.J.P. Advani admits that over a period of time many streams contributed to the culture of this country, to the nation, and then reverses himself by saying "Hinduism" is the essential ingredient of this culture. What is this essential ingredient, the explanation expresses its narrow, sectarian nature. K.R. Malkani's write up in the 'Organiser' explains, "when....therefore the Hindu wishes for a Hindu State....All that the Hindu wants is that Hindu values should be recognised and Sanskars respected in Hindustan, i.e. Sanskrit invocation with chanting of our Puja and Havan with coconut and conch shell should be welcome as the right rituals for any solemn occasion in India to clear the atmosphere and uplift the soul"³⁹

B.J.P.'s liberal interpretation of Hinduism is to attract the liberal minded people to support the B.J.P., however, this liberalism is only skin deep. In this liberal guise it had attacked the secularists. But this attack on secular ideals did not make them popular, therefore, the B.J.P. reversed its methodology, it started calling others as communal and themselves as secular. They coined a new phrase "Genuine secularism". The plea is that the Hindus adopted secularism as the philosophy of state is indicative of their inherent secular nature. Time and again it asserted that it was a great concession on the part of Hindus towards Muslims and Christians that they are allowed to live in this country at the mercy of the 'Hindus'. The trick in this demagoguery of communal B.J.P. is to speak on behalf of the entire Hindu community. The fact is the B.J.P. has been rejected by the Hindus. No one can deny the fact that different religious communities of India have accepted secularism. Hindus are secular indeed but not the B.J.P. So the B.J.P.'s secular communalism camouflages itself in the doctrine of 'nationalism'.

On this 'secular communalism' the B.J.P. and its leadership build their concept of Hindu nationalism. Bipan Chandra exposes the machinations of the B.J.P. He writes, 'to acquire political legitimacy and to grow nation-wide so as to acquire a he-

gemonistic position in Indian politics, it [B.J.P.] must take recourse to more universal doctrine and appeal to nationalism, it must give communalism a nationalist garb”.

This nationalist garb worn by Hindu communalism helped the B.J.P. to attract large number of non-R.S.S. non-communal persons in its fold. As a part of the strategy for winning the election, the B.J.S-B.J.P. from its inception had recruited people who were generally liberal in their outlook. In this election the B.J.P. made use of this strategy fully. It distributed tickets not to its cadre, who have been associated with the the organisation but to those people who had public standing. This served two purposes—(1) It could show that the B.J.P. is a liberal organisation, so that non-communalists could support it; (2) The B.J.P. does not lack people who have some public image. So recruitment for election purpose would give it a face lift. Bipan Chandra has explained the success of the strategy of the B.J.P. He Says, “Clearly, the B.J.P. has been quite successful in the last two or three years in winning over a section of the middle classes. This has been only a part of its attack on secularism as ‘minoritism’. It has been much more because of its appeal to nationalism. A major factor in the beeline that many professionals and retired bureaucrats and army officers have made for the B.J.P has been the perceived threats to India’s unity, integrity, stability and even independence. Many are impressed by the R.S.S. and the B.J.P.’s reputation for discipline. Nationalism is also enabling Hindu communalism to make up for its major weaknesses—its failure to draw intellectuals to itself. In recent years, it has finally succeeded in attracting many intellectuals, whose number though is still small”.⁴⁰

Thus the strategy of distortion of history, creating hatred against the minorities, and disseminating disinformation, demagoguery to the hilt, blackmailing Hindu sentiments in the name of Ram,⁴¹ engineering communal riots, especially in the poor areas to mobilise scheduled castes and backward castes, misguiding people about secularism, camouflaging communalism in the garb of nationalism paid dividends to B.J.P. in the 1991 elections in Uttar Pradesh. It increased its strength in parliament and also formed the government although by a thin majority in Uttar Pradesh.

This success, however, does not represent Indians who belonging to different communities are secular be they Hindu, Muslim, Christians, Sikhs etc. The communal parties are not their representatives. The B.J.P. does not represent the Hindu community either. The intellectuals have a grave responsibility at this juncture to counter the disinformation tactics of the fascist forces with the matching zeal to stall their growth.

Foot Notes

1. For relationship between R.S.S, See Craig Baxter, *The Jan Sangh: A Biography of an Indian Political Party*, Oxford, Bombay, 1971.
2. See, Kiran Saxena, *R.S.S., Jan Sangh, Janata, What Next?* Mainstream, Delhi, 14 April, 1980.
3. See, Dina Nath Mishra, *R.S.S., Myth and Reality*, Delhi, 1980, pp. 17-41.
4. There are different explanations of the birth of Bhartiya Jana Sangh Party. One explanation was given by an R.S.S. spokesman which has been accepted by Craig Baxter, *op. cit.*, Dina Nath Mishra, *op. cit.* Walter K. Anderson and D. Damle, *The Brotherhood in Saffron. The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh and Hindu Revivalism*, Delhi, 1987, pp. 157-207. Bruce Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics*, Cambridge, 1990, pp.5-43. Myron Weiner, *Party Politics in India. The Development of a Multi-Party System*, Princeton New Jersey, 1957, p. 179. However, in my view the reason for the birth of the Bhartiya Jan Sangh was that earlier the R.S.S. did not want to clash with the British imperialism, which would, in that case, curb its activities. The role as Hindu communal organisation would rather help the British to rule the country by practising a policy of divide and rule. In independent India participation in politics means enjoying power to translate their ideology.
5. The relationship between the R.S.S. and the Jan Sangh has been analysed by Anderson and Damle, *op. cit.*, Angela Burgers Sutherland, *opposition in a Dominant Party System: A Study of the Jan Sangh, the Praja Socialist Party and the Socialist Party in Uttar Pradesh, India*, Berkeley, 1969.
6. Myron Weiner, *op. cit.*, p. 197.
7. See Balraj Madhok, *Hindu rashtira, A Study in Indian Nationalism*, Calcutta, 1955 and *Indianisation*, New Delhi, 1970.
8. The emergence of the B.K.D. has been analysed as emergence of a peasant lobby which became a strong force after land reforms and the green revolution. See Paul R. Brass, *Caste, Faction and Party in Indian Politics*, vol. II, Delhi, 1985, pp. 65-162. Francine Frankel, *India's Green Revolution: Economic Gains and Political Costs*, Princeton, 1971.
9. The Jan Sangh (later B.J.P.) had lost the security deposits of the largest number of candidate amongst the important political parties of india which

- was referred to by *Socialist Congressman* (Delhi) "Jan Sangh leads India in forfeiture of Election Deposits".
10. A section in the Jan Sangh party wanted to join the Bhartiya Lok Dal, however, the other section which was a dominant section did not want the Jan Sangh to lose its identity. Therefore, the former section left the Jan Sangh and joined the B.L.D. Notable among them were Balraj Madhok who revived the Jan Sangh again.
 11. See, Kiran Saxena, *op. cit.*
 12. The assessment of strength is tentative as officially nowhere the strength of the party was estimated on the basis of their erstwhile party loyalties. According to '*Dainik Jagran*', Kanpur, June 20, 1977, the relative strength of the erstwhile parties were B.L.D., 150; the Jan Sangh 107, and according to '*National Herald*', the B.L.D. and Jan Sangh combine had 252 seats.
 13. See, C.P. Bhambhri, *The Janata Party, A profile*, New Delhi, 1980. Brahm Dutt, *Five Headed Monster: A Factual Narrative of the Genesis of Janata Party*, Delhi, 1978. For Uttar Pradesh, see, Kiran Saxena, *The Janata Party Politics in Uttar Pradesh 1977-79* in '*The Indian Political Science Review*', vol. XVII, July 1983, no. 2.
 14. S.C. Jha, *The Bhartiya Janata Party In Indian Party Politics*, Deep Publication, 1989, pp. 234-35.
 15. *Ibid.*
 16. *Ibid.*
 17. *Ibid.*
 18. The B.J.P. could not stick to Gandhi's concept of socialism because Gandhi's philosophy is just the anti-thesis of R.S.S. communal philosophy.
 19. The philosophy of 'Integrated Humanism' is an exercise in abstraction. Shibboleth, apparently humanistic, however, the philosophy of Integrated Humanism as practised by B.J.P. is unmitigated hatred for humanity.
 20. See Dina Nath Misra, *op. cit.*, pp.48-49.
 21. The Western scholars, see foot Note No. 4, who studied R.S.S., B.J.S., depend mainly on the material provided by the organization. These scholars do not take into account the real politics of these organizations on the streets, walls of the cities, conversation in spreading canards and rumours.
 22. A.G. Noorani, *B.J.P. Child of R.S.S. and Heir to Hindu Mahasabha*, '*Mainstream*', July 27, 1990.
 23. See the Bhartiya Janata Party election Manifesto, 1989.
 24. As a constituent of the Janata Party in 1977 it used its clout to suppress the liberal historical works and ordered the withdrawal of the writings of learned historians from the text-books.
 25. T.K. Oommen explains the expansionist and separatist character of Hindu Communalism in his paper, *Insiders and Outsiders in India: Primordial Collec-*

- tivism and cultural Pluralism in Nation Building*". in *International Sociology*, Vol. I, Number 1, March 1986.
26. Romila Thapar writes, 'The projection of the past in terms of communal history, namely that the history of india is to be seen as the glory of the ancient period when Hinduism is in the ascendent during the medieval period when that place was taken by Islam, continues to be the simplistic view of Hindu communal groups'. See, Romila Thapar, *The Politics of Religious Communities*, seminar 365, January, 1990.
 27. See Anthony Elenjmittam, *The Philosophy and Action of the R.S.S. for Hind Swaraj*, Bombay, 1951, p. 58.
 28. They are in fact not separate. These organisations are different organs of the same politics.
 29. See, Ashghar Ali Engineer (ed), *Babri Masjid / Ram Janam Bhoomi Controversy*. Ajanta Publications, Delhi, 1990. Elot Koeraad, *Ram Janam Bhoomi Vs. Babri Masjid: A Case in Hindu Muslim Conflict*, Delhi, 1990. Sushil Srivastava, *The Disputed Mosque, Historical Enquiry*, Delhi, 1991.
 30. See, Peter Van Der Veer, *God Must be Liberated: A Hindu Liberation Movement in Ayodhya*, in *Modern Asian Studies*, 21.2.1987, pp. 283-301.
 31. Ibid. (It is true that people by and large were not even aware of this issue prior to the 80s. Suddenly, the issue was raked up and was converted into a movement).
 32. This information has been collected from the election office in Delhi. Although all care has been taken in calculation yet there is a possibility of minor errors, as the information has not been collected and organised.
 33. I do not agree with Mr. Asghar Ali Engineer and leftists who had the illusion of National Front Government following a value based politics. See, Asghar Ali Engineer, *National Front Government and Communal Situation, Economic and Political Weekly*, May 26, 1990. Engineer writes, "it was hoped that with the installation of the National Front Government, with its commitment to the value-based politics, the communal situation would improve in the country". In my view the National Front did not follow a value-based politics. The National Front's attitude towards the B.J.P. was out and out opportunistic and it had to pay the price for it. First they entered in seat adjustments with the B.J.P. and they formed the government with the B.J.P. support in 1989. This short sighted opportunism of liberals for gaining political power has always been utilised by the B.J.P. for its long-term interest.
 34. Just after the 1989 general election, communal tilt in reporting of the incidents of Jaipur made it clear that the results of the election had emboldened the Hindu communalists and they seized the mass media and started whipping up hatred against the Muslims.
 35. Three doctors, Dr. Rajesh Sofat, Dr. D.K. Sexena and Dr. Md. Najib formed a committee to enquire the causes and forces behind the allegations of massacre of Hindu Patients by Muslim doctors in J.N.M.C, Aligarh which flared

- up Aligarh riots in December 1990. The committee held that there was design and motive in the spread of this baseless rumour against the doctors of J.N.M.C., Aligarh. See the report of Delhi Medico's Front, January 1991.
36. See Baxter *op.cit.*
 37. After the election, Ajit Singh, the Janata Dal leader had mentioned that the B.J.P. (communalism in other words) had made inroads in rural areas which so far were ardent supporters of the Janata Dal.
 38. *Nation's Hope*, B.J.P.'s Publication published by Vivekanand Gupta, B.J.P. Kathak Bhavan, Bombay, n.d.
 39. See, K.R. Malkani's Article in 'Blitz', Bombay, 25 January, 1986.
 40. Bipan Chandra, 'Economic Times', 27.7.91.
 41. *Ibid.* See, the reporting in *Times of India*, May 3, 1991, p. 4, about Uttar Pradesh electioneering. The report says, "if you care to examine the currency notes in your pocket, you are likely to find that almost every piece of paper money in your possession carries a new slogan: "Jai Shri Ram". The slogan is certainly not an extension of the promise held out by the governor of the Reserve Bank of India. It is there on every note, thanks to the propaganda machinery of the B.J.P. which has unleashed novel, ingenious methods of publicity to capture the minds of its largest electorate - the Hindu".

Party Politics and Communal Mobilisation in Faizabad

Pradeep Nayak

Communalism has been a problem for India's nation building process for long years. Yet, from the early eighties communalism, or what we now call communalisation of Indian politics, has become the most distinctive idiom of Indian politics. The reasons for a shift from a left of centre path of development and secular posture to the Right, accompanied by a politically communal posture by then ruling Congress party, are manifold, most of which are inevitable offshoots of the economic and political developments of the country since Independence.

The last forty years of economic development have led to a further pauperisation of the masses and a growing disenchantment with and cynical attitude towards politics in the form of popular democratic struggle and grassroot movements in various parts of the country. The successive Congress governments were unable to effect a radical economic change that would have eased the burden on the oppressed classes and prevented the political consequence of growing inequality. But the social logic and nature of class coalition has placed constraints on state intervention¹.

In the face of the growing crisis of legitimacy faced by the Congress party and its increasing failure to mobilise mass support on economic and social issues, appealing to the people by

invoking communal sentiments and fears has become a common and powerful strategy. Mrs. Indira Gandhi perfected the art of adopting communal postures as witnessed in the RSS's cooperation in the Congress party's victory in the Delhi Municipal election and the Jammu Assembly election, launching "Operation Blue Star" in Punjab, the ouster of Dr. Farooq Abdullah from the post of Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, the anti-Sikh riots after Indira Gandhi's assassination, and this was also manifested in the campaigns of Rajiv Gandhi in the 1984² and the 1989 General elections. Such a tilt to the communal line by the premier national party has encouraged the rise of hitherto marginalised and dormant political parties like the BJP. Moreover, the Congress party's dubious role in the Shah Bano case and the Babri Masjid-Ramjanmabhoomi dispute has furthered the process of communalisation of the Indian politics. If the fundamentalists and theologians could compel Rajiv Gandhi's Government to enact a legislation to nullify the Supreme Court judgement on the Shah Bano case, the Hindu communalists can also compel to demolish a historical mosque to construct a Ram temple there.

Crucial to the understanding of the shift of the political discourse and the new phase of communalism are two main points³. Communalism and politics have become complementary to each other. Communalism receives its wider acceptance and legitimacy in the political processes. Secondly, the role of the state has been seen as being one of communalising the political process which can be proved by even a cursory glance at the Ayodhya dispute.

In the present study, our analytical framework rests on the assumption that communalisation of Indian politics is essentially a political phenomenon. By "political" we mean those activities and events which can only be understood in terms of their relationship with public postures or wider goals and the decision making structures. Communalisation of Indian politics has been reflected in heightened community consciousness and prejudices, communal riots and mobilisation of a community on the basis of its traditional cultural symbols in the political process. It can also be perceived as a conscious attempt to divert the people's attention from the glaring failure of the

ruling as well as opposition parties to face the serious social and economic crisis of the society. In this political process, economic issues are pushed to oblivion and parochial and sentimental issues relating to a community's cultural identity, beliefs and symbols are played up as means for mobilising the electorate. Taking into consideration the fact that communalism and politics were both interlinked even in the past, it must be underscored that never before in the history of Indian politics has the communal virus attempted to swamp the Indian polity as we witness in recent years. In contradistinction to the previous general elections (upto seventh) what we are witnessing today is open and naked communal politics and blatant communal mobilisation in the general elections and a conscious attempt to unite the majority community under a common ideological banner.

Based on the analytical framework and political context as mentioned earlier, we have undertaken an extensive field survey of Faizabad Lok Sabha constituency in the eastern Uttar Pradesh to assess the nature of the political campaign and strategies of mobilisation adopted by the political parties, especially the BJP, on the eve of tenth General elections.

The Faizabad Lok Sabha constituency (under which falls the Ayodhya Assembly constituency) has become one of the politically important constituencies. It has attracted the added attention of scholars, and the print media and has received political importance by all the major national parties. Despite the secret understanding between the local Congress (I) and the BJP in the ninth General elections, the mandate was by and large in favour of communal harmony as evident from the humiliating defeat for the Congress (I) the BJP candidates in Faizabad Lok Sabha and Ayodhya assembly constituencies respectively. But the Faizabad district presented an altogether different political picture in the tenth General elections.

The Mandal-Mandir issue has polarised the electorate of Faizabad which would hardly make any difference in the voting pattern in the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. While the Muslims, the backward castes and some sections of Scheduled Castes population have heavily tilted in favour of the JD-LF

combine, the urban based middle classes, traders and upper castes have thrown their political weight behind the BJP and the Congress.

To avenge its humiliating defeat and demonstrate the grip of 'Ram wave' over Faizabad, the BJP was determined to wrest the Faizabad Lok Sabha seat and Ayodhya Assembly seat from its main rivals, the JD-CPI combine and the Congress(I). That for the BJP it was a battle for the heart and mind of Faizabad — the epicentre of Ram imbroglio — can be proved from its aggressive political mobilisation and shrill campaign with the help of its RSS-VHP-Bajrang Dal and Durga Vahini allies. The party expected that unprecedented local enthusiasm to Advani's rath-yatra and subsequent public sympathy to the events of October 30 and November 3, 1990 could be converted into votes by political mobilisation.

For the ardent supporters and local leaders of the BJP, the important issues in the elections were the demand for the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya, abolition of Article 370 and promotion of a uniform civil code. However, the issue of the Ram-Janmabhoomi Temple had received the foremost priority from the BJP supporters. They were of the firm opinion that the rath yatra had bridged the chasm between the upper and lower castes, if the massive public response to Advani's rath yatra is taken as an indication of wide public acceptance⁵. Aware of the subtle impact of the Mandal Commission Report among the backward castes who constitute more than 60% of the population in Faizabad parliamentary constituency and their spontaneous sympathy to the JD, the BJP had fielded Vinay Katiyar, a backward caste (Kurmi) member and the UP Bajrang Dal Convenor, to make a dent on the JD's growing backward caste support base. Further, projecting Mr. Katiyar would have helped to rescue the BJP from being stigmatised as "Brahmin-Bania" party. Moreover, by fielding Vinay Katiyar, the UP Bajrang Dal Convenor, who played a leading role in organising the "Kar Seva agitation" during October-November 1990, the BJP had virtually made the Parliamentary elections in Faizabad as a referendum on "Ram-Janmabhoomi"⁶. By doing this, the BJP had been able to portray Mr. Katiyar as the 'Rambhakt' fighting with CPI, Congress (I) and BJP candidates, branded as "Ramdrohis"

The BJP's exclusive emphasis on the Ram-Janmabhoomi issue and mobilisation of mass support around it was clearly discerned when the party's seniormost leader, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, addressed an election meeting of the party in Faizabad. The BJP and its allies left no stone unturned to ensure the success of Vajpayee's meeting. At the outset of the meeting, the local leaders describing the parliamentary and assembly elections as crucial for the Hindus since the election battles would be between the *Rambhaktas* or *Rashtrawadis* (the BJP and its allies) and *Ramvirodhis* or *Rashtravirodhis* (the JD, SJP, Congress (I) and the left), exhorted the public assembled at the huge gathering not to waste their vote by voting on caste lines. Addressing the mass Assembly as one of the *Rambhaktas*, the city unit party secretary sought to evoke the religious fervour by harking back to the events at Ayodhya in October-November 1990 and made a fervent appeal to them not to forget the 'martyrs' who died in police firing for "the larger cause of Hindus" and vote for the BJP to cherish that "noble" cause.

Mr. Vajpayee in his evocative and fiery speech concentrated mostly on his party's main poll plank — Ram — and appealed to the voters of *Ram Ki Nagari* to give a massive mandate to his party so that within a couple of years it would be able to build a magnificent Ram-Janmabhoomi temple. He asserted that Ram is the symbol of "our national pride" as "he transcends the social and economic barriers of Hindu society." The Ayodhya dispute, he asserted, is not simply the question of constructing a temple or righting a historical wrong, rather it involves the larger question of reconstructing Indian nationalism, Vajpayee declared amidst loud slogans of the party workers that rent the air: "*Jai Shri Ram, Jai Shri Ram*", "*Kar Seva Ka Balidan, Mang raha hai Kamal Nishan*", (the lotus symbol demands sacrifice from the Kar sevaks), "*Hindi-Hindu-Hindustan, Mang raha hai Kamal Nishan*" (the lotus symbol demands — Hindi, Hindu and Hindustan), "*Hindutva Ne Pukara Hai, Garam Khoon Hamara hai*" (Hindutva calls out to those who are hot blooded).⁷ In the meeting, it was very difficult to identify the core BJP workers from the large gatherings of their saffron brethren.

The BJP, in some rural areas, seems to have caught the imagination of the masses transcending the caste barriers. The memories of those Kar sevaks who were killed in police firing (while at-

tempting to do "Kar Seva" for "liberating" Ram-Janmabhoomi) still haunts the minds of a cross section of Hindus in and around Ayodhya township, thanks to the exaggerated and manipulated accounts given by the print media. Mulayam Singh Yadav's provocative speeches against the BJP-VHP in anti-communal rallies, removal of the canopy from the *Shilanyas* site, mass arrests, restrictions on movement, *parikramas* and worship at Babri-Masjid-Ram-Janmabhoomi and finally the police firing on the Kar Sevaks helped the BJP to whip up the communal sentiments of the Hindus. The video cassettes on the Ayodhya killings, pictures of the killed kar-sevaks, cassettes of the vitriolic speeches of the VHP's rabble-rousers combined with good organisational network of the party had given the necessary thrust to the BJP's elections campaign in Faizabad parliamentary constituency. Further, the JD's run for garnering Muslim votes and the Shahi Imam's appeal to Muslims (which had been projected by the BJP as the *Imam's fatwa* in their campaign) to vote for the Janata Dal, helped the BJP to foster communal consciousness among the middle class Hindus in urban as well as rural areas⁸.

In a desperate bid to wrest the politically crucial Faizabad Lok-Sabha seat, the confident BJP candidate⁹ stooped to an incredible low-level. We came to know from the villagers in the outskirts of Ayodhya that the BJP candidate for the Lok Sabha seat had sought their support by making them to take oath in the name of Lord Ram.

The BJP hopes that the Ram symbol would pave the way for attracting the OBCs, SCs to a transcendental cause that will make them forget their underprivileged position, ignore their rights and in this way its main support base, the upper castes/classes and urban based middle class would revive their weakening political hold. In numerous places around the Ayodhya township and rural areas the BJP had put the following slogans:

"Jaat Paat Ko Chhod Diya, Shri Ram Se Naata Jod Diya"

(Having dissolved our differences of castes and sect, we all have established a bond with Sri Ram.)

"Jan Jan Ki Yahy Pukar, Ram bina Jeevan Bekaar"

(It is the opinion of the every individual that, without Ram life is meaningless)

"Bhajpa Ki Hein Pukar, Janmabhoomi par Mandir bane Vishal"

(The BJP promises to build a massive temple at Ram Janmabhoomi.)

"Ram Rajya Ki ore Chale, BJP Ke Saath Chale"

(Let's go for Ram Rajya, let's go with BJP).

In the election campaign, the BJP's Hindutva campaign had been projected as synonymous with nationalism — as the following slogans found on the city walls of Faizabad reveals:

"Rashtravnaad Ko vote de, BJP ko vote de"

(Vote for nationalism, vote for BJP.)

Throughout Faizabad, on the city walls along busy thoroughfares, attractive and catchy slogans had been put up by the BJP's saffron brethren.

"Jo Hindu Hit ka kaaj karega Wohi Desh par Raj Karega"

(VHP, Bajrang Dal and Durga Vahini)

(He who works for the benefits of the Hindus alone is fit to rule the country.)

"Samast Hinduon se Anurodh hai ki Sangathith hokar Hindu Rashtra ke Nirman Hetu BJP ke Haath mazboot karen"

(We appeal to all Hindus to unite and strengthen the hands of BJP so as to fructify the dream of establishing a Hindu Rashtra).

In some places the CPI too had put up some captivating slogans in order to counteract the BJP's appeal.

Since all the national political parties except the BJP, had promised in their election manifestoes to maintain the status quo ante of all the religious places of worship as on 15th August 1947 by enacting a suitable legislation in case they form the government, the VHP in order to counter such a move resorted to blatant falsehood and disinformation campaign in order to mislead the voters especially the Hindus about the real meaning of the "status quo ante" of all religious places of worship.

Throughout Faizabad, one could see hundreds of posters put by the VHP which states - (translated from Hindi to English).

Restoring the status quo ante of religious sites as on 15th

August 1947 would mean what?

- * Shall the 'miraculously' appeared Ram be removed from the Ram-Janmabhoomi temple?
- * Shall all the temples and Gurudwaras in Punjab and Haryana be reconverted into mosques?
- * Shall we have to think once again about Somnath?
- * Shall we have to remove from public places the statues of Gandhi, Indira, Patel and Ambedkar and reconstruct the statues of Victoria and George V?

Nationalist, Patriotic citizens Awake!

See through these conspiracies or else you will lose your all!!"

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad by deliberately explaining such a legal issue in a very distorted way had sought to give an impression to the Hindus that, except the BJP, other parties are not in favour of constructing the Ram temple at Ayodhya.

Despite the BJP and its saffron brethren's aggressive campaign for the 'liberation' of Ram-Janmabhoomi, it is really astonishing that people of Faizabad have not fallen prey to the divisive designs of the BJP. While most of the places in UP became communally sensitive and extensive rioting took place during the "*shilanyas*" in November 1989 and the kar seva episode in October-November 1990, Faizabad and Ayodhya township did not witness any virulent communal riots. In the absence of any communal riot which could have heightened communal polarisation and benefited the BJP, it harped solely on the Ayodhya dispute and tried to whip up communal feelings of the Hindus in its election campaign.

BJP's election campaign centring around the Ayodhya dispute had posed a formidable challenge to the JD-CPI Lok Sabha candidate, Mr. Mitrasen Yadav, who was relying exclusively on the votes of OBCs, SCs and Muslims. Despite the party's strong support to the Mandal Commission Report, the Faizabad CPI unit had made the anti-communal campaign as its main agenda in the election.¹⁰ Most of the banners and wall writings put by the CPI proved this point clearly. Two attractive slogans of the CPI written on the walls of Faizabad city, which attack the BJP for exploiting the Ayodhya issue for its political

purpose, are as follows:

"Ram Naam Japna Ya Kursi ka Sapna" (They chant the name of Ram just to capture political power.)

"Vo Kahte hein Maro Kato Mandir Masjid Yaad Karo Hum Kahte hein Beghar Bedar Logo ko Abad karo".

(They tell us to kill in the name of the mosque / temple. We say that instead, the poor and shelterless should be given proper housing.)

While the BJP candidates for both the Faizabad Lok Sabha and Ayodhya Assembly seats were engaged in a sectarian campaign, the Congress(I) provided a broad platform of mobilisation. Severely bruised by the Mandal and Mandir factors, the Congress party projected its old image of a party which belongs to all sections of the people. In contrast to his first election rally on the eve of the ninth General election at Faizabad, this time Rajiv Gandhi in his election meeting appealed the voters of Faizabad to overcome their caste and communal prejudices and vote for the Congress(I) which alone can provide political stability and defeat the communal and casteist forces. Despite the feverish campaign and hectic mobilisation, the Congress(I)'s electoral prospects in both the Faizabad Lok Sabha seat and Ayodhya Assembly constituency were grim due to the party's dubious stand on both the Ayodhya dispute and the Mandal Commission Report. The Congress(I)'s old slogan of providing political stability had failed to cut much ice in an election fought on issues of a polarising nature.¹¹

Politically marginal parties like the Samajwadi Janata Party and the BSP provided a listless campaign in the election.

To sum up, in North Indian politics, religion has been a more powerful and a primary line of cleavage than other primordial sentiments. One of the important characteristics of party-politics in UP is that, parties tend to reinforce the social and ethnic cleavages among the communities.¹² Even though religious sentiments and feelings are attached with the Ram temple agitation, this cannot be understood in isolation from the developments in the political process which are produced and managed. The Babri-Masjid-Ram-Janmabhoomi controversy which had virtually been a dormant issue in 50's 60's and 70's received the attention of political parties in the beginning of the 80's with the emergence of a new phase in Indian politics.¹³

In Faizabad Parliamentary elections, the BJP had exclusively depended on the Ayodhya factor for its victory. Given the JD-CPI candidate's ability to appeal OBC's and Muslims, the BSP's hold over the SC's and Congress(I)'s broad platform of mobilisation, the BJP Unit in Faizabad had left with no other option to mobilise the Hindus, except the sentimental Ram Janmabhoomi issue.

Notes

1. See Zoya Hasan, "State and Identity in Modern India" in Zoya Hasan et. al., eds., *State, Political Processes and Identity: Reflections on Modern India*, N. Delhi Sage, 1989, pp.14-25.
 2. James Manor, "Parties and Party Systems" in Atul Kohli, ed., *India's Democracy*, Princeton, PUP, 1988, pp. 88-89.
 3. See Rajni Kothari, "Communalism: The New Face of Indian Democracy" in his *State Against Democracy*, Delhi: Ajanta, 1988, pp.240-43.
 4. Interview with the BJP candidate for the Ayodhya Assembly seat, Mr. Lallu Singh on May 18, 1991.
 5. Interview with the Faizabad city unit party functionaries.
 6. See Independent Initiative team's report, "Democratic and General Elections in Faizabad Lok Sabha Constituency", p.2.
 7. Based on my account as a participant in the meeting at Kshatriya Boarding School, Faizabad on May 12, 1991.
 8. From the speeches of the BJP leaders in several street corner meetings and interviews with the cross-sections of people in Faizabad and Ayodhya townships as well as known personalities in the localities.
 9. He had also termed the Faizabad Lok Sabha election as a battle between the *Ramzadas* (son of Lord Ram) and *Haranzadas* (bastards).
 10. Interview with Mitra Sen Yadav at his party head office, Faizabad on May 20, 1991.
 11. This was also admitted by Arvind Singh, the Congress(I)'s Ayodhya assembly seat candidate, during my interview with him on May 14, 1991.
 12. See for this point in Paul R. Brass, *Language, Religion and Politics in North India*, Delhi: Vikas, 1975, pp.36-41.
 13. See, for example Peter Vander Veer, "God Must be Liberated: A Hindu Liberation Movement in Ayodhya", *MAS*, 21, 2(1987), p. 301;
Zoya Hasan, "Changing Orientation of the State and Emergence of Majoritarianism in the 1980s" in *Social Scientist*, Vol. 18, Nos.8-9, Aug.-Sept. 1990, pp.27-37;
C.P. Bhambhri, "Ninth General Elections: Role of Communalism", *Teaching Politics*, Vol. XV, No. 3&4, 1989, pp.51-59;
Romila Thapar, "The Politics of Religious Communities", *Seminar*, 365, Jan. 1980, pp.27-31.
- The Spectacular success of the BJP in the last two general elections and its ascendancy to the centre stage of Indian politics proves this point clearly.

Democracy and the General Elections — A Report on the Faizabad Lok Sabha Constituency

V. Krishna Ananth

The general elections to the tenth Lok Sabha were significant in the history of independent India for two major factors in general. Firstly, the violence and bloodletting that took place on its eve was unprecedented to the extent that booth capturing had become a part of it — be it by the ruling parties in the various states or by candidates from the opposition fronts. Another aspect, more significant and dangerous for the social fabric was the communal hatred that was initiated and carried out by the BJP-VHP-RSS Combine, not to speak about the groups represented by the Muslim Fundamentalists. In fact, the BJP-VHP-RSS Combine along with the Shiv Sena had succeeded to a large extent in defining the scope of political discourse by means of religious denominators and thereby drawing a linear progression between religiosity and nationalism and patriotism. This aspect is more striking in terms of its dangerous potentials than the frequent communal riots that had taken place in the past five years. It is this element of the fascistic content that needs to be noticed when the BJP Member of Parliament from Dhanbad, Mrs. Rita Varma says in reply to a question as to when did she become a sub-

scriber to the BJP's political views, that "for one thing, I have always been very religious minded" — (The Times of India, New Delhi, of 25 June 1991).

It is this straight-jacketing, of religiosity being synonymous with Hinduism on the one hand, and implicitly followed in it that to be a Hindu is in turn synonymous with 'patriotism', 'love for the country', etc. that was at play in Faizabad Lok Sabha Constituency, centered around Ayodhya, the *mythical birth place of the mythological character, Rama*. By fielding Vinay Katihar, the leader of the Ram Janma Bhoomi Mukti Morcha in this constituency, the BJP in effect converted the elections to the tenth Lok Sabha into a referendum on the Ayodhya dispute. By doing so, the BJP effectively portrayed Mitra Sen Yadav, the outgoing M.P. as the 'enemy of the nation' and 'unpatriotic' essentially because, his views on the Ayodhya dispute were unambiguously opposed to that of the BJP-VHP-RSS Combine. The Secular Chief Minister of U.P. was branded as a 'Mulla' (the least derogatory expression among the abusive language they used) and thus the nominee of the SJP was again put in the company of the Muslims. The Congress(I) was 'discredited' for their association with 'Mulla Mulayam'. Thus, the BJP-VHP-RSS combine began the election campaign in Faizabad in specific and UP in general with their self-proclaimed claims of being 'true' Indians who 'love the country' and, the electorate was hence *instructed* to 'Love India or Leave India' meant to vote for the BJP. Alas, the RSS variety of patriotism of the Hedgewar and Gowalkar days and even the Shyama Prasad Mukherji-Faz-ul-Haq honeymoon in Bengal during 1942-1945 were supposed to be forgotten.

The electorate in Faizabad perhaps had not forgotten the RSS and the BJP-VHP brand of patriotism so soon. Notwithstanding the fact that the representatives of this fascistic combine — Vinay Katihar and Lallu Singh had won the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha seats respectively, defeating Mitra Sen Yadav (CPI) and Jai Shankar Pandey (SJP), there are two factors that need to be stressed to substantiate that the constituency expressed a decisively secular mandate against the fascist combine. The victory margin of the BJP candidates is in itself a pointer to this factor. Katihar, in spite of all this offensive and blood-letting campaign had won by a margin of only about 35 thousand votes — a rela-

tively slender margin given the nature of his campaign. In this context, however unrealistic it may sound, had the anti-BJP forces, especially the CPI and the SJP candidates not cut into each other's votes (since they were together in fighting the communal offensive of the BJP-VHP-RSS Combine), the fate of the spokesman of the mythical Ram Janma Bhoomi would have been sealed. This, however, was only one factor that helped the victory of Katihar.

The more important pointer to the secular credentials of the people of Faizabad is that, the BJP Victory was not obtained by means of democratic instruments. The elections were marred by violent incidents aimed at preventing the voters from predominantly Muslim localities from going to vote as well as booth capturing and bogus voting, in connivance with the polling officers in various booths in the Constituency. On the whole, there is definite evidence of at least 11 booths being captured by the BJP Goons in the Ayodhya and Sohawal Assembly segments of the constituency. The list of the booths captured is given at the end of this Report. However, it is important to give a detailed picture of the events in a few booths that this team visited in the Ayodhya Assembly segment, to substantiate the arguments.

The team visited twenty polling booths within the segment and found that there were tensions brewing up in at least four booths around the area called Gusiana. The booths were Mandi Samiti, Ram Nagar, Lal Bagh and Anil Saraswati Shiksha Mandir. In fact when this team reached the booths there were women (purdah clad) complaining that they were not given the ballot paper after their signature/thumb impression was obtained on the sheet by the officials inside. Similar complaints were received from some polling agents also, who were standing outside. They stated that their sitting inside the booth did not make any sense. Our efforts to enter the booths were, however, in vain. However, we convinced the polling agent of the CPI candidate (since other agents, leaving out the ones of BJP were nowhere to be found) to intervene and resist such practices and this they did.

This had obviously infuriated the BJP candidate and at around 11.30, a CPI worker, Halim by name was attacked by the BJP Goons at the Anil Saraswati Shiksha Mandir. But then, this alone could not serve the purpose. At around 12.30, Lallu Singh,

(BJP Candidate for the Vidhan Sabha) came over to the residential area at Ram Nagar and passed through Paharganj-Gusiana. This was followed by a march by about a thousand saffron banded storm troopers of the BJP, torching a hotel that is run by Halim and his brother, looting a medical shop (Kumar Medicals) run by Mohammed Anees and ransacking the hair-cutting saloon belonging to Mukhtar. All this was done in about five minutes in the course of which at least nine country made crude bombs had exploded.

When this team reached this spot, the saffron clad men, having completed their business of guarding democracy, were boarding into a waiting truck, destination of which we could not know. The District Administration had prohibited us from using any vehicles. Then the intended damage was done — both to property as well as to democracy. The people of the locality were reaching back to their homes from the polling booths on hearing the explosions and refused to go back to the polling booths to cast their votes.

Yet another incident that the team witnessed and recorded was the capture of a polling booth at Saadat Ganj, very near the residence of the BJP candidate for the Ayodhya Vidhan Sabha Constituency. In this booth, Lallu Singh with his army had spilt the indelible ink available with the polling officer at around 8.30 a.m., but ensured that polling continued without any break. When the team reached the polling booth at 12.10, about 100 voters, predominantly from the minority community were waiting in the booth, some of them reportedly for more than two hours. Ironically, the records showed good polling going on; there were about 15 men, doing the voting, for perhaps the men waiting outside. We ensured for ourselves that they were doing this, when the indelible ink was not available. Apart from the grown ups, there were boys (aged between 12 and 15 years) and two girls also of the same age.

The team got the Sector Magistrate (whose name we could not ascertain) and handed over the minors to him and managed to initiate the procedure to cancel the polling in the booth. This perhaps infuriated the BJP Goons and they began to attack the Sector Magistrate. A member of our team (a lady), who attempted to capture this scene with her camera was attacked by

the Goons and we had to run for our lives. We managed to escape with our camera and had to leave Faizabad after calling our Delhi Office and informing them about the incident. The damage was complete. By 2 p.m., the Saadat Ganj booth was completely captured by the B.J.P.

Similar things were recorded at the polling booth at the Cantonment Area — the Cantonment Board, where the daughter-in-law of one Brig. Nayar and her associates, were instructing the voters from inside the booth to vote for the BJP. A brilliant example of the secular tradition of the Indian Army! One wonders, where have the Service Rules gone? Have they gone with the wind of majority communalism, i.e. fascism?

This should provide the background to the victory of the BJP-VHP-RSS Combine in the Faizabad constituency. One can state with conviction that it was not a victory by democratic means. It was ensured by means of booth capturing, by terror and in all of this the state machinery consisting of the polling officials, the police and the notorious PAC were hand-in-glove with the fascists. The Hinduisation of the state, essentially ensured the victory of the BJP candidate in Ayodhya. This, was the case of U.P. as a whole.

In any case, the battle is not lost at all. One silver lining that we could find asserting itself was that the victims of this violence, the people from the minority community, even in the riot-hit Gusiana area, stated with conviction that the riots were engineered by the BJP leaders alone. Not just one of them had felt that the Hindus were responsible for this. Yes, it is this secular tradition of Ayodhya that should be taken as a base to isolate the fascist storm troopers.

The victory margin of Vinay Katihar — 34 thousand odd votes — is thus a significant factor, in the sense that they could manage the same only by means of capturing at least 11 booths on which we have information.

List of Booths Captured

Ayodhya Assembly Segment

Saadat Ganj,

Cantonment Board,

Lal Bagh,
Anil Saraswati Shiksha Mandir,
Sarai Rashi,
Sanathu, Mach-Sewela.

Sohawal Assembly Segment

Amauna,
Sariyavan,
Gopalpur,
Mohawa.

The Janata Dal's Only Bastion

Shekhar Iyer

When the Bihar Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav told a television interviewer that his party could not win all the 54 Lok Sabha seats from the state because the election commission had countermanded some of them, he was not just joking.

Yadav's remarks were in a humorous vein but underlying them was a sense of achievement. The Mandal hero had been proved right. Not only had Mandal prevailed over the mandir but it had also checked whatever sympathy was generated by Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, making Bihar the only state where the Congress-I came a cropper and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s success too was confined to some areas in south Bihar.

To those outside Bihar, the results may appear to be related to the reports on the use of money and muscle power during the polls. Politicians in Bihar are known for their style of booth capturing which is locally known as 'booth management'.

But in how many seats did 'booth management' finally decide the results? It is true that, like in the past, politicians of all hues in the state resorted to this tactic. It is also possible that with the official machinery under their control, leaders of the Janata Dal and its allies were favourably placed to influence voting to some extent in many constituencies.

These factors notwithstanding, no political leader in Bihar believes that the Janata Dal's victory was entirely due to such manipulation. Rather, opposition leaders in Bihar privately

admit that the Janata Dal's victory is the result of Laloo Prasad Yadav's deft campaigning for social justice for the backward classes, Harijans and minorities.

In a state where the caste system remains most oppressive, Laloo Prasad Yadav became the direct beneficiary of V.P. Singh's efforts to use the caste factor to unite an unassailable vote bank. While V.P. Singh failed in his attempt in Uttar Pradesh, swamped by the BJP's *mandir* wave, it was Laloo Prasad Yadav who turned the caste factor into a major poll plank, uniting the backward classes and Muslims in Bihar.

The Bihar Chief Minister's efforts were such that nothing could change the electoral outcome. Not even threats of poll postponement or violence. Bihar stood solidly behind Laloo Prasad Yadav as he faced several barbs from the opposition as well as from the Chandra Shekhar government which created numerous problems for him and, to say the least, the election commission which in a blatant manner revealed its bias against Patna.

Laloo Prasad Yadav's success is not inexplicable. Bihar has been fractured by the caste factor for many years and the politics in the state has only mirrored the power struggle in the society between the privileged upper castes and the deprived backward classes. In such an environment, the Mandal Commission's report turned out to be a tinder box. The glaring disparities in the economic status of various castes in Bihar and stark poverty that permeates the majority of the backward classes stirred passions and the divisions which already existed only widened.

The opposition to the Mandal Commission recommendations came from the upper castes who considered it a direct threat to their dominance in politics, power and administration. The unity among the upper castes provoked a counter move among the less privileged. Consequently, Bihar was the only state in the Hindi belt that saw the backward classes responding in equal measure to the violent resistance to the Mandal report from the upper castes.

It was natural for the backward classes to see a panacea in the Mandal panel's recommendations having been subjected to years of denial. The author of the Mandal report was B.P. Mandal, former Chief Minister of the state and the issues thrown up

by the report reflect the economic reality there. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Mandal issue drew an immediate response in Bihar.

As mentioned earlier, the upper castes united in opposing the Mandal commission's recommendations, but the arithmetic tended to favour the backward classes who, along with Muslims, outnumbered the former. Two dominant upper castes — Rajputs and Bhumihars — who decided to avoid mutual confrontation and splitting of votes in the Lok Sabha elections could do little to upset the Janata Dal's position.

Almost all the political parties in Bihar relied more on the caste card while selecting candidates for the Lok Sabha elections. The Yadavas got the biggest share. Each party tried to solicit the votes of the caste which appeared to have acquired a militant image because of the fact that the chief minister belonged to it.

Interestingly, reports about other backward castes, like koeris, banias, kurmis and harijans, aligning themselves to groups opposed to the Yadav-dominated Janata Dal did not result in any major setback for the latter. By the time polls drew near, whatever resentment existed against the Yadavs failed to be translated into any negative votes against the Janata Dal.

Subsequent analysis has only shown that the Mandal wave seems to have worked wonders even in the reserved Lok Sabha constituencies with the Janata Dal and its allies bagging nine of the 13 seats earmarked for SC and ST.

The Yadavs who constitute roughly 11 per cent of the population along with Muslims formed a major chunk of voters solidly backing the Janata Dal. What is interesting to note is, in some constituencies the upper castes' vote was split between the BJP and the Congress-I. But in most of the areas, the upper castes deserted the Congress-I which lost more ground after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi as the BJP took up the stability plank.

The loss of a leader of national stature affected the Congress-I's prospects to a large extent while the BJP's popularity among the upper strata was due to its militant postures since the arrest of L K Advani by the Laloo Prasad government before the rath yatra entered Uttar Pradesh.

This fact also prompted Muslims to support the Laloo Prasad Yadav government. Muslims who form 13 per cent of the

population did not want the BJP to win. They had deserted the Congress-I since the last elections holding it responsible for the communal riots in Bihar when it was in power.

Another factor that influenced the poll outcome was the uncertainty caused by the election commission's threat to cancel polling in Bihar on the ground of law and order, which scared many voters. The turnout on an average was not more than 50 per cent during the two phases of polling.

The row between chief election commissioner T N Seshan and the state government was seen by many in Bihar as a desperate move by the centre to get the Laloo Prasad Yadav government out on one pretext or the other. To the majority of the poor voters Laloo Prasad Yadav continues to be the hero, having made it to the top from their ranks.

In south Bihar, it was regionalism that swung votes. Of the 14 Lok Sabha seats from the region, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha agitating for a separate state got as many as six seats while the BJP projecting 'vanachal' for tribals got five. All five seats the BJP got came from the central regions of tribal Bihar. Of them Dhanbad, Ranchi and Palamau have a mixed urban-rural and tribal-non-tribal population.

The JMM won in those areas which were centres of tribal revolt. Its performance was the best ever, comparable to the victory the Jharkhand Party had under Jaipal Singh.

(Courtesy: Independent)

Tenth Lok Sabha Elections and the BJP's Victory in Gujarat

Ghanshyam Shah

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) swept the 1991 Lok Sabha poll in Gujarat by winning 20 out of 25 seats. It secured 51 per cent of the votes polled, and hopes to capture power in Gujarat in the next Assembly elections. It is difficult to predict at this stage whether the BJP will get power in the state or not, but it is certain that the party is an important force to reckon with in this and the decade to come.

The BJP's victory is, more often than not, attributed to the Ram Janmabhoomi issue, which has communalised Hindu votes. In the absence of systematic study, one may tend to agree with this observation. But it is too simplistic to deduct from this that Hindus voted for the BJP primarily because of the Ayodhya issue and that they consider other problems of their life so trivial that they put all their weight behind the construction of the Ram Mandir in place of the Babri Masjid. The victory of the BJP in Gujarat is not an overnight event, attributable only to the Ram Janmabhoomi issue. The issue has certainly contributed in creating and sustaining communal hysteria in favour of the BJP, but the party would have got sizeable votes even without the Ram Janmabhoomi issue. The BJP has built up its organisation and support base both on secular and communal lines with sustained efforts since the end of the sixties. This paper seeks to probe into

the strategies of the BJP in building up its organisation and winning votes.

Rashtriya Svayamsevak Sangh (RSS) trained volunteers, belonging to upper castes, opened a chapter of the Jan Sangh party, the forerunner of the BJP, in Gujarat within six months of its birth in 1951. The fifties was the Jan Sangh's formative period, during which the party was not visible on the political scene. Its activities were by and large confined to RSS Shakhas (branches) in a few middle class urban areas. Harish Gohil, a Rajput, became its president in the early sixties. And under his leadership, the party captured 21 out of 25 seats of the Botad Municipality in Saurashtra in 1965. It then opened its account in the State Assembly by capturing one seat from Rajkot in the 1967 elections. After five years, the party won three Assembly seats. The party became a partner of the United Front i.e. the Janata Morcha in 1975. For the first time, a Jan Sangh member from Gujarat entered the Lok Sabha in 1977. The Jan Sangh then became the BJP in 1980. The BJP's electoral base enlarged in the eighties. The party won the Rajkot Municipal Corporation elections three times consecutively. It also captured the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation and intermittently ran Surat and Vadodara Municipal Corporations where no party got clear majority. Besides, 10 municipalities, 8 nagar panchayats and 2 jilla panchayats have been under its control since 1986. It has also a sizeable strength in 150 taluka panchayats. The party secured 67 seats in the state Assembly and 12 Lok Sabha seats in the 1990 elections. Thus, though the party began its work in urban areas, it has slowly consolidated its position before the Lok Sabha elections in rural areas too.

Urban Scene

In their study on electoral trends from 1952 to 1972, Weiner and Field show that when radical parties of the left or right are active in a state, then the urban areas tend to give these parties more support than do the rural constituencies. The urban constituencies are becoming more distinctive insofar as electoral protest and electoral polarization are concerned.¹ This trend seems to have continued and worked in favour of the BJP in two successive decades.

More than one-third of the population in Gujarat live in urban areas. The number of towns has increased from 181 in 1961 to 255 in 1981. More important, the economy of Gujarat is not sharply divided into two distinct urban and rural sectors. There is a great deal of overlap and a continuum between the two. For instance, of the 11.58 lakh enterprises in Gujarat, 79 per cent are non-agricultural and 21 per cent are agricultural. A majority of these enterprises, 58.78 per cent, are in rural areas and the remaining 41.22 per cent are in urban areas. Even of the non-agricultural enterprises, 48 per cent are located in rural areas. And, thanks to development of the transport and communication networks coupled with penetration of the market, urban-rural linkages have increased.

With the expansion of activities of the state, industrial development and higher education, the size of the middle class has increased significantly in the last four decades. As I have argued elsewhere, the growth of the middle class in Gujarat has been disproportionate to the economic growth to the region.² This has resulted in a steep rise in educated unemployment and consequent expansion of the lumpen crowd in urban areas. The lumpens have social ties with the middle class on the one hand and the underworld on the other. Their services have been used by politicians for underhand activities in electoral politics, rousing passions and fear, and settling scores for personal or political purposes. As a result, overall insecurity and distrust leading to cynicism in public life have spread. Side-by-side, aspirations for the possession of items of conspicuous consumption as status symbols are growing among members of the middle class. In this pursuit, they go in for hire-purchase schemes, lotteries, gambling, and all kinds of ways and means to get extra money to make two ends meet. They stretch themselves beyond their means and get pulled between the so-called modern ways of life and the traditional ethos. Most of them are unable to find the wherewithal to satisfy their basic needs and maintain their traditional status. They have high aspirations and at the same time suffer from a sense of deprivation. They are vulnerable to reactionary forces such as caste, religion, and other political sentiments.

The urban middle class led the movement for a separate state for Gujarati speaking population in the mid fifties. The

same class was in the forefront in the anti-price rise agitation in the cities in the early sixties. The non-Congress parties, particularly the socialists, the CPI and the Khedut Sangh were active in these agitations. At this time the Jan Sangh was nowhere in sight. But it was not so in the 1974 during the students led Nav Nirman movement. The Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad (ABVP) was leading a major faction in the movement highlighting price rise and scarcity of essential commodities as well as corruption in public life.³ The Jan Sangh members of the state Assembly were the first among those who resigned from the Assembly and joined the agitation for its dissolution. The BJP became vocal on this front in the subsequent period. It launched an anti-price rise campaign in 1981-82 during which it published leaflets, pamphlets, posters, etc. and organised public meetings in as many as one hundred towns. The party organised processions in the cities and submitted memoranda to authorities demanding reductions in prices. Several hundreds of its volunteers courted arrest. It also launched a statewide agitation against state transport fare hike. Other such agitations were launched between 1985 and 1987. They raised the issue of unemployment and made attempts to lock the local offices of the Employment Exchange for their inability in providing job opportunities. The party demanded that Gujaratis be given preference in public undertakings and government departments. In its manifesto for the 1990 elections, the party promised 85 per cent reservations for Gujaratis in class III and IV positions in the public sector. By doing this, the party gave voice to and thereby legitimised, the widespread feelings among Gujaratis that they suffer from injustice in public undertaking corporations functioning in Gujarat. In its 1990 campaign, an allowance for educated unemployed youths was not only promised in its manifesto, but also highlighted in its campaign posters and banners. The party has also penetrated the working class. It has organised the Bharatiya Majdoor Unions in several cities. It has 81 registered unions in 61 towns/cities with around 20,000 members.⁴ The union believes in maintaining a harmonious relationship between workers and employers. It has taken several issues such as higher wages, retrenchment, compensation, etc. Associations of slum-dwellers have also been set up to ventilate and redress their grievances. Along with such activities,

the party workers organise religious festivals, kathas i.e. narration of epics and bhajan singing. However, the BJP's base in slum areas is still very weak and insignificant in comparison with its base in the middle class.

Today, politicians are looked upon with contempt as a bunch of rogues with no moral values. Frustration and cynicism are the order of the day. There is overall decay not only in the law and order situation but also the moral ethos in society. In such an environment the BJP has somehow created an impression of itself as the only value-based party with non-corrupt and devoted cadres who are committed to moral values for the betterment of society. Though this self-styled image does not necessarily correspond with practice, it is, indeed, a relatively more organised and less faction ridden party than the Congress and the Janata Dal.

Changing Nature of Religious Activities

In the absence of systematic study, it is difficult to ascertain whether religiosity among the Gujarati middle class has increased since Independence. If so, what are its reasons? To answer this we would have to define religiosity and evolve a scale for its measurement. What seems to be certain is that the nature of religious activities in all communities has changed. For limitation of space, we shall confine our observations to Hindus only. Traditionally loose and informal organisations of sects centered around one *guru* or family are slowly getting reoriented to institutional structures, opening to greater participation of devotees in day-to-day functioning. An organisational network with a line of command, and co-ordination among various units and office-bearers for recruitment, training, and execution of various activities has evolved.

Oral, visual and printed media with modern sophisticated methods in simplified language and pictures are being used for discourse and propagation of religious preachings. Moreover, not only have a number of religious journals, pamphlets and booklets on religion multiplied, but regional newspapers give extensive coverage to news related to religious activities. Almost all dailies give at least one column once a week on religious matters which include not only legends and myths but also the

relevance of religion in our day-to-day life to attain happiness. An often repeated and reinforced sentiment is that the present day unhappiness in life is due to lack of devotion in religion. Though competition among various sects prevails, what is being emphasised is the commonality among them — of being Hindus and custodians of Indian culture vis-a-vis the Muslims and the Christians as foreigners. Intra-community sectarianism has mitigated as against other communities notwithstanding the rise in inter-caste conflicts and emergence of new sects is somewhat mitigated by this newly forged common front.

Traditional bhajan-kirtan sessions, recital of collective prayers and rituals, have continued to be the pursuit of middle aged and retired persons. Youths are indifferent to such activities. But at the same time, popularity of certain festivals and group visit to pilgrimage centres has increased. The traditional stiffness among the followers of different sects is hardly found among the youth. In the past, particularly among upper castes, Shivaites would hesitate to visit a Krishna temple, or devotees of Krishna would rarely celebrate Ram-Navmi (Ram's birthday). Such sectarian attitudes have declined. The style and form of celebration of certain festivals which were traditionally confined to mainly the middle and low castes in certain regions have now become popular, breaking caste barriers. They have taken a Pan-Gujarati-Hindu form.

Efforts have been afoot, particularly by those who claim to be social and religious reformers, for building unity across sects within Hinduism. They criticise casteism and untouchability as a menace to Hinduism. Sachchidanand, one of the 'radical' saints stands for rejuvenation of Hinduism and nationalism. For him the varnashram or caste system and untouchability are deformation of the religion and dangerous for its very existence. He has a sizeable audience from urban middle class, particularly from the intelligentsia — professionals, freelance writers, journalists, teachers, etc. — attend his public discourse. He regularly writes a social commentary in a widely circulated newspaper. Colleges and universities invite him for lectures and he has been acclaimed as Narmad, the father of Gujarati renaissance, for his social reform and literary work. Pandurang Athavale, the architect of the Swadhyay sect, which is largely popular among tradi-

tionally low castes — fishermen, Kolis, Vagaris, tribals and Dalits — also opposes the caste system. Swadhyay emphasises building up an 'intimate community' based on the equality and dignity of the individual. The deprived groups are made aware of the rich religio-cultural heritage of our society which is more often than not reduced to Vedic period culture, euphemically called Hindu culture. Swadhyay combines religious activities with social reform and economic activities. Though Athavale does not talk about *Rashtra*, state and politics, his notion of traditional heritage seems to provide breeding ground for Hindu *Rashtra* ideology. One university invited him to give the convocation address, thus according to him honour as a distinguished public figure. Another religious saint, Morari Bapu is one of the most popular *kathakars*, i.e. a religious story teller of the *Ramayana*, of the eighties. He began public narration of Ram Katha in 1966 and has till now presented more than 400 katha's sessions, each one running into eight to ten days. Morari Bapu tells that the *Ramayana* was not meant for this or that varna, it was meant for manav (human being), for all, irrespective of sect or religion. It is a matter of faith for the devotees to listen to the *Ramayana* with devotion and follow its teachings. He says that the story of the *Ramayana* is well known, what is needed to be elucidated is its relevance in modern life. Without posing himself to be a social reformer, he asserts that Ram Rajya can only be established when the Dalits get equal status with others. Morari Bapu's kathas attract a cross section of society in several thousands, both in urban and rural areas. Social and political elite too attend the katha and compete with each other to get blessings from Morari Bapu. The rich patronise these programmes. Collections from the kathas, which often run into several lakhs, are used for charitable activities — relief to drought, flood and fire victims, construction of temples, hospitals and school buildings. One of the leading universities of the state also organised his katha programme for collection of funds and the then Vice-Chancellor who enjoyed an international reputation for his scholarship attended the function as a *bhakta*, i.e. a devotee. Such programmes not only legitimise what Morari Bapu preaches but also add to his status.

Unity among the Hindus is the main concern of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) also. The theme is repeatedly found in

Vishwa Hindu Samachar, the organ of the VHP edited by K.K. Shastri, an ex-president of the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad, who received the title of Vidya Vachaspati, i.e. a pre-eminent learned person. The journal often exhorts: "All Hindus should unite against Vidharmis (people of other religions, obviously a reference to Muslims). Outmoded feudal values still prevail in our villages which have kept the caste pollution intact and has thus resulted in friction within the Hindu fold... Savarna Hindus should now become alert and not widen the gap between the castes and compromise with Dalits and should not continue to remain selfish".⁵ The orthodox schools of Hinduism either remain indifferent to such views or passively agree with them as an inevitable necessity in modern times if the religion has to survive. This, however, hardly alters their practices. Atrocities against the Dalits by upper caste Hindus have not declined in any way. Thus contradictions prevail: casteism and intercaste conflict continue in practice but overt caste differences in the matter of rituals and customs decline. Casteism is being delegitimised even by those who adhere to it in their day-to-day interpersonal relationships.

Unlike orthodox believers, the reformers emphasise the political dimension of religion. They are the champions of nationalism, albeit Hindu nationalism, and dominance of the majority in political and cultural spheres. For the protection, assertion and development of Hindu nationalism, the issue of unity among Hindus is emphasised again and again. Though the orthodox and reformers do not see eye to eye on the matter of caste purity and maintenance of the caste system, both share a common platform on the issue of Hindu nationalism. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad, RSS, Hindu Milan Mandir, or Bharat Seva Sangh, who more or less function as frontier organisations of the BJP, do not consider religion a personal matter and do not believe in dissociating religion from politics. Though they plead for Hindu unity and oppose differences on the basis of caste, these groups do not harp on the issue of caste of untouchability, fearing that this would alienate the upper castes. Instead, they have of late, intensified philanthropic and welfare activities among the low caste Hindus and tribals to win them over. A number of spiritual leaders of different Hindu sects as well as Jain munis have also

joined the fray by expressing solidarity with Hindus and exhorting them to unite against the 'danger' facing Hinduism. They say that we attained geographical independence but not religious, spiritual and intellectual freedom. "The present awakening for Hindutva is an inevitable consequence of a larger change... For rejuvenation of Hindu culture, the voters should vote for the BJP candidates."⁶ On the eve of the 1991 elections, Morari Bapu issued an appeal to those who love their religion and love their nation. He asked them to vote for those who are supporting the following issues of national importance: (1) Construction of Ram Janmabhoomi temple; (2) Deletion of Act 370 which separates Kashmir from the rest of the country; and (3) Ban on cow-slaughter. "Vote for only patriots... Let martyrdom of those innocent Ram Kar Sevaks not go astray" he said.⁷ Such political overtones equating religion with nationalism became sharp during and before the elections. The anti-BJP political parties and activists found themselves lost, unable to cope with the propaganda of the BJP and other Hindu organisations. In fact, even these parties share the notion of Hindu nationalism, though they do not subscribe to its fanatic face.

Rural Scene

Rural areas have not remained aloof from this politico-religious climate, thanks to the closely interwoven social and religious fabric and urban-rural linkages. The BJP has built political consciousness in the rural areas around social and economic issues. Following the Congress strategy of caste alliance, the BJP has concentrated on other backward castes, Dalits and tribals. BJP leaders organised a parallel Kshatriya Sabha to that of the Congress dominated Gujarat Kshatriya Sabha in the early eighties. Kshatriyas — Kolis, Bareeyas, Thakors, Patanwadiyas, etc. who claim to be the Kshatriyas and join hands with Rajputs in political sphere — constitute more than 20 per cent of the population and politically they are most active among all the backward castes. Their early political mobilisation in the fifties was around caste pride, Hinduism and Hindu nationalism.⁸ The present president of the Gujarat BJP belongs to this caste, from north Gujarat. His predecessor also belonged to another backward

caste, from south Gujarat. The BJP formed Harijan and Adivasi cells in 1980 to take up the problems of these social groups. Several Harijan and Adivasi leaders have not only been recruited in the party but have been given positions in the organisation too. One of the Harijan leaders, who has imbibed middle class values, though he claims to be a radical in his ideology, told me that "the BJP subscribes to Brahminical ideology but the Congress in practice is in no way different. Moreover, I worked in the Congress for more than ten years but I did not get a position whereas the BJP has given me a party position". The party protested against atrocities on Harijans in 1982. It organised processions in several district headquarters and submitted memoranda to the collectors for giving protection to Harijans. In 1989, the BJP was the first political party which supported the protest of the Harijans of Sambarda village in north Gujarat against the atrocities by upper caste Hindus. The party organised *nyaya yatra* (pilgrimage for justice) during the drought year 1985-86. The Yatra began on the birthday of Ambedkar on 6 December and ended on Vivekanand's birthday on 12 January. It toured 118 talukas and 15 districts covering 26,000 kilometres in 38 days. During the tour, the organisers claimed to have inspected 12,000 relief camps and met 4.5 lakh persons in rural areas and 1.5 lakh persons in urban areas.⁹ The VHP, BSS and various organisations of different sects participated in organising drought relief activities. The Congress government took help of some of these religious organisations for collecting donations and managing relief camps for the drought hit people and cattle. It is important to note that Muslims were discriminated against in many such camps but the government ignored such complaints, even those made by high-placed Congress leaders.

To counter the Janata Party and the rising influence of Sharad Joshi among the peasants, the BJP sponsored the Bhartiya Kisan Sangh (BKS) in 1985. The BKS initiated the agitation of the farmers in the later part of 1986. It formulated a charter of 31 demands to mobilise every concession in electricity tariff, section of the peasantry and included something for everyone. Along with demands like cheap agricultural inputs, ultra-modern artificial rain making device, there was also a demand that cow slaughter should be banned and the cow and its progeny be

protected. The Gujarat Khedut Samaj, led by Sharad Joshi, also willy-nilly supported these demands. The agitation continued for almost a year. Various programmes including processions and rallies, dharnas, rasta rokos, stoppage of milk and vegetables to urban areas, no-payment of revenue and electricity bills, gh-
eraos of the state assembly, Gujarat bandh etc. were launched which successfully mobilised various sections of peasants.¹⁰

The party also launched the Narmada Dam Abhiyan i.e. campaign in 1988-89. Tours on foot from one part of the state to another were organised in support of the dam. The campaign highlighted the problems of frequent droughts and a need for irrigation, for which a dam on the Narmada, Gujaratis believe, is a necessity. Early clearance from the Central Government for the construction of the dam was pressed for.

Thus, the BJP took up various issues affecting peasants and highlighted their plight. The membership of the BKS increased from merely 4,000 in 1986 to more than two lakhs in 1991.¹¹ In order to mobilise peasants the party took the support of spiritual leaders of different sects, invoked religious symbols and aroused passions for Gujarati nationalism. The Congress and other parties too have been in no way different from the BJP in their modus operandi in organising and mobilising peasants.

Communal Riots

Religious militancy surfaces in a crude and blatant form in communal riots, reinforcing prejudices and tensions between two communities. Communal riots between Hindus and Muslims is not a recent phenomenon in Gujarat. It has historical roots which date back to pre-British times.¹² The fifties was a relatively quiet period as far as large scale communal riots were concerned. But the situation changed in the sixties. Between 1963 and 1968, twenty-nine communal riots of varying intensity took place in different parts of Gujarat. The Indo-Pakistan war in 1965 aggravated tension, and provided fertile ground for rumour mongers. The Government and non-party secularists were passive spectators. Anti-Pakistan feelings got transformed into anti-Muslim expression. Communal speeches of the RSS and Jan Sangh leaders added fuel to existing communal tension. Some religious

leaders and Jan Sanghis formed the Hindu Dharma Raksha Samiti (committee to defend Hindu religion) in Ahmedabad in 1968. Tension between the two communities culminated for the decade in the large scale riots in 1969. The Jan Sangh and RSS workers were actively involved in the riots either by provoking the people, taking initiative in leading mobs, or by simply providing money or material to the rioters. The Congress Party which was in power not only failed in controlling riots but the Congress leaders were also not free from the communal outlook. They not only shared the anti-Muslim attitude with the Jan Sangh but also participated directly or indirectly in the riots. Muslims were blamed for the riots and were advised to go to Pakistan.¹³

A lull prevailed in the seventies, during which issues of corruption, price-rise and the Emergency were in the forefront. But once again the state was engulfed by communal riots in the eighties. Anti-reservation agitations of 1981 and 1984 often turned into Hindu-Muslim riots in which intra-party faction fights of the Congressmen and the BJP's call for Hindu unity played significant roles. Non-party organisations like Gujarat Biradari dominated by Sarvodayists not only articulated a need for developing Gujarat's *asmita* (identity) but also exaggerated the role of Pakistani infiltrators across Gujarat's border in communal riots. This was interpreted in the public mind, and tacitly legitimised by the media, to mean that the infiltrators and Muslims in Gujarat were hand-in-glove with each other. The Hindu fanatics stressed the Gujarati identity with a view to bring all Hindus under one umbrella and to treat Muslims implicitly, and at times even explicitly, as outsiders.¹⁴ .

Ahmedabad and Vadodara witnessed communal disturbances during the decade every now and then. Bharuch and Surat, which had not witnessed communal clashes till the early eighties, were also affected by the battle. Riots have no longer remained an urban phenomenon. A number of small towns and villages even in the tribal belt were engulfed in communal passions, resulting in killing and looting. Some places had recurring experiences of this kind. At a number of places agent provocateurs slowly but meticulously built up fury over local intra-community conflicts, which then had a chain effect. But such

instigators were not required everywhere. Riots took place at several places even without them. The tension between Hindus and Muslims reached a climax on the issue of Ram Janmabhoomi.

The VHP, the RSS and all their allies, with or without organisational support of the BJP, organised *yatras* to propagate the message of the Ramshila in early 1989. The religious sentiments of the people were fanned by recitals of bhajans, slogans, legendary stories, myths, movies and rituals. The faith of the Hindus in Ram Janmabhoomi was juxtaposed with the faith of people of other religions. "As nobody doubts holiness of Mecca Sharif or Jerusalem, why should one raise question about the holiness of Ram Janmabhoomi? It is a matter of faith and feelings", was the VHP's argument. The Hindu propagandists asserted that Lord Ram was the life of *Bhartiya sanskriti*, i.e. culture, and Babar was an invader. It was not the question of individual religious faith, it was also a question of Indian unity and culture, national pride, nationalism and patriotism they said. This religious fervour took a political form. Bricks for the Ram Mandir were collected from villages as a token of solidarity. In some places each household was asked to contribute Rs. 1.25 towards the construction of the temple. People were asked, "Are you Hindus?", "If you are, then prove it by contributing Rs. 1.25 for Ramshila puja. If you do not contribute you prove that you are from a Muslim womb!" Later, volunteers were recruited for Kar Seva, i.e. voluntary work in rebuilding the temple and those who could not participate were asked to donate money for the cause. Exaggerated news and rumours about Kar Seva were spread by the media. Concocted news stories and video films showing the 'bravery and the sacrifice' of the Kar Sevaks in the face of 'brutal repression' by the State Reserve Police were widely circulated. Further, in order to gear passions to a high pitch, people were told: "The blood of the innocents shed in Ayodhya should not be allowed to go waste". Communal clashes followed.

Lal Krishna Advani began his dramatic Rath Yatra from Somnath in Gujarat in September 1990, and several mini Rath Yatras were organised by the BJP to spread the message of Ayodhya. Trishuls, saffron flags and caps, and slogans swearing by Lord Rama that the temple would be constructed at the same

place appeared in every corner of cities and towns to capture the public imagination for Hindu unity and nationalism. Passions flared up. Communal riots took place at 26 places, killing 99 persons between 1 September and 20 November 1990. This set a base for the BJP for the forthcoming 1991 Lok Sabha elections.

Election Campaign

Though in its manifesto and on public platforms the BJP mentioned several socio-economic issues before the country, the party primarily focused its poll campaign on the Ram Janmabhoomi issue. Besides, its Kisan, Majdoor and Mahila organisations, the RSS, the ABVP, the VHP, the Bajrang Dal, the Shiv Sena, the Bhavani Sena etc. worked individually and collectively for the election campaign of the BJP highlighting Hindu *asmita*, i.e. identity and interests and a need for Hindu unity. Various Hindu sects appealed to their devotees to vote for the party which would protect Hindu interests. The message was clear — only the BJP could do that. The other parties, they argued pamper the minorities for their votes and thus ignore the interests of the majority. The Hindus had become aliens in their own motherland. Jain munis, as mentioned earlier, also joined hands with Hindu spiritual leaders in support of the BJP candidates.

The VHP and other front organisations insisted that the construction of the Ram Mandir in the place of the Masjid was a matter of their right, to correct the injustice done to them in the past by Muslim invaders. It was the question of their faith and 'national', i.e. Hindu pride. Among many others, a saffron-clothed *sadhvi* i.e. a wandering holy woman Ritambhara Devi, an extremely popular orator repeatedly declared in public meetings that no power in the country could stop construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. The VHP told people that voting in the election is equivalent to performing *Kar Seva*, and that they should vote in that party which could facilitate the construction of the Mandir and protect the interests and cultural heritage of the Hindus and the nation. The 'martyrs' of Ayodhya demand, they said, "to form the government of the Rambhaktas i.e. devotees of Ram". The implication was that only the BJP candidates are Rambhaktas and only they could perform the task of constructing the temple.

The BJP leaders argued that the Congress and the Janata Dal (including Gujarat Janata Dal) had pampered the Muslims and other minorities and, therefore, the country was facing terrorism by Sikhs and Muslims in Punjab and Kashmir. The VHP declared that the Congress had said that it would demolish the Somnath temple. Echoing the same line of propaganda, Kashiram Rana, the BJP candidate and ex-president of the state BJP, alleged that Rajiv Gandhi had surrendered the Somnath temple to Muslim fundamentalists. Thus, the efforts of the BJP and all its allies were to identify the BJP as the Hindu party and the others as anti-Hindu and pro-minority parties. The BJP's nationalism, it was claimed, was the only answer to terrorism. The Congress was not able to counter such arguments. It tried to convince the Hindus that it was not against Hindu interests. The party was more or less defensive and asked people not to vote in a communal party. Chiman Patel, the leader of the Gujarat Janata Dal argued that the BJP was not interested in construction of the Ram Mandir. It was interested in power. Such arguments had no effect, especially when they came from a person whose greed for power was well known.

The BJP tried to project Ram as an ideal not only of Hindus but all Indians. He was the symbol of truthfulness, justice and compassion. Ram meant freedom from fear. Ram Rajya was the ideal state in which the ruler was responsible to the people. The BJP and its allies claimed that only the BJP could establish Ram Rajya. One of its election slogans said that voting for the BJP would usher in Ram Rajya. That alone, it was said, would give the nation a new economic and political culture, as people were fed up with the Congress, a symbol of corruption and nepotism, terrorism and anarchy, dynastic rule and authoritarianism.

The BJP posed itself as the cadre-based party whose leaders were honest and devoted to national interests. They stood for the moral values that would build Ram Rajya. The voters were told that they had tried all parties and received nothing but unhappiness. These parties had not only failed to solve their problems, but had allowed people's identity to be threatened in their own motherland. The time had come for an alternative. The common man had experienced the Congress and the Janata Dal's inability to solve basic day-to-day problems. A number of urban educated

persons too, who were otherwise non-communal and were not hypnotized by the Ram Janmabhoomi issue, said that they supported the BJP to try it out, as the Congress had failed the country in solving basic problems. Some others said that though economic issues were important, the identity of the community and nationalism were equally important when there was an onslaught of foreign culture.

It is evident that though the BJP has slowly but steadily built up the party organisation and support base by taking up socio-economic issues, it depended heavily upon the Ram Janmabhoomi issue in the Lok Sabha elections. Repeated communal riots and a systematic campaign against the Muslims and for the Ram Janmabhoomi by leaders and the rank and file of the VHP, the RSS and the BJP and also various religious figures created a near hysteria in society, which helped the BJP immensely in the electoral game. One has to wait and watch: How long will communal emotions stay at this pitch, and what will happen to the BJP vote bank when the hysteria subsides? Organisational weaknesses of the other parties and their unsatisfactory past performance in office put the BJP in an advantageous position in the elections. Even relatively non-communal citizens extended support to the BJP as the party of commitment and discipline. If nothing else, it was a desperate try for an alternative within electoral politics.

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Maharashtra — Still a Congress Bastion

Rajdeep Sardesai

The 1991 general elections revealed a fragmented electorate, with no single party able to gain an absolute majority. They also showed a trend towards increasingly flexible caste, regional and communal allegiances. As the Congress vote in the Hindi heartland seemed to collapse, the upper caste Brahmins of north India who had firmly stood by the Congress in the past, now appeared to move towards the BJP. The middle castes in Bihar became the bulwark of the Janata Dal vote, as did the Muslim community there. Elsewhere though, the Muslims seemed to cast a tactical vote for the Congress in the interests of defeating the BJP. In the south, the BJP made its presence felt in Karnataka for the first time, the Telugu Desam hinted at a revival in fortunes, while the DMK found it impossible to contain the combined strength of the AIADMK-Congress alliance, especially after the sympathy wave in the south following the assassination of the Congress President, Mr Rajiv Gandhi.

If amidst this unstable, erratic, indecisive and variable electoral verdict, we are to seek a link with previous voter behaviour, then Maharashtra provides the best answer. It is only here that there is a great degree of continuity between the 1991 election verdict and other poll results of the past.

The Verdict — Of 48 Lok Sabha constituencies in Maharashtra, elections were held in all but one. Elections were counter-

manded in Nanded following the death of an independent candidate. The Congress won 37 seats, the BJP won five seats, the Shiv Sena, the BJP's alliance partner, won three seats, the CPM won one seat, while the Janata Dal drew a blank. In percentage terms, the Congress polled 46.64 per cent of the votes, the BJP polled 20 per cent, the Shiv Sena polled nine per cent, while the Janata Dal polled 11 per cent.

If we are to compare this verdict with the 1989 Lok Sabha polls, we find that voter response in Maharashtra has shown a degree of consistency over the two elections. In 1989, the Congress had won 28 seats while polling 45.32 per cent of the votes. The BJP won ten seats polling 23.69 per cent of the votes, while the Shiv Sena won four seats while polling four per cent of the votes. The Janata Dal won six seats while polling 10.93 per cent of the votes.

There are some preliminary conclusions that we might draw from looking at these results. Firstly, although the Congress vote has increased by a little over one per cent in the two years, the party has gained eight additional seats. By contrast, the Janata Dal vote has actually risen very marginally, yet the party has lost all the six seats it had held in the previous Lok Sabha. Why did this happen?

It must be pointed out here that in 1989, as the opposition preferred to engage the Congress in one-to-one contests almost all over the state, the high index of opposition unity worked to the advantage of the Janata Dal. The party, with only ten per cent of the votes could gain six seats, a very favourable, if disproportionate percentage to seats ratio. Four of the six seats that the Janata Dal won in 1989 — Rajapur, Amravati, Nanded and Malegaon — were in the course of direct fights with the Congress. In 1991, there was a three-cornered contest in all these constituencies, and all of them went to the Congress (Nanded in the course of a by-election held later in the year). It would therefore not be unrealistic to conclude that the Congress was the major beneficiary of the failure of the non-Congress opposition to come to an agreement with one another.

One prominent victim of this failure was the seasoned Janata Dal candidate from Rajapur, Mr Madhu Dandavate, who had been winning the seat since 1971. His own clean personal image

and the absence of a strong three-cornered contest had helped Mr Dandavate retain his hold in the area. In 1989, when Mr Dandavate won the seat for fifth consecutive time, he polled 52.9 per cent even as his nearest Congress rival polled 43.2 per cent of the votes. There was no BJP-Sena candidate in the fray, as Mr Dandavate entered into an informal arrangement with the Sena.

But this time, the Sena, for some reason, was determined to teach Mr Dandavate a lesson. They not only put up a candidate against him, but put up a very formidable one at that in a sitting MP from Bombay South-Central constituency, Mr Vamanrao Mahadik. It may be pointed out here that in the state assembly elections held in 1990, the BJP-Sena alliance had captured three of the six assembly segments of Rajapur, the Congress had won in two, while the Janata Dal had squeezed home in just one. In other words, there was already a substantial BJP-Sena support base in Rajapur. This support base came to the fore in the Lok Sabha polls, and although Mr Mahadik finished third, he won enough votes to ensure that the Congress candidate got through. While factors like the sympathy ripple in the Konkan following Mr Gandhi's assassination did play a part, the prime reason for the defeat of a seasoned parliamentarian like Mr Dandavate at the hands of a political novice like Major S.S. Sawant (hardly anyone in the constituency had even heard of him) might be attributed to electoral arithmetic.

The second preliminary conclusion that may be drawn from looking at the results is that while the BJP-Sena alliance voting percentage remained more or less static around the 28-29 per cent mark, the number of seats the party won declined fairly sharply from 14 in 1989 to nine in 1991. Given that the alliance did not contest nine seats in 1989, the drop in its seats appears even sharper. To that extent, it would not be unreasonable to conclude that the BJP-Sena alliance also suffered from the absence of one-to-one contests.

The third preliminary conclusion that may be drawn from the results is that the Congress in Maharashtra has a substantial and fairly consistent support base at around 45 per cent of the popular vote in almost all the constituencies. At this level of support, it only needs the opposition vote to be split slightly for the Congress to emerge triumphant in Maharashtra. If one of

those opposition parties happens to be a centrist force (like the Janata Dal), then there is even the possibility that some of this centrist vote will drift to the Congress making it even more invincible. Let us now test some of these conclusions against regional and party voting patterns all over the state.

Regional Divide:- At the outset here, it needs to be stated that although Maharashtra is administratively one unit, socio-culturally there is a fairly sharp regional divide. In most towns in Vidarbha for example, Hindi is the predominant language. Vidarbha was also deeply influenced by the freedom struggle and by the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi. The Gandhi ashram in Wardha is in a sense of symbolic of the deep reverence which the Gandhi name evokes in these parts.

Marathwada by contrast remained part of the Nizam's state for over a couple of centuries, and was only integrated into Maharashtra after the reorganisation of states took place. The Muslim influence in the architecture, food habits, and cultural life of Marathwada is still there. The region's role in the mainstream freedom movement was marginal. The freedom movement in Marathwada was largely self-reliant and produced its own leaders.

Western Maharashtra, on the other hand, was at the heart of the Maratha kingdom and later, the Independence struggle. Behavioural attitudes here have often therefore been inspired by a feeling of power and superiority. Also most of the social reform movements that took place in Maharashtra in the late 19th and early 20th century originated here. Vidarbha and Marathwada were only touched on the periphery by social renaissance, although the Ambedkarite movement was to influence Vidarbha and Marathwada in the post-Independence era.

Bombay and the Konkan coastal belt were heavily influenced by the British raj, imbibing a western way of life, and placing a premium on modernity and development. The culture here is representative of the cosmopolitan character of a metropolis.

Economic disparities between the four regions are equally noticeable. Infertile soil and poor irrigation facilities in both Vidarbha and Marathwada meant that both these regions were economically relatively backward. The land relationship in these regions regulated by the zamindari system was equally oppres-

sive. In the forested border districts of Vidarbha, land relations were even more distressing. The Adivasi tendu-leaf pickers in Chandrapur and Gadchiroli district were forced to live as bonded labourers, exploited by a forest contractor-businessman-administrator nexus.

On the other hand, Western Maharashtra was always a more prosperous belt. Part of the reason was the high soil fertility. The enterprise of the people of this region could not be denied also, and ultimately found itself being expressed after independence in the formation of the sugar co-operative movement. But Western Maharashtra could never have achieved the prosperity it did but for the political patronage it received from a succession of Maharashtra Chief Ministers starting with Mr Y.B. Chavan in the 1950s. Indeed, ever since Maharashtra was created in its present form in 1960, the dominant Maratha peasantry of western and southern Maharashtra established its hegemony over the state's politics and economy.

This dominant group cornered the benefits of the state's largesse. Electricity, water and other basic facilities were available to the farmers of western Maharashtra. Many of them built up a nexus with the industrial bourgeoisie that was emerging in the Bombay-Thane industrial areas. The growth of industry here also benefited the people of the Konkan in terms of jobs, leading to the emergence of a money order economy in these parts.

The end result was a lop-sided political and economic growth, which the Congress as the party in power did little to prevent. The lop-sided political process meant that only a Maratha, preferably from Western Maharashtra, could hope to rise up the Congress ladder. When a non-Maratha like Mr A.R. Antulay, or a person from outside the sugar districts of western Maharashtra, like Mr Babasaheb Bhosale or Mr S.B. Chavan, became chief minister of the state, the Maratha lobby conspired to remove him. Economic imbalances were even sharper. While much of Vidarbha and Marathwada remained drought-prone, a cash crop economy flourished in western Maharashtra. The *sakhar samrats* or sugar barons built up petty kingdoms that encompassed virtually every aspect of the social life of the towns and districts they controlled. More than 75 per cent of the state's agricultural output comes from the Western Maharashtra dis-

tricts, even as industrial growth has been focussed on the Bombay-Pune belt.

It is also necessary to understand the demographic background of the state's major regions. In Vidarbha, Dalits comprise more than 20 per cent of the population in many districts and are known to be politically conscious. There are a few constituencies in Marathwada, like Aurangabad, where Muslims comprise more than 20 per cent of the populace. In Western Maharashtra, the Marathas are the dominant caste, while Bombay has a truly multi-caste, multi-class population.

Other Backward Castes though (or at least the 273 OBCs included under the Mandal report) make up for more than 70 per cent of the state's population. Of these OBCs, four castes are numerically and politically significant — the Kunbis (or the peasant caste which is the largest and is scattered all over the state), the Malis (who are found in large numbers in Vidarbha and Marathwada), the Dhangars (who are mainly in western Maharashtra and Marathawada) and the Telis (who are the dominant caste in many constituencies in Vidarbha like Wardha).

It has been necessary to give this background of the political, demographic, social and economic development of the state because it has had a profound impact on electoral patterns. Thus western Maharashtra, which had prospered on Congress patronage, has always been loathe to desert the party. The Congress vote percentage has averaged between 60 to 65 per cent almost throughout. In the last elections in 1989, the Congress won 14 out of the 18 seats on offer in Western Maharashtra. There are seven constituencies in Western Maharashtra where the Congress has never lost.

Vidarbha too remained a Congress bastion. Here, the loyalty was based more on tradition, the absence of a significant opposition, and the influence of the Gandhian legacy in these parts. Even the periodic demands for a separate state of Vidarbha or the feeling that its interests were being compromised by the sugar lobby did not affect the Congress hold. In the 1957 assembly elections, when the Congress was suffering reverses all over Maharashtra in the face of the Samyukta Maharashtra movement, Vidarbha enabled it to remain in power. Again, when Indira Gandhi was in political exile in 1978, the Congress won 62

of the 66 seats in Vidarbha. Till the 1989 polls, there were six Lok Sabha constituencies in Vidarbha where the Congress had never lost. It was only in the 1989 polls that the pattern seemed to change. The BJP, which despite having the RSS headquarters in Nagpur, had never won more than a couple of seats in the region, suddenly triumphed in four of the 12 seats. Its voter percentage arose over the 30 per cent mark. Yet, the Congress remained the dominant force, winning half the seats on offer.

Marathwada, on the other hand, had remained a little apart from the Congress culture, and thus tended to be more politically volatile. Oppositional groups like the Peasant and Workers party and the socialists had managed to achieve some success in these parts. It is also significant that when the Shiv Sena first expanded outside Bombay in the latter half of the 1980s, it was Marathwada that was most receptive to the party. Not only did the party win the Aurangabad municipals elections in 1989, but also won half of the 48 assembly constituencies, and three of the eight parliamentary seats in the region that year.

Economic and social interdependence had ensured that voting patterns along the Konkan coast matched electoral behaviour in Bombay city. Given the multi-class character of the city, it has not been unusual to find voting patterns in the city undergoing frequent change. Although, the labour areas in the city had voted for communist leaders and even socialists like George Fernandes won here in the 1960s, Bombay had remained with the Congress until the 1977 polls. Then, the anti-Emergency wave, the growing disillusionment with the "garibi hatao" slogan, the spurt in industrial action in the early 70s that affected business, and a sense of urban anomie, made the Bombayite look for change. The Janata Party won all the six seats in the city, a feat they nearly repeated three years later, even when Mrs Gandhi was making her political comeback. Indeed, the non-Congress opposition has gone from strength to strength in the 1980s, culminating in the Shiv Sena winning the 1985 municipal corporation elections, and the BJP-Sena alliance winning four of the six Lok Sabha seats in 1989 and 24 of the 36 seats in the 1990 assembly elections.

The pattern then just before the 1991 elections suggested that Maharashtra politics had begun to reflect the cracks in its re-

gional structure. Western Maharashtra was still firmly with the Congress; Vidarbha was slowly moving away from the party; Konkan and Bombay had become Shiv Sena strongholds; while Marathwada was divided. The crucial question was: would this multi-layered, multi-dimensional regional entropy persist? Let us look at how the various regions voted.

In Western Maharashtra — its traditional bastion, the Congress won all but two of the 18 seats. The two seats it lost were Pune and Jalgaon, where the Bharatiya Janata Party triumphed. The Congress polled almost 55 per cent of the votes, with most of its candidates winning by a margin of over one lakh. In Baramati, Mr Ajit Pawar, the nephew of Mr Sharad Pawar, won the seat by over three lakh votes. Even opposition candidates like Mr Bala-saheb Vikhe-Patil, a former Congressman turned Congress rebel who had won the Kopergaon seat on five previous occasions, was roundly defeated by a margin of 1.2 lakh votes in the neighbouring Ahmednagar seat. While the Pune victory represented a significant triumph for the BJP, part of the reason for the Congress debacle here was infighting in the party with a sizeable section of the party working against the sitting MP and former minister, Mr V.N. Gadgil. The Janata Dal candidates lost their deposits in most of these constituencies.

Vidarbha: — The Congress success in Vidarbha was in a sense the most surprising. The party's vote base had dipped in the last elections and, bedevilled with infighting, it was feared that the party's position would not register a significant improvement. As it turned out, the Congress won nine of the eleven seats in the region. The party polled 43 per cent of the votes, even as the BJP-Shiv Sena alliance polled 29 per cent. Of the two defeats suffered by the Congress, one was that of former union minister, Mr Vasant Sathe, in Wardha. He lost to the CPM candidate, Mr Ramchandra Gangare, who provided the Janata Dal led front with its lone victory in the state. But Mr Sathe's defeat was more an outcome of his failure to nurse his constituency despite having represented it since 1977.

The victory of the Bharatiya Janata Party in Akola is interesting because it was perhaps the only constituency in the region where a strong three-cornered contest was witnessed. Here, the presence of a formidable Janata Dal candidate Prakash Am-

bedkar meant that the minority and Dalit vote, which played a pivotal role in ensuring Congress success in the region, was divided. For the BJP, which had been expecting to win at least five seats in Vidarbha, its non-success in the region was a great setback. No one exemplified the fading fortunes of the BJP more than the Party's Nagpur candidate, Mr Banwarilal Purohit. He had joined the party only a few days before the nominations were filed and, with his personal charisma and enormous reserves of wealth at his disposal, was very confident of victory. In the end, he lost by over 75,000 votes.

Marathwada: — Of the seven seats in the region (polling was countermanded in Nanded), the honours were more or less evenly divided, with the Congress winning four seats and the Shiv Sena winning three. While the Congress polled 39 per cent of the vote, the BJP secured 19 per cent and the Shiv Sena polled 14 per cent. The Sena won in Aurangabad, Parbhani and Hingoli, but the first two constituencies already had sitting Sena MPs, so their success was not entirely unexpected. Hingoli was a notable victory for the Sena since it does have a large backward caste and tribal population. The BJP lost Jalna, a seat it had held last time. The Congress success came in constituencies which it has already dominated like Osmanabad and Latur, so it would not be fair to say that there was a dramatic improvement in support for the party of the sort that occurred in Vidarbha.

Konkan and Bombay: — The Congress polled nearly 40 per cent of the vote while bagging eight of the 11 seats in the region. If Vidarbha represented a big setback to BJP aspirations, then the Sena suffered along the coastal belt. It won just one seat, Bombay South-Central. This was also, interestingly enough, the only strong three-cornered contest in the region. The Janata Dal had put up the labour leader, Dr Datta Samant, and in a predominantly labour constituency he polled enough votes to give the Sena candidate, Mr Mohan Raole, victory by barely 4,000 votes. The BJP won the Bombay North constituency, providing further evidence of the immense personal popularity of its senior leader, Mr Ram Naik. But elsewhere, the Congress benefited from the virtual collapse of the Janata Dal vote, with Sunil Dutt and Murli Deora becoming the first MPs from Bombay to enjoy three successive terms.

The victory of the Congress in the Konkan was equally emphatic. It scored a big upset in Rajapur by defeating Mr Madhu Dandavate (see above); the former Chief Minister, Mr A.R. Antulay overcame charges of neglecting his constituency as well as dissident Congressmen, to win in Kolaba; and in Ratnagiri, the party scored a notable victory over the Sena, which has established an efficient network in the region and had swept the assembly polls here. The lone BJP victory came in Thane. Like Ram Naik, the other Ram in the BJP party, Prof Ram Kapse, won handsomely, largely on the strength of his personal image and the failure of the Congress to put up a candidate of merit.

If then, we consider regional voting patterns in their totality, we find that the Congress scored almost all over the state, with Marathwada being the only region where its performance was less than satisfactory. It retained its base in Western Maharashtra; recaptured it in Vidarbha; and registered a marked improvement in performances in Bombay and the Konkan. Almost all over the state, the party's vote percentage was over the 45 per cent mark, and in some constituencies, its candidates polled more than 60 per cent of votes.

The BJP-Shiv Sena alliance, on the other hand, found that its advance in Maharashtra had been seriously checked. In 1989, the BJP had registered its biggest gains outside the Hindi heartland in Maharashtra. In tandem with the Sena, it had obtained more than 25 per cent of the votes and had won ten seats, with the Sena winning four. Now, although its voting percentage held firm, its seat tally was halved to just five. Even more disturbingly for the party, it was able to retain only three of the ten seats it had won in 1989. When one considers that three of the party's five victories were registered in Bombay and Pune, the BJP's traditional image of being an urban party, at least in Maharashtra, appeared to have been revived.

The urban bias was to be found in the Shiv Sena's performance also. Two of the party's four victories were in Bombay and Aurangabad respectively. Its strongest showing was undoubtedly in Marathwada, which was the first region outside Bombay where the Shiv Sena had managed to extend its base. But the party clearly found parliamentary elections to be a different ball game to the assembly polls, where its local appeal won far more

followers. In the Konkan in particular, the failure of the Shiv Sena to carve a national image for itself was to cost the party dearly.

The Janata Dal, on the other hand, had a national image, but it just did not have the organisational strength to convert this into votes. Janata Dal nominees forfeited their deposits in 21 constituencies in the state. Even in Vidarbha, where Mr V.P. Singh had attracted huge crowds in pre-election campaign tours, the party was simply unable to translate their leader's popularity into votes.

The end result was that with 37 seats out of 48, Maharashtra provided the Congress with its single largest bag of seats in the country. What explains the spectacular performance of the Congress in the state, especially as it came at a time when voter confidence in the party had shown signs of declining in other parts of the country?

Ram and Rajiv:- To analyse this completely, we need to look at the circumstances under which the Lok Sabha polls took place in Maharashtra. The polls in Maharashtra were to be conducted over two phases — the first on May 23, the second phase to take place in early June. But on May 21, barely 36 hours before Maharashtra went to the polls, the Congress president, Mr Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated. There is little doubt that this was the single most important event in the election campaign. Until then, the Ram Mandir issue had held centre stage, with rabble-rousers like Sadhvi Ritambhara becoming key participants in the BJP-Shiv Sena's campaign. The death of Rajiv Gandhi in the most tragic circumstances meant that the election agenda showed distinct signs of shifting — from Ram to Rajiv.

BJP posters that had attacked Mr Rajiv Gandhi, either calling him a Muslim agent, a Bofors swindler; or an anti-Hindu temple destroyer, were hastily removed. The BJP campaign began to focus on national stability which they claimed only their party could provide at a critical juncture in the nation's history. But, unfortunately for the BJP, in making stability their key electoral platform, they were caught between two Rams — one Ram who aggressively espoused the cause of Hindutva astride a rath, the other Ram attempting to project a more sober and dignified image. The BJP itself may not find a contradiction between the two Rams, seeing both as evidence of their commitment to the

cause of a unified, if majoritarian, Hindu nation. However, the electorate, who had become used to the BJP's shrill and emotional campaign, only associated the party with the potentially explosive and divisive Mandir issue. With the cruel assassination of a major national leader, national reconciliation and not majority community consolidation was seen by the voter as the need of the hour.

This suited the Congress perfectly. The Congress, primarily because of its role in the freedom struggle, has always been identified as the party of the "nation". It has done best whenever the electorate has opted in a sense for consensual, status-quoist governance. The sacrificial spirit of several Congressmen dating back to Mahatma Gandhi right down not to Rajiv Gandhi has created a feeling among the masses that the party is the only one that can be trusted during a national crisis. The Congress campaign managers very skilfully played on this public sympathy. Suddenly, posters with pictures of Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi came up all over the state. The references to the heroism of these leaders became more and more frequent.

The critical question of course is, how did Rajiv Gandhi's assassination actually influence electoral trends in Maharashtra? The answer may not be easy to find because, unlike several other states like Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, both voting phases in Maharashtra were conducted after the assassination. In that sense, the schizoid nature of the 1991 elections that some political observers refer to, could not be fully tested in Maharashtra. However, analysis conducted by psephologists indicate that there was a marginal shift in favour of the Congress on account of sympathy for Rajiv Gandhi. This "sympathy ripple" might not have been as strong as it was in neighbouring states like Madhya Pradesh, but it was still strong enough to deprive the BJP and the Janata Dal of at least three seats each. In Vidarbha in particular, where the Nehru-Gandhi family has always been held in high esteem and where electoral behaviour is influenced by neighbouring Madhya Pradesh, the post-Rajiv scenario did boost the Congress. The other region where it might have played an important role was in the Konkan, an area where the electorate has always expressed a high degree of nationalistic fervour.

While there may be some debate over the exact influence of Mr Gandhi's death on the actual vote, the sympathy ripple did at least have one critical spin-off. This was the sudden emergence of state Chief Minister Mr Sharad Pawar as a leader of national stature. There was even a subtle attempt to build him up as the next Prime Minister of the country in the event of a Congress victory. Mr Pawar for his part did nothing to dispel this notion. In fact, in a newspaper interview he openly admitted that his future lay in Delhi.

Mr Pawar's emergence as a national alternative did have an important effect both, on the Chief Minister and on the Maharashtra electorate. It is a well-known secret that Mr Pawar and Mr Gandhi did not get along. While Mr Gandhi was not willing to trust the Maharashtra leader completely, Mr Pawar did not think that the Congress president was a mature and capable politician. Matters had reached a head in January this year when a well-orchestrated campaign was started to topple Mr Pawar. The campaign apparently enjoyed the blessings of Mr Gandhi. Mr Pawar never quite forgave the Congress president for destabilising him and was sulking throughout the early phase of the election campaign. The anti-Pawar lobby in the state Congress was equally determined to cut the Chief Minister to size, and when the candidates' list was announced, many politicians opposed to Mr Pawar were selected.

In a dominant party state like Maharashtra, the Congress has been its own worst enemy. It was therefore hardly surprising to find that in almost every constituency in the state, dissident Congressmen were trying to bring down the official candidate. Mr Pawar himself was keeping a low-profile. Mr Gandhi's assassination changed the situation drastically. Suddenly, Mr Pawar was galvanised into action. Senior Congress leaders realised that their very political survival was at stake. There was also uncertainty over the likely power equations in the post-dynasty era, but at the same time, the omnipresent suspicion that irrespective of what happened at the hustings, Mr Pawar would have an important role to play in the new order. This suspicion forced the Congress to close ranks behind Mr Pawar. No one exemplified this better than former Chief Minister, Mr A.R. Antulay, an arch Pawar foe, who, at a public meeting grandly announced that he

and Mr Pawar had joined hands to fight the common "enemy" (the BJP-Sena alliance).

It was not just Congressmen, but the general public who also joined the Pawar bandwagon at this stage. The Congress strategy was to create the impression that if Maharashtra voted for the party in a big way, then there was very likelihood that Mr Pawar would be anointed Prime Minister. The election had thus become a question of Maharashtra *asmita* (self-respect).

This concept of Maharashtra *asmita* has a long history, dating back to the early battle for control of the Congress between the extremists led by Lokmanya Tilak and the moderates led by Gandhi. Some historians may argue that the deep antipathy that Maharashtra has for the Delhi durbar dates back to the defeat of the Marathas by Ahmed Shah Abdali in the third battle of Panipat in 1761. That defeat marked the end of the Maratha empire. Since then, Delhi has remained a distant land for people from the state, who felt that they never received their dues from the Congress central leadership commensurate with the support they provided the party. When the late Y.B. Chavan was eventually marginalised in Centre politics in the 1970s, Maratha self-respect received another blow. With this background, the emergence of Mr Pawar as the flag-bearer of Maratha fortunes had a great influence on the voter's mind.

The contrast between the skilful manner in which Mr Pawar capitalised on the situation and the manner in which the Shiv Sena chief, Mr Bal Thackeray, overreacted to the political developments throughout the campaign could not have been more glaring. First, addressing a joint BJP-Sena rally in Pune, Mr Thackeray eulogised Nathuram Godse, the assassin of Mahatma Gandhi. This statement was in response to an allegation made by Mr Pawar at a public meeting that "the BJP had Ram on their lips, but Nathuram in their stomachs." By getting provoked, Mr Thackeray exposed his political naivete. Mr Thackeray's comments may have pleased hardcore Shiv Sena supporters, who are accustomed to their leader's provocative statements. But it might well have swayed the undecided vote in a few years against the Sena. Worse, the BJP did not really outrightly condemn the Sena chief's incendiary remarks. By their supine reaction, the BJP virtually confirmed the commonly held belief that Mr Thackeray was calling the shots in their alliance.

Mr Thackeray was to embarrass the BJP once again during the poll campaign when he chose to launch a diatribe against Mrs Sonia Gandhi, widow of former Prime Minister, the late Rajiv Gandhi. The Sena leader warned that his party would launch a "national movement" if Sonia were to succeed her husband as Congress president. The "anti-foreigner" line taken by the Sena chief fitted in with the BJP's own aim at creating a resurgent Hindu cultural identity. Yet, the BJP could not have approved of the insensitivity shown by Mr Thackeray in brazenly attacking a woman who had just gone through the trauma of her husband's assassination.

Sena-BJP Alliance :- In a sense, the variance in method, and at times in substance, between the two electoral partners, exposed the frailty of the Sena-BJP alliance in particular, and of the Hindutva concept in general. The BJP itself had never denied that Hindutva has varied interpretations. In fact, at one level, the alliance with the Sena was formed in 1989 so that the BJP's more philosophical brand of Hindu nationalism could get a popularly militant, if localised edge. At another level, the alliance was formed to exploit the political vacuum that had arisen in Maharashtra following a fractious decade in state Congress politics which had seen seven chief ministers. The previous two decades had witnessed only five Chief Ministers so the contrast could not be more glaring.

While the Congress was undergoing this period of extended internal strife, the BJP and the Sena were both changing tracks. The BJP by the mid-1980s appeared to have discarded the loin cloth of Gandhian socialism for the saffron robes of Hindu cultural and religious hegemony. The Shiv Sena, buoyed by its success in the Bombay municipal corporation elections, had begun to give its urban character a distinctly mofussil edge. It quite consciously took an anti-Muslim, anti-Dalit stand to aid its expansionary process into rural Maharashtra, and the rising political consciousness of Dalits in Vidarbha, the Shiv Sena had reason to believe that its policies would work, especially among the other backward castes who had been marginalised by Congress-dominated Maratha politics. Moreover, when Mr Pawar rejoined the Congress in 1986, many of his supporters in rural areas preferred to join a relatively nascent organisation like the

Sena which offered easy access to power and pelf, rather than get enmeshed in the cesspool of Congress politics once again.

On the face of it then, the Sena-BJP alliance was a potent combination. The two parties were after all articulating two very emotive issues — the imaginary communal fears of the majority, and genuine linguistic and regional grievances. The aim of the alliance was clear — to create an undivided Hindu vote bank by polarising the electorate on regional and communal lines. Initially, the alliance appeared to work, at least at the ballot box. By gaining 93 seats in the 1990 assembly elections, there was reason to believe that the BJP-Sena alliance had the potential to become a genuine force in state politics.

The 1991 elections however exposed the limitations of the saffron card. The Sena had undoubtedly made some inroads in rural Maharashtra, but a confrontationist approach could not work eternally in a socio-cultural milieu that had always encouraged reformist movements right from the period of the bhakti saints. Nor had the Sena ever tried to analyse the genuine reasons for rural impoverishment, much in the manner that the party had never attempted to understand the basic causes underlying the backwardness of local youth in the competitive job market of the metropolis or the erosion of Maharashtrian self-respect. To an extent, the influx of migrants, the growth of slums, the breakdown of family and other support structures, had created a state of urban anomie which allowed the Sena to camouflage its failure to evolve a comprehensive economic programme by relying on the rhetoric and personality of Mr Thackeray.

But in rural areas, the Sena had to pay the price for failing to build up an organisational structure and for ignoring economic issues. It might be even argued that the Sena never understood the needs and nature of its rural base. For one, their commitment to Mr Thackeray and the Shiv Sena was subservient to their great desire to acquire the spoils of power at any cost. When these Shiv Sainiks, many of whom were frustrated unemployed youth, found that power in the party continued to be controlled by a Bombay-based coterie that surrounded Mr Thackeray, they were naturally disgruntled. Worse, when despite much brave talk by Mr Thackeray, the Sena did not come to power in the 1990 assembly elections, the disappointment in the party ranks was

even greater. When Mr Thackeray exposed his political naivete by attacking the Mandal report in the full knowledge that the bulk of his rural support was OBC, the new generation Shiv Sainiks were even more troubled. When Mr Thackeray chose to attack the much-revered social reformer, Jotiba Phule, many Sainiks were convinced that the leadership had lost its way. When in Vidarbha, the BJP began to dominate the alliance structure, the Sainiks felt left out.

This distrust in the leadership created a confidence crisis in the Shiv Sena in rural areas during the 1991 elections. In many parts of the state, most notably in Chandrapur and Gadchiroli districts of Vidarbha, Shiv Sena workers actually stayed away and in some cases, even sabotaged the BJP campaign. In other areas, the Shiv Sena, contesting a Lok Sabha election on a large scale for the first time, found it difficult to find candidates of the requisite merit and was forced to put up some political novices. The end result was that the Shiv Sena found that, with the sole exception of Hingoli in Marathwada, it was reduced to being an urban party.

The BJP too was to find itself in a more or less similar situation when the results were declared. This may seem a little more surprising. After all, even if the BJP did not have a single leader in its ranks who could match the popularity of Mr Thackeray, it did have numerous other advantages. Firstly, it is a cadre-based party which has made full use of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh family network in building up its organisational structure. Secondly, it had prepared well for the elections. In Vidarbha for example, where the caste factor is crucial, the BJP had made an extra effort to put up a candidate from the dominant caste of each constituency. Senior BJP leaders like Mr L.K. Advani and Vishwa Hindu Parishad crowdpullers like Sadhvi Ritambhara had made numerous trips to the state during the election campaign. Thirdly, the BJP's campaign, unlike the Sena's, was not handicapped by a resource crunch. Fourthly, the party had succeeded to an extent in creating a strong backward caste leadership in some parts of rural Maharashtra. Finally, Mr Advani's rath-yatra had drawn huge crowds in the state and the state BJP leadership was convinced that the mandir-masjid issue would be on top of the political agenda.

As it turned out, the BJP's calculations went all wrong. The party won only five seats where last time it had won ten. Nowhere was the decline more perceptible than in Vidarbha where it lost all the three seats it had held here previously and did not even open its account in the region. In fact, its voting percentage declined in 10 of the 12 constituencies in Vidarbha. Its only significant gains were in Jalgaon and Pune, both of which are predominantly urban constituencies. The BJP had to wake up to the bitter reality that the Hindutva appeal had not cut much ice among Maharashtra's rural vote.

BJP Downfall:- Why? The BJP argument is that the election agenda changed at the last moment from Ram to Rajiv after the assassination of the Congress president. As explained earlier, the voter's concern for a national reconciliation suited the Congress just fine, especially in a state where the party has enjoyed a long period in power. More importantly, the Congress governments in Maharashtra, unlike their counterparts in other states like Gujarat, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, had been able to ensure that the state remained almost free of vicious communal riots and other forms of violence. This had served to create a natural association between stability and the Congress in the minds of the electorate in Maharashtra to a far greater extent than in any other state.

But the BJP must go beyond the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi to search for the reasons for their debacle. The fact is that with their high-pitched, emotive campaign on the mandir-masjid issue, the BJP polarised the Maharashtra electorate like never before. This may have worked in Uttar Pradesh and the Hindi heartland, but not in Maharashtra. There are many reasons for this, but the prime one has its origins in the rich socio-cultural heritage of Maharashtra. With a refreshing amalgam of east and west, of Hindu and Muslim culture, of literature and science, of education and reform, of industrial progress and agricultural growth, Maharashtra probably provides the perfect example of the republican values enshrined in our constitution. Parsi businessmen have flourished here; Muslim traders have contributed heavily to the state's economic growth; Maratha history is still a source of great pride; Brahmin scholars have added immeasurably to the fund of intellectual thought; Dalits have achieved high

levels of literacy. The communal harmony, the emphasis on a meritocracy, especially in urban areas, and the social upliftment of Dalits that has taken place (though not quite at the pace some would like to see), have all been intrinsic parts of Maharashtra's social structure.

In this socio-culturally vibrant society, the BJP's attempt to build a highly stratified, culturally sterile, socially regressive polity, was doomed for failure. Hindutva may succeed as a political slogan in a social milieu where the people and the government have lost faith in the true values of secularism and cultural diversity. This may have happened in north India where the Congress government's attempt to hunt with the Hindu communal hound and the Muslim fundamentalist hare, be it during riots in Bhagalpur or in allowing the shilanyas to take place in Ayodhya, was bound to have a backlash. But in Maharashtra, the government was, or at least was seen to be, relatively firm in its commitment to ensuring the security and protecting the faith and religious beliefs of people from all communities without any discrimination whatsoever. The BJP's commitment to the electorate to inch towards a Hindu rashtra appeared to work against this peaceful social order. Faced with the choice, the Maharashtra electorate opted for the tried and trusted regime.

Janata Dal Plight- What made the choice easier was the abysmal condition in which the Janata Dal-led Progressive Democratic Front found itself in the state. The Janata Dal contested 32 seats, leaving the remaining 16 for its electoral allies, mainly from the left parties. As it turned out, the Dal did not win a single seat and in fact, its candidates lost their deposits in most of the constituencies. The collapse of the Dal vote meant that unlike in some other states, most notably Uttar Pradesh, there were straight fights between the Congress and the BJP in most constituencies. The failure of the Janata Dal to emerge as a viable political force meant that the anti-BJP-Sena vote i.e. the Dal vote, especially among the minorities, shifted to the Congress, leaving the party in an unassailable position.

Tactical voting, clearly motivated by a desire to defeat the BJP-Sena candidates at all costs, was an important factor in the eventual Congress success. Take the voting pattern in Ratnagiri. The Janata Dal candidate here barely managed to secure 24,000

votes as compared to the 1.78 lakh votes polled by the Sena candidate. The victorious Congress MP, Mr Govindrao Nikam, polled 1.91 lakh votes. Had the Janata Dal candidate done a little better, he may have cut into the anti-Sena votes secured by the Congressman. The pattern was repeated in Vidarbha and Marathwada, where Dalit and Muslim minorities comprise nearly 25 per cent of the population and play a critical role in influencing the final election result in half-a-dozen constituencies. In Nagpur, for example, where there are more than a lakh of Muslims and Dalits each, a last-minute shift in preferences to the Congress, meant that the BJP lost what seemed a winning seat initially.

The disintegration of the Janata Dal may have surprised a few. Although winning only 24 seats in the 1990 assembly polls in the state, the Dal leader, Mr V.P. Singh had attracted huge crowds at his electoral meetings in the state. The local-level Dal leadership was convinced that an OBC minorities rainbow coalition had been created on the issue of implementation of the Mandal report. Around 273 OBCs had been included in the ambit of the report. Together they encompass around 70 per cent of Maharashtra's population. Mr Singh's electoral arithmetic told him that OBC+Dalits+Muslims was a winning combination in Maharashtra. But such cynical calculation, revolving around populist rhetoric, was always unlikely to work in Maharashtra.

Firstly, reservations for the backward castes in government jobs have been part of the Maharashtra government's stated policy right from the inception of the state. There is already 10 per cent reservation in government jobs for 164 OBC groups. In addition, there is 13 per cent reservation for scheduled castes, seven per cent for scheduled tribes and four per cent for denotified and nomadic tribes. Effectively, 34 per cent reservation already exists in Maharashtra.

Secondly, and more importantly, there is no direct job competition between upper castes and the OBCs in government services in Maharashtra. The high level of employment and industrialisation in the state has meant that the private sector offers numerous attractive job opportunities, which is not the case in relatively undeveloped states like Bihar. Thirdly, the Mandal report by including the dominant Kunbi caste-clusters in its classifica-

tion had created the impression among the other backward caste groups that the Kunbis would monopolise the Mandal benefits. In any case, the Kunbis of Maharashtra are widely dispersed and lack homogeneity. For example, the Tiloni Kunbis of Ratnagiri district are economically backward, even as the Kunbis of the adjoining Sindhudurg district are more prosperous. In fact, the OBCs in Maharashtra have never had a group identity.

Also, Maharashtra politics has always been dominated by one caste, the Marathas, with the result that caste competition in the political arena has been virtually absent. Finally, the non-Brahmin movement in the state has a rich tradition that reached its apogee during the Satyashodhak movement in the late 19th and early 20th century. This movement was able to provide a channel for fulfilling the aspirations of the non-Brahmin populace in the state more than 60 years ago.

The defeating silence that then greeted the tabling of the Mandal report in Maharashtra when compared to the blood that was strewn across the streets of north India should have convinced Mr Singh that the state had long adjusted to social re-ordering and had thereby developed an accommodative and flexible approach to inter-caste relations. This is not to disregard the impact that Mr Singh's reservation rhetoric had on the intermediate castes in the state. There was even a willingness among a section of the populace to accept that Mr Singh was a true messiah of the weak and underprivileged. In this category, were included the Dalits, the traditionally oppressed class. When Mr Singh appeared to sacrifice his prime ministerial gaddi on the mandir-masjid issue, the backward coalition found sympathisers among Muslims in the state too.

But sympathy and electoral support are entirely different. To ensure that sympathy for a cause is translated into positive gains at the ballot box, there is a need for an intermediate organisational structure and a local-level leadership having the maturity and experience to handle the pressures of a general election campaign. This is where, above all else, the Janata Dal was found wanting. Its state party president, Mrs Mrinal Gore, was hardly known outside Bombay. It did not even have a grassroot level OBC leadership in marked contrast to the BJP. The fact that the Janata Dal was short of finances made matters worse. It simply

could not compete with the propaganda blitz launched by the two other major parties.

The support of the Left Front parties too did not make much of a difference in a state where the communists have gradually become irrelevant, especially in the last decade. Other socialist groupings have their limited sphere of influence like the Peasants and Workers Party in the Konkan, but they could not be expected to galvanise an almost non-existent party machine on their own throughout the state.

Nor could the Dal rely on the support it was receiving from the Bhartiya Republican party led by Dr Prakash Ambedkar. For the Dalit leadership in Maharashtra is hopelessly divided and has been unable to articulate the grievances of the minorities as a cohesive whole. In most constituencies in Vidarbha, there were candidates belonging to different factions of the Dalit movement. The fragmented nature of Dalit politics has been exploited by the Congress to create a system of extending patronage to select groups who would be accommodated within the Congress umbrella.

Neither could Mr Singh believe that the Muslim populace in Maharashtra had the demographic clout to actually change the course of election results. Where it did, as in South Bombay for example, the overpowering desire to defeat the BJP at all costs, meant that the community preferred to vote for the candidate who was in the best position to defeat "the prime enemy". In most cases, this was the Congress.

Indeed, the pattern of Muslim vote in the state has been to stick with a national party that can counter the communal challenge. In Uttar Pradesh, and much of the north, this might have been the Janata Dal. In Maharashtra, it was the Congress. Three reasons may be suggested here. Firstly, the geographical distance between Ayodhya and Maharashtra had meant that the Congress double dealing on the temple-mosque issue was not on top of the Muslim mind. Secondly, religious leaders like the Shahi Imam who had come out in open support of the Janata Dal lay discredited and had few adherents in Maharashtra. Thirdly, there is a great deal of heterogeneity within the Maharashtra Muslim that prevents him from being seen as an en bloc vote. Muslims in Bombay for example, include recent immigrants

from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, as well as those who came to the city from Gujarat in the last century and prospered as traders. The Konkani Muslim speaks fluent Marathi, is relatively affluent having many relatives in the Gulf, and has enjoyed a long and harmonious relationship with the Congress. The Muslim of Marathwada is poorer, has been the direct target of communal riots and general hostility, and hence is more conscious of his minority status. The Muslim in Vidarbha too tends to find himself relatively impecunious and marginalised from the epicentre of society.

The end result was that Mr Singh was forced to plough a lone furrow. His only hope was that the plebiscitary nature of Indian electoral politics would assert itself, and his personal popularity and the Mandal message would be the sole issues guiding voter behaviour. For reasons stated above, Mr Singh was way off the mark as first Ram, and then Rajiv, hopelessly overtook the Reservation credo.

Conclusion:- The 1991 election results in Maharashtra proved once again that the state remains a Congress bastion. This in itself should offer important lessons to the Congress party at a stage when it is still struggling to emerge from the penumbra of uncertainty after the cruel assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. For the secret of the Congress party's continuing successes in Maharashtra lies above all else in the strong grassroot institutions it has promoted; its accommodative, relatively secular and pluralistic character; a leadership which has a mass base; and a refusal to allow factionalism to override a larger commitment to a stable and progressive social order.

It is precisely the absence of these characteristics in the Congress party organisation in other states which has led it to lose credibility and widespread public support. The modern-day Congress finds itself enmeshed in the deinstitutionalisation of the party apparatus; the emergence of power-brokers and coteries whose influence does not stem from popular support but from proximity to individuals; the willingness to play footsie with communal and sectarian forces for petty political gains; and seemingly perennial dissidence that ends up in toppling games, defections and total disorientation.

If then the Congress is to return to its previously unchallenged position in Indian politics, it will have to revive the sort of

politics it has by and large favoured in Maharashtra.

This is not to say that the dominant party system which has existed in Maharashtra is necessarily a healthy one. For it is of critical importance that a proper democratic set-up have an effective and vibrant opposition party. Else there is the danger that the ruling party can function in a vacuum and govern in an autocratic manner unmindful of the needs of the entire electorate. In a sense, this has from time to time been a problem in Maharashtra. The Western Maharashtra and Maratha lobby in the Congress has tended to monopolise the political discourse and the socio-economic benefits of the development process at the cost of some of the backward regions and castes of the state.

Unfortunately, the opposition parties have consistently failed to articulate the genuine grievances of these marginalised sections of the Maharashtra electorate. Nor have they tried to build an organisational structure comparable to that of the Congress. The 1991 elections exposed these weaknesses in the opposition parties.

The BJP-Sena alliance, instead of serving as a healthy counterpoint to Congress hegemony in the state, chose to polarise the electorate with its virulent, communal rhetoric. That Ram cannot provide Roti is something the BJP-Sena alliance does not understand, or chooses not to understand. The 1991 verdict gave the alliance another reminder of the voter's refusal to allow the social order to be disrupted by divisive sloganeering. If the BJP were to build a more unified, integrative concept of Indian nationalism, even as the Shiv Sena were to attend to the real problems of economic dislocation felt by the local populace, there is still the possibility that the alliance has a role to play in Maharashtra politics. If, however, it continues to tread the path of aggressive majoritarianism, fanning hatred among people along the way, then the alliance will die prematurely in Maharashtra.

As far as the Janata Dal is concerned, its obituary will have to be written straightaway. It has lost relevance as a centrist opposition force on Maharashtra's political spectrum. The 1991 election results should in fact act as a catalyst in the realignment of political forces. Already there are signs of many Janata Dal MLAs leaving the party to join the Congress. There is a need in a

bipolar political climate for all those political elements committed to be a secular, egalitarian, plural and progressive concept of the Indian nation to come together on one platform. Maharashtra, which has always stood by this concept, may well provide the lead in this direction.

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The 1991 Assembly and General Elections in Kerala: Dynamics of Communal Politics

Jaideep Nair

Introduction

Kerala became a State three and a half decades ago and since then has had fourteen ministries and been under President's rule seven times. So the average length of a ministry has been about two and a half years. Just a glance at these facts would indicate the intrinsic instability in Kerala's politics. This instability is despite a high literacy rate, a higher 'quality of life',¹ a consistent voter turnout of over 70% reflecting the level of political mobilization and consciousness, and extremely competitive bifront politics between the CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front (LDF) and Congress(I)-led United Democratic Front (UDF) with the other smaller and largely communal formations like the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML), and Kerala Congress (Mani and Joseph) oscillating between the two fronts. Since 1987, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has entered Kerala politics in a big way in an attempt to be a "third force".

The attempt here would be to analyse the recent Assembly and General elections in Kerala with the focus being on the com-

munal politics, mobilization and alliances which largely sealed the fate of the outgoing CPI(M)-led LDF government.

United Front Politics in Kerala

The experiment with a United Front government was first attempted in 1957 in Kerala, when the communists were *elected* to power. Since then United Front politics has become a feature of Kerala's politics with the LDF and UDF being the two fronts in contention for power, and always one being victorious with a very narrow margin. The first United Front government in Kerala was headed by E.M.S. Namboodiripad and lasted from 1957 to 1959, during which period it managed to initiate radical educational and land reform policies². As a reaction to these reforms, the Nairs and Catholics launched a movement and managed to get the Central government to intervene and dismiss the E.M.S. government in 1959, giving legitimacy for the first time to communal politics in Kerala. So far only two ministries, formed in 1970 and 1982, have lasted their full tenures. The LDF government which was in power since 1987 would probably have lasted its full tenure, but decided to call Assembly elections a year in advance.

Over the years, Kerala's politics seems to have comfortably taken the form of bifront politics, with either the UDF or the LDF being in power, that is, when the Centre hasn't intervened by imposing President's rule. What has distinguished one front from the other has been the *inherently* secular politics of the the LDF in comparison to the blatant communal politics of the UDF. Also, the CPI(M)-led LDF has managed to maintain a support-base among all communities in Kerala, whereas the UDF has relied largely on the Christian support through an alliance with the Kerala Congress(KC) and Muslim support by aligning with the IUML.

Issues in Tenth General Elections and Assembly Poll in Kerala

At the national level the tenth General Elections saw a deeply polarised and in many places a communalised electorate going to the polls on the issues of Mandal and Masjid. In Kerala too

the Mandal Commission recommendations and the Ayodhya dispute did become key issues in the run up to the elections. This was partly due to the influence national politics had on Kerala's people, and partly because of Kerala's social structure providing an ideal play ground for these issues to be sustained.

There are four major communities in Kerala. The Christians, dominant in Central Kerala, constitute 24% of the population; the 60% or so Hindu population consisting of the upper-caste Brahmins and Nairs, and lower-caste Ezhavas and Harijans (34%), is dominant in Southern Kerala; and the Muslims, 20%, are dominant in Northern Kerala.³

In spite of the communist parties having worked hard to mobilise and radicalize the masses in Kerala more on class lines, the influence of caste and religion is undeniably present. Religion does determine political affiliations and various groupings protect the interests of minorities. For example, the IUML, a fundamentalist and sectarian political party has a virtual stronghold over the Muslim majority Mallapuram District. The KC(J) and KC(M) represent the interests of the Christian community.

Even the forward caste Nairs and backward caste Ezhavas did float political formations to represent their respective interests. Amidst such a socially and politically polarised set-up, coalition politics has helped institutionalise communal politics to some extent.

In the recent elections, the Marxists in alliance with the Janata Dal hoped to capitalise on the "Mandal effect", as it had done in the district polls. The backward caste Ezhavas have traditionally supported the left. Further, the pro-reservation Samudhaya Samvarna Munnani (SSM) — a front consisting of 27 backward caste organisations — decided to back the LDF in the Lok Sabha elections, and all pro-reservation candidates in the Assembly poll.

Both the Congress (I) and IUML reiterated on the Mandal issue that the report did not benefit all Muslims in Kerala because the term used in the report was "moplah" which covered only Muslims in the Malabar region. The IUML felt that, in spite of there already existing 12% reservation for Muslims in Kerala, the Mandal report would be beneficial only if the word "moplah" was replaced by 'Muslim'.

The Mandir issue, sustained through a massive mobilisation by RSS cadres, gave the BJP in Kerala enough confidence to expect victory in at least two Lok Sabha and ten to fifteen Assembly seats. This optimism was the result, according to the BJP state unit leader, of a "terrific" response the Ram Janmabhoomi movement received in Kerala and the fact that a number of people had gone as Kar Sevaks to Ayodhya.

While campaigning vigorously on the Mandir issue, the BJP in Kerala accused both the LDF and the UDF of appeasing the minorities over the years by aligning with the IUML, KC(J) and KC(M). As a result the BJP was confident of consolidating the Hindu vote.

The Role of Communal Politics

Since the inception of bifront politics in Kerala, the Congress there has always rode piggy back on all sorts of communal outfits. Though one cannot vindicate the Communist parties there of totally shunning communal politics, it is important to note that they have been able to cut across caste and community to a large extent, and appeal to the masses on class lines. The CPI(M)-led LDF has flirted with communal politics by aligning with the IUML previously and recently with the KC(J). But the LDF is not inherently communal and occasional appeals to caste and communities are germane to their programme, and their programme is within the framework of an overriding plan.⁵ In fact, in 1987, on the insistence of the CPI(M) general secretary E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the LDF came to power plying a truly secular card, shunning alliance with all communal formations in Kerala.

In recent Kerala politics, the BJP and the IUML have played dubious roles. The IUML walked out of the UDF on the Mandal and Masjid issues and was hopeful of being accepted in the LDF-JD alliance. The League was confident that it could have some kind of understanding with the National Front. In fact, the JD sponsored the case of an alliance between the League and the LDF, thinking that it would also rope in the support of the SSM. But the LDF decided it would have no truck with the League as it was a communal outfit. E.M.S. even wrote in Kerala Kaumudi urging the IUML to self-destruct because there was "no need for

a Muslim party." He advised the League to give up the greed for power and support the LDF from outside. This arrangement was similar to that in Tamil Nadu where one faction of the League is an ally of the DMK with which the CPI(M) has an understanding. This statement created a lot of furore and was withdrawn later. So the IUML was left in a dilemma and eventually went back to the UDF with the belief that at least in Kerala it could tilt the balance decisively.

What distinguishes the BJP in Kerala from other states is its dependence on the RSS. The RSS cadres have managed to mobilise and sustain the cause of Hindu fishermen and others in confrontation with the Christians and Muslims. There have been bloody clashes between RSS and CPI(M) cadres and the BJP has accused the CPI(M) of using its cadres and the police to torture the RSS and BJP workers.

Congress(I) - IUML-BJP Alliance in Kerala

Given the political compulsions of the Congress(I) and IUML in the Assembly and Lok Sabha polls, it was expected that the Congress, with its flair for communal politics and keeping in mind the national implications, would reach an understanding with the IUML. In fact, this election was a 'win-or-wither' battle for the UDF. A defeat this time would seal not only the fate of the UDF but also of the Congress(I). The Congress(I) did realise that it could not maintain its allies in the UDF without coming to power. This realisation gave the front a more homogenous 'appearance'.⁶ In fact, Mr. Karunakaran issued a statement in Trivandrum that an understanding had been reached with the IUML by accepting August 15, 1947 as the crucial date for the maintenance of status quo in respect of religious places and committing itself to the full implementation of the Mandal recommendation.⁷

The BJP finding it difficult to make headway in the polarised situation in Kerala, knew it could not come to power on its own. So, its basic anti-Communist instinct pushed it towards an opportunistic and tacit understanding with the UDF.

The ultimate communal gang up in Kerala in these elections between the Congress(I)-BJP-IUML was the result of Congress(I)'s politics of survival, and the BJP's and IUML's

quest for power. Disregarding the political sensibilities of Kerala's people, the UDF forged an alliance with the BJP in Vadakara Lok Sabha and Beypore Assembly constituencies. The BJP extended support to the joint independent candidate of the IUML and the Congress(I) against the LDF candidate K.P. Unnikrishnan in Vadakara. Meanwhile, in the Beypore constituency, a former BJP candidate Dr. Madhavan Kutty, was put up as an 'independent' against the LDF, and the Congress(I) and IUML supported the independent candidate. This immoral and communal alliance came to be known as "Co-LE-BI". But it wasn't accepted by the people and the LDF candidates won in both these constituencies.

The 1991 Election Results: An Analysis of the LDF Defeat

In a dramatic reversal of the trend in the District Council elections in January 1991, the UDF led by the Congress(I) scored a stunning victory in the election to the Assembly, capturing 89 seats, leaving only 50 for the ruling CPI(M)-led LDF-JD alliance. In the Lok Sabha elections in Kerala, of the 20 seats, the UDF won 16 and the LDF 4.

The Tally: Assembly Elections 1987 and 1991 (Figures for 1987 in brackets)

CPI(M)	CPI	INC(S)	JD	RSP
30(42)	12(17)	2(6)	3(8)	2(5)
KC(J)	Total LDF			
1	50(78)			
INC(I)	IUML	KC(M)	KC(B)	NDP
55(33)	19(15)	9(4)	2	2(1)
CMP	UDF	KC(J)	Total	Independents
	Ind.	(5)	UDF	
1(1)	(5)		89(61)	(1)

Source: *Frontline*, July 20-Aug. 2, 1991, p.95.

The defeat of the LDF in Kerala came as a surprise because during the last four years under it there has been much effort towards decentralisation, new thrusts in agriculture and industry,

fiscal discipline, new initiative in participatory development such as the literacy drive, and a semblance of order in public life with an absence of corruption scandals.

Comparative Performance in 1987-91

	1987 Assembly	1989 LS	1991 Dist. Council	1991 LS	1991 Assembly
LDF	Votes(lakhs)57.35	60.55	65.42	63.83	64.99
	Share(%) 44.97	44.42	47.68	44.78	46.17
UDF	Votes(lakhs)56.58	73.51	59.45	70.04	67.18
	Share(%) 44.36	49.29	43.33	49.14	48.19
BJP	Votes(lakhs) 8.26	6.73	10.12	6.57	6.74
	Share(%) 6.48	4.51	7.38	4.61	4.79
Others	Votes(lakhs) 5.36	2.65	2.21	2.09	1.15
	Shares(%) 4.19	1.78	1.61	1.47	0.87
Total valid votes polled (lakhs)	127.55	149.13	137.20	142.53	140.76
(% of votes polled)	80.55	79.10	73.06	73.36	73.38

Source: *Frontline*, July 20-Aug. 2 1991,p.93.

The difference between the two fronts was only 1.7% in favour of the UDF in 1991 and 1.1% in favour of the LDF in 1987 Assembly polls.

If one were to attempt an analysis of the LDF defeat, the first factor that comes to mind — keeping in view the Congress (I)-BJP understanding in Kerala, is the possibility of a shift in BJP votes to the Congress(I)-led UDF. Overall the BJP's share of popular vote in the recent Assembly polls was 4.7% as compared to 6.47% in 1987. With the lowering of voting age to 18, Kerala would have had 46 million (9.5%) more voters this time. It is hard to explain this erosion of BJP's support-base especially when a BJP 'wave' is sweeping the country. The BJP which got over ten lakh votes in the district Council elections, polled only 6.5 lakh votes this time. This means that in the 68 lakh or so votes the UDF secured this time, around 35 lakhs were the BJP's contribution.⁸ This only points to the tacit understanding the Congress(I) and the BJP had in Kerala, with the primary intention of defeat-

ing the LDF. Of course, the Congress(I) would like to emphasise that the Congress votes which had shifted to the BJP over the years, came back to the Congress(I) this time, especially after the 'sympathy' generated by Rajiv Gandhi's assassination.⁹

The Mandal issue seems to have boomeranged on the LDF, as the close association of the CPI(I) with the SSM could have alienated some of the upper-caste supporters of the LDF.

The Christians, Nairs and other forward classes seem to have ganged up against the pro-Mandal LDF-JD combine. Further, the ambiguity created at a later stage when the CPI(M) openly advocated the Karpoori Thakur formula based on economic criteria and expressed reservations on the criteria used by the Mandal Commission report, created confusion amongst the pro-reservationists.

These elections also saw a sharp drop in the poll percentage of nearly 6% from the 1987 level. In these elections there were only 8 constituencies where polling crossed 80%, as compared to 82 constituencies in 1987. This seems to have gone against the LDF as it won most of the high-polling seats.¹⁰

Lessons to be Learnt from the Elections

A much debated question in LDF circles is how wise it was to have simultaneous Assembly and Lok Sabha polls in Kerala. The decision to hold elections was largely influenced by the LDF's sweeping victory in the District Council elections using the Mandal issue, and the fact that the IUML had left the UDF and was in total disarray. What the LDF didn't anticipate was the immoral, communal alliance between the Congress(I) - BJP-IUML. Some important questions do arise here: Why couldn't the LDF win 2% more people to its side in spite of its good performance while in power? In spite of the LDF successfully defeating the UDF-BJP alliance in northern Kerala, why couldn't it succeed in southern Kerala which is traditionally Leftist?

There are some important lessons to be learnt from these elections in Kerala, for both state-level and national-level political observers. The defeat of the BJP-UDF alliance, especially in Bepore and Vadakara, to the LDF shows that all Muslims are not with the IUML and nor are all Hindus with the BJP. This is

important for maintaining the secular fabric of Indian society. What must be highlighted is the inherently communal nature of the UDF, the IUML and the BJP, and that a 'nationalist', 'secular' party like the Congress(I) will stoop to any level to come to power in a state, and the total disregard this immoral alliance showed towards the politically sensitive people of Kerala.

In Kerala, both the Congress (I) and CPI(M) have reached near peak in their voting strengths. The voter seems to find it difficult to distinguish one party from the other, especially since the CPI(M) too began indulging in communal politics, and used tactics similar to that of the Congress(I). An ideological dilution in the CPI(M) position is the result of such moves.

A positive development of these elections has been that despite contesting the largest number of seats in Kerala, as compared to any other state, the BJP's share of the votes cast has decreased in most districts. The performance of the BJP in Kerala was in sharp contrast to that in other states. This only goes to show the necessity of the LDF to establish a truly left, secular and democratic front to further marginalise the BJP and its allies, so that it could resume its effort towards a radical realignment of political and social forces in Kerala.

Conclusion

The history of Kerala seems to be witness to two processes, at once strengthening secular trends as well as mobilizing people on communal lines. For the past 90 years or so continuous mobilization of communities has been taking place to achieve economic and political (secular) ends, but invariably using religious symbols and communities. Kerala's path to secularism perhaps sustained primordial elements. But what needs to be mentioned here is that the nature and function of these primordial categories underwent change. Religion did give legitimation to the quest for a new society thus showing the way for the rise of a religious platform for secular ends. An example is the secularising ideology propounded by Sree Narayana Guru, though clothed in religious garb, which played a great role in the anti-feudal struggle of the people of Kerala. But the fall-out of blending religion with politics for a secular end has been the preserva-

tion of feudal instincts in the popular mind and this tended to restrict the scope of the anti-feudal upsurge. The appeal to religious faith and the resulting polarisation made people in Kerala to organise as Christians, Ezhavas or Nairs.¹¹

In the long run, under the pressure of the secularisation process, communal politics has undergone a change in Kerala. Especially with the Communist parties mobilizing people largely on class lines, people began to wonder whether communalism is "the disguised expression of the struggle between vested interests belonging to different faiths who gave a communal form to that struggle".¹² To combat this the most effective method was to unite the lower strata of different communities to secure their common economic interests, and by doing this the communists came to power in Kerala in 1957.

Though communal politics seems to be rather active in Kerala's politics, it is of symbolic value for the nation that, "Kerala represents a unique religious picture. No-where else do adherents of the three major world religions live side by side in such large numbers. Interreligious living in Kerala is not only a possibility, it is an everyday fact of life."¹³ As Swapan Das Gupta wrote in *The Statesman*, "Kerala despite being a hot-bed of communal politics is remarkably tolerant and devoid of communalism."¹⁴

When there is a clash of interest in an individual's varying allegiances, "there will be a tendency to choose that set of allegiances which maximises material and social gains in the society at large and minimises survival risks."¹⁵ This explains to a large extent the immoral alliance the BJP and the UDF did make in the 1991 elections in Kerala. Looking at Kerala's political experience one can be optimistic that competition among communities for material gain, status and power could ultimately lead to a situation where the communal process would be largely eroded and more scope given to the process of secularization. But in this ongoing process, the major role falls on the shoulders of the Communist Parties and their *Secular* allies who need to establish a truly left, secular and democratic front to combat the communal politics of the UDF and the BJP as witnessed in the recent elections. Meanwhile, Kerala's electoral politics will continue to reflect only one predictable factor, that is, its unpredictability.

Notes

1. Refer to R.W. Franke and B.H. Chasin, "Kerala State, India: Radical Reform As Development", *Monthly Review*, Vol. 42, no.8, Jan.1991.
2. T.J. Nossiter, *Communism in Kerala* (New Delhi, 1982), p.242. Also see, George Mathew, *Communal Road to a Secular Kerala* (New Delhi, 1989), pp.146-51.
3. Data from T.J. Nossiter, *Marxist State Government in India* (London, 1988), p.60.
4. Refer T.V. Sathyamurthy, *India Since Independence-Studies in the Development of the Power of the State*, Vol.1 (Delhi, 1985); G. Woodcock, *Kerala-A Portrait of Malabar* (London, 1967); See W. Klatt, "Caste, Class and Communism in Kerala", *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 59, Part III, Oct. 1972.
5. See Woodcock, *op. cit.* ; Rudolph, L.I. and Rudolph, S.H., *The Modernity of Tradition* (Chicago, 1967).
6. There was a significant drop in the number of candidates contesting for the Assembly-From 1,253 in 1987 to 792 in 1991. The drop was in the case of independents basically, who numbered 746 in 1987, and were mainly UDF rebels. These independents gained 5-10% votes in various districts, which led to the UDF defeat in 1987. This time, they polled only 1.5% of the votes indicating that the UDF was more united and cohesive. Data from *Frontline*, July 20-Aug.2, 1991, p.99.
7. See *The Hindu* April 12, 1991.
8. Data from *People's Democracy*, June 30, 1991, p.3.
9. Though the Congress (I) denies any sympathy wave having helped it in Kerala, voting patterns in Central Keralas seem to point towards the Christian community there having felt the 'wave' the most. Sonia Gandhi's brief ascendancy into the centre stage of Congress(I) politics seems to have gone down favourably with this section.
For voting patterns, see *Frontline*, *op.cit.*, pp.94-96.
10. Data available in *Frontline*, *op. cit.*, p.97.
11. George Mathew, *op.cit.*, chap.7.
12. A.R. Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (Bombay, 1976), p.384.
13. Rolland E. Miller, *Mappila Muslims of Kerala* (New Delhi, 1976), p.20.
14. Swapan Das Gupta in *The Statesman*, March 18, 1987.
15. Quoted in George Mathew, *op.cit.*, p.203.

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8. Nair, Jaideep, *State Intervention, Popular Mobilization and Redistributive Reform: Politics of Land Reform in Kerala, 1967-75*, M.Phil. dissertation submitted in Centre for Political Studies, JNU, New Delhi, 1990.
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Communalisation of Politics: The Voting Behaviour of Muslims in the 10th Lok Sabha Elections with Special Reference to Rajasthan

Dr. (Mrs.) Zenab Banu

The 10th Lok Sabha elections were held at a very crucial period when communal feelings amongst the Hindus and the Muslims were at the boiling point. These were the elections for which political parties, specially the BJP and its allies, i.e. the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Shiv Sena and the Bajrang Dal, had started campaigning since V.P. Singh took over as the Prime Minister of India. The BJP dreamt that it would be the next party to form the government at the centre¹, if it succeeded to raise the sentiments of Hindus who constitute the religious majority. But this proved illusory as the caste hierarchy and non-doctrinal theology came in the way of Hindu unity. The BJP therefore, used Ram as a symbol to rally round all the castes under its banner. The BJP also exploited the concept of Hindu revivalism to some extent. Until recently Hindu revivalism was a minor factor in Indian politics. But the Ram-temple controversy imparted to it a new significance in national politics. The fall of the V.P. Singh government is of course the most dramatic example. He was tumbled out of the office not because of political mechinations of his rival colleagues

under the leadership of Chandra Shekhar, but because he failed to resolve the crisis thrown up by the assertive Vishwa Hindu Parishad and its ally, the BJP.

During the 10th Lok Sabha elections, the BJP openly used the Hindu card against the Muslims. It adopted a strategy during the election campaign that generated a feeling of fear and insecurity among the Muslims. The BJP mentioned in its election manifesto that steps must be taken to remove the lacunae in the Indian constitution. Immediate steps should be taken to abrogate Article 30 and 370. Implementation of Article 44 and the abolition of minority commission. Secondly, the BJP used Sadhvi Ritambhara and Uma Bharti during the election campaign, both of whom had aroused Hindu sentiments by their speeches and had aggravated communal hatred and hostility towards Islam. The following pieces are extracts from Sadhvi Ritambhara's speech at an election meeting in Jodhpur which have been translated into English.² "We asked you Muslims to live with us like sugar mingling with milk. But you are trying to do the work of a lemon in milk, running behind those Shahabuddins — Shahabuddin, which really means — Shaha - buddhi - Heen, someone who has no budhi (intelligence) at all. That buffalo sitting there in Jama Masjid, the Shahi Imam Abdullah Bukhari, who for days and nights, is in religious fever (bukhar), these Muslims are following him and playing the role of a lemon in milk, so that the milk breaks.... The whole culture of these Muslims lies in doing exactly the opposite of whatever the Hindus do.... I would like to ask them — you want to only do the opposite of what Hindus do, don't you? You do the opposite here too?.... To these lunatics we have given our brotherhood, our love, our bindless and yet we are called bigots, we are called extremists...." Thirdly, one of the main forms of BJP propaganda was books and pamphlets published, not directly in the name of its own identity but by dozen of its sister organisations, better known as the RSS Kutumb. The publications were of extreme importance particularly in elections because the RSS had ordered all the members of its kutumb to unleash its propaganda and strength so as to ensure a BJP victory this time. Few samples from those publications are referred to as follows.

"Hindus in their ignorance have recognised Islam and Christianity as religions. This recognition has to be withdrawn. This is

the first implication of the emerging national vision.... we have to proclaim from the house tops that we do not recognise Christianity and Islam as religions." This excerpt is from a book entitled *The Emerging National Vision* (p. 11, 13) by a leading ideologue of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Sita Ram Goel.

"Once our Hindustani is awakened, then whatever we do would be Hindu, would be appropriate, would be beneficial. This I believe that Islam understands only the language of force... Riots will not end until Muslims mould themselves in the Indian culture.... In this country Hindu dominance is a must." These gems flow from the pen of the VHP's latest fan, none other than from. *The Times of India's* editor, Giri Lal Jain in his book *Naqli secularism banam Rashtriyata* (p. 13, 14, 74). "Every Hindu politician or pen pusher who aspires to be inducted in the list of secularism has to proclaim that Islam stands for equality and brotherhood, celebrate the prophet's birthday with fanfare, attend urs of sufis and urdu mushairas.... He should also keep quiet or look the other way when Muslims breed like rats" ... It is Sita Ram Goel in his book *Perversion of India's political Parlance* (p.13). All these exhibited that the ideologies of the BJP asserted the philosophy of hatred, animosity, division and injustice. Fourthly, the BJP formulated the "Kesaria Vahini" — probably the first armed unit officially sponsored by a right wing political party. The Vahini aimed at combating electoral malpractices, specifically booth capturing. But the common opinion outside the BJP circle was that the outcry was raised to capture booths especially in Bihar and other states notorious for rigging and booth capturing. Fifthly, the BJP strived hard to replace secularism with what it called "pseudo secularism." It strongly asserted that this "pseudo secularism" of the Congress, the Janata Dal and the Communist parties follows the policy of appeasement of the Muslim minority to exploit them as vote banks. The media also gave great publicity to these views. It elaborated the following elements of appeasement — "*Ham Panch Hamare Pachees - we, the five, our twenty five*"³. Muslims are allowed to have four wives while the Hindus have to be satisfied with one only. For the safety of Muslim Personal Law, the Congress Government had passed Muslim Women's (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Act, against the Supreme Court's verdict on Shah Bano case. The

minority commission that was set up for the alleviance of the plight of the Muslims and to check the separatist tendencies have been active in non-Hindu states only — Punjab and Kashmir.

II

The spurt in communal disturbances has been the most marked change in Rajasthan and communal violence was the major issue ever since the BJP's advent in the 1989 Lok Sabha elections when it captured 13 out of 25 seats in the State in alliance with the Janata Dal. The explosion began on the very first day of the BJP's triumph when a victory procession of the BJP's Jaipur candidate deviated from the permitted route and raised aggressive slogans in a Muslim dominated area, provoking violence in a city that had been peaceful even at the height of the partition riots. A similar incident took place in Kota also.

The BJP won the state assembly elections three months later and communal violence became a recurrent feature.⁴ Nagpur, Udaipur, Manoharpur, Pali, Beawar, Sojat and many other towns and cities witnessed riots after riots.

Advani's arrest provoked a number of communal riots erupting in many cities of Rajasthan. About 15 districts were placed under the protection of the army. Jaipur, the capital city of the state witnessed its second riot (official toll - 48) when the BJP forced a bandh in protest against Advani's arrest. These riots have a striking parallel with the Delhi carnage of 1984. The ruling parties themselves — the Congress in Delhi and the BJP in Jaipur - were widely suspected to have instigated violence on an unprecedented scale against the minorities — the Sikhs and the Muslims respectively.⁵ Simultaneously, a city of Western Rajasthan — old Marwar was engulfed in riots for the first time ever in its history. In short, the communal tinder Box that the party in power — BJP appears to have ignited, put to the shade its failure on the corruption front. The BJP had promised both before and after the assembly elections the eradication of corruption as its first priority.

Interesting enough to note that in the 10th Lok Sabha elections the BJP had not given a single ticket to a Muslim even though they constitute about 10 per cent of Rajasthan's overall population. In the 1990 assembly poll it had fielded just one

Muslim candidate and that too in Pushkar, a Hindu pilgrimage centre, Ramzan Khan won that election.

Former Chief Minister and Congress leader Harideo Joshi declared before May 1991 elections that Shekhawat Government's non-performance, communalism, corruption and opportunistic alliances with defectors⁶ are the reasons that the congress will get votes here more than that by the stability factor.

But the election results manifested that the BJP nevertheless polled 41% of the votes as against 29.64% in the last elections. Though its tally of 13 seats was reduced to 12, it retained 3 more (93) assembly seats in comparison with the 1989 results when it won 90 assembly seats. The BJP maintained its traditional stronghold in the Hadoti region and also succeeded in penetrating the congress-I's traditional constituencies in the north-east of the state.

It is true that a swing of 7.1 per cent helped the Congress-I to walk away with 13 of the 25 Lok Sabha seats. It recaptured its old position in the State. The BJP has blamed the sympathy factor pointing to the fact it won 10 seats where elections were held in May. The fact remains that its position in Udaipur, Bhilwara and Dausa was breached.

The Muslims' voting against the BJP was also a deciding factor. The Janata Dal drew almost a blank — (a big disappointment from its figure of 11 seats in the last election) here. Because of the lack of the winning capacity of the JD candidates most of the Muslims voted for the Congress to check the BJP victory. In Udaipur constituency, most of the Muslims had supported the BJP candidate in 1989 election (There was election alliance between the JD and the BJP). But this time the frightened and insecure Muslim voters favoured Congress-I, the lesser evil. A similar situation existed in Bhilwara Lok Sabha Constituency where the communal riots erupted just before two months of the forthcoming election. But the BJP failed to reap a rich electoral harvest there. Because Muslims en bloc voted against it.

III

Manifesto voting behaviour is a resultant of interplay of many latent factors and forces. Some of these operate only in a

specific political matrix (e.g. the given political circumstances and awareness of the people and the actual number of parties and candidates in the fray while others fall into a general pattern based on the socio-economic characteristics of the people. Thus, on the one hand in a politically advanced country, where the voting choice is preferred mainly in terms of the ideological programme and policies of the rival parties and candidates while on the other hand in a politically underdeveloped country, even basic issues are decided in terms of traditional criterion of the states and the power influence of the rivals in the field.⁷

In India the forces of religion, language, region divide the people and strengthen the feeling of caste or communal solidarity and integrity which has been highly exploited by the political parties during election campaign. It has been argued that it is the Muslim minority's vote which determines the outcome of the electoral contests in the country. (See Appendix-1). Social scientists have been trying to offer plausible explanation of this phenomenon. If the minorities' vote is of such a great importance, what is the significance of the majority vote? Why does the majority vote not determine the final outcome of the election? What are the profiles of the majority voter and the minority voter? It is true that Hindus are in majority i.e. 82.72 per cent of the total population. But they are not a majority in a number of states like Nagaland, Punjab, Jammu & Kashmir. It is wrong to believe that if Hindus are about 83 per cent, the remaining 17 per cent constitute non-Hindu minorities. A bulk of the scheduled castes, enumerated as Hindus in the census, do not share the Hindu identity. The dominant feature of the Hindu identity is Brahmanical in essence. After all it is the identity of traditionally literate and spiritually initiated (twice born) upper castes⁸. Besides, the Hindu society is characterised by fragmentation, rigid stratification and hierarchy. But in the Indian polling history, it was for the first time that the BJP and its allies the VHP, the RSS, the Shiv Sena, the Bajrang Dal strived to impose the Hindu, monolithic identity against the minority in the name of Lord Ram's Mandir issue - '*Kasam Ram ki khate Hain Mandir Valin Banayenge*'. This nurtured a very hostile environment towards the Muslims too. Hence the 10th Lok Sabha elections had become a question of survival for the Muslims in India. Because the

election results had to prove whether there is any existence of Muslim vote bank or not? Secondly, which party could provide security to them in an atmosphere of increasing insecurity? Thirdly, was it obligatory for the Muslims to obey the 'Fatwa' issued by the Shahi Imam? Fourthly, if the said was not true, it meant the Muslims of India were as much satisfied with the existing situation as their Hindu counterparts. Fifthly, how far the apparent gale of 'Hindutva' psychologically affected them? And which type of strategy (offensive/defensive) had been adopted by Muslim elites — religious and political. Lastly, what did the Muslims get by their vigorous electoral participation? What effect did they exercise on the political system as such? The 10th Lok Sabha election results have answered all the above questions. It established the open fact that in general Muslim votes too reflected the same national mentality, motivated with the same slogans and issues like the non-Muslim voters. The Muslim voting patterns manifested that neither in past nor during recent elections, they were under the command of any self-styled leader like the Shahi Imam who claimed to be a leader of all the Muslims as well as other minorities. He was the chief campaigner of the NF-LF combine from the pulpit of the Jama Masjid.

In spite of the employment of the 'Maulanas' to do election work for Rs. 50/- to Rs. 100/- per day and the use of communal tricks by most political parties, the recent Lok Sabha polls have once again proved the non-secarian and non-particularistic character of the minority voters.⁹ One must recognise that the process of political fragmentation of the Muslim electorate was very much at work. The swings of Muslim votes have varied on a state-by-state basis in which local issues have played a very crucial role. Take the example of Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal and Kerala. In U.P., the Muslim votes were divided between the Janata Dal, the Janata Dal(S) and the Congress-I.¹⁰ Consequently even in the Muslim dominated Bundelkhand region the BJP won seven seats which is a significant win. In West Bengal about 23 per cent of electorate belongs to the Muslim voters. Here Muslims decided to vote differently in the Lok Sabha and assembly polls which were held simultaneously in the state. Since the Congress had far better chances to form a government at the

centre than the Left Front, the Muslims in West Bengal voted for the Congress-I in Lok Sabha to thwart the BJP from coming to power at the centre. The majority of the Muslims continued to support the Left Front in the assembly elections for the reasons of security and the secular character of the Left Front government. In Kerala, during Kerala district council elections, the Muslim heartland of Mallapuram voted largely in favour of V.P. Singh's Leftist allies (who impressed the Muslims by the sacrifice of his Prime ministerial chair to protect the Babri Masjid). But in the 10th Lok Sabha elections the Muslims, besides the others, voted for the Congress led united Democratic front and the LDF found themselves routed here both in the Lok Sabha as well as assembly elections.¹¹

Summing up, the 10th Lok Sabha elections have established the fact that one cannot separate the drain of Muslim voting behaviour from the mainstream of general voting behaviour. It has proved false the hypothesis of a Muslim vote bank. It articulated that the Muslim votes were badly splintered¹² with minor groups such as the Bahujan Samajwadi Party (BSP) which benefited from the disenchantment with the Congress-I ideology.

The election results in general manifested a triumph of voters who wanted a government that works effectively and works for national interest only. They communicated a message that they will not tolerate a bad government and bad politicians. Nowhere was this better illustrated than in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh where the voters simply punished the government in power — the BJP — for its abysmal administrative failures. Ironically, in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP benefited from this same effect. It was able to make productive use of Hinduistic Ram platform largely because of the existing backlash against the Mulayam Singh Yadav's regime which was corrupt, ineffective and tried to harvest the Muslim vote bank by unleashing unprecedented state repression during the Ayodhya temple crisis. In Bihar where L.K. Advani's Rath Yatra was brought to an abrupt halt following his arrest, the Mandal wave cancelled Ram in what was a relatively peaceful poll. However, the conclusion is inevitable that a good government is the best insurance for votes and no casteist or communal appeals can counter this force at the hustings. "One need not be pessimistic on this count of

minority leaders, communal solidarity or assertiveness and the theory of counter productive Hindu backlash. Whatever the degree of ideological manipulation, whatever the degree of state repression, whatever the degree of cultural inertia, whatever the forces and it is substantial — of family or caste or religion, there is nothing illusory about food and clothing and shelter.¹³

Notes and References

1. The fact is the BJP is not primarily interested in parliamentary majorities. It is primarily interested in transforming the bourgeois democratic state structure into a fascist state structure. In January, 1991 when L.K. Advani was asked about the possibility of his party coming to power in the next election, he replied, 'It is not an election victory that I am concerned with. The real questions seems to me: "Is the BJP ready for power"? 'How telling! And how frank. Editorial, *The voice of the people awakening*, Vol.4, No.6, June-July, 1991, p.7.
2. Ibid; p.16.
3. According to the latest census of India, there are only 987 Muslim females for every 1000 Muslim males in the country i.e. not even 1 Muslim female for every Muslim male let alone 4. As for Pachies (twenty five) children, the census reveals that population growth rates for both Hindus and Muslims during the last 2 decades have been stationary and that both Hindus and Muslim recorded a fertility decline during this period.
4. Previously the state record of communal riots was an average of 5 riots a year. But in the year 1989 alone, there were 18 riots and 140 disturbances in which 29 persons were killed, one hundred injured and a loss of 20 million rupees in terms of property destruction recorded.
5. Manoj Mittal, "Little work, many Riots", *Sunday Times of India*, May 12, 1991, p.14.
6. BJP had formed the government with the collaboration of Janata Dal (Digvijay Singh, a local defector group of Janata Dal) who possessed 25 seats in the house of 200 with the BJP's 88 seats.
7. S.P. Verma & C.P. Bhambri, *Elections and Political Consciousness in India*, Meenakshi Prakashan, Meerut, 1967, p.120.
8. S.H. Roudolf and Lloyd I Roudolph, 'The centrist future of Indian Politics', *Asian Survey*, June, 1980, p.580.
9. Most of the independent Muslim candidates had forfeitted their deposits. Only some of them could even play the role of spoilers. In Assam, Muslims are 26 per cent and they weild considerable political clout. In the last assembly election they favoured the Muslim Front and it had won 30 seats. This time they nearly ignored the Muslim Front and voted for the congress for the reason of better security and better control of law and order situation.
10. Rampur where Muslim voters formed 47 per cent, but BJP won, because Muslim votes were divided among Janata Dal, SJP and Congress. Similarly in the Domariaganj constituency in U.P. where Muslim votes were 35 per cent but it got divided and BJP won.

11. For the Congress-I led UDF it was a surprise victory. And possibly undeserved. Clearly it was not an anti-establishment vote that humbled the LDF. What tilted the scales in the UDF's favour was a combination of the sympathy factor, the anti-Mandal polarisation and the BJP strategic voting. *India Today*, July 15, 1991, p.50.
12. Though the Muslim leaders perceive the Muslim community as a homogeneous community which should stand united as a pressure group. The feeling behind it is that religious communities can make their problems better understood and solved if they solidly organize themselves. The common Muslims are viewed by those leaders as material to be manipulated.
13. Moin Shakir, *Islam in Indian Politics*, Ajanta Publications, 1983, p.104.

APPENDIX-I

(Maya, 30th April, 1991)

Total Muslim voters in India	:	about 12 per cent
Total Lok Sabha seats	:	545 (2 nominated)
Constituencies where Muslim votes have deciding weightage	:	262 (excluding 6 seats of Jammu&Kashmir.)

STATEWISE CONSTITUENCIES WHERE MUSLIM VOTES CONSIST MORE THAN 10 PER CENT

<i>Northern India</i>	<i>Total seats</i>	<i>Muslim influence</i>
	Total 238	120
1. Uttar Pradesh	85	
2. Bihar	54	
3. Rajasthan	25	
4. Madhya Pradesh	40	
5. Himachal Pradesh	04	
6. Haryana	10	
7. Punjab	13	
8. Delhi	07	
<i>Southern India</i>	<i>Total seats</i>	
	Total 129	
Andhra Pradesh	42	60
Karnataka	28	
Tamil Nadu	39	
Kerala	20	
<i>East India</i>		
	Total 77	52
Assam	14	
Orissa	21	
West Bengal	42	
<i>West India</i>		
	Total 74	30
Gujarat	26	
Maharashtra	48	

BJP in West Bengal: A Cause for Concern

Surajit Mukhopadhyay

In the last Lok Sabha and State Assembly polls the Left Front has once again romped home victoriously. Out of the forty-two Lok Sabha seats, it has won in thirty-seven thus retaining the same number of seats as in the 1989 elections. In the State Assembly polls, the Front has got its usual three-fourths majority — two hundred and forty-four seats out of two hundred and ninety four. This is about six seats less than in the previous house. The Congress has increased its strength from forty to forty-three in the Assembly and from four to five in the Lok Sabha.

The picture painted above, thus, shows the apparent stability of "Left and progressive forces". But it is 'apparent' because it masks the rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party as a mass force in Bengal politics. Though the BJP failed to bag a single Lok Sabha or Assembly seat despite having contested all of them, its share of aggregate votes has increased, from a paltry 5.3 lakh in 1989 to a sizeable 35 lakh this time. For a state which is known for its communal amity and secular politics, the rise in votes for the BJP is a scary proposition. With around twelve per cent of the total votes the BJP threatens to be the third force ready to upset the bipolar character of the electoral politics of Bengal.

A quick glance at the results of the tenth Lok Sabha elections shows that the BJP could garner 16 per cent to 18 per cent of the

total votes (the national average being 20.3%) in areas which have a high Muslim population and which are close to or have contiguous border with Bangladesh. Thus, in Raiganj, which is quite close to Bangladesh and has a large Muslim population, the BJP had 16.2%, in Malda it had 16.54%, in Balurghat 18.94%, in Jangipur 18.42% and in Behrampore 20.22%. In Calcutta and its suburbs the BJP had a mixed fortune — a low of 0.30% in Jadavpur (a suburb to the south of Calcutta) to a high of 16.83% in Dum Dum (a suburb to the north of Calcutta). But the highest BJP percentage share of votes was secured by Victor Banerjee, a noted film actor, from the Calcutta North West constituency — 22.20%.

What are the causes behind this improved performance of the BJP? One of the major reasons behind this success is the all too apparent failure of the Left Front to solve the increasing unemployment problem. Lockouts, closures and strikes dominate the industrial scene, with 174 cases of lockout in 1990, involving 119,079 men and a loss of 20,586, 946 man days which is however less than the 207 cases of lockout the year before. Lockouts accounted for 98.5% of the lost mandays and strikes for 1.5% in 1990. Along with the proverbial losses in the public sector, the industrial work scene looked bleak indeed.

The second major reason is that the BJP could mount a campaign in the districts, especially in the border areas, that the gloom of unemployment is the creation of the Left government insofar as it has allowed Bangladeshi refugees to settle and prosper in Bengal. The strategy of blaming the others — minorities in this case — as the ones who take away jobs and resources is a time tested tactic of Fascists and rascists in history. Germany of Hitler and present day Britain are glowing examples. This propaganda paid dividends as is evident from the statistics of districts adjoining Bangladesh. What is of note here is the well orchestrated attempt of the BJP to produce its own concocted myths about the demographic composition — obviously to show that the minorities would in some mystical but not so distant future reduce the majority to a status of marginals. All along the campaign and even before it, the BJP had assiduously built up myths of Indian tradition, culture and history. It nearly has now, a complete set of an alternative discourse that serves its political interests.

It can also be argued that the victory of the Left was greatly facilitated by the BJP dividing the opposition vote, which in hitherto bi-polar Bengal, meant eating into the Congress vote bank. The Congress in Bengal is more of a loose unity of different factions and their leadership has never been able to project a united force. Along with this problem the Congress according to popular perception is a lumpenised organisation which has lost its 'ideal' and 'principles'. It is seen as a constantly feuding organisation and therefore unable to deliver the political ambitions and expectations of the Centre-Right interests in Bengal. It is here again that the BJP comes out strongly. Its self-projected image is one of strict discipline and order with a cadre-based organisation that has the potential to battle with the Left. Thus in 1989, where the BJP had polled a mere 1.7% of the total votes cast by fielding nineteen candidates, this time it secured 12% of the votes by setting up forty-two candidates for the Lok Sabha. Whereas in 1989 0.089 per cent of votes per candidate was secured by the BJP, in this election that increased to 0.285 per cent per candidate, i.e. an increase in the "depth of support" by 320 per cent.

Does this mean that the rise of communal politics, so long contained so well in Bengal, is a reflection of the communalisation of the Bengal politics as well? I feel that the rise of the BJP signals the more abject failure of the secular parties and their plans for "development" and other socio-economic packages, that failed (fails) miserably year after year. Communalism is feeding itself on the frustration of the populace — a populace for whom there appears to be no political alternative.

The other important reason that can be cited to account for the rise of the BJP is that rightist elements who were within the Congress so far have found an outlet to vent their political aspiration. In other words, the communal elements so far accommodated within the Congress have suddenly discovered their very own mouthpiece. Thus a large portion of the BJP votes, which we now term as support for fundamentalism or communalism, had always existed under the benign Congress umbrella. In that sense, communalisation of Bengal politics was always latently alive.

Thus we can safely say that the rise of the BJP as a mass force in Bengal politics has nothing to do with a sudden change of heart of the 'secular' voter. The roots are firmly embedded in more mundane but existential problems of socio-economic dimensions that have gripped Indian politics in general and Bengal politics in particular. The alarm has been sounded. Failure to act promptly may sound the death knell of progressive and secular forces.

Communalisation of Politics & The 10th Lok Sabha Elections in Karnataka

Hasan Mansur

Mysore which was a princely state before re-organisation of states had always a tradition of harmony among communities. This is significant since the ruler was a Hindu and the Dewan (i.e. Chief Minister) was a Muslim. When certain districts of the erstwhile State of Hyderabad and Madras and Bombay Presidencies were merged to form the new state of Karnataka, in a way, this brought in its wake communal tensions because of sizable Muslim Communities in Bidar, Gulbarga, Bijapur, Hubli, Belgaum, Mangalore, Kanara and other places. Though there has been no history of riots in these towns, the very presence of sizeable minorities generated unease if not hostility.

Communal tensions arose for two reasons: (1) Religious festivities, particularly the Ganesh festival. (2) Economic rivalries in places where Muslims appeared to be prosperous. The RSS had begun its activities in early forties in Old Mysore and had among its traditional supporters, the trading community and the Brahmins. It had made steady progress here and in South Kanara, but it had a temporary setback with the assassination of Gandhiji. Its role in the Ganesh festivities has always been prominent and through these, it fosters Hindutva revivalism, through these ac-

tivities, the BJP got its political mileage. As for economic rivalries, the silk filature business is in the hands of the Muslims in Kolar, Ramanagaram, Chintamani, Channaptan, and so also the agency for buying and selling mangoes in Kolar district. As for the majority of Muslims, they are uneducated and below the poverty line.

Ganesh festivities in 1990 had their impact on several towns like Bangalore, Bidar, Kundapura in South Kanara, Shimoga, Raichur, Ramanagaram. The last named, forty kilometres from Bangalore had been notorious for occasional communal clashes earlier. In the wake of the Ganesh festival, came the *Ram Jyothi* that passed through several villages before reaching the town. The climax came on September 2, with clashes which left seven dead, several injured and properties and vehicles burnt. Nearby Kanakapura reported clashes on September 11.

Group clashes occurred in Malebennur in Chitradurga district; a clash was averted on September 27 in Gonikoppal in Coorg district. The *Ram Jyothi* passed through Kanakagiri in Gangavathi taluk in Raichur district which touched off clashes there. The *Ram Jyothi* processions in Bijapur on September 28 provoked clashes there.

In Channaptna, 50 Kms. from Bangalore and 10 Kms. from Ramanagaram, troubles broke out when some Muslims tried to take law into their own hands over the issue of a girl allegedly teased by a boy; in the disturbances that followed 17 died, 15 of them burnt to death when homes and shops were set on fire. 80 houses and shops were set afire and properties worth lakhs lost. In M.M.K. Doddi, a village 14 kms away, 37 houses were burnt, but their inmates miraculously saved themselves because they had fled before this arson took place. On the same day, 40 kms. from Bangalore reported tension.

In Hosadurga in Chitradurga district, police opened fire on a *Ram Jyothi* procession when it went berserk, injuring one, an employee of Canara Bank. Prohibitory orders were imposed on all towns in Kolar district, twelve places in Chickamagalur district and also in Shimoga from October 6. Then there was arson in Somwarpet in Koddagu district with 2 killed, and a bandh was observed in several towns of the district protesting ban on the *Ram Jyothi* processions. Police had to open fire on crowds in Tumkur on October 8, 1991.

The *Ram Jyothi* procession in Davangere went away in October. Police opened fire killing eight persons and four died of stabbing. Yet there were persistent efforts to take out *Ram Jyothi* processions despite a ban on them. In Hubli, a *Ram Jyothi* procession turned violent on October 25; one died and two stabbed and a 48-hour curfew was imposed on the town. In Kunigal, 100 kms. from Bangalore, clashes were provoked by an article in a local newspaper and night curfew was imposed for a week. In Chanarayapatna in Hassan district, police opened fire on October 24, killing one and injuring 8; sixty six houses/shops were damaged. In Saklespur in the same district, Muslim resident from Kerala were attacked and the police had to repatriate them to their home towns to save them. Night curfew lasted for a considerable period in Kolar, Davangere, Madikeri in Coorg district, Mandya, Kanakapura, Nelamangala, Chamrajanagar, Chanaryapatna and Ramanagaram.

Sporadic incidents with night curfew continued during November, 90, Hulikere in Chickamangalur district, Barikere near Ankola in North Kanara district, Kanakapura, Anekal near Bangalore, Chikkerur in Dharwad district. Prohibitory orders were imposed in almost all districts of the State. Chamarajanagar in Mysore district saw clashes on November 7, and again on December 6. There were group clashes again on November 12, in Ramanagaram, Kolar, Madiker. Youths went on a rampage in Harihar in Chitradurga district and clashes ensued. A student was stabbed in Nagamangala in Mandya district and all schools were closed.

The Iraq war in February '91 and the sympathy of some Muslims for their Arab co-religionists aroused anger in the other community. In Kolar, some Muslims demonstrated in favour of Iraq while the VHP came out in support of President Bush! A procession of 10,000 Muslims wend its way through the streets of Bangalore to declare their support for Iraq. When posters hailing President Saddam Hussain were pasted near a Mandir, it touched off clashes in Kalasipayam in Bangalore. Here the provocation came from a few misguided Muslim Youths.

As late as March 1, 91, there were clashes on a minor scale in Jamkhandi in Bijapur district, and in Malavalli in Mandya district. On April 19, clashes were reported in Itagi village in Bellary

district and Ron in Dharwad district. Tension was not confined to towns. It had spread to villages particularly around Ramana-gram, Channapatna, Davangere and other places. In the aftermath of October/November 1990 riots thousands of mango trees in Kolar district were cut down overnight causing losses running into lakhs and the minority community suffered most. Even in Coorg, trees, hundreds of years old, precious teak, were cut down to block the roads; of course these belonged to the government.

In all these riots as it happened in other parts of the country, Muslims suffered most in terms of life and property; those who were hit hard were of course the poorest among them. There have been reports of Muslims migrating into towns in pursuit of security; this happened in Kolar, Davangere and Channapatna.

The total dead in these riots amounted to 88 and properties lost were worth Rs. 4.37 crores.

The campaign for the tenth Lok Sabha was marked by great virulence. The BJP had mobilised the RSS and the VHP and a host of fanatical front organisations to campaign for it. It was obvious, it was flushed with funds, posters, streamers, handbills and slogans on walls blatantly proclaimed it. Since Ram was one of its battle cries and the Mandir its goal, cassettes spouted venom on the Muslims and video-cassettes showed alleged killing of 'innumerable' kar sevaks in Ayodhya. Even villages as in Kolar district were not spared in vivid display of communal outpouring in these forms. The saffron flag had become omnipresent along the high-ways, lanes and alleys. For instance, in Bangalore, areas where communal clashes had taken place, were singled out for special attention, flooding them with slogans, streamers, posters and handbills in Nehrupuram, Mavalli, Neelasandra and other places. Life-size portrait of Lord Ganesh was drawn in several places on public walls and votes sought for the BJP candidate in Bangalore North. Intellectuals who had campaigned for communal harmony came for special attention in abusive language issued by BJP front groups. The BJP which had failed to send a single candidate to the 9th Lok Sabha sent four to the 10th Lok Sabha. It was runner-up in eleven constituencies. It had an edge over the Congress(I) in 80 Assembly segments. It lost to the Congress(I) in Davangere in a recount by hardly a hundred odd

votes. The C.P.I. which had a good standing among workers in plantations in Chickamangalur was way behind the BJP. The Dalit Sangharsh Samithi candidate, supported by the Janata Dal who contested on the ticket of the latter in Kolar was ranked third with the BJP ahead of it. The Karnataka for his impeccable secular credentials, a popular party of kisans was way behind the BJP in Kanara, Raichur, Shimoga and Bijapur constituencies. The other lone winner was from the SJD.

The BJP with four seats, runner-up in eleven constituencies, had polled nearly 30% of the votes as against 2.9% of votes polled in the elections to the 9th Lok Sabha. The *Jai Siya Ram* cry had successfully garnered a rich harvest of votes.

Karnataka has the dubious distinction of being the foremost Southern state and the third in India with riots in 22 places and many people died, in communal killings. The BJP had to extract this price from the people of the state to secure the rank of the second largest party represented in the Lok Sabha. It has vowed to make this state, the U.P. of the South and this is no empty threat.

Out of the four seats it has won three of these constituencies have been notorious for Hindu-Muslim clashes and tensions: Tumkur, Mangalore and Bidar. The last named has witnessed many incidents, the latest being the killing of Sikh students some years ago. Bangalore, the fourth constituency has large areas known for communal animosities, particularly Kalasipalayam, Chamrajpet, along the Mysore Road, Kasturbha Nagar, Azad Nagar, Valmikinagar and a little away Jagjivan Ram Nagar. It missed winning by a whisker the seat in Davangere the scene of worst riots in the State. It has secured the second place in Chickamangalur, Kanara, Mandya, Udipi, Mysore, Kanakapura, Dharwad (North), Kolar, Chitradurga, Davangere, Chamarajnar, Bangalore (North), and Belgaum, most of these towns have known communal incidents. Undoubtedly it has thrived on blatant use of religion for political ends. Each election booth had a number of its polling agents, money was of no consequence, its opulence seen in its campaigns, its campaigners armed with the discipline of stormtroopers.

The writing on the wall is clear. The BJP is poised to jump into the seat of power in Karnataka. The so-called secular parties like the Janata Dal, the D.S.S., the K.R.R.S. and the Left are yet to

learn the lesson drawn from the traumatic experience of October/November 90 events. Only the people with faith in democratic values, of all hues have to mobilise all the resources to combat the saffron threat of the Hindutva wave. Karnataka must be saved for democracy and this is possible if the democratic process with its tenets of equality, liberty and fraternity is understood at the grassroot level and practised there. The conspiracy to turn the state into a theocracy must be defeated and that could be done only by a faith rooted in democracy, with love and understanding among all communities.

A study of events in the following towns will reveal how communalism had an impact on the latest elections to the Lok Sabha. Ramanagaram/Channapatna, Kolar and Davangere where major riots took place would be illustrative of this. Ganesh festivities had generated lot of tension in Ramanagaram which is 50 kms. away from Bangalore and is known as the silk capital of Karnataka with its silk filatures. This industry is largely in the hands of Muslims who have a sizable presence in the town. It has had a history of communal outbreaks from time to time, probably traceable to economic rivalries. Riots broke out on September 2, 1990 over an alleged dispute over a chitfund draw. Another version speaks of a mistaken identity of a Muslim stabbing another Muslim, mistaking the latter for a non-Muslim, which touched off the riots. The cottages that were ransacked and burnt belonged largely to poor Muslims and few homesteads in between were those of poor dalits. The Muslim poor alleged that the police led by the Sub-Inspector of the town police had set fire to their homes because a man belonging to his caste had lost his autorickshaws in the case of arson. This charge was repeated by Shri S.M. Yahya, a minister who visited this town.

A Hindu organisation stepped into the fray and enticed the dalit workers in the silk industry to a grove nearby where they were fed and incited to demand that the industry should be nationalised because of exploitation of labour by the Muslim proprietors. Thus the dalits were used by the communal elements and set against the Muslims. The irony was, the victims were the Muslim poor who had been equally exploited. This presented an ideal scenario for the *shilanyas* celebrations to be followed by *Ram Jyothi*. These riots left seven dead, scores injured and properties

worth lakhs burnt or destroyed. The State government is still debating whether employment should be provided for the relations of the dead and severely injured.

Channapatna, 13 kms. away, a town with a population of 83,000 of whom about 33,000 are Muslim was undoubtedly affected by the events nearby. Some of the rich Muslims have their investments in the silk industry though the majority, economically and socially backward live in a ghetto called Dayira. This town had undergone convulsions over festivities of Ganesh, *shilanyas* and *Ram Jyothi*.

The pretext for the riots came in the form of alleged teasing of a Muslim girl by a Hindu youth. The youth was arrested but the Muslims demanded that the police hand him over for instant justice which the latter justly refused. Frustrated and infuriated, the mob moved out attacking huts and looting shops. Of 16 dead, eleven were burnt to death.

A few kilometres away from this town, a village called Muhammed Khan Doddi was attacked by villagers from nearby places. 36 houses were burnt down and three houses saved because they were of R.S.S. The inhabitants, all Muslims miraculously escaped, the women and children were sheltered by non-Muslims who conveyed them safely to town when the trouble subsided.

Day and night curfew lasted for 5 days in this town and night curfew for a month. The silk market closed for nearly a fortnight leaving several unemployed and causing loss of thousands of rupees. Cottage crafts like mortar and toy-making for which the town is famous came to a halt and the economic life of thousands was hit. Most of the victims were the Muslims and dalits, poor alike. The worst affected were the poor of all communities.

Those who suffered losses were 323 in number, victims of riots were 1878, houses completely burnt 171, wooden shops burnt 107 and houses partially burnt 267. In villages, 55 huts were fully or partially burnt down and 63 people in town and villages suffered mild injuries. Incensed mobs of villages destroyed mango, sugarcane and ragi crops. The total loss of properties was estimated to be about 3.5 crores of rupees.

Nearby Kanakapura witnessed clashes too and vehicles were set afire. The Kanakapura constituency that includes Channa-

patna and Ramanagram which had never fielded a Jan Sangh or BJP candidate showed how these riots enabled the latter gain rich dividends.

Total electorate	: 13,44,864	Congress(I)	: 3,01,455
Votes polled	: 8,10,336	Janata Dal	: 2,07,376
Invalid	: 17,17,499	BJP	: 2,67,992

Mandya, the sugar town placed between Ramanagaram/Channapatna, and Srirangapatna/Mysore, the latter had riots sometime ago, felt the impact in the elections:

Total electorate	: 9,69,868	Congress(I)	: 2,59,500
Votes polled	: 6,23,832	BJP	: 1,64,153
Invalid	: 12,924	Janata Dal	: 52,331

Mysore, comparatively quieter, had its riots earlier over the issue of a blasphemous short story in '*Deccan Herald*'. The *Shilanyas* and *Ram Jyothi* processions had shaken it and its candidate, the son of old time Maharaja, a renegade from the Congress(I) who had joined the BJP.

Total electorate	: 10,65,425	Congress(I)	: 2,25,871
Votes polled	: 5,87,681	BJP	: 2,08,985
Invalid	: 15,480	SJP	: 1,17,466

Close to Mysore, *Chamarajanagar*, never known for communal rancour, had its share of skirmishes.

Total electorate	: 9,43,849	Congress(I)	: 2,17,831
Votes polled	: 5,77,591	Janata Dal	: 1,48,743
Invalid	: 19,486	BJP	: 1,48,374

Bangalore South which had trouble simmering in the heart of the city in Kalasipalayam and with sensitive areas with mixed populations like Azadnagar, Kasturba nagar, Jagjivanramnagar, Valmikinagar voted for the first time for the BJP.

Total electorate	: 13,26,936	Congress(I)	: 2,17,831
Votes polled	: 6,07,128	BJP	: 2,75,083
Invalid	: 9,223	Janata Dal	: 65,356

Bangalore North with tension simmering in Nehrupuram, Neelasandra, M.R. Palyam and other sensitive spots didn't escape the effect of the virulent communal propaganda.

Total electorate	: 13,40,816	Congress(I)	: 3,52,047
Voted polled	: 8,32,465	Janata Dal	: 23,43,427
Invalid	: 15,656	BJP	: 2,01,315

Tumkur, 60 kms away from Bangalore, underwent the trauma of the *shilanyas* and *Ram Jyothi* programmes. No wonder, it returned a BJP candidate who is at present the Deputy Speaker of Lok Sabha.

Electorate	: 9,47,487	BJP	: 2,55,184
Voted polled	: 6,05,002	Congress(I)	: 2,36,269
Invalid	: 15,574	SJP	: 73,597

Kolar, about 40 kms. from Bangalore has a population of 1 lakh of which Muslims are 30%. Trade, education and transport are controlled by the majority community while silk rearing/reeling business and small trade are handled by Muslims, who are largely from the middle and lower middle classes. All non-skilled labour is Muslim and educationally and socially most backward.

Traditionally, there has been amity between the communities, going back to the age of Hyder Ali and Tippu Sultan. As late as 1967, language chauvinism over Kannada began, with this language deified as goddess Bhuvaneshwari carried in a procession along with other idols of the town on Rajyotsva Day. This caused a breach between the communities.

Then came the first public observance of Ganesh festival in 1984. An official order was obtained from the district administration to collect funds for this! Huge sums were collected and the spirit behind this was the chief of the RSS in town.

In 1987, breaking of idols in Vokkalery near Kolar was blamed on Muslims, and the town observed bandh in protest. Following this, the RSS began building temples adjacent to dargahs.

In December 1988 the centenary of the Hedgewar, the founder of RSS, was organised on a grand scale. The whole city turned saffron, processions of idols went their way through the town. Initially the Muslims did not react to this, but a small crowd pelted stones which touched off rioting by way of looting of shops, with villagers attacking Muslims near the cocoon market. The police joined in, attacking houses in the Dargah locality.

As a result, the cocoon market closed and many Muslims were unemployed for a month.

The silk trade in Kolar provides a living for thousands in Kolar. The growers are non-Muslims while the reelers are Muslims who buy cocoons; there is constant tension because of the misbehaviour of middlemen who also happen to be Muslims. This is exploited by the RSS and the BJP. The labour force is from surrounding villages and they are all Muslims, shamelessly exploited by their Muslim proprietors.

As a reaction to the assertion of Hindus — Muslims celebrated the Prophet's birthday on October 3, 1990. Some Muslim youths pelted stones at passing vehicles and the RSS declared a bandh in protest on the following day. A Hindu youth was allegedly stabbed by RSS activists and it was blamed on Muslims. Yet, fortunately there was no reaction.

Instances of stabbing took place outside the town. There were sporadic clashes and violence against Muslims. As per police records, there were 158 cases of stabbing, 4 cases of arson and two dead. Govt. Road Transport buses were stopped on the highway, Muslims identified, pulled out and thrashed. A Muslim woman was stripped too on the road. For a month, no commodities came into Kolar and articles grew dear.

Disturbances caused migration of Muslims from villages to town. Muslim retail traders were afraid to go into villages to buy agricultural produce. The town was under curfew for a record number of 78 days. The government officials and local police betrayed their bias against the minorities and so did the police from Andhra which had been drafted in.

The dalits have a strong presence in Kolar. They had organised a procession and held a conference which drew thousands. This was before the direful events of October/November 1990. Kolar always sent up a leftist to represent it in the State Assembly till 1964. The Congress(I) won the election in 1971, 73 and 78 while the Janata won it in 83, 85 and the Congress(I) won it in 1990. The BJP which never had an electoral presence before, fared well in 1991.

Kolar:

Total Electorate	: 9,58,921	Congress(I)	: 2,35,347
Votes polled	: 5,98,248	J.D.	: 1,51,329
Invalid	: 13,861	BJP	: 1,71,754

The Janata Dal Candidate was the leader of Dalits.

Davangere, a major commercial capital of Chitradurga district witnessed unprecedented violence during October 5-12, 1990. The *Ram Jyothi* arrived in town on the 5th leaving 17 dead, 70 injured and properties worth lakhs destroyed and burnt and 400 arrested.

The Prophet's birthday was organised on a scale never seen before in this town on October 3, leaders of both communities participated in this. Yet this roused the ire of the Hindu Yuva Shakti (HYS), an organisation of rich and upper class youths. Earlier they had mobilised the Hindu poor for the Ganesh festivities. The RSS and the VHP were the galvanising forces behind the HYS. Tension grew on 4th and 5th of the month, because of the procrastination of the Muslims in dismantling the decorations put up for the Prophet's birthday. The President of the town Municipality, a Muslim, hustled them to do the dismantling. Muslim leaders had promised to be present for the *Ram Jyothi* puja.

Rumours in the meantime built up of stabbing and skirmishes; dabba shops belonging to poor Muslims were burnt down. Rich Hindu youths riding on motor cycles were seen shouting provocative slogans.

At first, the police banned the procession fearing trouble, it relented later and permitted it on condition that a certain route, avoiding sensitive areas would be followed. This was agreed upon by the leaders of both communities. A procession of 30 to 40,000 reached a certain point and tried to make its way into the Muslim locality which it was not supposed to enter as per the understanding with the police. When the mob broke the police cordon, the latter opened fire killing five and injuring 25. The police claimed that if the mob had its way, hundreds would have been slaughtered.

The press never reported the harsh behaviour of the police after this holocaust. Scores of Muslim youths were arrested and cases filed against them. The Home Guards joined in this persecution of the innocents.

A fact-finding team of CFD (K) which investigated these events in Davangere held the VHP/RSS/BJP solely responsible for the direful events. They found evidence of the Muslim leadership restraining its youth while the other leadership totally failed.

Davangere with its tradition of left-wing trade union movement with the CPI having a notable presence very nearly returned a BJP candidate who lost barely by a hundred votes to the Congress(I) candidate. Thus the former did reap a rich harvest of votes out of the blood and tears of the dead and injured. The losers in terms of properties were the poor Muslims with their petty shops and paltry business.

Chitradurga, convulsed by events in Davangere and nearby Hosadurga, reacted to these in the last general elections thus:

Total Electorate	: 10,33,269	Congress(I)	: 3,02,847
Votes polled	: 5,90,026	BJP	: 2,20,335
Invalid	: 13,075	SJP	: 42,989

Chikmangalur, with its estate labour controlled by the CPI showed the pattern where communalism stands to gain.

Electorate	: 9,48,455	Contress(I)	: 2,17,309
Votes	: 5,08,734	BJP	: 1,85,437
Invalid	: 10,624	CPI	: 97,727

Bidar, one-time district of the State of Hyderabad, with its sizable Muslim population and Sikh minority with its history of communal bickerings, the latest being the slaughter of Sikh students, the only district in Karnataka through which Advani's Rath Yatra passed, voted for a BJP candidate.

Total Electorate	: 9,95,696	Congress(I)	: 1,11,642
Votes polled	: 4,58,812	BJP	: 2,27,867
Invalid	: 9,591	JD	: 1,03,759

Disturbances in Hubli with its sizable Muslim population affected Dharwad (i.e. they are twin cities). The latter for the first time in history saw riots in 1990. This had its reflection in the Lok Sabha election.

Dharwad (North):

Total Electorate	: 9,34,428	Congress(I)	: 1,57,682
Votes polled	: 4,88,496	J.D.	: 1,34,565
Invalid	: 14,395	BJP	: 1,35,891

Adjoining it, Belgaum with its Shiv Sena hordes undoubtedly backed the BJP as the voting pattern reveals.

Electorate	: 10,25,101	Congress(I)	: 1,61,391
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Votes polled	: 5,30,115	KRRS	: 1,15,482
		(Peasants' organisation)	
Invalid	: 15,124	BJP	: 1,04,381
JD	: 89,347		

Shimoga: Shimoga, always prone to communal bickerings, fielded the leader of the BJP in Karnataka as its candidate and the results were as follows:

Electorate	: 10,41,502	Congress(I)	: 2,85,182
Votes polled	: 6,31,367	BJP	: 2,40,479
Invalid	: 14,951	J.D.	: 63,974

Raichur: Raichur is again a city of low intensity. Nevertheless communal rumbling showed the following results:

Total Electorate	: 9,75,310	Congress(I)	: 1,94,702
Votes polled	: 3,91,452	J.D.	: 72,747
Invalid	: 14,597	BJP	: 66,504

Bellary: Another city of tensions of low intensity had the following outcome:

Electorate	: 10,36,179	Congress(I)	: 2,34,812
Votes polled	: 5,31,221	J.D.	: 1,68,831
Invalid	: 19,937	BJP	: 84,837

The west coast always showed itself partial to the RSS. Though Mangalore has a strong trade union movement of the CPM, yet it defeated an ex-minister of Congress(I) and sent up the BJP. It has a stable Muslim population, most of them of working class.

Electorate	: 9,35,505	Congress(I)	: 2,39,262
Votes polled	: 5,59,028	BJP	: 2,74,814
Invalid	: 7,946	CPM	: 23,794

Udupi:

Electorate	: 9,21,587	Congress(I)	: 2,34,120
Votes polled	: 4,95,133	BJP	: 1,46,308
Invalid	: 6,511	J.D.	: 1,04,071

Canara:

Electorate	: 9,16,415	Congress(I)	: 1,71,436
Votes polled	: 4,97,775	BJP	: 1,41,412
Invalid	: 15,229	J.D.	: 1,24,123

The State Legislative Assembly was informed by the government that 198 religious places of various communities were either destroyed or damaged. 815 cases were registered against the rioters out of which 314 have been withdrawn.

It is thus proved irrefutably that the communal organisations have a vested interest in fermenting riots, killing, destruction of properties. A political party could ride the crest of communal killings to capture political power.

Additional Note

In the by-elections held on November 16, 1991, to the Lok Sabha, Dharwad South:

Congress(I)	:	2,31,473
BJP	:	1,57,702

All other candidates except the BJP lost their deposits. This was the first time the BJP had contested the Lok Sabha seat. Dharwad South Constituency has Hubli town. The second biggest city in Karnataka which was rocked by Ganesh festivities, followed by *Shilanyas* and *Ram Jyothi* program in October/November 1990.

In the Hunsur Assembly Constituency held on the same day, results were as following:

Congress(I) : defeated the BJP by 3,932 votes while all the other candidates lost their deposits. It was the first time again that the BJP had fielded a candidate in Hunsur.

This is additional evidence that the BJP could completely sideline the Janata Dal, which ruled the state before the Congress(I) took over.

Electoral Behaviour Defying Logic?

V. T. Joshi

If there is any logic in electoral behaviour, the ruling BJP should lose heavily in a snap poll for the Vidhan Sabha in Madhya Pradesh and again be driven into the role of an opposition party.

This is more than evident in a break-up of the results of the recent Lok Sabha elections. The BJP candidates have trailed in as many as 184 Assembly segments in a total of 320. Its Lok Sabha nominees led in only 129 Assembly seats. This clearly implies that the party lost as many as 90 seats from its present two-third strength of 219 and fell 31 seats below the majority mark of 160. Among the losses are some 20 seats (segments) held by Ministers in the Patwa Government, some of them prominent Cabinet members.

The Congress party this time bagged 27 of the 40 Parliamentary seats as against just eight in 1989 and has increased its share in popular vote by nearly eight per cent while the BJP tally dropped from 27 seats to 12 though the party increased its share in the vote by two per cent. All other parties were decimated except the Bahujan Samaj Party which registered its maiden victory by winning the Rewa seats. The Janata Dal drew a blank as for the seats while its vote was almost halved from nine per cent to a little more than four per cent.

It should, however, be a chastening experience for both the BJP and the Janata Dal, which fought against each other this time, to note that their combined votes slightly exceeded those of the Congress (46.14 per cent and 45.32 respectively). Their division lost both dearly in terms of seats while in 1989 they had an electoral alliance and both did exceedingly well and inflicted a crushing defeat on the Congress, proving the old adage, "United we stand, Divided we fall." Not that the BJP and the Janata Dal would have worked wonders together this time, but the damage to both would have been substantially reduced.

The only saving grace for the ruling BJP is that all this is with reference to the results of the Lok Sabha polls and does not affect it immediately, and is, therefore, only notional or "moral." However, morality is a far cry in the present-day politics.

The BJP won a magnificent two-thirds majority in February 1990 in the Vidhan Sabha elections but only to squander it, as it were, in a matter of 16 months. It has given a tremendous boost to the sagging morale of the Congress party which has lost no time in mounting a relentless campaign for the dismissal of the Patwa Government and fresh Assembly elections.

And herein comes the question of logic in electoral behaviour, the relation between votes and seats, and, even more important, the relation between the performance of a party in power and the popular vote. Opinion may be divided on all the three aspects, but they are vital enough to deserve the attention of psephologists as well as serious students of politics.

Will the electorate vote again exactly in the same manner as it did in the Lok Sabha poll in the event of a mid-term election for the State Assembly in the foreseeable future? Perhaps or perhaps not. If experience is any guide, it will. Since 1977 there have been four occasions when the Vidhan Sabha elections have closely followed the Lok Sabha polls in more or less similar circumstances. Their outcome has invariably been the same the electorate supporting the same party overwhelmingly in both the Lok Sabha and the Vidhan Sabha elections if the time gap between them is not very wide. Hence the M.P. State Congress party's eagerness, smacking of indecent haste, to cash in on its unexpectedly spectacular performance in the Lok Sabha electoral history of the country was Karnataka when the electorate voted for the

Congress in the Parliamentary elections and then for Mr. Ramakrishana Hegde's Janata party in the space of just a few months some six years ago). With different parties ruling at the Centre and the States at different times increasingly in the emerging political milieu of the country it is high time that certain national norms are evolved to deal with such situations uniformly and the Madhya Pradesh results provide an ideal case study. Here is a State Legislature with a whooping two-thirds majority supporting the Government of the day while the ruling party has received a severe drubbing at the hustings which are technically and constitutionally totally unrelated to the governance of the State as the elections were held for Parliament. Yet its results cannot be dismissed out of hand as it broadly reflects the public mood against the party in power, whichever be that party. Unfortunately all the parties involved in such situation on the past four occasions in M.P. (as elsewhere too) have never taken a consistent stand. Indeed they have adopted abominable double standards and mounted their demands and defensive postures according to their political convenience at a given time. Thus, the Congress which sulked from stepping down from power in 1989 is now demanding the exit of the BJP and the BJP is doing exactly the same in reverse. It vociferously demanded the resignation of the Congress Government 20 months ago, but is now dithering, arguing that the recent verdict was only for the Lok Sabha and that it has not lost the mandate to rule the State for five years (of which just 16 months have so far elapsed).

Endemic in this is the need for a rational relationship between votes and seats which has long been debated as a sine qua non of meaningful electoral reforms which every party has proclaimed, but has done nothing about it, hoping that it would eternally benefit from the shortcomings of the present system. But pending the resolution of this issue, a thumb rule for norms to decide the fate of the State Governments doing badly in parliamentary elections cannot brook any delay.

This brings us to the crucial question: why has the BJP failed so miserably in its own bastion after having reached the pinnacle of success in the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha elections barely 16 months ago? Is there any relationship between the performance of a Government and its influence in attracting votes?

In the mid-Sixties, the Bhaktavatsalam Ministry was acknowledged to have given the then Madras State (later Tamil Nadu) one of the best administrations in the country. Yet the Congress party went down in the 1967 elections under the onslaught of C. N. Annadurai's DMK and has not been returned to power in that State ever since. The Patwa Government in M.P. has certainly no outstanding achievement to its credit despite its crazy publicity to the contrary. But by no stretch of imagination has its rule been any worse than successive Congress regimes. If anything, it has been a shade better in many respects. At worst, the two rival regimes could be said to be tweedledum and tweedledee.

Even so, some of the measures such as farmers' loan waiver — certainly a bold innovative scheme for benefit of the rural poor and needy — slum clearance, housing and rehabilitation of the weaker sections, road-widening and removal of traffic hazards and anti-encroachment drive, were all laudable, visible achievements of the Government which normally should have received recognition and appreciation at the hustings. So also the claim that not a single development work was stopped for financial reasons and political corruption had been substantially curbed, that no work had been linked with collection of party funds and that all these had a "salutary" effect on the general administration.

Then when everything looked like "milk and honey", and the party was aspiring to capture power at the Centre on the basis of its performance in Madhya Pradesh, what was it that suddenly went wrong? In the excitement of the post-poll scene a variety of esoteric terms have cropped up and critics as well as apologists of the BJP have come up with several reasons such as the much abused "style" of functioning, personalised publicity regimen, lack of restraint in Mr. Patwa's public utterances in his criticism of the Congress his obduracy in dealing with his own party workers and their simple personal problems, coterie rule, both in the party and in administration, unbridled overlordship of the bureaucracy, failure to curb administrative corruption together with the curb on political corruption, faulty implementation of the party's lofty policies, and the rank communal appeal, breeding an awful complacency and incredible over-confidence, almost bordering on arrogance.

The impact of the poll debacle was most evident in the lacklustre annual Budget presented by the Finance Minister on Thursday which was neither fish nor fowl. All in all, a rejuvenated Congress faces its hitherto bleak future with renewed confidence as the BJP citadel in M.P. stands in ruins — at any rate for quite some time to come.

(Courtesy: *The Hindu*)

The Last Parliamentary Poll in Jammu & Kashmir, November 1989 — A Study

P. S. Verma

Studies on elections have proved quite useful in understanding the dynamic relationship between the fast changing socio-economic reality and the democratic political process. Since the electoral politics is organically linked with a nation's political life and provides many insights into the various aspects of the political system, including its basic nature and actual functioning, studies of this nature, particularly in the context of a society having distinctive, have become all the more important.

Ours is a country where the bulk of people still suffer from poverty, illiteracy, social backwardness, primordialism, and feudal or semi-feudal vestiges. Moreover, in regions ridden with religious consciousness local political groups having deep religious roots have established their firm hold. They further consolidate it by making frequent appeals to parochial feelings, more particularly during the periodic elections. In fact, most political parties including those claiming to be secular, progressive and nationalist, tend to bank upon such emotive ties for securing electoral victories. On occasions, such "cynical exploitation" of socio-psychological factors has led to dangerous consequences resulting in destabilisation and fragmentation of the

socio-political life in certain parts of the country. This shows that "elections may also enhance the power of disruptive and often reactionary social forces and tear down the entire structure of public authority."¹

All this makes it imperative to explore the problems and intricacies of electoral politics, especially in some sensitive areas or states of the Indian union. The present paper confines itself to an examination of the November 1989 Parliamentary poll in Jammu and Kashmir. The political situation in the state in the wake of this election so deteriorated that the whole exercise ultimately turned out to be counter-productive. This had never happened before in the entire electoral history of the state. It has not been possible to hold any election in the state since then. This election was held under disturbed conditions. Incidentally, the holding of this election hardly helped the situation to return to normalcy. It has rather deteriorated further. Anyway, before we go into the details of this election let us first, briefly, examine the precarious conditions in which this election was held. Regarding this, a quick survey of some major events and incidents that stirred the political life in the state between the last assembly elections(1987) and this parliamentary poll becomes imperative. It may also serve as a background to this parliamentary poll.

Political Situation on the Eve of this Election: The State of Jammu and Kashmir where the fabric of amity and oneness between the diverse religio-cultural groups had remained impervious to communal tensions, even in the worst of times, tended to have hardly any bearing of such considerations in 1989. Paradoxically, all the three regions viz. the Muslim dominated Kashmir valley, Hindu dominated Jammu region and Buddhist majority Ladakh were riven by ethno-communal and regional resurgence. Parochialism surfaced and issues like region and religion seemed to have become synonymous in the common mind. Most political parties channelised issues along religio-communal as well as regional lines. In the valley, the Kashmiri identity became indistinguishable from Muslim identity. The entire valley fell prey to Muslim fundamentalism and subversive forces, whereas the Jammu region became impregnated with Hindu communalism. Similarly, the Buddhists in Ladakh harboured a strong sense of neglect which manifested itself in the

form of a militant agitation, spearheaded by the Ladakh Buddhist Association(LBA). This agitation was focussed against the Kashmiri Muslim domination and demanded "Union Territory" status for Ladakh region. Subsequently, this peaceful region of Ladakh where there existed no caste or racial distinctions also turned to communal violence in 1988-89.

On July 7, 1989 a clash took place between a Buddhist youth and a Muslim youth at a cinema theatre. It soon culminated into violence and arson in Leh town. Again on August 27, 1989 violence erupted in which three Buddhist agitators were killed in police firing. Violence also flared up in Villages where the Buddhist boys, among others, were reported to have forced some Muslims to convert to Buddhism. A 51 year old Muslim teacher was reported to have been forced to temporarily accept Buddhism before being rescued and brought to the Leh town. He said "It was a terrible feeling, I will never recover from it".² In reaction to this, the Shia-Muslim dominated Kargil district retaliated against the Buddhist minority there. Interestingly, the Muslims in Kargil were sympathised with and supported by the valley Muslims in reaction to which the Hindus in Jammu sympathised with the Buddhists.³ The LBA raised controversial slogans like "Save Ladakh, save India", "Free Ladakh from Kashmir" etc. The well articulate Buddhist youths, mostly belonging to relatively better-off families, took to mobilising the Ladakhi Buddhists on community lines. It was virtually an expression of socio-economic and political grievances through the medium of communalism.

The situation became so communalised that Muslims in Kargil did not allow Buddhists to set up new monasteries. Nor did they allow them to renovate the existing ones. In the Leh district on the other hand the Sunni Muslims were first put under "*Hooka Pani Bandh*(Social boycott)" and later driven away from the villages.

A 30 year old Muslim lady said "They chased us with sticks and axes. We ran into the mountains and then crossed the Indus at night to reach Leh after three days. Our house was set ablaze."⁴ On the whole, these events in Ladakh showed a complete departure from the history of this region. This land of "Lamas" which remained closely identified with humanistic and

tolerant tradition became acutely polarised on communal basis. It made considerable impact on the electoral politics of the parliamentary poll in 1989.

Like Ladakh, the Jammu region was also beset with endless regional wrangles and communal consciousness resulting in serious riots in 1988 and 1989. In July 1988, the town of Poonch in the Jammu region in the close proximity of the "line of actual control" fell prey to communal clashes. The "Muslim Action Committee" planted a "Chinar" sapling in the middle of the parade ground and claimed that it was their burial ground, hence be restored to them. The Hindus on the other hand claimed that they had been using the ground for Dussera celebrations. It ultimately turned into communal violence which also spread to other towns resulting into arson, blaze and looting. Several persons were injured during violence. The elements who were responsible for creating communal tensions were allegedly seen at the houses of the ruling party's legislators in Poonch town.

Moreover, on the day of the 10th Guru's birthday on January 13, 1989, the Jammu town witnessed the worst mayhem in which 14 people were killed and over 75 seriously injured in the Hindu-Sikh riots. Over 100 shops were looted, 75 set ablaze and about 50 vehicles burnt by the unruly mobs consisting of youthful people who went on rampage in areas like the Purani Mandi, Link road, Parade grounds etc. Which were not far off from the central control room of the state police.⁵ Policemen acted as spectators. Hardly any known shop of a Sikh was spared by the rioters. Most of the killings were done by beating with lathis, rods and no firearms were used.⁶ The situation could be controlled by calling out the army. Besides this, in March 1989, communal violence erupted in the Rajouri town between Hindus and Muslims in which a boy was killed in police firing. The trouble began when some youth of one community tried to stop the procession held in connection with the Holi festival. The local police was accused of partisan attitudes. The Muslim constables defied the orders of the Hindu Superintendent of Police. The violence continued for three days and was controlled by calling out the army. This region, though it had occasionally been the site of communal violence in 1931, 1947, 1986 etc. never experienced riots with such frequency in the past.

Apart from communal violence, this area also witnessed intense agitational spree based on parochial lines. The prominent agitations were : the "Darbar move agitation" from 7 October 1987 to 14 November 1987; strikes and bandhs against the decision of shifting the divisional office of P.W.D. from a Hindu dominated town to a preponderantly Muslim area in June 1988; and an agitation for the implementation of the "Wazir Commission" report which recommended the creation of three new districts in the Jammu region. All these agitations were the products of a situation in which the politicians often mixed up religion and politics in most explosive manner to serve their political ends.

In the Kashmir valley, the mutual recriminations and use of religion to serve political ends not only strengthened the fundamentalist and anti-India forces but also accentuated communal violence. In the past, even the communal holocaust of 1947 failed to have any echo in the Kashmir valley. But the same Kashmir in February 1986 witnessed large-scale communal riots in which the minority community suffered enormous damage to property assets. The loss amounted to: "338 shops damaged or burnt; 55 temples looted, desecrated or damaged; 30 shops damaged or burnt; 60 houses looted; 20 kothars, cowsheds destroyed or burnt; one school and one cremation ground demolished; and 7 vehicles damaged".⁷ These riots came as a shot in the arm of various communal organisations and the process of religious revivalism. Subsequently, in September 1986 a new organisation called "Muslim United Front" (MUF) comprising over a dozen fundamentalist groups was formed. It also participated in the March 1987 assembly poll on the plank of "Nizam-e-Mustafa" (Islamic rule or way of life) and secured as high as 32 per cent of the valid votes cast in the Kashmir valley. People were told "vote for the ruling alliance is vote against Islam and vote for the MUF is vote for the strength of Islam". Later on the MUF made a substantial contribution to the growth of militancy in the State. Many of the MUF activists sympathised with or joined one or the other militant outfit in Kashmir. The militant violence began on 31st July by exploding bombs for which the "Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front" (JKLF) owned the entire responsibility. Within a month three powerful

bomb explosions took place in the valley. Initially the militants seemed to have kept minimum loss of life by striking on empty vehicles and houses or official buildings after the office hours or uncrowded places but gradually it turned to large-scale killings and destruction which goes on unabated. Some of the militant leaders acted as polling agents of the MUF candidates during the 1987 assembly poll.

Ironically, the March 1987 assembly poll itself catapulted and reinforced the current militant violence in the State. The MUF leaders believed that the Front's candidates in most assembly segments in Kashmir got majority of votes but the ballot boxes did not produce them. Already, during the course of campaigning some senior MUF leaders had warned that if the ensuing poll (1987) was rigged Kashmir would be turned into another Punjab.⁸ It proved prophetic. All sorts of interpretations and calculations that the March 1987 assembly poll was a triumph of secularism and would put "democracy back on the rails" proved wrong. The reality came to be the other way round. The entire political spectrum was soon turned to agitational politics, communal riots, militant violence, etc.

The allegations against the ruling party included distribution of duplicate ballot papers, proxy voting, booth capturing, arrest of opposition leaders, assaulting, harassing and buying polling agents, misuse of government machinery, inordinate delay in the declaration of results etc. The close margins and rejection of ballot papers were also raised as indicators of malpractices. They alleged that the MUF candidates were fraudulently defeated in several constituencies. A close look at the constituency level would show that in the ten assembly constituencies the margin of victory was very narrow. In nine such seats the close rivals belonged to the MUF and in the remaining one to the People's Conference of Mr. A. G. Lone. As the results in certain seats were declared late, the MUF took it as a sure case of electoral malpractices.

It is difficult to say either way in regard to the charges of rigging, but the MUF alongwith others took the matter to the streets and paralysed the entire political life in the Kashmir valley. The use of police force and large scale arrests

of the MUF activists further aggravated the crisis and gradually brought it to the present impasse. The dissatisfaction in the opposition circles was so intense that the declaration of results was followed by bandhs, strikes, violence and arrests of opposition leaders.

Interestingly, despite opposition's rejection of the results on the charge that it was completely a rigged election, the number of election petitions this time declined. Only 18 election petitions were filed in the state High Court as against 76 in 1983. This time the mind of major opposition groups in the valley, perhaps, got set on some different strategy as the dominant section of the MUF (i.e. Jamaat-e-Islami) subsequently decided to withdraw from the electoral politics. The Jamaat leaders openly declared that they had lost faith in Indian democracy after their bitter experience in 1987 assembly poll.⁹ The anti-India stance among the MUF leaders became pronounced. Not only that they considered state's accession to India as provisional but the howks in the Jamaat-e-Islami also urged the government in Delhi to accept the right of "self-determination" to Kashmiris. The Jamaat now onwards concentrated on the Islamisation drive and anti-India propaganda. By the Mid-1989, this group also decided to part with the membership of the state legislature and on 30th August 1989, the MUF MLAs resigned from the assembly. They termed it as their disapproval of the government headed by Dr. Farooq Abdullah as it was installed after a large-scale rigging. Mr. Sayed Ali Shah Gillani (veteran leader of the Jamaat) said that neither the MUF MLAs had resigned in response to the militants' call nor any militants were members of Jamaat-e-Islami. The Jamaat, as per Mr. Gillani, believed in the principles of the *Quran* and Sunna. Further he stressed that the main aim of the Jamaat-led MUF was to establish the Islamic system.¹⁰ It was under the above conditions that the November 1989 Parliamentary poll was held in Jammu and Kashmir.

The 1989 Parliamentary Poll

Soon with the announcement of this parliamentary poll, the Kashmiri militants issued a boycott call and announced "civil curfew" for the polling day. The Jamaate-e-Islami leaders also

followed suit. Subsequently, all opposition groups in the valley, though earlier they intended to contest the poll, dropped the idea of entering the fray. None except the National Conference and few independents dared to contest. The hold of the militants in the valley by then had become quite strong. Even Mufti Mohd. Sayeed, a top Janata Dal leader in the State, managed to contest from Uttar Pradesh. In the case of the Srinagar seat even the independents had also withdrawn leaving it to be represented unopposed by the National Conference candidate. In the remaining two seats of Kashmir valley, in Baramulla there were five independents against the National Conference candidate and in Anantnag eight. But this hardly created any election fervour in the valley. Here the concern of the voter was "not about who will be the candidate or who will win, but whether it will be safe for him to go to the polling booth".¹¹

Most voters, as a result of the boycott call, abstained from voting in the Kashmir valley. Even in the rural areas where the National Conference enjoyed a traditional stronghold people did not cast their vote. In all the three parliamentary constituencies of Kashmir valley there was hardly any semblance of the an election. The electioneering remained dull and drub.

As per the Kashmir Governor, in the Sopore town from where there was one cabinet Minister and the Chairman of Legislative Council, only five votes were cast. In addition, on the polling day on November 22, 1989 very interesting things happened at some polling booths. As per the Governor's letter "... TV sets were placed near some of the polling booths with placards reading : 'anyone who will cast his vote can take this as a gift'. Near some other booths, coffins were placed with the cryptic note : "Anyone who will cast his vote will get this".¹² Factually, the polling in the two seats i.e. Baramulla and Anantnag was as low as 5.48 percent and 5.07 per cent respectively (Table-1). If one sees it in relation to the total number of voters in the valley including the Srinagar seat which was returned unopposed, the polling in Kashmir remained only 3.41 percent during the November 1989 poll. Even this meagre turnout was suspected by many people. Moreover, a bulk of the votes were polled at few polling booths only, which caused further doubts and apprehensions. According to Balraj Puri:

“Even presuming that this percentage is genuine, it merely shows that there are a few far-flung areas in the two constituencies where the unit of the militants for poll boycott did not run on cent per cent people. In Baramulla for instance the National Conference winning candidate got over 22,000 votes out of 35,000 he polled from only two stations, Handwara and Uri, which are inhabited by a large non-Kashmiri Muslim population.”¹³

It shows that the National Conference was completely left high and dry by the Kashmiri voters. Even most of its cadre (lakhs in the valley) remained ineffective during the Parliament poll. The calls of the Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, hardly propelled the party activists at the grass-roots. Several of them under fear had announced their disaffiliation with the National Conference through advertising in the local papers. If it is compared with the poll boycott call by the militants in Punjab it hardly affected the polling in 1985. Interestingly, in Kashmir, much of the violence and killings took place after the 1989 poll whereas in Punjab the election was preceded by the two most tragic events i.e. the “Operation Blue-Star” and Delhi riots which hurt the feelings and psyche of the Sikhs in Punjab as well as outside. The reasons for the success of the boycott call in Kashmir could be attributed to the preponderant Muslim population in the valley and long time controversy relating to the state’s status. This apart in Punjab all the political groups had participated in the elections whereas in the case of Kashmir none barring the ruling National Conference; most rival groups in Kashmir rather helped for the success of the boycott call.

Interestingly, in the remaining two regions, i.e. Jammu and Ladakh the boycott call by the Muslim militants made no major impact and elections were held as usual. In Jammu both the parliamentary seats witnessed tough competition. The Congress(I) was opposed by various political parties such as the Janata Dal, the BJP, the Panthers Party and the BSP. But, unlike other states, the target of one to one contest could not be achieved. In both the seats, considerable polarisation of votes on communal lines was witnessed. An appreciable number

of Muslims and Sikhs went along with the Janata Dal and the Scheduled Castes with the BSP. The Muslim Gujjars of Poonch and Rajouri area, traditional supporters of the Congress(I), this time turned to the opposition as they felt ignored regarding their demand for a Schedule Tribe status whereas a similar demand from Ladakh was conceded by the then central government in October 1989.

In the case of Ladakh, initially, the Ladakh Buddhist Association also called for a poll boycott but soon it was withdrawn after an agreement with the central government.

Interestingly, the Ladakh seat, which had mostly returned Congressmen from amongst the majority Buddhist community, this time was captured by an independent Muslim candidate in a straight contest against the Congress(I). The voters were highly polarised on communal lines for which the prolonged Buddhist agitation for the union territory status also played a decisive role. In the Buddhist dominated Leh area, the Muslim independent rival did not find support. The same happened to the Congress(I) sponsored Buddhist candidate in the Muslim dominated Kargil area. As observed : "Broadly the votes polled by the two candidates correspond to their electoral strength. The parties did not matter at all. For while all Buddhist voted for Mr. Namgyal because he was a Buddhist and not because he was a Congress candidate, the National Conference could not transfer any Muslim vote to him".¹⁴

The first ever defeat of a Buddhist candidate by a margin of 4539 votes in 1989 in the Ladakh Parliamentary seat surprised most people. The Muslims, though population-wise slightly less than the Buddhists (61,882 Muslims and 68,376 Buddhists as per 1981 census), had more votes than the latter in the constituency. The Congress(I) candidate, Mr. Namgyal, also alleged that the state authorities had manipulated the population records and registered between 10,000 and 15,000 bogus voters in the Muslim dominated Kargil area.¹⁵ Part of it may be true but a relatively lesser degree of attention paid by the Buddhists in their area both in terms of registration of voters and percentage polling was also no less important in this regard. In the Kargil segment out of the 52,934 voters, 87.27 per cent cast their votes whereas in Leh out of 48,804 voters only 85.38 percent voted. However, in both

the areas, such a high percentage of polling despite inclement weather in a most sparsely populated constituency was in itself an important factor. It was far higher than the two parliamentary seats of the Jammu region where the elections were held (Table-I).

It is revealing that in the Kashmir valley where 78.22 per cent voters cast their votes during the March 1987 poll, only 5.48 per cent turned to exercise their franchise in 1989. Mention may be made that electoral turn-out in the Muslim dominated constituencies of the state has been always on the higher side than non-Muslim areas. It may be further seen from Table-II.

However, outside the valley the boycott call by the militants made no serious impact except in few Muslim dominated segments like Doda and Banihal of the Udhampur Parliamentary constituency. The number of total votes polled in the Doda assembly segment was only 9,291 (i.e. 20.75 per cent) and Banihal 5,788 (i.e. 13.27 per cent). Some more Muslim dominated segments where the boycott call received some attention were Inderval and Kishtwar with 24.33 and 29.23 per cent polling, respectively. In the remaining three Muslim dominated assembly segments of the Jammu region it was a normal to moderate polling.

Interestingly, the turn-out in the Shia-dominated Kargil segment of the Ladakh Lok Sabha seat, as mentioned above, went as high as 87.27 per cent. It tended to be higher than the previous elections in 1987. But the Shia-dominated Pattan assembly segment of the Baramulla parliamentary seat in the Kashmir valley hardly witnessed any polling. Only one vote was cast out of 56,311 in this segment. It was the lowest in the entire state. The minority Shias in Kashmir Valley then followed the majority Sunnis not the Shias of Kargil. Actually, the militants were hardly a force outside the valley.

However, the poll boycott in the Kashmir valley was the most disturbing factor. It is, in fact, the Kashmir region which has determined the entire spectrum of state politics since independence or even before. Well established leaders and powerful political groups like the National Conference lost their credibility. The family of Sheikh Abdullah, which remained at the helm of affairs for over 50 long years, got decimated. The Sheikh's mausoleum itself has to be heavily guarded by the security

Table - II

**Comparative Performance of Different Political Parties in the
Assembly and Parliament Elections in Himachal**

Year of Election	Assembly Elections					Parliament Elections				
	Congress	JS/BJP	CPI/CPM	Other Parties	Indepen- dents	Congress	JS/BJP	CPI/CPM	Other Parties	Indepen- dents
	Seats won	Seats won	Seats won	Seats won	Seats won	Seats won	Seats won	Seats won	Seats won	Seats won
1952	24 (47.3)	-	-	3 (26.2)	9 (26.3)	3 (52.4)	- (10.7)	-	- (28.2)	- (8.5)
1957	Elections held to territorial council					4 (47.30)	-	- (2.80)	- (42.90)	-
1962	Elections held to territorial council					4 (68.65)	- (4.49)	-	- (19.34)	- (7.52)
1967	34 (42.19)	7 (13.87)	2 (3.28)	1 (2.56)	16 (38.10)	6 (48.35)	- (19.06)	- (2.65)	- (7.46)	- (22.48)
1971	-	-	-	-	-	4 (75.79)	- (10.94)	- (1.65)	- (8.83)	- (3.10)
1972	53 (53.23)	5 (7.75)	1 (3.55)	2 (7.20)	7 (28.27)	-	-	-	-	-

Year of Election	Assembly Elections					Parliament Elections				
	Congress	JS/BJP	CPI/CPM	Other Parties	Independ- ents	Congress	JS/BJP	CPI/CPM	Other Parties	Independ- ents
	Seats won	Seats won	Seats won	Seats won	Seats won	Seats won	Seats won	Seats won	Seats won	Seats won
1977	9 (27.74)	53 (49/01) Janata/BLD	- (2.56)	-	6 (20.69)	- (38.58)	4 (57.19) Janata/BLD	- (2.17)	-	- (2.06)
1980	-	-	-	-	-	4 (52.08)	- (36.38)	- (1.94)	- (5.60)	- (4.00)
1982	31 (42.42)	29 (35.15)	- (1.88)	2 (6.21)	6 (14.21)	-	-	-	-	-
1984	-	-	-	-	-	4 (67.58)	- (23.27)	- (0.93)	- (4.64)	- (4.00)
1985	58 (55.46)	7 (30.61)	- (2.13)	1 (3.52)	2 (8.28)	-	-	-	-	-
1989	-	-	-	-	-	1 (41.96)	3 (45.25)	- (1.73)	- (10.24)	- (0.72)
1990	9 (38.40)	46 (42.40)	1 (2.80)	11 (11.10)	1 (5.30)	-	-	-	-	-

forces. Begum Sheikh Abdullah, while addressing the memorial function on the Sheikh's death anniversary in September 1990, herself declared that "National Conference cannot claim leadership" in the current situation in Jammu and Kashmir.¹⁶ Several party leaders and activists have been already shot dead and many have resigned from its membership by advertising in the local papers. Kashmir has never experienced such a vacuum since the formation of this party in 1932. Nor have the Kashmiris been without a 'local hero' since then. The vacuum did arise after the passing away of Sheikh Mohammad Abdullah in 1982 but people after a while, started rallying round his successor son, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, though he was no match to his towering father. But presently his leadership stands almost thoroughly exposed. Not much following is left for him and his group in Kashmir, leave alone Jammu and Ladakh. However, none has so far emerged on the scene to fill in the gap. Will it be possible to revive the political process in the state in such circumstances? It is difficult to answer either way. Any revival with Dr. Farooq Abdulla shall invoke strong protest, particularly from the Hindu communalists, Muslim fundamentalists, subversives and militants. But without him or his family there is hardly any hope as no viable alternative seems to have emerged in the State till now. Of late, people from Jammu and Ladakh region have started pressurizing the authorities to hold elections in their areas. Since the current scenario tends to confine to the Kashmir valley, they do not see any rationale in not holding elections in the rest of the two regions. However, keeping in view Kashmir's strategically delicate position no such exclusion would find favour with the decision-makers.

Conclusion

The Parliamentary election of 1989 in the State of Jammu and Kashmir was held in unusual circumstances. The entire state, on the eve of election, was ridden with growing communalism and agitational politics. The opposition parties were in revolt and accusing the ruling party of large-scale rigging in the 1987 assembly poll. When the increased poll percentage of the "Muslim United Front" in the Kashmir valley did not materialise in terms

of number of seats it caused many doubts in the minds of the MUF leaders. As a result, with the trickling of results the entire Kashmir valley was turned into agitational politics. Subsequently, the dominant partner in the MUF i.e. Jamaat-e-Islami turned to the non-electoral path. Such developments not only prevented the authorities from conducting a successful parliamentary poll in 1989 but also swelled the number and ranks of the newly formed militant groups in Kashmir valey. With the completion of this election there emerged a new scenario in the state in which after a while all democratic options became obscure and the peace loving Kashmiris were thrown into the quagmire of unending violence.

The Kashmir valley which has always been the throbbing heart of electoral politics witnessed only nominal turn-out during the 1989 poll. The campaigning also remained dull and drab. Though the remaining two regions had normal polling, there too the forces of regional and communal chauvinism received considerable impetus and subsequently acquired enormous proportions.

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The Dilemma Before The Muslim Voters

(They must not allow themselves to be
treated as a mere Vote Bank)

By Parwez Hafeez

Launching the BJP election campaign in New Delhi, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee accused the "pseudo secular" parties of playing the politics of the "Muslim vote bank." It is time the Muslim community came out of this strait-jacket of a vote bank and removed this stigma of being regarded merely as a flock of sheep by various political parties. With the growing evidence of collective Muslim support (or collective Muslim rebuff) to the Congress(I) in the last few general elections, it has become increasingly clear that the community provided the most reliable monolithic vote bank in the country. This monolithic vote bank syndrome, however, has done far more grievous damage to the community than it dares to realise.

For over four decades, the Muslim community has supported, except on two occasions, just one political party—the Congress(I). It is this king-maker aspect of the community which has been resented by the erstwhile Jana Sangh and its new avatar, the BJP, the RSS, the Hindu Mahasabha and the VHP. All leading personae of these organisations occasionally chided Muslims

openly for backing the Congress en masse and thus helping it rule the country for almost 40 years. The frequent communal riots that the BJP-RSS-VHP-Bajrang Dal combine has been inciting in various parts of the country are perhaps a manifestation of resentment and frustration with the proximity of the Muslims with the Congress(I) and later with the Janata Dal.

After the Partition, the massive burden of guilt for a sin it did not commit pushed the Muslim community into a cocoon. Accused and lambasted at every opportunity for the creation of Pakistan, the Muslims thought it discreet to remain isolated in their own 'ghettos'. Alas, even the psychological trauma of the community was viewed with suspicion and the Muslims were constantly chided for not joining the mainstream. Humiliated and harassed, the morale of the Muslims was at its lowest when Jawaharlal Nehru came to their rescue. He installed a new confidence and a sense of purpose among the Muslims and helped them to shake off their pessimism and growing cynicism. The Muslims, in sheer gratitude, threw in their lot with the genuinely liberal, socialist and secular head of the Union government and his party. In the first three general elections, held in Jawaharlal Nehru's lifetime, the Muslims wholeheartedly supported the Congress party. After his death, Muslim support was automatically transferred to his daughter. Mrs Indira Gandhi, however, like her son, did not enjoy uninterrupted Muslim support. In 1977 and in 1989, the Muslims expressed their anger with the Congress by voting for the Janata Party and later the Janata Dal, which helped the fledgling parties come to power.

There are more than 150 million Muslims in India today. But with the exception of a very few, how many Muslims can honestly claim to think individually and independently? A herd mentality is one of the factors behind the community's backwardness. Today, the Muslims have virtually become—and they themselves are no less responsible for this—merely an abstract mass of votes, which various political parties make use of at election time and later discard with the same disdain with which they discard their poll manifestos. Riding high on the success of the extraction of a secular Bangladesh from fundamentalist Pakistan and being declared a reincarnation of goddess Durga, even Mrs Gandhi had once defiantly announced that she did not care

for Muslim votes. In 1977, the Muslims, incensed with Mrs Gandhi's apathy towards them, with the frequent riots and the draconian measures during the Emergency like forcible sterilisations, demolition of houses and properties and the Turkman Gate police firing, voted en masse against the Congress(I). The 1977 election has been a landmark in the history of Indian democracy in many ways. And the most important thing it proved conclusively was that Muslim votes are a crucial deciding factor at the hustings.

Riding an anti-Congress wave and with overwhelming Muslim support, the Janata Party came to power, but during its brief tenure even the new ruling party failed to redress the grievances of the Muslims although before the polls it had promised them the moon. Very soon the Janata Party government committed harakiri and paved the way for a spectacular comeback of Mrs Gandhi in 1980. This time a chastised and wiser Mrs Gandhi went out of her way to win back the Muslim electorate with some new and some old promises that included according legal status to the Minority Commission, restoration of the minority character of Aligarh Muslim University and making Urdu the second official language in the country. Dis-illusioned with the brief honeymoon with a khicchdi Janata Party, the Muslim community once again voted in favour of the Congress(I). Once again, Mrs Gandhi assumed enormous importance of the Muslim electorate. All her promises were, as later events proved, just mere poll promises.

When Mr Rajiv Gandhi took over the reins of the country, the Muslims extended their full cooperation to the heir of the Nehruvian legacy of socialism and secularism in the fond hope that in the 'innocent' and 'clean' hands of Mrs Gandhi's elder son, their future was safe. It is another matter that, due to some extent his own political ineptitude and his dependence on some unsavoury weather cock-like time-servers who not only gave him wrong advice but also totally alienated him from the masses, even Rajiv disillusioned his Muslim electorate rather soon. Towards the latter part of his tenure, his relationship with the Indian Muslims became ambivalent and ambiguous. To please (or to appease, as Mr Advani would put it) the Muslims, he codified the Shariat law and passed a legislation banning legal

jurisdiction on matters relating to the Muslim Personal Law. How fickle and indecisive Mr Gandhi was on this issue became evident when, on one hand, he asked his favourite at the time, Mr Arif Mohammed Khan, to defend the court order by citing evidences from the Muslim scriptures while, on the other, he performed a volte face by giving the green signal to Z.R. Ansari to make an impassioned plea in favour of the Shariat and against any legal interference with it. For a while, people as well as the Press were at loss as to who was speaking on behalf of the Congress(I). However, it soon became evident that Mr Ansari had Rajiv's patronage. An embarrassed Mr Khan was left with only two options—either to retract or quit. He chose the latter.

Again it was on Mr Rajiv Gandhi's explicit instructions that his cousin and confidante at the time, Mr Arun Nehru, got the gates of the disputed Babri Masjid complex unlocked and his home minister, Buta Singh, performed the shilanyas ceremony there. Mr Gandhi, while denouncing the communal and revivalist policies of the BJP, himself lagged off his 1989 elections campaign with the assurance of "Ram rajya" in Faizabad near Ayodhya. The significance of the poll slogan as well as the choice of place, in the surcharged atmosphere of Hindutva, was not lost to anyone. Wishing to eat his cake and have it too, Mr Rajiv Gandhi played what was dubbed by the political pundits as the Hindu card. He, however, lost both his traditional vote bank, that is the Muslims, to the Janata Dal and his newly won Hindu electorate to the BJP. The brutal communal carnage in Bhagalpur for which the Muslims held the Congress(I) responsible along with the BJP and other fundamentalist parties proved to be the last nail in the Congress(I)'s coffin. Once again the Muslims, to teach a complacent and uncaring Rajiv Gandhi a lesson, voted collectively in favour of the Janata Dal-led National Front. Once again, the detractors of the Muslims cried foul about the 'appeasement' of a vote bank.

During Mr V.P. Singh's rule at the Centre and Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav's rule in UP and following Chandra Shekhar's coming to power in New Delhi, the worst communal carnage in the history of Independent India took place. Mr Singh and Yadav, the self-proclaimed messiahs of the Muslims, merely looked on while the community was pulverised by the bigots and

the revivalists. Mr Yadav's defiant and excessively belligerent posture against the Kar sevaks, sowed the seeds of animosity even among those Hindus and Muslims who had been living peacefully with one another in the small towns of UP for generations. From the rostrum of his massive "communal amity" rallies, Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav spewed venom against the Hindu bigots and the poor Muslims had to bear the brunt of the incited rioters. Mr Yadav's high-handed treatment of the kar sevaks and the police brutalities on them in Ayodhya on October 30 and November 2 made even the secular Hindu a Muslim-baiter. All the excesses that Mr Yadav perpetrated against the BJP-VHP-RSS-Bajrang Dal combine boomeranged on the hapless Muslims.

The rioters set more than two dozen towns in UP on fire chiefly to teach pseudo-secularists like Mr V.P. Singh and Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav a lesson. Mr Advani openly declared: "I said, my quarrel is not with the Muslims. If there are riots in the country I do not blame the Muslims, I blame the Hindu leaders of the so-called secular parties." Just to keep their vote bank intact and to acquire the halo of a 'champion of the minorities,' Messrs Yadav and V.P. Singh destroyed the fibre of unity that existed between the two communities despite minor clashes in the past. Mr Yadav's policy of divide-and-rule may have paid some dividends at the hustings, but it has completely alienated the Hindus from Muslims. Mr V.P. Singh, who had projected himself as the martyr for the cause of secularism in the last days of his prime ministership, was never genuinely concerned with the solution of the vexed problem of Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi. Even the self-proclaimed friend of the Muslims, Mr Chandra Shekhar, revealed his true colours immediately after assuming office. During his brief stay in power, Mr Chandra Shekhar realised the growing influence and clout of the BJP leaders. No wonder he hobnobbed with the likes of Dr Jain (the man who should have been put behind bars for making inflammatory video cassettes on Ayodhya), Bal Thackeray, Bhairon Singh Shekhawat and Nanaji Deshmukh. Mr Chandra Shekhar is now so close to the BJP-VHP that Messrs Vajpayee and Advani, who miss no opportunity of lambasting Mr Rajiv Gandhi, Mr V.P. Singh and Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav, have nothing but praise for the caretaker Prime Minister of India.

With the mid-term polls not even a month away, all the parties have begun employing their tactics of wooing and winning over the Muslim electorate. The Congress(I), the Janata Dal and the Janata Dal(S) are going out of their way to seduce the Muslims who constitute 12 per cent of the total electorate and can make or mar the fortune of any party.

Like the previous few general elections, this time too, following the announcement of the 10th Lok Sabha polls, traders in Muslim votes have mushroomed overnight. Along with the political parties, these Muslim leaders are also responsible for the community being treated as a mere vote-bank. Some of these self-styled Muslim leaders operate individually while others float limited companies. Mr Salahuddin Owaisi, Mr Javed Habib and Mr Jeelani have recently floated the National Minority Front. This Front has taken upon itself to 'market' Muslim votes to the right 'customer'. The Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid, Syed Abdullah Bukhari, and Syed Shahabuddin have kept away from the meeting of intellectual Muslims held in New Delhi to decide the fate of the Muslim franchise as well as the newly formed Front. These two giants do not relish the idea of being merely a part of a group. They wish to project themselves as the sole proprietors of the Muslim vote.

It was the Shahi Imam who was the chief architect of the wholesale Muslim support to the Janata Party in 1977 when he had travelled all over the country exporting Muslims to teach the "cruel murderess" a lesson by voting her out of power. In 1980, Mrs Gandhi won over the Imam and, on his appeal, Muslims again voted for the Congress(I). In 1989, it was once again Bukhari who single-handedly brainwashed the Muslims into voting against the Congress(I). This time too, realising his enormous influence over the Muslim electorate, both Mr V.P. Singh and Mr Rajiv Gandhi have been trying to obtain a fatwa in their favour. The Imam has either not made up his mind or does not want to declare his intention in public yet. Syed Shahabuddin has of late been in a sulk. In the past one and a half year, his influence among the Muslims has been marginalised by some comparatively new and lesser-known leaders of the Babri Masjid Action Committee. Nevertheless, this veteran self-appointed advisor cannot resist the temptation of advising the community.

In the latest issue of his journal, Muslim to vote en bloc in favour of Mr V.P. Singh and, where the situation demands, in favour of Mr Rajiv Gandhi to defeat communal forces. This en bloc voting is the main bugbear of the BJP. No wonder, during his election campaign in eastern UP, Mr L.K. Advani has accused the Congress(I) as well as the Janata Dal of not "seeing the Muslims as human beings but only as votes."

The question is: Why should less than 15 so-called leaders decide the fate of 150 million Muslims? In a democratic set-up, why must the Muslims need these power-brokers to make up their minds for them? Don't the Muslims feel insulted that the entire community bows to the decree of one man who should be followed only during a namaaz and not in such mundane matters as the election of an MP? How can an Imam-a power-leader-lead the entire Muslim community? What is the past record of these self-styled Muslim leaders? Have they done anything concrete for the community in the last four decades? Who has given them the authority to assume the stewardship of the whole community? What have they done to deserve this lofty position? Is it not true that they have merely traded in the misery of the Muslims by exploiting them during each general election? Is it not true that they are also responsible for the mess the Muslims today find themselves in? Is it not true that they are adept in only delivering verbose and emotional speeches in Urdu and giving sensational press statements just to remain in the limelight? Is it not true that the Babri Masjid issue was aggravated beyond a point of no return by the irresponsible and inept handling of these "intellectuals" of the community?

(Courtesy: *Telegraph*.)

The Big Rush for the Muslim Vote

Smita Gupta and Vidya Subramaniam

India has the world's second largest Muslim population and it is but natural that this segment should be courted, wooed and won over just before the general elections. It is also natural that this segment, because of its concentration in the crucial Hindi heartland, should have a decisive say in who wins and governs the country.

But in pursuing the Muslims with single-minded zeal, are our politicians chasing a mythical vote bank? Does the community really vote en bloc for a favoured party regardless of who the mainstream is voting?

While the existence of a Muslim vote bank, independent of the mainstream, is debatable and it is also likely that, as among the Hindus, there are varying views within the community, it is a fact that Muslims react strongly and more or less similarly to issues which they see as vital to their interests.

Whenever the community has perceived a threat to its survival it has not hesitated to use the ballot to express its anger, as in 1977 and 1989. However, on neither occasion did the Muslims go against the opinion of the mainstream.

In fact, the Muslims have never consciously defied the majority view to register their dissent. The two general elections of 1980 and 1984 illustrate this. In 1980, the general mood was

against the Janata Party even though there was no perceptible wave for the Congress. Reflecting this, the Muslim vote was divided between the Congress and the opposition. In 1984, on the other hand, a massive Rajiv wave swept across the country. The Muslims recognised the inevitability of the majority emotion and despite their unhappiness with the Congress went along with the mainstream in ushering it to power.

It is an acknowledged fact that till the 1971 general elections, a majority of the Muslims supported the Congress. This was the period dominated by the pre-partition generation of Muslims who swore by the Congress. The Congress, in turn looked upon the Muslims along with the Harijans as its main vote bank.

The year 1967, when the Congress coasted home on a water thin majority, could have been tricky for the party but for the support it got from the Muslims — the oldest of the now militantly articulate post-partition generation was still to attain voting age then and, consequently, anti-establishment rebellion was unheard of within the community.

The year 1977 was a watershed in Indian political history. The excesses of the Emergency, particularly in the north, turned the majority of the population, including the Muslims against the Congress. If the curbs on civil rights annoyed the Hindus, the compulsory sterilisation elicited a near-violent response from the Muslims.

So much so, for the first time after independence, the suspicion that the Congress was not the benefactor that their parents had made it out to be entered the minds of the Muslim children of partition, now nearly thirty.

From now on the Congress would find it increasingly difficult to take the Muslims for granted. In 1980, the country reacted negatively to the Janata experiment, and the Muslims who had given the Janata Party a massive mandate in 1977, too, registered their protest. However, this by no means signalled a whole-hearted return to the Congress.

In fact, the old fervour for the Congress was noticeably missing this time. An analysis of the Muslim dominated constituencies of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar bear this out. Out of a sample of 12 Lok Sabha seats with more than 25 per cent Muslim population, five went to the Congress and seven to Charan Singh's Lok

Dal. Significantly, this period also coincided with the beginning of the Congress's pro-Hindu phase.

1984 was the year of Indira Gandhi's assassination and the anti-Sikh riots. Angered by this outrage against another minority community and the blatant use of the Hindu card by the Congress, the Muslims were all set to vote it out. But the tidal wave of sympathy for Rajiv Gandhi coupled with the lack of an alternative overwhelmed them into voting for the Congress. The Imam was rendered so helpless by this phenomenon that he did not even attempt to issue a *fatwa*.

The opening of the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi complex and the controversial shilanyas ceremony on disputed land in November 1989 once again turned the Muslims against the Congress.

But this time around, even the Hindus were upset with the ruling party for its refusal to permit construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya so, the Muslims readily collaborated with the mainstream to oust Rajiv Gandhi.

Now, as the countdown to the 1991 elections begins two points are to be answered: will the Muslims vote as they did in 1980 when they were divided, or as in 1977, 1984 and 1989? Will the Muslims, despite their dissatisfaction with the Congress, vote with it in case of a last-minute wave for stability or will they defy past practice to make a point?

Soon after it was clear that elections would be held in May this year, the proliferating body of Muslim leaders sprang into action. And, the holy season of Ramzan provided the perfect setting for pre-election iftaar diplomacy.

When in the past, the Imam of the Jama Masjid, the most influential and coveted of Muslim leaders, decreed who the Muslims should vote for on the eve of the elections, this year he found that he had competition.

Indeed, realising the potential of the Imam's job, a second rung of leadership, far younger and far more articulate than the elder clergyman entered the fray this year. Not only were these younger elements brazenly irreverential towards the Imam, they were also quick to realise the importance of good public relations. This was evident from the string of political iftaar get-together hosted by them.

The first iftaar of the season was courtesy Javed Habeeb, a former office bearer of Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) and till recently a camp follower of the Imam, at the home of Sultan Salahuddin Owaisi of the Majlise-Ittihadul Muslimeen.

The highlight of the evening was the presence of a galaxy of ministers from the Chandra Shekhar government.

The next was organised by the Jamait-e-Islami. The guests included the Insaaf Party chief Syed Shahabuddin, Congress-I MPs Syed Ahmad Hashmi and C.K. Jafar Sharief and the Muslim League's Sulaiman Sait.

As the Ramzaan month drew to a close, the place of activity in the various camps increased and, on the last Friday before Id, the Imam lashed out at the Congress-I, stopping just short of announcing his support to the V.P. Singh-led Janata Dal.

It was clear that the Imam was setting a price for his support. In the next couple of days, the Imam's son, Naib Imam Ahmad Bukhari let it be known that the Imam's inclinations notwithstanding, his patronage would be available only to a party which was willing to give Muslims a fair representation in ticket allotment.

In short, the Imam through his son was conveying to the Congress-I that his doors were still open. Privately, the Imam and his son voiced the opinion that though their hearts were with V.P. Singh, they feared that only the Congress could defeat the BJP.

Simultaneously, Shahabuddin and Javed Habeeb separately tried to mobilise Muslim opinion. Habeeb, who had broken with both the Imam and V.P. Singh just before the election announcement, aligned himself with Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar and formed the National Minority Fund.

The declared objective of each of these conscience keepers was the same: to keep the BJP out by voting for a party which was most likely to defeat it.

While the Imam shrewdly kept the question of his support open, Habeeb was more or less certain that even if the two Dals could be persuaded to unite, they could take on the BJP only in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and not in states like Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat.

His case was that with V.P. Singh-led Janata Dal being almost non-existent and the Janata Dal-S showing only a marginal

presence in these states, it would be strategic to vote for the Congress here.

In fact, at a meeting specially requisitioned to formulate election strategy, the NMF decided in principle to support the Congress in non-Janata Dal states.

But, as it turned out, all these groups were in for a shock. Despite prolonged negotiations with the Congress, the Imam and his son realised that it would be fatal for them to switch their affections to this party: the feedback from the public showed that Rajiv Gandhi's popularity rating was still low.

Further confirmation of the Congress's continuing unpopularity came when teams sent out by Habeeb across the country returned with the startling news that it was VP Singh who was still the darling of the Muslim masses. This pro-Singh feeling prevailed even in states like Rajasthan and Gujarat, where Muslims were expected to favour the Congress because of the BJP threat.

According to Habeeb, who sent out teams to Rajasthan, Bihar, UP, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Assam and Andhra Pradesh, the survey established the following unanimous views as far as the Lok Sabha elections are concerned: Singh is *sharif* (honest and sincere) and stands for secularism.

Since social justice as an ideology will benefit the community in the long run, the Janata Dal/National Front candidates have to be supported regardless of their victory chances.

The community will not tolerate opposition to VP Singh from Muslim leaders.

In fact, the community is annoyed with the Muslim leadership for delaying its announcement in support to VP Singh. When specifically asked whether it would not be more sensible to vote for the Congress-I in Rajasthan and Gujarat, the respondents rejected the idea outright, arguing that even if the Janata Dal has no candidate in a particular constituency, they would rather vote for the left parties, the Bahujan Samaj Party or the Muslim League.

Completely taken aback by the results of the survey, Habeeb, who sees himself as a rising leader, decided that he could not go against the popular mood. In fact, Habeeb, who toured Rajasthan as part of the survey found himself gheraoed by angry Muslims

who wanted to know how he could have even suggested voting for the Congress-I.

Habeeb also found the common Muslims combating Congress-I volunteers with a rare zeal. Sent by the party to swing Muslim opinion towards the Congress, the volunteers, Habeeb said, would begin their exercise by pointing out that V.P. Singh had done nothing in the eleven months that he ruled.

To this the Muslims' answer would be that V.P. Singh had sacrificed his office for them and if, indeed, his rule was not effective, it was only because of mischief-makers like Arun Nehru and Arif Mohammad Khan.

Having gauged the popular Muslim sentiment, Habeeb has now sent out teams to Uttar Pradesh to find out if the community would prefer Mulayam Singh Yadav to V.P. Singh for the assembly elections. Habeeb will make a formal appeal to his community on who to vote on April 30.

As for Shahabuddin, it is clear that despite his personal fondness for Chandra Shekhar, he, too, would rather support the Janata Dal than the Samajwadi Janata Party or the Congress-I. In fact, sensing the public mood, Shahabuddin has mended fences with the Shahi Imam and has expressed his willingness to go as far as merging his Insaaf Party with the Janata Dal.

At the time of going to press, Shahabuddin had already filed his nomination from the Kishanganj Lok Sabha constituency on the Janata Dal ticket.

Judging by the near-unanimous opinion among the Muslim leadership in favour of the Janata Dal it would appear that the Muslims are going to spurn the Congress, regardless of how the mainstream votes.

More so since the Muslim leadership has no opinion of its own it is more guided by than providing guidance to the masses.

The behaviour pattern of the Muslims in this election is certain to be of interest to polsters. For one thing this election is different because, for the first time, there is a clear communal divide between the Muslims and the Hindus. In the past the two communities voted together if their interests coincided, this time they see their interests as being diametrically opposite. If for the Muslims, the issue is self preservation versus communalism, for the Hindus it is Hindu pride versus minorityism.

If the Muslims do go against the majority Hindus this year, they could be establishing many firsts. One, they would be voting as a separate and established vote bank. Two, if the Janata Dal-National Front does not come to power, they would be supporting a losing party. Three, they would be rejecting the notion that Muslims feel threatened by instability and are guided only by immediate safety requirements.

However, this is not to suggest that the Congress-I should be written off. For the average Muslim, the threat of the BJP is very real and he may well turn to the Congress-I if he perceives it as the only party in a position to defeat it. The Congress-I understands this only too well and hence it has been deliberately projecting the BJP and not the Janata Dal as its number one enemy.

The way the Congress-I sees it, the more powerful the BJP, the more threatened will be Muslims. In such a situation, the Congress-I with its past record of stability will be a far better bet for the Muslims than the Janata Dal whose only distinguishing feature in office has been V.P. Singh's lofty gesture of sacrifice.

This strategy of the Congress-I suits the BJP also. If the BJP is the Congress-I's principal enemy, it follows that the Congress-I considers itself pro-minority. And if the Congress-I panders to minorityism, the Hindus can have only one option: turn en bloc to the BJP.

So, in effect, both the Congress-I and the BJP have a vested interest in promoting each other and pretending that the Janata Dal is a non-starter. While the ground swell of opinion among Muslims indicates that this is certainly not so, the way news is projected creates its own atmosphere for or against a party. When the Muslims are constantly told that the Janata Dal does not even figure in the race, they are bound to take cognizance of it.

Quite apart from all this is the fact that Congress-I has figured out that it doesn't pay to play the Hindu card overmuch. For no matter how much it exerts itself, the Congress-I can never compete with the BJP for sheer brazenness. And, if anything, it is the Muslim-Harijan combination of the past which has returned the Congress-I in election after election.

It is for this reason that the Congress-I allowed a marathon debate to precede the framing of its manifesto. In the tussle

between the Hindu and Muslim sections of the party, the leadership finally gave in to the latter. However, the party also made several concessions to the Hindus.

The convoluted and ambiguous wording of the party manifesto bears testimony to this. If in promising to restore the status quo of religious shrines as on August 15, 1947, the Congress manifesto has made a conscious effort to be pro-Muslim, it has almost neutralised this by making a special assurance to the Hindus on the Somnath temple.

On the status quo question itself, the party has tied itself in knots, not clarifying who will restore it and how and whether the status of disputed structures will indeed be reverted to the 1947 position.

On the question of reservation to the Muslims, too, the Congress-I document is deliberately ambiguous.

However, as a senior Congressman explains manifestos are an academic exercise and only a few among even the discerning actually examine it with a microscope. What ultimately matters is how the manifesto is perceived.

A few buzz words like status quo and job reservation, he says, can quickly catch the fancy of the elite and percolate down to the masses.

This is indeed so. As Muslim leaders are quick to point out the lucrative promises in the Congress-I manifesto have slowly but surely started to make an impact on the educated Muslims. With the last crucial fortnight of the elections still far away, the message could swing the masses away from VP Singh.

So, as D-day nears, will the Congress-I succeed in edging out the Janata Dal from the hearts of the Muslims? Will the Muslims settle for safety or be daringly different this time?

Impact of the Muslim Vote in the Coming Election

How crucial is the Muslim vote in deciding who forms a government in the centre? In casting his vote, is the Muslim partial to a candidate from his own community regardless of which party he belongs to? Conversely should parties field only Muslim candidates in Muslim dominated constituencies?

The Muslim population of about 12 per cent is not spread evenly across the country. This makes the Muslim vote very

decisive in some areas even while rendering it insignificant in others. The Muslim concentration reaches its maximum in the Hindi heartland states of Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Bihar, and, outside of this belt in West Bengal and Kerala.

In states like Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh (MP) and Himachal Pradesh (HP), there is not a single Lok Sabha constituency with more than 20 per cent Muslim presence. In the northern states of Punjab and Haryana, too, they have no presence, except in Faridabad where they cross the 25 per cent mark. In the Deccan region, they are a dominant force in only two areas, Hyderabad in Andhra Pradesh where they form 32 per cent and Kerala, where they account for over 20 per cent in as many as seven out of 20 Lok Sabha constituencies.

It would be easy to conclude from these statistics that since Muslims dominate the Indian political scene in only four states, their electoral importance is negligible. This is far from the truth. Muslims may matter only in UP, Bihar, West Bengal and Kerala, but these states, particularly the first two, are politically more crucial than the rest of the country put together. In fact, UP and Bihar send up a staggering total of 139 MPs to the Lok Sabha and virtually decide the country's Prime Minister.

Of the 85 Lok Sabha seats in UP, Muslims concentrated heavily in the western regions, have a presence in 74. Of these in as many as 20 Lok Sabha seats, they account for over 20 per cent of the population. In fact, in a contiguous belt from Saharanpur to Rampur in western UP, Muslims form over 30 per cent.

Of Bihar's 54 Lok Sabha seats, Muslims have a presence in 48 and form over 20 per cent of the population in eight. Kishanganj with a Muslim population of nearly 66 per cent tops the list. Here, too, the concentration runs in a belt, but in the east, along the state's border with West Bengal.

In MP, HP, Gujarat and Rajasthan, out of a total of 95 Lok Sabha seats, only 18 seats have a Muslim presence of over 10 per cent, explaining why in these states the Bharatiya Janata Party swept the polls in the last elections, and why today the pro-Muslim Janata Dal finds it difficult to secure even a foothold.

Given this picture, what can be the impact of the Muslim vote on the current elections? Let us assume that the majority of Muslims will favour the Janata Dal in UP and Bihar, the Left

Front in West Bengal and Kerala and the Congress-I in MP, HP, Gujarat and Rajasthan.

In UP and Bihar, Muslims should help swing the verdict for the Janata Dal only provided they don't favour Muslim candidates fielded by other parties. Past trends show that the Muslims are not particularly bothered about the candidates being Muslim as long as the party they favour is in a position to win.

For example, of the six UP Lok Sabha seats with over 30 per cent Muslim population, in three, the Congress-I's Muslim nominees lost to the Janata Dal's Hindu candidates in the last elections. In all three the victory margin was well over 20 per cent, establishing that having made up their minds to vote the Janata Dal, the Muslims refused to be swayed by the presence of Muslim candidates from the Congress.

However, in the last elections the BJP was a virtual non-starter in these two states. This time around, the BJP parties stand to lose by fielding Muslim candidates. For instance, if the Janata Dal fields a Muslim and so do the Congress-I, the Samajwadi Janata Party and the Bahujan Samaj Party, the Hindus, who form a majority even in Muslim constituencies, are certain to polarise around the BJP giving it a definite edge.

On the other hand, in MP, HP, Rajasthan and Gujarat, the Muslims have practically no say. So, even if they decide to support the Congress against the BJP, they cannot help in its victory, unless the Hindu vote too goes to the Congress.

In West Bengal the Muslims should help the Left Front as they have in the past. In Kerala, where the Muslim vote has swung between the United Democratic Front (UDF) and Left Democratic Front (LDF), the Muslims recently voted against the UDF despite the Muslim League being one of its constituents. As of now there is nothing to indicate that the community has changed its mind.

(Courtesy: *Independent*)

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Downtrodden Must Have a Say in Nation's Affairs — V.P. Singh

The assassination of the former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi has dramatically altered the political scenario with the forebodings that Election'91 would usher in a period of unprecedented violence having come true in the worst possible way. There is little doubt that there is a void in the political spectrum created by the unexpected departure of Rajiv Gandhi, a major contender for the leadership of the centrist forces. The post-Rajiv era holds many questions which underline the troubling nature of the agenda ahead and the complexity of the task for those struggling to keep the vision of a secular and democratic India as the centrepiece of public policy.

In this context, *The Hindu* asked the former Prime Minister, Mr. V.P. Singh for his assessment of the emerging situation. Mr. Singh does not believe that the agenda of Election'91 has changed as a result of Rajiv Gandhi's death, but devotes a major part of his analysis of the post-Rajiv situation to the BJP's challenge, making clear that he regards this frontal assault by the BJP as the most substantive threat to national unity. In a conversation with Malini Parthasarthy in New Delhi last Tuesday, Mr. Singh said national unity could be strengthened only by the "unity of the masses on the ground." He is convinced that unless the "deprived" are given their due share in the running of the country's affairs, it will be difficult to give the people of India the

“inner strength” that will forge greater national unity.

Question: The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi must have come as a great shock to you...

Answer: Yes, although we had a different political line, the death of Rajiv Gandhi does affect one personally. He was heading the largest political party of the country which is now deprived of its leader but I am sure that the Congress will be able to face the situation.

The challenge we are now facing is that the moneyed section, who were with the Congress are now with the BJP. In the BJP, they have direct access to power. They have one drawback, they do not have mass support. The moneyed class has no attraction for the deprived. So in order to garner their votes, they have taken to the ploy of religion. It's not a religious struggle at all or a fight for religion, but the moneyed sections are wanting to use this ploy for political reasons. The National Front-Left axis is championing the cause of the deprived. If we want a strong India, we will have to involve them.

There is a feeling that outside forces are working to destabilise the country, eliminating the top leadership as demonstrated in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. Do you see the hand of outside forces? Or even an attempt to subvert the democratic process as it happened in the middle of the election campaign?

It's too early to say anything. There has to be concrete evidence. It is the responsibility of the Government to find out who were behind it. Protection should be given to the family of Rajiv Gandhi.

Do you think there has been a setback to democracy in this country?

There is no question that violence is being increasingly used in public life which we are not accustomed to. When I went to Bihar, a bomb was thrown. A boy died that time. I've gone through this. Acid packs were thrown in Bhopal. It's become a normal professional hazard. That's not a good thing for democracy.

Do you think the agenda of the rest of the election campaign has changed as a result of the assassination?

No, I don't think so. The agenda has not changed, in fact we have been dictating the agenda since 1987 and that agenda exists. As far as the people of India are concerned, the issue is what sort of lives they live. That is the agenda of this election also.

As in 1984, is there not a sense of heightened national vulnerability which will be a factor in this election? The feeling that there is threat to national integrity....

We have not taken a negative platform against the Congress. We are speaking positively, we say that to overcome the crisis that the country is facing, we need a strong and united India and, for that, the masses should be taken into confidence, they should have a say and a share in running the country's affairs, that only will give them the inner strength. If we do not address ourselves to this and allow the society to be divided, how do we give real strength to the country? Just some of the better off coming together does not give strength. The people alone can give strength to the country. The rock foundation of strength and stability are the people.

The BJP is trying to capitalise on the changed situation in the sense that they are now heavily emphasising the "Patriotic" line, they are even taking the Congress(I)'s theme of "stability". How would you counter this line of attack?

The BJP has no numbers. Where do they have the numbers? They are not going to get any seats in the south or Bihar or even the north-east. The question is have you the capacity or the power to take any line of attack when you are not getting the seats...One can't write novels in policies.

Nevertheless, the sense of heightened vulnerability can be played upon.

We always underrate the political sense of the masses. The people are very hard-headed, they see through everything. The voter is an active political ingredient who knows his own mind. All the political parties and leaders cannot make the people of India. No one can hijack any slogan or line.

Economic Character of BJP

The real point is that the moneyed class wants direct access to power and have polarised around the BJP. Basically the economic character of the BJP must be understood. Only then you can tear off the mask and recognise the real face. This has to be debated. It has to be shown how it affects the interest of the working people. Press for labour participation in management, the BJP will be the first to oppose it. Arguments that since labourers in a factory are Hindus, give them a share in management will not cut any ice. To cover up all the economic contradictions, religion is brought in, you don't have a responsibility to answer the economic contradictions. You can continue to maintain the status quo. The BJP and the Congress are the forces opposing measures for social and economic justice. This is exactly what has to be shown. How are the interests of the working people or the producer class promoted in this way?

“Most important is do we want a country of hatred or of love, of justice or of injustice?”

But at this juncture, the immediate focus is on the challenge to national unity and integrity...for which better tactical response might be to re-emphasise secularism and other such values... When the masses unite, then only the strength will come. To unite India you will first have to unite the masses. If a group of people come together, is India united? Social divisions first have to be abolished.

But there is the argument that with the revival of the Mandal Commission recommendations, your government did have a hand in reviving these social divisions...

We are trying to break these divisions. Our society has been deeply divided and that is an injustice to the producer class. That has been our weakness and it has weakened India in the past. There is a deep divide in the hearts of some people because they are deprived. You have to recognise the pain there. Just because you don't see someone's pain, it doesn't cease to exist. And if he speaks of his pain, you say he is disturbing my peace. That is the

situation we have got to address, we have to acquire strength by harmonising and unifying those who have been deprived.

Looking beyond the election, what do you think are the most important issues in the immediate future?

Most important is not the sort of government that we make...of course, that is also important and we are certainly contesting the election with a hope to form a government, but the more important question is what sort of country we make. Do we want a country of hatred or of love? Or of fraternity? Will it be a country of justice or injustice? We can make a mistake in forming a government and that can be undone in a few weeks, but a mistake about the country itself will take generations to rectify. The country is not a piece of paper, it is a map in the hearts of the people and when demarcation lines are drawn in the heart, it will have an effect on the ground. The Janata Dal will not allow this demarcation in the hearts of the people.

One question that often comes up against your critique of the BJP is that by aligning with them in 1989 did you not give them the respectability that was a launching pad for to-day's formidable presence...?

In 1989, it was almost a national consensus that the Congress should go, it was almost a universal desire and we were responding to that desire and, in the response to that desire, we worked on various strategies. I remember that in December 1987, I had said that the centrist parties would have to merge and have an alliance with the regional parties and that alliance would have to have seat adjustments with the right and the Left parties. People laughed at me and the newspapers said I was crazy, but it happened precisely that way two years later in 1989.

Time for Compromises

Even then, in 1989, when we were working out this strategy, I had taken the caution to see that we were not entering into an alliance with the BJP, our alliance was only with the National Front. What was designed was a strategy to ensure that the Opposition votes would not be divided, it was not a friendship

with the BJP. Even in the elections, I did not stand on the dais with them, the BJP said I was against them and that was at election time when everyone compromises. We didn't compromise then.

But you took their support to form a government...

Wait, let me complete...coming to the formation of a government, the largest single party did not want to form the government, we were invited because we were the second largest party. I carried the letter of the Left parties to the President, but not the letter of the BJP. They had no letter. We formed the Government because we were the second largest party and we sustained the party in the House because of the support from the Left and the BJP.

The BJP had its own compulsions to support us. When the Congress had refused they could not form the government because they were too small a group and there would of course, be no support from the Left for them. There was also such a hostile anti-Congress mood then and any action to bring the Congress back to power would have alienated the people. They could not be seen to be bringing in the Congress. And when they supported us, even then it was "critical" support. Even then we had made it clear that we were not going to deviate from our manifesto. I took a tough line during the election on this point. Both the BJP and we stated our differences on the floor of the House on Article 370 and Ramajanmabhoomi.

"In 1989, our alliance was only the National Front..... the BJP had its own compulsions to support us." The trouble started when we implemented Mandal and then they took up the Kamandal. It was obvious that it was to frustrate a measure of social justice. Remember, Mahatma (Jyotiba) Phule Said, "whenever the process of social justice nears success, the vested interests will always raise the bogey of religion to confuse the people and to frustrate the process of social justice." That is what actually happened here. A mindset has come forward to use religion to frustrate the aspirations of the people for social and economic justice. What has the BJP said regarding labour participation in management?

They did include the right to work in their manifesto...

Exactly. I was speaking to a BJP leader, I won't name him and I asked him...after all, the right to work is in your manifesto, why haven't you taken action on this?

Don't you think the realignment of centrist forces has become a necessity in the present context?

Again you are forgetting the people. You are thinking in terms of names and parties. In the coming years you will see that it is the people on whom the equilibrium will rest and not on leaders and parties. We are unifying the people at the mass level and that is what matters.

What about a realignment in the event of a hung Parliament?

There is not going to be a hung Parliament and on that there is no doubt. When we were out of power, we could see that my Government had won the confidence of the poor and we are not going to let them down. We are going to form the government.

Is there not a need for some drastic rethinking on economic policy? One of the major problems today or perhaps the major issue today is the state of the economy.

I am not surprised. I had predicted this situation way back in 1986. I had said that the Government was following a path then for which it would be in trouble by 1990. I had said that the revenue deficit would be so high that we would not be able to finance our Plan. We have now reached the same figures that I predicted then. I had said that over a period of time there has been a mis-management of macro-economics and I had argued that we should avert a catastrophe. I prepared a paper for the Cabinet, but before that I was removed from the Finance Ministry.

Increasing revenue

We need to increase revenue and cut down expenditure. When I say, increase revenue, I don't mean increasing taxes. Everyone immediately jumps to the conclusion that increasing revenue

means more taxes. Another way is to increase public sector efficiency and also employment generation. Export promotion and maintaining industrial production are also important. We cannot spare foreign exchange for consumption, we will have to have a sensible regime of foreign exchange.

Will not our having taken an IMF loan impose some constraints on our room for manoeuvrability?

We have to take the people into confidence on the situation. We cannot paint a rosy picture to them. Tell them that this is the situation and they will cooperate. This issue should be above party line and everyone should come together to agree on how to tackle this problem. We will have to protect our national priorities irrespective of the IMF. This is where we must seek the cooperation of the people on how to salvage our economic independence. To retain our economic independence, sacrifices will have to be made.

Might not your espousal of the Mandal plank prevent you from inheriting a broader centrist platform?

The issue is much more than electoral considerations. We are not in a barter arrangement and when you take up the cause of the downtrodden, you have to stand by them. We are talking of 75 per cent of India...the question is do we want an India where the 75 per cent, have a place or do we not? It is not a question of that section or this, we want to unify the totality of India where 75 per cent has to be brought in. This is the issue. Our issue relates to the lives of the people. The question is what sort of system do we offer to them in material, emotional and social terms. The issue is much bigger than an election issue of that party or this party or this election. The government should not be just an instrument of governance, it should also be an instrument of change.

Therefore, we need a government that is an instrument of change. Once that government is no longer an instrument of change, it must be jettisoned. That was why although we could have compromised to retain power, we jettisoned our Government because it could no longer function as an instrument of

social change. We had no qualm, in jettisoning it then because that would not have served the purpose of social change.

(Courtesy: *The Hindu*)

It's a BJP-Congress(I) Fight

—Advani

Anand K. Sahay

The BJP leader, Mr. L.K. Advani, believes that in the forthcoming election, the real fight is between his party and the Congress(I) and expresses the confidence that the BJP would form the government at the Centre. He regards the Janata Dal as a party which never did crystallise fully and which would be out of the picture altogether if it did poorly in the poll.

Mr. Advani has also noted in this interview to *The Hindu* that the BJP would not bring into controversy religious places other than the one at Ayodhya if it wins the election or even if it becomes the principal Opposition party. However, it would withdraw the Ayodhya dispute from the court.

QUESTION: Is there any specific feature in this election which was missing in earlier elections, a distinguishing feature?

ANSWER: Almost all decisive elections earlier, 1977, 1980 or 1989, were informed by an anti-establishment feeling. This is the first time when you don't see a strong, categorical, clear-cut anti-establishment feeling because today's establishment happens to be a party which is not a principal contender in the battle for power.

This is one thing. Yet another difference is we do not have the kind of polarisation that always existed in the kind of polari-

sation that always existed in the preceding elections — a polarisation between two camps, one of the Congress and the other, non-Congress. In fact, there are three main contenders this time. You will have some areas where the polarisation is between the Congress and anti-Congress, in certain areas between the BJP and anti-BJP, and in some, between the Janata Dal and anti-Janata Dal.

You have said there can't be a very positive or negative feeling about the present Government of three or four months. But don't you think the basic election agenda was set at the time of the V.P. Singh Government of which you were virtually a partner, by the developments of that time whether you take the Mandal or the Ayodhya issue? The Congress(I) has been out in the cold for nearly 18 months. So, it really boils down to you being responsible, or if you like, the V.P. Government. Let me call it your Government.

No, you can't blame us for the two issues you mention were the main cause of our disenchantment with V.P. which led to the fall of his Government. Thus, we cannot be identified with the establishment on these counts. The principal agenda certainly was set in November when we withdrew support from the Janata Dal Government leading to its fall. You may recall Mr. V.P. Singh did not resign immediately after we withdrew support. His explanation was that he wanted to have a debate on this issue of secularism, of communalism, of nationalism. I said why confine it to the four walls of the House (Lok Sabha), but also have it outside. Let the people decide. At that time V.P. was not ready. Nor were the Leftists. The Congress certainly was not. So, I think the issues in this election have certainly been set by us.

In that sense this is the most ideological election in many, many years. The issue you have posed is that only nationalism, or in your case, Hindu nationalism, can provide stability. You have not posed the question of the identity of your party, either now or in the Jan Sangh days, in as sharp or extensive a manner as you have done this time.

Yes, that is true because in all the preceding elections, we were part of the anti-Congress/non-Congress camp. Even in 1989, these issues had been projected by us. That is why we had

said we will fight the election on our own manifesto. But the fact that because we had seat adjustments with the Janata Dal, a party that had a diametrically opposite position on issues like the Minorities Commission, Urdu as the second language in U.P., like Ayodhya, the battle on these issues could not take place. We also, naturally, played them down because of anti-Congressism.

Anti-Congressism was the principal motivating factor at that time though in my earlier analyses also I have always maintained that while the success of all Opposition parties, particularly the Janata Dal, had its roots only in anti-Congressism, in the success — remarkable success — of the BJP in 1989, there was a positive content also. This stemmed from our distinct positions on our own issues.

Since the monopoly of power of the Congress party, including in the States, is no longer visible, is there still room for anti-Congressism as a fundamental platform for our national parties?

Today it would vary from State to State, area to area. In areas where the Congress is the dominant party even today, anti-Congressism will play its part like Karnataka or Andhra Pradesh.

Surely, that cannot determine the future of India?

Yes it won't. That is why I have said at the national level there will be no such thing as anti-Congressism. But in parts it will be the Janata Dal and anti-Janata Dal or BJP and anti-BJP, but maybe, at the national level, in terms of the ideological battle, it will be the BJP and anti-BJP, for today, on all these issues relating to secularism, all the other parties are on the one side and we, on the other.

Well, it would seem it is not the issue of secularism which is being posed, but the issue of Hindutva and what it means.

No, I believe it is the issue of secularism. I have always denied playing the Hindu card in the way the term is used. We always play the patriotic card and in India nationalism and patriotism divested of its Hindu element do not have any meaning, any force, any dynamism. It does not have the potential even to keep the country united. The disunity that is in the country today has not been there only for the last four decades and it has been growing. One reason is that in the name of secularism, we

have constantly, systematically undermined the unifying ingredient of this nationalism.

Which is Hinduism?

Which is Hinduism. Yes. But I am not talking of Hinduism as a religion or as something which is contradistinct from Islam or some other thing. I am talking of the Hindu content of nationalism. For instance, I have spoken today (in a newspaper article) of the (Muslim) League's attack on 'Vande Mataram' (the patriotic poem of Bankim Chandra) in which it was denounced as idolatrous. It was denounced by the Muslim League as anti-Islamic. Gandhiji had to reply to it and he said he did not understand this. But from the purely secular point of view that is pronounced today, the League's position was absolutely correct. According to it, we can't worship India like a mother.

But don't you think it is also understandable for the minorities to feel uneasy when in a large country 80 per cent are....(Hindus)?

The unease of the minorities I can see. But I don't blame the minorities (for it). I blame the political parties. I would only recall that it was this sense of uneasiness in the minorities that Jinnah calculatedly created and which led to the Partition of the country.

After all, what was the justification for Partition that he gave? That if the Congress gets independence for undivided India, it would be Hindu rule in which Muslims would be uneasy. They would be condemned to be slaves of Hindus forever. The theory propounded by all the so-called secular parties and their attack on the BJP and the sense of uneasiness in the minorities are absolutely parallel to the situation prior to Independence with the difference that the role of the Muslim League has been taken up by these pseudo-secular parties.

And, well, the 1947 developments told us that appeasement does not pay. It did not avert the Partition of India. Even leaders like Nehru and Gandhiji who could not be accused of being Hindu chauvinists or narrow fundamentalists, could not allay the misgivings of the Muslims. Partition had to be conceded. Riots had to be had on an unprecedented scale. Are we going to learn

a lesson from this or not? Unfortunately, all political parties in the country have refused to learn a lesson.

Only today the situation is worsened and aggravated. You see, in the case of Nehru and Gandhiji, it was a case of perspective, not the desire for any power or any vote bank. Now it is pure, sordid vote-banks.

Do you think your party would have taken out the 'rath yatra' and campaigned in such a manner for Hindutva and such issues had Mandal not come earlier? Many believe you took out your campaign because you thought Mandal would divide 'Hindu society'.

It may be fortuitous. But it was in month of June (last year) when I issued that statement warning V.P. Singh's Government that if there is a confrontation on the issue of Ayodhya between the Government and the people, the country may witness the biggest ever mass movement in history. Now, this was not an idle statement. I am not inclined to make statements of this kind. Even at that time when I had not decided the course of action, I had not decided about my 'rath yatra', but I had decided in my mind that this time on October 30, the BJP would be there in full strength.

Why October 30?

That was the 'kar seva.' In June had expired the four months given to the V.P. Singh Government by the VHP in January and nothing had happened. It was at that point of time that I was asked that since the four months had expired and kar seva was being announced, and tentatively it was for October 30, what will happen? I said there are still two or three months to go. I hoped the V.P. Singh Government would find a solution, but if he is not able to find one and there is a confrontation, the consequences would be disastrous.

Had you assured Mr. V.P. Singh before the last election that the BJP would not bring up the Ayodhya issue as a critical point?

Not at all. This is baseless. In fact, after the BJP National Council met in Bombay in October 1989 (where the Shiv Sena cooperation was clinched), there were Janata Dal statements in Delhi that they will have to reconsider their proposals for seat

adjustment with us. In Delhi later I candidly told Mr. V.P. Singh that the decision in our party to have seat adjustments with you is a consensus decision of the leadership and not of the rank and file. I also said if the adjustments did not come off, our rank and file will heave a sigh of relief.

Our ranks are not happy, I said, that we are having a truck with you because your attitude on all issues we raise is diametrically opposed to ours, though, for my part, I would not be happy, for if there is no adjustment, you would be guaranteeing the Congress's return to power.

I also said the principal beneficiaries of the seat adjustment would be you though we would also benefit; and if there is no seat adjustment you would be the principal loser though we would also lose.

I did not say this to him, but it was our assessment that in the absence of seat adjustment, the principal party in the Opposition would be us and not the Janata Dal. So, at no point did we give the Janata Dal any assurance of any kind. We refused to do it.

Are you looking forward to being Prime Minister in a few months' time?

I am looking forward to getting a majority for the party. These days I never wanted to go into the question of Prime Ministership or leadership. When someone asked me for my opinion I gave my opinion but it was felt in the party that we need not bring up that issue at all.

Why has the BJP not enlarged on other major issues of the day when the country is in multi-dimensional mess? Why is there the focus only on what you call the secular question?

So far as the 1989 manifestoes of various parties are concerned, you may find the BJP's the most comprehensive. That was not too far back. Since then our positions have not changed very radically, while those of many parties might change because of the collapse of economic statism the world over.

So, now that holy cow of the public sector getting the commanding heights of the economy may not be repeated (laughs good humouredly), who knows, even by the Marxists. Thus, others may change. But we would certainly like to spell out in some detail what would be our stand on some issues relating to

industrial growth, business, or guaranteeing the common man the minimum needs of life. All these are bound to be spelled out. But your question is why the focus is on one issue. That is because the focus is on (that) one issue in the whole country. It happens often that certain issues come to dominate the whole scene which, according to analysts, influence the verdict. So everyone is more concerned with that.

Would you say that if you came to power, or if you were the principal opposition, you would uninhibitedly advocate the winding up of the Planning Commission or undoing the MRTP(Act or Commission) i.e., beliefs associated with the Nehru model of development?

Yes, we would like to depart very sharply from the Nehru model of development, but on specific issues like the MRTP and the Planning Commission, etc., I would not like to say anything until the whole thing is finalised.

On foreign policy, we are operating in an environment where there is absence of Soviet power. The U.S. is the real big power left and it has shown its muscle. In such a situation, would you like to redefine non-alignment? Once you spoke of genuine non-alignment, but there is no need for that now. So, what next?

Yes, redefine nonalignment, but even though we think that the U.S. has shown its muscle, we think that India's foreign policy must be independent.

What does that mean?

It simply means that the Government of India must recognise the potential of this country. After-all, Japan or Germany are also emerging as powers in their own right. Though they have very friendly ties with America, that does not make them camp-followers of America. So, if there is a school of thought that in the changed situation India should be tied to America's apron strings, like, say, Pakistan, I would like India to pursue a very pragmatic policy in which the potential of this country to become a pole in global politics on its own should never be forgotten.

Isn't the concept of Greater Hinduism or 'Akhand Bharat' to which your party is spiritually aligned, only one step away

from Hindutva? Will that influence your foreign policy, especially vis-a-vis the neighbours?

No. As far back as 1957 or '56 the Jan Sangh had occasion to define what it meant by Akhand Bharat. It came in the form of a joint statement by Deendayal Upadhyaya (the Jan Sangh ideologue) and Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia (the Socialist leader). Dr. Lohia those days tried to come very close to the Jan Sangh. Lohia said the Akhand Bharat slogan might give the Muslims the feeling that you would like to invade Pakistan.

To this, Upadhyay replied that we regard the formation of Pakistan or the division of India as unfortunate for the people of both countries. But it is a reality. It is an international fact that we recognise and respect such global facts. We would not like to undo them by the use of force. But we do think that it would be a happy day if one day even the people of Pakistan recognise this and there is a demand from Pakistan itself, a voluntary desire for a re-unification, and there is, if not one country, a confederation of India and Pakistan (then Bangladesh had not been formed).

Today if I have to interpret Akhand Bharat I would think in those terms. Why not a confederation of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, perhaps even Sri Lanka.

What are the odds? Do you think there are more chances of your being in government or being the principal opposition?

I am optimistic that we shall be in Government. My own assessment is that even the voter does not want a hung Parliament. If I were to give a parallel. In 1980 the Janata Party had split into the Janata and Lok Dal and there was disenchantment with the Janata rule because of infighting. But there was no swing-back to Mrs. Gandhi's Congress prior to the election. In this situation, many talked of a hung Parliament on the assumption that so many parties were in picture. But as the campaign went along and to the common voter, it appeared the Congress is the first in the race and toward the end of the campaign there was a powerful swing in favour of the Congress with the result that the Janata Party and the Lok Dal were left with just 72 or 73 seats in all.

Something similar can happen this time as well. This is what I expect to happen. Who would be the beneficiary of this kind of

swing depends upon who, in the perception of the electorate, is first in the race among three parties (the BJP, the Congress(I) and the Janata Dal) towards the end of the campaign. I am saying that these predictions about a hung Parliament may not be valid and it is on that basis that I am optimistic.

Why is there no anti-Congress feeling this time? If you recall, the Opposition won the 1977 election, but the echo of the Emergency did not die down at least in the propaganda of parties, until the next election. This time there is no trace of the corruption issue, the Bofors issue, which was the central issue a year and a half ago. Why have things changed so sharply?

Because even in 1980 the Congress was a force. Today it has suddenly become, no, not a non-force, but just one of the forces. The dominant position is lost.

Let me take you back to the hypothesis of the hung Parliament. If there is one, in spite of your expectations to the contrary, would you visualise a European kind of cooperation? Would you then tell the Janata Dal and the Left 'come along now', like last time, except that this time you might be in the lead.

I would not say anything about that situation though we have never emphasised political untouchability. All the other parties have.

If you come to power in Delhi, or in U.P., if you win the State Assembly poll, would you 'liberate' the 'Krishna Janmabhoomi' in Mathura and the temple in Banaras?

So far as the BJP is concerned, we have never spoken about anything except Ayodhya.

The Congress party's handling of various issues has been very inept. I should imagine that would weaken the party in the eyes of the electorate. Would you say the Janata Dal may have been similarly weakened as a result of its policy positions or organisational problems, especially of the kind visible in recent days?

The Janata Dal has not been able to crystallise at all and there does not seem any chance of it being able to crystallise. In this

election at the present point of time the Janata Dal is a contender, but it is not a stable pole. It may disappear. Suppose it does not fare well in this election, it is out. At the national level, the main contest is between the BJP and the Congress, though in U.P. and Bihar, it may be between the BJP and the Janata Dal.

Cong-I Offered to Protect Mosques — Banatwala

Sriprakash Menon

The Congress-I has agreed that the status of various places of worship, as they existed on 15 August 1947, will be protected by appropriate legislation, Indian Union Muslim League general secretary G.M. Banatwala told *The Independent*.

Banatwala said talks with Congress-I were held both in Kerala and Delhi but it was on April 9, after talks with Congress-president Rajiv Gandhi, that "areas of agreement finally emerged."

Banatwala, a former MLA from Umerkhadi (Maharashtra), represented the Ponnani in Kerala. In an exclusive interview he talked of the League's relationship with the Congress-I, the Left Democratic Front in Kerala, the Ayodhya imbroglio and other issues facing Muslims in the country.

Is the IUML pact with the Congress-I going to be a long term one?

Wide-ranging issues were discussed and a broad agreement with the Congress-I on several issues was arrived at. This included adhering to the court verdict if no negotiated settlement was reached in the Ram Janmabhoomi case, the implementation of the Mandal Commission report with special provisions including reservations for the minorities, statutory

status for the Minorities Commission, suitable amendments to the Wakf Act.

We also agreed upon adequate measures to maintain and promote communal harmony including the strengthening of the intelligence network with minority representation, a proper composite police force, a special court to expedite riot cases and statutory compensation and relief for riot victims.

What caused the strain in your party's relationship with the Congress-I?

The IUML resolved to sever its link with the United Democratic Front led by the Congress-I in Kerala as it was dissatisfied with some Congress-I policies. It decided to enter an electoral alliance and adjustments with parties other than the BJP and the CPM whose policies it found satisfactory. Our electoral adjustments are strictly issue-based and not opportunistic.

Did you hold talks on seat adjustments with the Congress-I?

Seat adjustments for the Kerala elections will be decided by state leaders. There is no problem over seat-sharing as for nearly 21 years we have been going along with the Congress-I. Talks for seat adjustments are also going on in Tamil Nadu and West Bengal.

What do you think of Imam Bukhari's appeal to Muslims to vote against the Congress-I?

So far as Muslims are concerned, no party's track record is good. We have serious reservations about the Congress-I on certain issues. We are also not happy with the Dal's performance. It is sad that not a single party has been consistent in its attitude towards the Muslims. The Imam is an influential and respected figure among the Muslims so his appeal to them may be significant. But the IUML stand has also been taken through a consensus among Muslims.

What is your party's stand on the Mandal Report?

We are for the implementation of the report. But it has not taken into consideration the problems of the minorities as has been sharply focussed in the Gopal Commission Report.

How do you think your party can help solve the Ayodhya imbroglio? There is a feeling that Muslim and pro-Muslim parties have taken a political and not spiritual stand on the dispute?

Our stand is just that failing a negotiated settlement the court verdict shall prevail. However, they are not demanding just the Babri Masjid but another 1,000 places of worship. The IUMML has been demanding a legislation to protect places of worship as they existed on 15 August 1947 and a bill was moved in the eighth Lok Sabha but was rejected in the house.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the BJP have said the mosque has not been in use for some time now and cannot be of great religious significance.

That the mosque was not being used is utterly baseless news. Prayers were held there until 22 December 1949 after which it was locked. But prayers were going on there until the day of dispute.

Did you disagree with the LDF on major issues in Kerala? Was the CPM-led LDF in Kerala interested in an alliance with your party?

When we withdrew from the UDF we made it clear that our support was issue-based. The leftists have been against the shariat. They do not believe in Mandal and want the Karpoori Thakur formula to be implemented.

The CPM also had reservation about Article 30 of the constitution which guarantees the educational rights of the minorities. They want everything to be state-owned. CPM state leaders are trying to cheat the people of Kerala by saying reservations have to be decided on the basis of a general consensus rather than by Mandal. And yet they want to give the impression that they are for Mandal.

It was E.M.S. Namboodiripad who declared the IUMML and the LDF could join hands. But the LDF later looked towards the Tamil Nadu formula. This inconsistency only showed EMS to be a prisoner of his own party.

What is the remedy for peace in Jammu and Kashmir? Do you think the abrogation of Article 370 will improve the demands from the states for a special status.

In case of Jammu and Kashmir have to win the confidence of the people. Genuine problems both in Kashmir and Punjab should be addressed within the framework of the Indian constitution. Janata Dal leader George Fernandes had made slight progress in Kashmir but could not go on due to pressure from the BJP. The scrapping of Article 370 will only escalate the crisis as this was the article which made the Muslims come to India.

Why don't the Muslims come to the mainstream of Indian politics which keeps them away. The BJP equates nationalism with Hinduism and this gives a distorted idea. The national mainstream cannot be so defined.

Muslims are eager to join the national mainstream. It is the fascist forces and the government's policies which keep them away. The BJP equates nationalism with Hinduism and this gives a distorted idea. The national mainstream cannot be so defined.

What about the argument that why should only the BJP and the Shiv Sena be branded communal when they believe in positive secularism? What do you feel about parties with a religious background? Do you think the Election Commission should ban all such parties.

The BJP claim of secularism is totally bogus. The Muslims have never demanded any extra-constitutional rights. But they have been denied even the constitutional rights guaranteed to them. Parties like the BJP and the Sena which have the Hindutva ideology cannot be called secular. The IUML has not asked for an Islamic state. Our demand is constitutional.

Muslim leaders have been indifferent to illiteracy and poverty in their community. What is your party doing about this?

Politics have played havoc with the upliftment of our community. Our party has been focussing on these issues. Various measures for the economic and social upliftment of the educationally and socially backward minorities like the provision of adequate credit facilities for Muslims and other minorities were agreed upon during the talks with the Congress-I.

What do you have to say about the common civil code?

The personal law of Muslims has never come in the way of the country's unity and integrity. It is a myth that the common code will help improve the social condition of the Muslims. Insisting on it is unjustified and is not in national and secular interests.

How would you rate the LDF performance? How is the electorate in Kerala? Any special reason for choosing Ponnani as your constituency?

The LDF has aggravated several problems and did not pursue any developmental policies due to its own limitations as the communist ideology is cracking all over the world. The electorate there is mature and it is not easy to dupe them.

I'm contesting from Ponnani for the fifth time. I cannot speak or read Malayalam but the state has proved it is above regional and linguistic considerations. I want Kerala to be an ideal for the rest of the country. There is no question of a vote bank now as the electorate is enlightened.

(Courtesy: *The Independent*)

BJP Dilemma Over Ram & Rajya

Anjali Puri

Just three days old in office, the Bhartiya Janata Party Government in Uttar Pradesh headed by Mr Kalyan Singh, is trying to strike a difficult balance between the compulsions of *rajya*(rule).

The 59-year old Chief Minister's first official gesture after coming to power—a Cabinet mission to Ayodhya, to the accompaniment of slogans like “*Ram lalla hum aye hain, mandir yahin banayenge*” (Lord we've come, will build the temple right here)—seemed like an extension of the party's strident election campaign in Uttar Pradesh. As the Chief Minister himself indicated in his first interview to a newspaper after coming to power, the chief aim of the exercise was to dispel the impression that the party had deviated from its stand on the mandir issue.

On the other hand, the Chief Minister's repeated appeals to Muslims to cooperate on the issue, his refusal to name deadline and his reluctance to commit his government to a firm course of action on the issue, if negotiations fail, seem to be sending out signals of a different kind. The duality of tone indicates the uncertainty that is only too evident in the party echelons here over how to retain the Ram card without alienating minorities or entering into a possible collision course with the Centre and the courts. Excerpts from the interview-:

Question: In these three days, have you been able to gauge what sort of a government you have inherited?

Answer: We have inherited lawlessness, communal discord, social tensions, criminalisation of politics, and, worst of all, a terrible economic crisis. The situation is so bad that even if something goes slightly wrong, there will be no money to pay officials their salaries. All development plans have come to a standstill. I want the public to know the kind of difficulties we are facing. With their blessing, I have no doubt we shall overcome them. We will give Uttar Pradesh a clean and healthy administration.

How are you going to keep your promise of building the Ram temple?

Our stand is very clear, I will make it clearer. We are firmly committed to the construction of the Ram temple on Ram Janmabhoomi. It is a symbol of our pride, our religious freedom, our national culture. We will reopen a dialogue with the Muslim community to achieve this aim through peaceful negotiations

Have you set any deadline for completing this process, or fixed any date for initiating it?

It's too early yet, we have just come to power. But our stand, as I said, is very clear on the issue, and I have no doubts we shall succeed in persuading our Muslim brothers to help us build the Ram temple.

Suppose you cannot? Will you try to acquire the disputed site through an ordinance (some of your partymen are already talking about this) or will you obey the court verdict?

I consider the first question a hypothetical one. Why should we start with the premise that we will fail?

Do you rule out an ordinance?

I don't say that, I say that we are hopeful at the moment of a dialogue. On the second point, our stand remains the same as before, that this matter cannot be decided by a court. There are some issues based on belief on faith, and they are outside a court's purview. Our Christian friends firmly believe that Virgin Mary gave birth to Lord Jesus. In today's scientific world, this may be challenged but no man of science can challenge it, nor can any court. It's matter of faith. There are so many other examples.

So in these talks that you are planning to initiate with the Muslim community, you will not go into the matter of evidence and proof at all, but only argue your points on the issue of faith?

There are no limitations where the talks are concerned. They will be held with an open heart and an open mind.

Some people have already reacted adversely to your gesture of making a pledge, along with your entire Cabinet, at a disputed site. They feel that regardless of what is said on political platform, a government should not make such a gesture.

Our stand is clear. We have not taken any new stand after coming to power. We wanted to convey a message to the entire country that there is no deviation from the BJP's commitment to build the Mandir. These criticisms are completely unfounded.

How do you react to the charge that you are in a fix now and are forced to make these gestures, because building the temple is not as easy as promising to do so on a political platform?

By promising to build the temple, the BJP has soared far above other parties, which are still stuck in a bog. As for the temple, it is our firm commitment, it is linked with the emotions of crores of Hindus. That is why I appeal to our Muslim brethren once more, don't prolong this matter endlessly, we all have to live together, we all have to live in peace.

You spoke earlier of a disturbed communal situation in the state. Your party also faces the charge of having contributed to communal tension during the recent election campaign, for example, by fielding provocative speakers like Sadhvi Ritambhara. How will your government seek to assuage the feelings aroused by your campaign?

I have heard Ritambhara's cassette. It was not a speech that would arouse communal passions. She talks about creating unity within Hindu society, she has criticised the weaknesses in Hindu society. There is nothing wrong with that.

But there is a strong anti-Muslim tenor to her speeches and statements as well. Her speeches have contributed to riots.

Not at all. I can say with confidence about Uttar Pradesh that wherever the Vishwa Hindu Parishad has held sabhas in lakhs-I myself have been present at several of them, there were no riots caused by the speeches. The riots were provoked by the poisonous speeches of the leaders of the then ruling party here....Of course, when a popular struggle is launched, one or two things may be said in the heat of the moment, but the BJP or the VHP has not approved of such slogans when they are raised. I assure my Muslim brothers that they shall be the safest under the BJP, they need not worry. But they should not let themselves be led astray by anyone. Apart from the temple issue which is our topmost priority another of our top priorities will be to make the state a riot-free state, a state free of fear. There will be no discrimination towards any community and no appeasement either.

You have stated that you will investigate some of the actions of your predecessor government. How do you propose to go about this?

We are setting up a commission to investigate the actions of officials involved in the November 2 and October 30 killings, as well as the role played by leaders in the then government by creating communal tension through poisonous speeches, etc. The actions of both the guilty of officials and certain leaders in government will be scrutinised by the commission, but anybody against whom charges are levelled will be given a chance to defend himself. There will be nothing arbitrary about this, no spirit of revenge.

Why are you taking so long to announce the portfolios of your ministers?

I have hardly assumed office. I was sworn in on Monday evening, on Tuesday, we went to Ayodhya. We will be finalising them soon.

There are already comments in the press, inspired by complaints from your partymen, perhaps that adequate regional representation has not been provided in your council of ministers?

I think it is too early for the press to make such comments. I have already made it clear that this is a small ministry, and will be expanded very soon.

A last question. There may be pressure on you, as Uttar Pradesh's first BJP government, to take up issues such as Krishna Janmabhoomi and Kashi Vishwanath along with Ram Janmabhoomi. What is your thinking on these?

The immediate question before us is Ram Janmabhoomi, on account of which a fire has been created.

And after that?

After that, various matters will come up. We will sit down and sort them out. But the burning question is Ram Janmabhoomi.

(Courtesy: Indian Express)

Kamandal Overtook Our Obsession With Mandal: Biju Patnaik

Nirupama Subramanian

Bijoyananda Patnaik has been hitting the front pages of newspapers ever since the heady days of Independence. As the pilot-owner of Kalinga Airlines more than four decades ago, he transported Indian troops to Kashmir to prevent its occupation by Pakistani forces. Thereafter, on instructions from Nehru, Biju Babu, in a daring mission, airlifted Sokarno, then an underground leader of the Indonesian freedom struggle, out of the archipelago.

Today, those days of daring do have been replaced by bravado of another kind: The 76 year-old senior leader of the Janata Dal has gained notoriety for making politically outrageous statements. From calling the BJP a party of Marwaris, to suggesting a Congress-JD coalition, Patnaik is doing what he does best—make waves. In an acerbic interview with Nirupama Subramanian, the seasoned politician made his irritation with the world of “petty politics” clear.

Excerpts:

Q: Just as the election results were declared, one of the first statements you made was that the Congress and the Janata Dal should join hands. For someone who has been opposed to the Congress party for so many years, was this not a strange posi-

tion to take?

A: No, it only shows that I have risen above parties. My view is that the government (at the Centre) must have stability, must have acceptability. This kind of minority government just cannot evoke the confidence of the people; and it certainly cannot gain the confidence of the International agencies. No one is going to take a government with a minority status, seriously.

Most of the other leaders (in the Janata Dal) have not been in politics as long as I have; they are not thinking of the nation's interests first, they feel it is the party's interest which is more important. These leaders say that we are a separate party and that we have been voted only to be in the opposition. Of course, we have been voted to be in the opposition. But since no one has a majority, I was thinking beyond the narrow confines of party lines.

But is the Janata Dal not a separate party, made up of people who have come together, according to their own admission, for certain values. Now, if it "joins" the Congress, don't you think it will lose this identity completely?

What is the make-up of the Janata Dal? Except for a few socialists, a majority of them are former Congressmen — yesterday's, today's or day-before-yesterday's Congressmen. I, myself, headed the first Congress government in Orissa in 1961 — I cannot make the Congress out to be a hostile party. Of course now, the values in the present Congress set-up have taken a nosedive. Earlier, there was a spirit of sacrifice; today the only value is "what can I get out of the party".

So, if there is an invitation....

(interrupts) There is bound to be one and why should we back out? We have to keep in mind the national interests.

How successful do you think the new Congress government will be in solving the country's problems?

Not at all. This government will be able to solve nothing. What President Venkataraman suggested was a truly national government, so that the people could get out of the old concepts like the Mandir and Ram and think about the development of the nation. We should have the best man at the head of the govern-

ment. That sort of think alone will win the confidence of the people on the one hand, and international confidence on the other.

All these quarrels about who becomes the Prime Minister are of no consequence to 50 crores of people below the poverty line. What can the Congress government do? Even Nehru's government could not do anything, so what can these tip-tops (new leaders) do?

The only good thing that has happened in these elections is that the Prime Minister is not from UP. But apart from that, a minority government can do nothing. What is the Congress party without a victory in the north?

The other day, Ajit Singh said that the main threat to the country was from the BJP....

What is the BJP? The BJP has created a Ram-obsession which has caught the imagination of the people. You tried to create an obsession by creating Mandal. Then the BJP brought in *kamandal*; and the Mandal obsession was superceded by *kamandal*.

Everybody is trying to create an obsession for capturing votes. You talk of social justice, they talk of Hindu *rashttra*.

Don't you think that the Congress and the Janata Dal becoming one entity will help the BJP become the main opposition party in Orissa?

There is no BJP in Orissa.

But there is every chance....

There is no BJP in Orissa. There are only two people there from that party in the state assembly. One of them stood for the parliamentary elections and lost.

Do you think that the Janata Dal in Orissa would have done better if you had allowed V.P. Singh to campaign there?

Who stopped him from coming to Orissa and campaigning? He campaigned in other states where the party performed poorly — the party has not done well at all in UP, his home-ground. Nor has it done well in Rajasthan. And what about Delhi?

To what do you attribute the failure of the Janata Dal in Orissa?

It was a total Rajiv wave. Rajiv went from Orissa and then died. The assassination was juxtaposed by the Congress, with its election campaign. Our defeat had nothing to do with any Singh or Patnaik. Where we had previously won by over a lakh votes, we managed to scrape through with barely 10,000.

Was the failure in any way related to the performance of the state government?

No, on the contrary, it was the performance of the state government that kept the losses to a reasonably low level. There were other reasons also — probably the candidates were unsuitable.

Would you say that the Janata Dal requires a change in leadership?

That is for the leader of the party to decide. The leader must take the initiative. If the leadership fails, it has to be the first to recognise this fact.

Politically, what is it that the Janata Dal must do?

What is the Janata Dal? It is only a Dal. I want to talk about the nation; not the Dal. The nation is in a terrible state — trade balances are down like hell; we have borrowed like hell; we even have to borrow to pay interest charges; prices are up.... they are beyond the means of any ordinary person.

Forty-five years of Independence and 50 crores of people below the poverty line! We have today the 1935 British Civil Services Act on which the country is run. It created a bureaucracy designed to rule, not to serve.

Would you agree with the argument that after his resounding victory in Bihar, Laloo Prasad Yadav has emerged as the most important and powerful man within the Janata Dal?

Angry What is all this? Nobody is an important man, everybody is only a party man. That is enough for now.

It is being said that your alignment with Ajit Singh is a front against V.P. Singh and Laloo Prasad....

Furious What kind of petty questions are these? I have no time to answer them.... (strides out of the interview)

(Courtesy: *Sunday Observer*)

Mixed Reactions to BJP Religious Drive: A Definite Influence

V. Shankar Aiyar

L.K. Advani's Rath Yatra that took off from Somnath and wound its way to the downfall of the National Front government was undoubtedly the single most important political event of 1990. A phenomenon that elicited unprecedented public response and set the political agenda for the new decade. The question that haunts politicians today is "will the response be reflected on the ballot?"

A team of *Express* reporters, who retraced the route of the rath in Gujarat and Maharashtra, found that the primary and vital impact of the Rath Yatra has been the inclusion of the BJP and L.K. Advani as political entities in the rural minds. A fact that is agreed to by all parties and that has instilled confidence within the rank and file of the BJP.

Another interesting aspect observed is the fact that while in Gujarat there exists a perceptible impact of the Rath Yatra, in Maharashtra the impressions of the phenomenon are largely faded and washed out by the historic predominance of the Congress(I).

As far as the people of Gujarat are concerned — from Somnath to Ahmedabad — the Rath Yatra was an event they saw, and is now but a memory. Events thereafter have forced them to shift their priorities. Today their immediate concern is the rising cost of living and inflation. True, the Rath Yatra has definitely

done a lot for the BJP. The most important achievement being the fact that the voters in rural Gujarat — so used to the Patel culture and Congressmen — now know of an entity called the BJP and a politician called L.K. Advani. But if the BJP mandarins believe that the Rath Yatra is the mantra that will take them to power, there is a real need for re-thinking. For the Rath Yatra is indeed an ace up their sleeve but is definitely not the trump card.

R.B. Jabra, a milk-trader in Junagarh puts it succinctly: "If the elections had been announced soon after the arrest of Advaniji, the BJP would have swept the polls. As of now the impact has lost its edge with time and the advent of other developments like price rise. It is not as if all is lost -- the BJP as a party is now well-entrenched in the minds of our rural folk. There will a definite swing towards the party — 20 to 25 per cent in the coming polls." As for himself, Jabra promises to vote for the Congress. "The prices were much lower then," is his reasoning.

Similar are the sentiments of Devji Ambawi, a farmer from Gadodhar in Keshod taluka: "I don't think people remember the Rath Yatra all that much *wo to bhuli gayo.*" Ambawi who spends his spare time watching video feels that "with all this rise in prices most of my villagers will weigh the pros and cons and of course consult the village patil." He, like Jabra admits that there will be a considerable effect of the Yatra in the forthcoming polls. Anandbhai, leader of the Bharwad community in Junagarh district, echoes Jabra and Ambawi. He avers that "there will be a clear influence of the Yatra but I don't feel it will be an overwhelming one."

One noticeable aspect throughout the route was the awareness of the people of the fact that the Rath Yatra was not purely religious but also a political campaign. Keshubhai, another farmer from Keshod feels that "the massive attendance for the Rath Yatra was due to the fact that Saurashtra has always been known to be a pilgrim centre. To say that all those who attended the Rath Yatra would vote for the BJP would be totally misleading." A feeling echoed by a wide section of rural-folk in the districts of Junagarh, Rajkot, and Surendranagar. Clearly those who attended the Yatra didn't want to be taken for granted.

Of course it is not that effect of the awareness has been totally negative. Take for instance Maruji Mohanbhai, a trader

from Surendranagar district: "I do remember having seen the Ratha Yatra and so would a lot of people. We now know that there is a party called the BJP... the last time I voted for the Janata Dal but this time round I think I am going to vote for the BJP." Others like Maliben, a resident of Shapur village near Somnath believe that the BJP is the right medicine for the country today. "My village," she says, "is going to vote for the BJP.... their chances are better because of the Rath Yatra." But most of the rural-folk would rather wait for sometime before committing themselves, the Rath Yatra notwithstanding.

The urbanites too echo the feelings of their rural brethren. Most of them feel that the Rath Yatra will have an impact on the polls but hasten to add that the rise in prices, inflation and the question of a stable government also feature in their scheme of things. As school teacher Neeta Dave puts it, "It is true that a lot of people attended the Rath Yatra but things have changed. That was religion, this is politics. People are not going to vote for the Rath Yatra. The public wants a government which can look after their day-to-day problems.... I for one would vote any party which promises to bring down the prices."

As one enters the industrialised and urbanised areas, there is a perceptible change in the mood, even a tilt towards the BJP, though not very pronounced or overwhelming. In several semi-urban and neo-urban areas, there is a growing feeling that the BJP needs to be given a chance. Especially in Rajkot where the party has had a good showing since it came to power in the local body. In fact one Muslim rickshaw driver revealed that he worked for the party and that his family would definitely vote for the party.

The BJP has established two cooperative banks in the town and a number of consumer co-operative stores which are highly popular. The banks have been helping traders and businessmen tide over the credit crunch by offering them finance at competitive rates. Mahendra Patel, a dry-fruits merchant from Rajkot feels that the BJP has a definite edge in Rajkot "not because of the Rath Yatra but because of the work the party has done here and also the fact of its historical dominance in the area."

But as one moves out of Rajkot into the hinterland flanking the National highway No 8-A, one finds the mood changing. The

populace is clearly not swayed by the BJP mystique. For these people there are some real problems to be faced before they expend energy on the Ram Mandir issue. The rural folk in this area have had a bad time in the last few months, water shortage and the cut in diesel supplies are issues they would rather discuss. Hirabhai Rana and Govindbhai Jethalal two farmers on their way to the Haat, aver that "The rural folk are more interested in real benefits... yes, the Rath Yatra did have an impact but not much of it is left now. The BJP does have an edge over others but it is not because of the Rath Yatra but because people are tired of the usual Patel government."

Of course there exists in Gujarat the usual quota of hard-core BJP voters who believe that nothing can prevent the BJP from coming to power. Gunvantrai Thakur, who was performing puja at Damodar Kund has been a resident of Junagarh since ages. Says the octogenarian "We (he and his sons) have taken an oath, made a pledge with Mataji that till the day Mulayam Singh and the Congress(I) go we won't rest...."

An interesting side-light is the fact that unlike the past the new generation of RSS, VHP or BJP workers do not shy away from advertising their leanings. In one instance (near Somnath) while the father was reticent about speaking to the reporter the son was open about his connections with the RSS and prompted the father to speak up. Clearly it is no longer a stigma to be part of the right-wing.

Most politicians (apart from the BJP workers) who responded to the queries tended to dismiss the Rath Yatra as a mantra that had lost its magic. That people are more bothered about their day-to-day bread and livelihood problems. Gujarat Chief Minister Chimanbhai Patel doesn't believe that the Rath Yatra will have much of an impact on the polls. "I am not saying that there will be no impact and neither am I underestimating.... But it will not be to the tune of what they expect. The Narmada issue has totally diluted whatever effect the Rath Yatra had."

BJP leaders would of course beg to differ from the CM's assessment. Jyotindra Mehta, director of the Rajkot Nagrik Sahakari Bank and BJP leader warns that the BJP is not to be taken lightly. "The last time too they misread the Shilanyas issue and suffered. People used to say that the BJP is a party of the

urban middle class but today we are even more popular in the rural areas. There is a clear and definite awareness of the party in the rural and semi-urban areas. The last time there was only the "Shila". This time there is an entire temple.... so those who think otherwise are bound to suffer."

Ashok Bhatt, the BJP chief whip in the Assembly avers that "the very fact that the Congress and Chimanbhai have joined hands is proof of our strength. The Rath Yatra.... the feeling is still existing. You see it as an incident. I see it as a phenomenon. The bhavna is still present and will come to the fore given the context and/or the need." Exactly the fear most politicians express in private. Many of the Congress and Janata Dal workers admit that fear of the BJP — its increasing influence in the rural areas and the Rath Yatra's hangover — is real and palpable. As one Congressman puts it, "it (the Ram Mandir issue) is after all a tune, they can sing anytime and expect a chorus."

But will the electorate sing along?

Wonderful — but that's all

The rath yatra of the Bharatiya Janata Party President, Mr L.K. Advani still lingers in the memories of the people of Ahmedabad. For some it is as fresh as a major event of the day while for others it needs but a little reference to rekindle their memories.

They all have almost similar expressions like it was wonderful, crowd was impressive or the procession was magnificent. But except a few, none of the over 30 persons interviewed at random from different parts of the city believe that they should vote for the BJP.

At the same time, quite a good number of people made their preference for the BJP clear on grounds like they should be given a chance as others have failed to deliver the goods or the party appears to have better image than others.

Even the priest of the Muktajivandas temple of the Swaminarayan sect, where the caravan had a night halt, has serious doubts whether the rath would have any impact on the Lok Sabha elections this year. The priest, Sadhu Bharat Priyadas, is clear and does have an analysis also to support his claim that the BJP would have a tough fight from the Congress-I.

Mahant Vasudeo Swami of another Swaminarayan temple in the same locality where Mr Advani had gone before leaving Ahmedabad on his onward journey to Ayodhya, also has similar reservations: "It would be too optimistic to believe that the yatra had any appreciable impact on the people," he says.

Talking about his own locality and his own choice of casting the vote, he said the choice of candidates would matter rather than religious sentiments. There might be some devotees who might vote for the temple, but the locality had a predominance of literates and intellectuals and so they were not likely to be swayed by passions, he said.

Another Maninagar resident has faith left in God only. Mohitbhai Patel, a middle-aged businessman, said the initial euphoria of the yatra was over and in the present situation of confusion and chaos, only God could help this country.

Chandrabhan Sharma, a pan vendor, near the Muktajiwandas Swaminarayan temple, who hails from eastern U.P. where Ayodhya is located, had to be reminded about the yatra before he could recollect his thoughts, "What I gather from the talks of hundreds of people flocking to my shop daily and from my own experience, is the stark reality that it is becoming increasingly difficult to make two ends meet. Hardly anyone talks about Ram or Ayodhya", he said.

The Gomtipur and Bapunagar localities, simmering cauldrons of communal passions, where Mr Advani had addressed a mammoth crowd and was welcomed by a youth who applied *tilak* on the leader's forehead, cutting his thumb, did not seem to have any palpable impact on the yatra.

Manjulaben Panchal, a 30-year old housewife living in the Navavas locality of Rakhial area, said that she herself did not see the yatra, but heard about it from others and read its account in newspapers. Still, she believes that if any such yatra is taken out again, people would joint it in the name of Ramo.

Sureshbhai Joshi, a workman employed in the industrial unit, said the influence of the BJP had increased after the yatra. Mr Joshi, a graduate, feels though it is not good to use Ram for votes, Hindu society would be for those who understand it and the BJP had done precisely that.

Manubhai Vaghela, a tailor who has a shop near Nikol Char Rasta in the Bapunagar area, is still lost in the reverie of the yatra. Vaghela, who belongs to Saurashtra, said that he had never seen such a colourful yatra, but is not sure whether the procession would have any impact on the BJP ballot box.

But if the results of the civic by-elections of Gomtipur ward held in December are any indication, the yatra could not turn the tide in favour of the BJP in the communally sensitive ward in the eastern part of the city.

In a triangular fight, the Congress-I managed to retain the seat defeating both the Janata Dal-S and the BJP even though the yatra had been there and a mammoth public meeting was also held in the same area.

The Paldi area through which the yatra had entered the city and where a grand civic reception was held for Mr Advani, is no different than the other two areas.

(Courtesy: Indian Express)

Politicians not in Touch with Voter Mood

None of the major political parties appear to have their finger on the pulse of the electorate, according to a major opinion poll carried out for *The Times of India* by MARG, the country's leading opinion polling organisation. The poll opinion was conducted in 15 towns and 32 villages across six states of northern and western India (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Gujarat) between April 1-3, 1991.

Some of the findings of the poll, the first to report on the political climate in the country after the announcement of the general election, should make the country's politicians sit up and take note:

- * Voters feel that inflation is the most important problem facing the country today, and not Ram Janmabhoomi or political stability or separatism.
- * The preferred solution to the Ram Janmabhoomi problem — by voters of all communities — is to build the temple next to the mosque, and not to demolish or move the mosque.
- * A substantial chunk of the electorate is undecided on which party to vote for, and this is particularly so with the Muslim community.
- * The electorate is, on the whole, very pessimistic and cynical about the state of affairs in the country, and consequently a low voter turn-out is very likely.
- * Mr Rajiv Gandhi is still seen to be the best bet for Prime

ministership, among men and women in both urban and rural areas.

- * The oft-discussed urban - rural divide appears much less pronounced than it is made out to be.

These findings form the first of a series of "readings" from the *Times* - MARG Pollmeter, which will track the mood of the electorate in six key states of northern and western India until the general election. For this first poll in the series, 3,253 randomly selected voters (1,699 men and 1,554 women) were interviewed in their homes by over 60 MARG interviewers.

1. The Most Important Problem Facing the Country

Voters in the six states covered by the poll were asked to name the single most important problem faced by the country today.

Every second person interviewed by MARG was of the opinion that inflation was the number one problem confronting the nation. Of the other issues, all of which were mentioned by a much smaller proportion of voters, the dominant one was another 'economic' problem — unemployment. Mention of Ram Janmabhoomi and communalism, taken together, make it the next most important problem, as perceived by voters in the 'Ram Belt'.

	<i>All</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
% who said the most important problem is:					
Inflation	57	48	64	50	60
Unemployment	18	22	16	22	16
Communalism	6	7	5	9	6
Stability	6	7	4	7	5
Law & Order	3	5	2	4	3
Ram Janmabhoomi	3	4	2	4	3
Separatism	2	3	1	3	2
No opinion	5	4	6	1	5

2. Babri Masjid—Ram Janmabhoomi: The Preferred Solution

MARG interviewers asked voters which one, out of four options available on the Babri Masjid, was preferred by them. The four

options were: maintain status quo; build the temple next to the mosque; move the mosque and build a temple in its place; demolish the mosque.

Clearly, the preferred option is to build the temple next to the mosque; without disturbing it. Interestingly, this view is held by both Hindus and Muslims.

	<i>All</i>	<i>Hindus</i>	<i>Muslims</i>
% who said....:—			
Temple should be built:			
— next to the mosque	41	41	47
— by moving the mosque	16	16	10
— by demolishing the mosque	14	16	1
There should be no change	13	11	27
No opinion	16	16	15

3. Benefits of Belonging to a Particular Community

Asked whether Hindus and non-Hindus enjoy the same benefits and privileges or whether one or the other gets a better deal, opinion was predictably divided along community lines.

	<i>All</i>	<i>Hindus</i>	<i>Non-Hindus</i>
% who said the Non-Hindus have:			
More benefits than Hindus	40	42	7
Same benefits as Hindus	27	27	34
Fewer benefits than Hindus	13	12	36
Can't say	20	19	23

4. Voting Intentions

Respondents were asked whether or not they had decided on the party they will vote for in the forthcoming general election.

As many as 45 per cent of the voters interviewed by MARG claimed that they were undecided. This proportion was even higher among women (50 p.c.) and among Muslims (55 p.c.). In MARG's experience level spanning almost two decades, this is the highest level of uncertainty ever recorded.

	<i>All</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
% who have:					
Decided which party to vote for	55	60	49	57	54
Not decided which party to vote for	45	40	51	43	46

5. The State of the Nation

Asked how things were going in the country these days, voters in the "Ram Belt" were extremely despondent, with three-quarters telling MARG interviewers that they felt things were going badly. Once again, this is among the gloomiest readings of its kind ever witnessed by MARG.

	<i>All</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
% who said things in the country are going:—					
Well	18	19	18	18	19
Badly	75	77	71	77	74
Can't say	7	4	11	5	7

6. The Person who would Make the Best PM

Reactions to the four main contenders to the prime ministers' "gaddi" were obtained by asking voters to rate each candidate on a five-point scale, ranging from "very good" to "very bad".

Mr Rajiv Gandhi emerged considerably ahead of the others, with (50 p.c.) saying that he would make a "good" or "very good" Prime Minister: The corresponding figures for Mr V.P. Singh and Mr Chandra Shekhar was between 26 p.c. and 28 p.c..

Mr V.P. Singh received the highest number of negative mentions, with 32 p.c. saying that he would make a "bad" or "very bad" PM. None of the other three potential Prime Ministers attracted a negative rating from more than 20 per cent of the voters interviewed.

	<i>Rajiv Gandhi</i>	<i>L.K. Advani</i>	<i>V.P. Singh</i>	<i>Chandra Shekhar</i>
% rating him:-				
Very good	25	9	11	6
Good	25	19	15	22
Average	18	15	17	27
Bad	11	12	17	14
Very Bad	6	8	15	5
No option	15	37	25	26

In a similar vein, when asked if Mr Gandhi's and Mr Singh's performance would be better, worse or the same if they ascended the 'throne' again, a majority of the electors who responded to the poll said that Mr Rajiv Gandhi would perform better in his second innings. In case of Mr V.P. Singh, opinion was divided and expectations were considerably lower.

	<i>Rajiv Gandhi</i>	<i>V.P. Singh</i>
% who said he would perform:-		
Better than last time	51	26
Worse than last time	13	25
Same as before	17	20
No opinion	19	29

7. Rating of the Chandra Shekhar Government

Respondents were asked by MARG to rate the performance of the Chandra Shekhar government, again using a five-point scale.

Voters' assessment of the Chandra Shekhar government was neither very favourable nor very unfavourable. However, the balance of opinion was on the positive side, particularly among men and in the urban areas.

	<i>All</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Urban</i>	<i>Rural</i>
% who rated the government's performance:-					
Very good	6	7	4	6	6
Good	24	28	19	28	23
Average	33	35	32	45	31
Bad	11	13	9	10	11
Very Bad	5	6	5	4	5
No opinion	21	11	31	7	24

8. Responsibility for the Collapse of the Chandra Shekhar Government

Asked whether the Congress had brought down the Chandra Shekhar government or whether it fell because of its own problems, voters did not come up with a clear verdict. Twenty nine per cent held the Congress responsible but 36 p.c. felt that the Janata Dal (S) had only itself to blame.

	All	Urban	Rural
% who said the government:-			
Fell by itself	36	40	35
Was brought down by the Congress	29	38	26
No opinion	35	22	39

Almost all of those who felt that the Congress had brought down the Chandra Shekhar government disapproved of this action.

(Courtesy: *The Sunday Times*)

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Voting Pattern Before and After Rajiv Gandhi's Assassination

Gains & Losses - 1991

Pre-Assassination phase

Party	Won	Retained	Gains	Losses	Net
INC	50	18	32	24	+8
BJP	52	21	31	22	+9
JD	31	23	8	35	-27
CPM	28	25	3	2	+1
CPI	9	5	4	1	+3
BSP	1	-	1	1	-
IND	-	-	-	2	-2
OTH	15	11	4	5	-1
TDP	10	1	9	-	+9
	196	104	92	92	

Post Assassination Phase

Party	Won	Retained	Gains	Losses	Net
INC	174	122	52	26	+26
BJP	67	22	45	16	+29
JD	21	19	2	50	-48
CPM	7	3	4	2	+2
CPI	3	2	1	3	-2
BSP	-	-	-	1	-1
IND	1	-	1	7	-6
OTH	14	5	9	16	-7
TDP	3	-	3	1	+2
SJP	5	-	5	-	+5
ADK	11	9	2	1	+1
DMK	-	-	-	1	-1
		306	182	124	124

- Results withheld in Guwahati Assembly(Assam): Davangere (Kartnataka); Begusarai, Monghyr/Sasaram, Bikramganj, Aurangabad, Banka, Godda, Madhubani (Bihar).
- Poll countermanded in Gaya, Patna, Purnea, Madhepura (Bihar); Etawah, Meerut, Bulandshahr (U.P.); Kutch (Gujarat); Dhenkanal (Orissa); Nanded (Maharashtra); Cuddapah (Andhra); Dharwad South (Karnatka).
- Independent/Others include 13 TDP (Andhra), 6 JMM(Bihar), 4 Shiv Sena(Maharashtra), 11 AIADMK (T.Nadu); 3 Forward Bloc, 4 RSP in (W. Bengal).

(Courtesy: *The Independent*)

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BJP Gained Most, JD Suffered Worst

Although the tenth Lok Sabha poll saw the return of the Congress-I to power, in terms of the popular support, the BJP was the top gainer and the Janata Dal the worst loser.

The Congress-I's popular vote dropped to 37.57 per cent — its second lowest since 1952 with its vote bank being eroded in 12 States and five Union Territories but it increased in 11 States and two Union Territories.

While the Congress-I's popular vote dropped in the first phase of polls to 32.90 per cent, it picked up in the second and third phase to 40.65 per cent after the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi according to a PTI-Modi Olivetti computer analysis.

The BJP saw its popular vote going up to 20.95 per cent from 11.49 per cent, a swing of nearly 10 per cent in its favour. It gained more during the pre-assassination phase when it got 23.75 per cent of the popular vote but only 19.09 per cent after. Its popularity went up in 13 States and one Union Territory but dropped in three States.

The Janata Dal, which came to power in 1989 with resounding success in the northern belt, saw its popular vote going down to 11.60 per cent from 17.66 per cent in 1989, a swing of 6.06 per cent against it.

During the pre-assassination phase its popular vote was 12.2 per cent and lesser at 11.6 per cent in the post assassination phase.

The Janata Dal's popularity nosedived in 12 States and one Union Territory but was up in two States, the computer analysis shows.

The swing in the Congress-I vote in relation to 1989 polls ranged from minus 15 per cent to plus 20 per cent.

The BJP swing ranged from minus four to plus 22 per cent, while that of the JD ranged from minus 25 per cent to plus 13 per cent.

In the Southern States, considered its stronghold, the Congress-I saw its popularity vote dropping in Andhra Pradesh (—5.17 per cent), Karnataka (—5.25 per cent), Kerala (—3.58 per cent), Pondicherry (-3.98) per cent) and Lakshadweep (—1.72 per cent).

But in Tamil Nadu the Congress-I saw its popular vote going up with a swing of 3.6 per cent in its favour. It won all the 28 seats it contested in the State and almost all the candidates won by margins of more than one lakh.

There was also a 3.17 per cent swing in Congress-I's favour in the Union Territory of Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

The BJP saw its popularity dipping in Kerala with a swing of 0.50 per cent against it and a drop of 4.22 per cent in Maharashtra, considered its stronghold.

The Janata Dal saw a big erosion in its vote bank in its stronghold Karnataka with a near 10 per cent swing against it.

The swings in favour of the Congress-I were in the States of Himachal Pradesh (+3.97 per cent), Madhya Pradesh (+9.56 per cent), Maharashtra (+0.66 per cent), Orissa (+5.93 per cent), Rajasthan (+8 per cent), Tamil Nadu (+3.6 per cent), Arunachal Pradesh (+19.46 per cent), Meghalaya (+3.88 per cent) and Union Territory of Andaman Nicobar Islands (+3.17 per cent), Dadra Nagar Haveli (+33.79 per cent).

The swing against the Congress-I in U.P. was 11.83 per cent, 5.54 per cent in Bihar, 8.33 per cent in Gujarat, 5.07 per cent in Haryana, 5.32 per cent in West Bengal, 0.29 per cent in Manipur, 8.64 per cent in Mizoram, 15.95 per cent in Nagaland, 2.55 per cent in Chandigarh and 7.03 per cent in Daman Diu, both Union Territories.

Although the BJP lost some seats in the States of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, its popularity actually went up over the 1989 level.

In Rajasthan the party's popular vote went up by 12.23 per cent.

The BJP's popular vote was up by 7.67 per cent in Andhra Pradesh, 6.04 per cent in Bihar, 21.57 per cent in Gujarat, 2.92 per cent in Haryana, 25.52 per cent in Karnataka, 8.69 per cent in Orissa, 1.39 per cent in Tamil Nadu, 14.71 per cent in Goa and 2.52 per cent in Tripura.

How they fared

The following is a table showing percentage votes of parties in the 1991 general elections.

States	Cong-I	BJP	SJP	JD	CPI	CPM	State parties	other parties
Andhra	45.83	9.64	1.05	0.58	2.11	2.57	TDP -33.22 BSP - 0.44	4.55 -
Arunachal	69.46	6.16	-	24.09	-	-	-	.29
Assam	39.03	13.77	0.94	7.65	2.82	7.02	AGP -18.02	10.47
Bihar	22.47	18.99	5.78	32.41	7.91	1.74	JMM -5.58 BSP - 0.15	4.30 -
Goa	56.88	15.4	—	1.03	1.46	—	MAG -20.30	4.33
Gujarat	28.83	52.04	0.58	3.48	—	—	JDG -13.68	1.34
Haryana	41.08	11.23	28.19	13.79	—	—	BSP - 1.98	3.74
Himachal	45.94	42.58	1.28	6.93	0.73	—	—	2.54
Karnataka	43.65	28.07	4.24	18.49	0.71	0.20	BSP - 0.03	4.57
Kerala	38.12	4.01	0.13	4.45	7.98	22.31	NUL -49.03 KEC -2.21 RSP - 2.36 KCM -2.65	10.69 — — —
Madhya Pradesh	47.28	43.73	—	4.72	0.44	0.02	BSP - 2.76	0.41
Maharashtra	46.02	19.50	0.71	10.61	0.99	1.28	PWP -17.00 SHS - 7.82	12.44 —
Manipur	44.75	9.44	0.81	21.63	—	—	MRP -23.37	—
Meghalaya	59.26	9.95	—	—	1.08	—	—	29.01
Mizoram	39.81	—	—	24.55	—	—	MNF -35.64	—
Nagaland	44.34	3.00	—	—	—	—	NPC -52.65	—
Orissa	44.36	9.97	3.76	34.70	3.28	2.13	JMM - 0.27 BSP - 0.15	1.39 —
Rajasthan	44.98	41.87	3.30	5.94	0.13	0.69	BSP - 0.12	2.56
Sikkim	—	—	—	—	—	3.04	SSP - 93.58	3.38
Tamil Nadu	43.46	1.68	0.16	2.97	2.08	2.53	ADK -18.49 DMK -23.06	1.36 —

<i>States</i>	<i>Cong-I</i>	<i>BJP</i>	<i>SJP</i>	<i>JD</i>	<i>CPI</i>	<i>CPM</i>	<i>State parties</i>	<i>other parties</i>
							PMK - 3.14	—
							MUL - 0.25	—
Tripura	85.96	3.10	—	—	—	6.79	—	4.14
U.P.	19.94	35.27	11.09	23.04	1.09	0.80	BSP - 8.44	0.32
W.B.	36.06	11.66	0.21	1.19	3.77	35.79	RSP - 4.64 FBL - 3.75	2.01
A & N islands	50.38	4.85	—	—	—	44.14	—	0.63
Chandigarh	37.66	30.24	24.25	2.90	—	—	BSP - 4.95	—
Dadara NH	62.40	35.77	—	—	—	—	BSP - 1.83	—
Daman Diu	30.66	43.00	—	3.68	—	—	—	22.66
Delhi	41.00	41.66	1.28	14.72	0.10	—	BSP - 0.96	0.29
Lakshadweep	50.55	—	—	49.45	—	—	—	—
Pondicherry	46.49	1.73	0.85	—	—	—	DMK - 31.77 PMK - 2.99	16.57
All India	37.57	20.95	3.49	11.60	2.54	6.68	—	3.96
Pre-assassination	32.90	23.75	4.37	12.02	2.65	11.24	—	2.95
Post-assassination	40.65	19.09	2.92	11.06	2.46	3.66	—	4.63

How the votes swung

The following table gives the State-wise swings of the Congress-I, the BJP and the Janata Dal in the 1991 Lok Sabha polls. All figures are in percentages. Plus indicates swing in favour, minus indicates swing against.

Swings Chart

<i>States</i>	<i>Cong-I</i>	<i>BJP</i>	<i>Janata Dal</i>
Andhra Pradesh	- 5.17	+7.67	-0.26
Arunachal Pradesh	+19.46	—	—
Bihar	-5.54	+6.04	- 3.99
Goa	+9.45	+14.71	- 17.04
Gujarat	-8.33	+21.57	-24.32
Haryana	-5.07	2.92	-25.11
H.P.	+3.97	-2.67	-0.26
Karnataka	-5.25	+25.52	-9.85
Kerala	-3.58	-0.50	+2.59

<i>States</i>	<i>Cong-I</i>	<i>BJP</i>	<i>Janata Dal</i>
Madhya Pradesh	+9.56	+4.07	-3.56
Maharashtra	+0.66	-4.22	-0.35
Manipur	-0.29	—	—
Meghalaya	+3.88	—	—
Mizoram	-8.64	—	—
Nagaland	-15.95	—	—
Orissa	+5.93	+8.69	-14.77
Rajasthan	+8.00	+12.23	-19.74
Tamil Nadu	+3.60	+1.39	—
Uttar Pradesh	-11.83	+27.69	+12.86
Tripura	+30.46	+2.52	—
West Bengal	-5.32	+9.99	—
Union Territories			
Delhi	-2.41	+15.47	-1.56
Chandigarh	-2.55	—	—
Pondicherry	-3.98	—	—
Andaman Nicobar Is.	+3.17	—	—
Lakshadweep Is.	-1.72	—	—
Dadra Nagar Haveli	+33.79	—	—
Daman Diu	-7.03	—	-15.24
All India	-1.93	+9.55	-5.80

(Courtesy: *Indian Express*)

The Imam's Decision is not Binding on Us

Jyoti Punwani

While most political parties have been wooing the Shahi Imam in the hope of winning over the Muslim votes, public reactions indicate that the community will not necessarily vote according to the dictates of their religious leader

Is the Shahi Imam's word binding on Muslims all over India? The Janata Dal and the Congress-I have been trying to get him on their side under the impression that he decides who will bag the 'Muslim vote bank', if it exists.

The practice of wooing the Imam goes back to the Emergency days, when he was popularly believed to have helped Indira Gandhi lose the 1977 election by campaigning for the Janata Party. Ever since, he has been wooed by the Congress-I but in 1989 and now, the National Front has beaten the Congress-I in the competition for his favours.

This phenomenon has always been made the most of by the BJP as an election issue; it provides the most vivid example of what it terms as "pseudo-secularism". This time, the BJP has also drawn the attention of Chief Election Commissioner to the meeting between V.P. Singh and the Imam in the Jama Masjid last week. Even the CPI-M, a leading Front partner, is unhappy with this wooing of the Imam.

Reports from our correspondents show that Singh need not have bothered to pursue the Imam to such great lengths (he is deciding on Janata Dal candidates) to win the Muslim vote (and alienate a section of Hindus), because the Imam's word does not count outside Delhi and parts of Uttar Pradesh; and even there, many question his right to issue directives on political matters. Second, even as a religious leader, he does not command much respect among Muslims outside Delhi, thanks to his past record.

"*VOTE TO hum apne manse hi denge. Kisiko batayenge nahin Koi kuch bhi kahe.*" (Our vote will be our own decision, we won't tell anyone about it, let anyone say anything.) This was the spontaneous response of Suleiman, a breadwallah, when asked whether he would obey the Shahi Imam's directive on whom to vote for. Not understanding the question, he initially replied, "Yes, we must listen to him, it's a question of our religion." But when asked whether this applied even to voting, he gave the above reply.

Suleiman is from Lucknow, and Uttar Pradesh is said to be the state most likely to be influenced by the Imam's directive. But his reply was of a kind with those given by other Muslims interviewed in Bombay: not one of them believes that the Imam has any right to tell them whom to vote for. If they do end up voting as per his directive, it will be for different reasons. Suleiman, who will be going to Lucknow to vote for V P Singh, explained it well: "An Imam knows in which direction the wind blows. If he fails to go along with people's thinking, he'll lose his *izzat*. After all, if the owner of a *karkhana* didn't have more brains than the rest of us, he wouldn't be the owner."

Many Muslims are not willing to grant Imam Bukhari the right to issue any kind of *fatwa*. Said Sheikh Abdus Sattar Yusuf, secretary, state unit of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board, "Only a mufti can issue a *fatwa*; Bukhari's not one." As for political affairs, no one is empowered to issue any *fatwa*, said the Sheikh.

According to Maulana Zaheeruddin Khan of the Tableeghe-Seerat, an organisation comprising the peshimams of mosques in Bombay, there is no imam in India whose word is binding on all Muslims. A taxi-driver echoed his views: "I don't accept the Shahi Imam as my religious leader—he's not from my sect," he

said. Hailing from Uttar Pradesh, he had decided not to vote for anyone although last time, he had voted for V P Singh and conceded that most Muslims would again vote for him.

As Maulana Zaheeruddin Khan put it, "If the Imam's decision is right, people will go along with it. It will act as a morale booster; otherwise people tend to think they are alone in their choice." He was willing to grant that Bukhari's influence extended beyond Delhi to Uttar Pradesh. However, Maulana Zilur-rehman Siddiqui, former president of the local Jamait-e-Ulema, restricted it to the Jama Masjid.

He ascribed the importance being given to Bukhari by national parties to the tendency of politicians to be swayed by the mood in Delhi.

But there is no evidence that the mood in Delhi will be reflected in Maharashtra. The Muslims' need for security may drive them towards the Congress-I here, seen as the only party which can defeat the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance, and, as the Sheikh put it, "Our one-point programme is to defeat the BJP." There is also evidence that the candidate, not the party, will decide the vote here.

Most people have a high regard for Singh, but that does not overrule the fact that his party has not chosen candidates who can inspire confidence among Muslims in the state. Not many may agree with Maulana Siddiqui, who said that the only way the Janata Dal can be strengthened is by voting it to power.

But the former Jamait-e-Ulema president had other reasons for opting for the Janata Dal. He ruled out both the Sena-BJP and the Janata Dal-S in Maharashtra; and reserved the strongest criticism for the Congress-I. "The Congress-I has not made its stand clear on the Ayodhya issue in its manifesto; *golmol tarike se baat Kahi hai*. And by bringing in a mention of the Somnath temple, they've made matters worse. There was no controversy over Somnath; we have never claimed it, nor are we interested in what is not ours."

According to Maulana Zaheeruddin Khan of the Tableegh, the general opinion in the community remained anti-Congress-I. "Whatever weakness has overtaken the community, people ascribe to the faith reposed in him by the Muslims in 1989. "He took some right decision; in others, he had his compulsions."

There is a general belief that sending Jagmohan to Kashmir and then making him a Rajya Sabha member despite the large-scale police firings which took place under his regime; and, allowing L K Advani to start his rath yatra, were the former Prime Minister's biggest mistakes.

However, the Maulana is against "flowing" with just one party. "The candidate must be right; the right candidate always" wins.

This is also the stand of the Jamaat-e-Islami, which is likely to repeat what it did in 1989: declare its favoured candidate in every constituency of the state (not necessarily a Muslim) going by his/her moral character and secular outlook; all Jamaat-e-Islami members will be bound by its decision.

This seems to be the common feeling. The Sheikh revealed that this time, Muslims were going to vote for Sharad Pawar, because he had kept the state free from communal violence and had not allowed the Jogeshwari riots to spread.

The Sheikh lives in Thane and had been approached by the local BJP to welcome Advani's rath yatra when it reached Thane. "But I told them, with what words should I do so? I don't share your view about the Babri Masjid. I asked them, what harm have we Muslims done to you? You must accept us as your brothers." He revealed that when Ram Kapse went to file his nomination papers last week in Thane, among the slogans that were raised was *'Ek dhakka our do, Babri masjid tod do.'* He also mentioned Vajpayee's recent speeches. His conclusion was that in a party like the BJP, the individual didn't matter, the party line did. He was all praise for the local police commissioner, R C Tyagi: "Only he could have dared to arrest Sena leader Anand Dighe; none of his predecessors had the guts to do so. And that is because Pawar was behind him."

Yet, the Sheikh and his fellow residents will vote for the Janata Dal's candidate in their constituency: Parashuram Tawde, a veteran socialist and long-time resident of Bhiwandi and the sitting MLA there, both because he is popular among Muslims and also because the Congress-I candidate is unknown. "We don't want the anti-BJP votes to be divided."

For the same reason, Imtiaz Ansari of Versova will not vote for the Janata Dal, though he does not know who he will vote for.

The Dal there has chosen Anees Syed, retired head of the history department and wife of *Current* editor Ayub Syed. Not many Muslims even know that Anees Syed is a woman; all they know is that she lives in "Malabar Hill" (actually, Cuffe Parade). Similar is the case with the Dal's Suresh Narvekar in South Bombay. "Never even heard of him," muttered Sahar Baba, an ardent V P Singh fan, disgustedly.

Muslims in Bombay are at present confused, waiting for things to settle down. The Jamait-e-Ulema, the Jamaat-e-Seerat are all waiting for their Delhi offices to take a decision, at the same time holding meetings here too. Their decisions will be binding only on their own members. The Shahi Imam is irrelevant here.

Uttar Pradesh

Radhika Ramaseshan

Zafer-e-Yab Jilani, convenor of the All-India Babri Masjid Action Committee and Quami Morcha, a registered political party of Uttar Pradesh.

I have no comments to offer on the reported decision of Bukhari Sahab to indirectly support the Janata Dal in the coming elections. He is free to do what he wants, his decision after all is not binding on us. He cannot issue a *fatwa* in political matters.

My party (the Quami Morcha) has decided to support the JD-S and Mulayam Singh Yadav in the coming elections, and not the JD. This is because from February 1990 till date, Yadav behaviour has been straightforward with Muslims. He tried his best to stop the atrocities that were being inflicted upon Muslims in UP but his officers didn't co-operate. That is not Yadav's fault.

V P Singh was also sympathetic to Muslims only on paper. Most of the ministers and officers working under him were controlled by the BJP. Not even one name recommended by the All-India Babri Masjid Action Committee for central appointments in V P Singh's time were okayed. Because they were made by the AIBMAC, it seemed to be a disqualification,

Even a Muslim minister in Singh's cabinet, Mufti Mohammad Syed, said the site on which the shilanyas was performed

(by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad before the last elections in November 1989), was not disputed property. The BJP became powerful during Singh's regime. His own cabinet secretary, Vinod Pande took orders from L K Advani.

Neither our decision nor that of Bukhari Sahab is binding on Muslims. It is not binding, it is persuasive. I will campaign for the JD-S in UP, except in all those places where we don't want to oppose a particular candidate. I will not campaign in V P Singh's constituency.

Dr Ishtiaq Hussain Quereshi, an important Sunni leader of Lucknow. Secretary of the Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat (UP unit), a Socio-cultural Organisation and a member of the Muslim University Court.

In the last election, I expressed my personal view in an Urdu weekly called *Nidyamillat* published in Delhi, where I said the first choice was the Janata Dal, second the communists and third, the Bahujan Samaj Party. Support the candidate from the party which is in a winning position, was my advice. Bukhari's decision to back the JD this time is fine but his view can be treated only as an opinion and not a *fatwa* which is binding on the Muslim community. After all Bukhari's only qualification is that he is the Imam of the Jama masjid, which is the biggest masjid in India, and happens to be located in Delhi. So all politicians and important international Muslim leaders are bound to meet him and as such he has a lot of moral authority, so his word will carry weight.

Of course, unlike the last elections when the position was very clear, and there was an anti Congress-I wave, the picture this time is one of confusion. The Muslim voter will support the JD-S in UP, except in all those places where we don't want to oppose a particular candidate. I will not campaign in V P Singh's constituency as his image still remains as untarnished as it was before the last elections.

Even on the day his government fell, there was a debate in parliament for 11 hours before he stepped down as prime minister but nobody could make a single personal allegation against him. On the Ayodhya issue too, V P Singh took the right step. Some people, however, are critical of the ordinance he had passed in October last year, handing over the disputed site in Ayodhya to the government till such time as the Supreme Court

or the High Court gave its decision, while some said this deprived the Muslims of their fundamental right. But I still maintain that it was the most sensible thing any Prime Minister could have done in those circumstances.

Mulayam Singh Yadav's intentions may have been genuine but he did not handle the Ayodhya issue in the right way. He aroused very strong anti-Muslim sentiments among Hindus. Politically too, Yadav is weak. He had the state budget passed in ten minutes flat. Is he playing a joke with public money? Chandra Shekhar too did the same.

Arif Mohammad Khan and Arun Nehru have no following, no credibility. They keep shifting sides. Arif has no following among Muslims, no personal clout. No government will fall because of Arif. As for the Congress-I, Rajiv Gandhi has done nothing in the last year and a half by which he can claim to have regained the confidence of Muslims after the terrible riots at Bhagalpur. Although issues specific to Muslims do exist, I see everything in a national perspective. And I want to say this emphatically, 'that among all parties, it is the Congress-I which is most responsible for national disintegration'.

The linguistic reorganisation in 1956 was the most dangerous step taken towards national disintegration. Before that people did not see themselves as Bengalis, Tamils or Assamese. Today even the Bodo tribals living in Assam are demanding a separate state for themselves on the basis of language.

The only purpose of linguistic reorganisation was to avoid creating an Urdu region. It is the biggest setback to the cause of Urdu. Urdu was the first language in Uttar Pradesh but today its use is banned in the assembly.

No member can take his oath in Urdu. In forty years the Congress-I has killed the language.

We Muslims are not a minority but a majority in this country. We have contributed towards making the state into one linguistic entity.

Maulana Aameedul Hassan, a Shia leader of Lucknow and Chairman of Jamm-e-Azmia, a hundred-year-old religious institution of Shias.

I have personally not read what Bukhari Sahab has had to say, so I would not like to comment on it. I have only one request,

that secular forces among Hindus and Muslims are strengthened. I consider the BJP to be the only non-secular party, so all other parties must strengthen secular elements within them.

I do not approve of the politics of looking at communities as different entities, on the basis of religion or language. To unite Muslims in the name of votes is wrong. That is how communal forces get united. I do not approve of the Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid speaking on politics from public platforms or from the masjid.

Muslims are intelligent and politically conscious enough to decide on who to vote for. They do not need guidance or orders. And what is Bukhari's credibility? Is he ever consistent? Today he supports one party, tomorrow another, so the over-all impression people get is that such an individual can be easily manipulated. His word, therefore, should not be taken seriously. I myself have been approached on numerous occasions by politicians in Lucknow during elections. But I have refused to play into their hands.

West Bengal

Manojit Mitra

The minority of the Muslims in Calcutta give no weightage to the Shahi Imam's decision to back the Janata Dal. It is likely to influence, at best, only a section of the orthodox Muslims in rural West Bengal, not big enough to tilt the balance in any party's favour.

That also will be possible only if the Imam issues a "whip" in favour of the Janata Dal. Educated Muslims in Calcutta are in fact, sceptical, even resentful, of the role the Imam plays in politics. The consensus is that an Imam should restrict himself to conducting the namaj and not bother with things which are not his business.

Some Calcutta Muslims asked to comment on the subject, use the most uncomplimentary epithets about the Shahi Imam which would shock his close followers. They make three points in common: the Muslims of West Bengal are alert enough to be able to choose their representatives without dictates from reli-

gious heads, religion is not to be mixed with politics and that politics is none of the Shahi Imam's business.

They are also unanimous that the Shahi Imam's influence is mainly confined to his own crowd in the Jama masjid area in Delhi, pockets in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar and isolated rural areas in West Bengal and some other states. Several Calcutta Muslims said not more than 5 per cent of the Muslim population in West Bengal, comprising orthodox people and some of those in the lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder, would care to vote according to his *firman*.

Faizan Ahmad, General Secretary of the Unani Medicine Council who subscribes to the 5 per cent theory, said West Bengal was different from most other states in that people here did not take political decision on religious consideration.

Shahjehan Jehangir, president of the Muslim-dominated Oriental Chamber of Commerce, felt the Imam's image has been blown out of proportion by political parties and the press who sought to use him. He said the activities of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the rath yatra, the demand for a Hindu rashtra and communal riots in different parts of the country had somewhat eroded the confidence of the Muslim community. The Imam might be able to influence areas affected by such phenomena, but not West Bengal where the community was under no threat, despite a few clashes, and voting would be on political lines. As ever, even a *firman* issued by him would make little impact.

"Muslims will hear everyone, and keep their counsel to themselves," said Wazid Ali, a central Calcutta doctor. They will attend meetings in large numbers and give a patient hearing to Imams and leaders, but will not be swayed by speeches. "They have their own assessment and I feel they have made "their decision, but they will remain tight-lipped." Ali is one of those who refuse to take the Imam seriously. "We enjoy his antics," says he, "his voice is not trusted in Calcutta, and by only a small section in the villages."

The Left Front and the Janata Dal are happy, though the Front is not being vocal about the Imam's stance. A senior CPI-M leader said West Bengal, admittedly, was different where religious gurus did not enjoy a very high status, but the Imam's

attitude would add to the Left Front-National Front alliance's votes. "We would have got the support of the majority of the Muslims anyway, but this is going to help us," he said.

State Janata Dal General Secretary Shyam Bhattacharya, a parliamentary candidate himself, said Muslims in West Bengal had moved closer to the Left Front in recent years because they enjoyed peace and security under the LF regime. They had confidence in Jyoti Basu and V.P. Singh and the alliance would benefit from the Imam's support.

The Congress-I thinks the Imam is entirely unreliable and inconsequential said Sheikh Anwar Ali, president of the Congress-I minority cell. "But he has been messing around with political parties. Some day he will probably ask the Muslims to support the BJP." Anwar Ali believes that at most, the Imam could confuse and mislead a section of illiterate Muslims but that would make no impact.

(Courtesy: Independent Journal of Politics & Business)

1991 Lok Sabha Elections in Himachal Pradesh

*P.S.Verma & B.S. Dhal**

This paper seeks to analyse certain important aspects of electoral politics such as the political situation in the state on the eve of the tenth Lok Sabha elections, pattern of electoral alliance, issues and themes highlighted in the campaign, voter turn-out and poll verdict. This is, naturally set in the matrix of the socio-economic and political profile of the state in which the electoral politics operates. With a view to comparing it with past elections, the aforesaid issues are also examined in relations to the earlier elections, particularly the preceding parliamentary and assembly polls held in November 1989 and March 1990, respectively.

In terms of location the state is bordered by Jammu and Kashmir in the north, Punjab in the south-west, Haryana in the south, Utter Pradesh in the south-east and Tibet in the east. It is a hilly region "with mosaic of valleys" comprising an area of 55,673 sq. kms. The total population according to 1991 census was 51,11,079 out of which 91.30 per cent of the people lived in

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villages, depending on agriculture as the mainstay of the economy. Over three-fourths of the total working force in the state is engaged in the agricultural sector. Cultivation is mostly done by small and marginal farmers who contribute about 45 percent of the domestic product. People usually grow cereals and pulses¹. In recent years horticulture has also become a major source of economy, particularly in the upper regions of the state. The density of population in the state is as low as 77 persons per square kilometres.

As for the formation of the state, it came into existence on April 15, 1948 by merging thirty odd former princely hill states into "one centrally administered territory under the charge of a Chief Commissioner". The accession of these states into the Indian Union and their eventual integration into one administrative unit was forced by the coordinated agitations conducted by the Praja Mandals of the princely states".²

Somehow even after its formation in 1948 the state continued experiencing frequent changes in matters relating to its territorial jurisdiction and politico-administrative set-up. "In politico-administrative terms it was a centrally administered area upto 1952; a 'C' state between 1952-56; union territory with a responsible government from 1963 to 1971 and a full fledged state since 1971".³ The state acquired its present form only in the wake of the linguistic reorganisation of composite Punjab in 1966. The new areas transferred to it from the erstwhile Punjab State on November 1, 1966 included :

- (i) Districts of Kangra, Kulu, Lahul Spiti and Simla;
- (ii) Nalagarh tehsil of Ambala district;
- (iii) The Kanungo circles of Lohara; Amb, Una and Santokhgarh of the erstwhile Unal tehsil of Hoshiarpur district; and
- (iv) Dhar Kalan Kanungo circle of Pathankot tehsil of Gurdaspur district.⁴

With the inclusion of these new areas the state's socio-economic and political complexion was considerably changed. Earlier it consisted of the erstwhile princely areas in which the level of political cognition of the people was quite low in the absence of required political institutions and organisational infrastructure. It was only the Praja Mandal movement which mobilised the people against the oppressive feudal regimes of

this region. The Congress organisation in these areas came into existence only around 1948. Conversely, the people in the newly transferred areas from Punjab enjoyed relatively better political participation and awareness in the past. In the wake of the freedom struggle they were mobilised by the Congress organisation and its allied groups. Moreover, these new areas in the post-independence period also experienced relatively better competitive politics under different political parties such as the Congress, the Jana Sangh and the Communists. Mention may be made here that the Jana Sangh and the CPI, prior to 1966, "remained tagged" to their respective party units in Punjab. The CPI in old Himachal had only a district party status. So much so that the Jana Sangh did not even subscribe to the existence of Himachal Pradesh as a separate entity. In fact it stood for the merger of Himachal Pradesh into a greater Punjab.⁵ The CPI did not subscribe to the idea of "greater Punjab" but it too demanded merger of Una, parts of Kangra etc. in the Punjab state on linguistic basis. The State's Reorganization Commission in 1956 also suggested its merger with the Punjab State.

However, with the transfer of the new areas from the erstwhile composite state of Punjab in 1966, the opposition groups particularly the Jana Sangh made all sorts of efforts to extend its support base into the entire state of Himachal Pradesh. The RSS units were already working in the major towns of the state. Moreover, the demographic features of the state further propelled the party to compete with the ruling Congress and thus minimise or break its hold over the state power. Incidentally this state preponderantly comprised Hindus with well-entrenched dominant castes like Rajput and Brahmins. According to the 1981 census, the total population of 42,80,818 consisted of 95.77 per cent Hindus, 1.63 per cent Muslims (mainly Gujjars), 1.23 per cent Buddhists, 1.22 per cent Sikhs and 0.15 per cent others. The Jana Sangh in the post-merger period also tried to utilise the rising assertion of people from the "new areas" against the dominance of the "old areas" consisting of Sirmur, Mandi, Mahasu etc.

But since the Congress organisation commands political monopoly over the entire state including the "new area", the Jana Sangh initially failed to make inroads in the power politics of the state. The Congress being the first ruling party enjoyed many

advantages over its rivals. It claimed full responsibility for launching various progressive measures (abolition of big landed estates, ceiling on holdings etc.) and introducing numerous development schemes in different parts of the state in the post-independence period. Besides this the Scheduled Castes (24.62 per cent of the population) and Scheduled Tribes (4.61 per cent) also regarded the Congress party as their protector and gave it en bloc support for decades. The Buddhists in the state were also included in the Scheduled Tribes category.

Reservations apart some backward caste groups (Ghiraths etc.), which earlier groaned under perpetual exploitation by the landed classes also became a stronghold of the Congress party in the post-independence period when properties were conferred on them. "Untill recently their (Ghiraths) economic conditions were miserable. They used to till the lands of the "Zamindars" and depend upon the little corn that the latter left for them after taking away most of the crop. Their teenagers used to serve as petty domestic servants in the homes of the innumerable well-to-do people in the plains".⁶

Moreover the Congress party was blessed with enlightened popular leaders like Dr. Y.S. Parmar, a Rajput and top Praja Mandal leader, who mobilised people against the erstwhile autocratic rules in the pre-independence period. He remained at the helm of affairs till 1977. Not only he fought against the erstwhile princes in the pre-independence period but later also he curtailed their role in public life by keeping them away from the seat of power. The members of his government were largely those who had participated in the Praja Mandal movement or contributed at some stage to the freedom struggle. This further improved his image among the people in the state. Dr. Parmar also knew how to adjust people of diverse classes or regions in position of power. When a Rajput held the position of Chief Minister the Brahmins were suitably adjusted against other powerful positions. Similarly in the event of the Chief Minister being from the "apple-potato zone"⁷, politicians belonging to lower Himachal were duly accommodated against other portfolios.

Interestingly while the erstwhile Rajput princes were not encouraged, the dominance of the Rajput community in the politics of the state as a whole was allowed to continue as before. Another advantage of Dr. Parmar to the Congress was that many

Rajputs were initially drawn to this organisation mainly because of him and his close associates. Earlier they refrained from participation in the movement against their co-caste Rajput rulers. But when Dr. Parmar came to power they felt that, despite the slipping away of political power from the hands of Rajput princes, their interests would be safe in the hands of a leader drawn from their caste in the new democratic set up.⁸ This, among others, also crystallised the Rajput-Brahmin combination in power politics which helped the ruling Congress for a considerable period of time and made it unassailable in the politics of the state.

Unlike many other states of the Indian Union in Himachal there existed hardly any intermediary peasant caste group which could destabilise this combination. In fact these two castes have maintained their hold over various economic activities such as agriculture, professions, service etc. The Rajputs also command hold over the "apple-potato" production. Moreover, the Rajputs and Brahmins have virtual monopoly in the state legislature which may further be seen from the table-I.

In terms of occupation most of the legislators belonged either to the class of Zamindars or orchardists or to the class of professionals and ex-bureaucrats.⁹

Table-I
Caste-wise Composition of MLAs in the
State Assembly of Himachal Pradesh

<i>Caste</i>	1952	1967	1972
Rajput	19 (46.3%)	29 (46.0%)	31 (45.6%)
Brahmin	10 (24.4%)	15 (23.8%)	13 (19.1%)
Mahajan	4 (9.8%)	3 (4.8%)	5 (7.3%)
Scheduled Castes	8 (19.5%)	16 (25.4%)	19 (28.0%)

Source: Vir Singh Chauhan, *Significance of Population Element in Political Geography: A Case Study of Himachal Pradesh*, (Unpublished M. Phil. Dissertation, Department of Geography, Panjab University, Chandigarh, 1980, p.60).

The aforesaid discussion makes it explicit that the Congress organisation in Himachal enjoyed favourable conditions due to which it continued in power till 1977. The opposition groups till then remained marginalised. The Bhartiya Jana Sangh, though it had entered the election fray in the very first general election in 1952, failed to win any seat in the state then. In fact, in eight out of the ten seats that it contested its candidates even lost their deposits. It was only in 1967 that it won seven seats with 13.87 per cent valid votes. Incidentally most of these seats were from the "new areas" merged with the state only in November, 1966. A section of the people in these Hindu dominated areas in the wake of the Punjab-Suba movement developed close affiliations with the Jana Sangh party as it favoured Hindi and "Devnagri" script and put up a stiff resistance against the Akalis. The Hindu-Sikh feelings were also aroused during the course of the Punjab-Suba movement. In addition the Hindu dominated areas of the erstwhile Punjab also developed a feeling that they were discriminated against by the Punjab government. It may be mentioned here that some grievances of this nature continued to exist even after the transfer of these areas to Himachal Pradesh. The dichotomies were now expressed in the form of "new areas vs the old Himachal" or the apple-potato belt vs the rest of the state. Most rival groups, particularly the Jana Sangh, started accusing the ruling Congress of ignoring the interests of the people belonging to the non-apple-potato zone. Incidentally, the Congress Chief Minister till now has been elected from the apple-belt and always represented the interests of the class of orchard owners.

The Congress monopoly for the first time was challenged in the state in 1967. The Jana Sangh, while accusing the Congress of ignoring the interests of "new areas", also took advantage of the anti-Congress wave in the entire country. This later shrunk the support base of the Congress party but still it swam through and fetched 42.19 per cent votes in the state. Moreover, it won all the parliamentary constituencies. It shows that the people in Himachal were not so dissatisfied with the Congress organisation. They were also happy over the merger of the new areas in the state in 1966. Most people belonging to the new areas did not want to stay back in Punjab. Incidentally, with the completion of the 1967 elections, the Congress party's hold in the neighbouring states of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh came to an end.

In the next elections in 1971-72, the Congress party won hands down in the state of Himachal Pradesh. There occurred a sharp decline in the performance of all the opposition groups including the Jana Sangh. People, it seems, thanked the Congress for granting the status of statehood to Himachal Pradesh in 1971. The overall political situation in the entire country was otherwise also quite favourable to the Congress party in 1971-72. But the imposition of the Emergency in 1975 crippled the entire democratic process in the country at all levels and created great resentment among the people. As a result the state of Himachal Pradesh, like most other north-Indian states, came to be swayed by the anti-emergency wave in 1977. Consequently, the Congress party lost all the Parliamentary seats in 1977. Subsequently the Janata also captured 53 out of the total 68 assembly seats in the state. The Congress could win only 9 seats with 27.74 per cent votes. The first non-Congress government in the state was headed by Mr. Shanta Kumar, a Brahmin with RSS background. He, unlike his predecessors, belonged to the non-apple belt comprising the "new areas" merged with Himachal in 1966. The people for the first time not only saw a non-Congress government working in the state but also experienced some better schemes such as 'Antodaya' and drinking water facilities. This soon placed the Chief Minister quite high in the expectations of the people. Most activities of his government, to begin with, gained appreciation and added to his leadership and reputation.

Since it was mainly the Jana Sangh faction which was virtually ruling under the name of the Janata Party, this group fully utilised the opportunity to penetrate into different areas and groups of people who had so far backed the Congress party in the state. As a result the Jana Sangh/BJP faction in the subsequent years emerged as a formidable force to provide alternative to the Congress party. Its electoral performance in the following elections itself explains this phenomenon. This may further be seen from the following table (Table-II).

The Election Eve Situation (1991)

The state was run by the BJP government under the stewardship of Mr. Shanta Kumar when the tenth Lok Sabha elections were

Table - I

Voter Turn-out during the 1989 Parliamentary poll

Parliamentary seat	No. of electors	Total votes polled	Total valid votes	National Conference % of valid votes	Congress(I) % of valid votes	Other Parties % of valid	Independent % of valid votes
Barmulla	6,98,284	38,235 (5.48)	37,466 (5.37)	35,139 (93.79)	-	-	2,327 (6.21)
Srinagar	7,82,598	Unopposed	Unopposed	Unopposed	-	-	-
Anantnag	7,36,495	37,377 (5.07)	36,907 (5.01)	36,055 (97.69)	-	-	852 (2.31)
Ladakh	1,01,738	87,863 (86.36)	85,763 (84.28)	-	40,612 (47.35)	-	45,151 (52.65)
Udhampur	8,09,465	3,19,326 (39.45)	3,12,762 (38.64)	-	1,27,161 (40.65)	1,60,552 (51.33)	25,139 (8.03)
Jammu	10,26,600	5,84,078 (56.89)	5,73,223 (55.89)	-	2,39,701 (41.82)	3,06,831 (53.53)	26,691 (4.65)

Figures in brackets represent percentage.

Table - II

Voter turn-out in areas dominated by different communities in 1983 and 1987 Assembly elections

Year of Poll	Muslim dominated areas		Non-Muslim dominated areas	
	Total No. of electors	Votes cast	Total number of electors	Votes cast
1983 (77.42)	21,06,207	16,30,643 (64.41)	9,95,458	6,41,166
1987 (77.45)	24,66,961	19,10,644 (67.70)	11,10,420	7,51,711

Source: Compiled from the Seventh and English General Election Reports of the Election Department of J & K Government.

completed in Himachal on May 20, 1991. This government had taken charge only in March 1990 and was settling down to implement the policies, programmes and promises made by the BJP during the assembly elections held on February 27, 1990. The ruling party itself appeared to feel that the Lok Sabha elections had come a little too early. Further, the government witnessed series of agitations ranging from the higher support price for apple to the issue of Mandal Commission. Somehow the Mandal issue did not acquire any alarming proportions in Himachal Pradesh as the factor of OBC in the state was not so important barring some pockets of Kangra and Kamirpur. The state thus did not witness the spree of violence and self-immolations. Nor did this issue make any notable impact on the voting behaviour of people during the parliamentary poll in 1991.

But the agitation launched by the apple-growers had acquired a massive character and considerably damaged the image of the ruling party in the state. The highly organised orchardists also commanded strong politico-economic hold in the state. Since long the apple-belt has been a traditional stronghold of the Congress party. In the initial stages this agitation originated from the Chief Minister's declaration that "the policy of support price was illogical and wrong". Conversely, the apple growers were demanding a higher support price of Rs. 3.50 per kg. for their produce against Rs. 2.75 which was given by the previous Congress(I) government.¹⁰ The BJP government on the other hand had reduced the support price of culled apples from Rs. 2.75 to Rs. 1.30 per kg. As a result the entire apple belt comprising the regions of Simla, Mandi etc. went to the agitationist path. The Congress(I), the CPI(M), the Janata Dal, the BKU etc. also backed the agitation. On July 22, 1991, the agitation took a violent turn resulting in the killing of three persons in police firing near the Kotgarh police station. At Rampur Bushaher too the police had to fire in the air when a crowd threatened to set fire to the police station. In addition violence was also witnessed at Khara, Pathar, Jubbal etc. where liquor vends were also looted by the people. Mrs. Vidya Stokes, a senior Congress(I) leader and prominent figure representing the interests of the apple lobby, demanded immediate judicial enquiry into the police firing. Interestingly some political groups from the neighbouring state of Punjab such as the Akali Dal(Mann), among others, also an-

nounced relief of Rs. 5,000/- each to the families of three persons killed in police firing. Politically this agitation later on in the Parliament poll cost the BJP a sizeable number of votes from the aforesaid districts or regions.

Apart from agitations, the populist issues raised by the BJP during the March 1990 assembly poll had also become a big problem for the ruling party during the Lok Sabha elections. With regard to this the Congress(I) during the budget session (1991) had made a hue and cry accusing the BJP government of running away from responsibilities on all fronts. The Congress(I) leader Mr. Virbhadra Singh (ex-Chief Minister) claimed that the BJP had promised to give work to the unemployed but on the contrary 35,000 daily wage workers were retrenched since its coming into power on March 5, 1990. He also accused the ruling party of selecting "*Antodaya*" families on the basis of political considerations. Further, he alleged that the Chief Minister, Mr. Shanta Kumar, had even forgotten about the unemployment allowance. Moreover, Mr. Virbhadra Singh said that the provision of giving "a tap to each kitchen", as promised by the Chief Minister, Mr. Shanta Kumar would cost more than Rs. 1,000/- crore, but the state government had allotted only Rs. 2 crore in the budget.¹¹ Incidentally, during the said assembly elections Mr. Shanta Kumar promised that his party would provide "*atta*" (flour) at Rs. 1.50 per kg., rice at Rs. 2.50 per kg and salt at 0.50 paise per kg. Earlier while conducting a "*Pad Yatra*" from Palampur to Shimla in March-April 1989 this assurance was repeated on frequent occasions.

But while in power his government narrowed down this dole to only those families whose annual income was less than Rs. 3,600 per annum. The quantity was also reduced to 5 kg of wheat and one kg. of rice per member of a family each month. The price of *Atta* had soared to more than Rs. 5 per kg. in the open market.¹² Moreover, the BJP government in line with its policy of deregulation and "private equity participation in public sector enterprises" (Jaiur Session of BJP, February 1991) extended invitation to big businessmen from outside to purchase land, set up hotels, cement factories and take over power projects in the state.¹³ These things stirred fears that Himachal might be made open to the exploitation and dominance of wealthy persons from

outside. In February 1991 the opposition groups including the Congress(I) also protested against the failures of the government and "mortgaging of the Himachal people's vital interests to the private sector". On this issue once they also walked out of the state assembly. The opposition groups also accused the BJP government of giving favours to the ruling partymen from within and outside. Similarly the new scheme called "*Van Lagao - Rozi Kamao*" (Plant trees and earn) was also criticised as being "a ploy to gain political mileage". The scheme was intended to achieve the twin objective of effective afforestation as well as employment generation. The rival parties apprehended that the whole scheme would be used for political purposes. It was under the above conditions that the May 1991 parliamentary poll was held in the state of Himachal Pradesh.

Alliances and Candidates

As regards the electoral alignments the two major rivals i.e., the BJP and the Congress(I) entered the election fray separately on their own. They locked horns in all the four parliamentary constituencies and claimed to win hands down in each of them. The third contender was the Janata Dal which entered into the electoral arena in alliance with the left parties i.e. the CPI and the CPI(M). However, in the Hamirpur parliamentary constituency they could not achieve this goal as the CPI candidate, who had also contested the previous parliamentary poll in November 1989, opposed the Janata Dal nominee who also fought the 1989 Lok Sabha election as an independent candidate. But the Janata Dal was hardly a force in the state. It contested just to cash in on the Mandal issue which had some influence in Hamirpur and the Kangra parliamentary seats. But in Hamirpur the Congress(I)'s candidate himself was a Ghirath(OBC) and had long innings in politics. Moreover, in these two seats the BJP had made its strongholds which were not easily vulnerable to such issues. These areas happened to be native places of Mr. Shanta Kumar and Thakur Jagdev Chand of the BJP.

With regard to the selection of candidates both the major parties, barring the BJP in the case of Shimla seat, decided to repeat their old candidates. In the previous parliamentary poll in

1989 the BJP lost the Shimla seat wherein this time it decided to nominate a new candidate who happened to be a sitting member of the state assembly. Thus all the nominees of the two contending groups were important political leaders having considerable standing in their own areas. In terms of their social profile they not only represented the major caste clusters in their respective constituencies but also enjoyed sound economic background and sufficient political standing in the state's politics.

The Campaign

In line with their election strategies and support base different political parties planned their campaign to mobilise people in their favour. The Chief Minister, Mr. Shanta Kumar, tried to wade through by launching the twin programmes of "*Antodaya*" and "*Van Lagao-Rozi Kamao*". His party also released a pamphlet depicting the failures of the Congress Party and achievements of the BJP. Among the major achievements claimed by the BJP were: waiving of agricultural loans worth Rs. 57.30 crores; providing private water connections in 8,000 houses; and providing subsidised ration (i.e. flour for Rs. 1.50 per kg., rice 2.50 kg. and salt 0.25 paise per kg.) to one lakh poor families in the state in 1990. The pamphlet further assured more scholarships for the children of *Antodaya* families, loans for self-employment, pensions for widows and the disabled, one rank one pension for retired army men, opening of dispensaries, hospitals, schools etc., better employment avenues, and stringent action against corrupt and dishonest persons.

The BJP also made the "Mandir" as a big issue for purposes of wooing the simple and deeply religious people of this "land of gods". The Chief Minister in his speeches stated that the election "will not only decide which party would rule at the centre, but also show which course "Hindutva" would take". All the BJP leaders and activists throughout maintained their religious stance and leanings. They claimed that the BJP was the least hypocritical party in this regard. Saffron Sadhus and Sadhvis fanned out in the state to spread the message of Hindutva. They also received the whole hearted support of the Vishva Hindu Parishad, the RSS, the ABVP and the Shiv Sena. Audio and

video-cassettes were played by the BJP to manoeuvre the voters on emotive considerations. Women voters seemed to have shown relatively more interest in religious propaganda. Three audio and six video-cassettes were distributed by the BJP for the Lok Sabha elections. The general voters got quite impressed by the *"The Man India Waits"*, a film to project Mr. L.K. Advani as the leader India was waiting for; *"Ram Rajya Ki Aur"*, a propaganda-film giving views of party leaders on the various issues facing the people; and *"Sabki Bus Yahi Pukar"* dealing with election issues and largely based on interviews with BJP leaders.

BJP leaders also brought forth issues of national significance in the campaigning and made their stand clear regarding the ongoing crisis in Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir and Assam. Their focus, by and large, remained on Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir. They favoured scrapping of article 370 and creation of a security belt along the border with Pakistan. Moreover, they pleaded in favour of a uniform civil code throughout the country. Among the other propaganda issues they accused the Congress(I) of ignoring the interests of the state and promoting corruption, nepotism etc. in everyday life. Most of the top national leaders of the party visited the state and made speeches in different constituencies. Workers and state leaders worked in unity and a disciplined manner in most parliamentary seats.

Since the Congress(I) had been ruling the state for a long time right from 1947 onwards, it projected itself as the pioneer of the entire development process in Himachal Pradesh. Its leaders mounted attack on the BJP for making false promises in the 1990 assembly elections. In fact the issue of "promise vs performance" of the BJP government was made a major plank of the Congress(I)'s campaign. They told people that the BJP made all promises without caring for their implementation. While highlighting the weaknesses of the BJP government, the Congress(I) leaders widely used the issue of police firing on apple growers, retrenchment of people from jobs and neglecting the interests of state employees. Mr. Rajiv Gandhi, during his election meetings made a frontal attack on the BJP and called it a communal and divisive force. He appealed to the electorate to give a clear and decisive verdict in favour of the Congress(I) which should be elected rescue the country from the divisive and manipulative

policies of caste and religion. Similarly, Mr. Vir Bhadra Singh, while enumerating the failures of the 13 months old BJP government in the state, told the people not to "waste" their vote for the BJP this time. He claimed that it was the Congress party which gave them the state of Himachal Pradesh in 1948, saved its merger with Punjab in 1956, made its size double in 1966, provided it status of a full-fledged state in 1971 and achieved for it the honour of being the most advanced hill state in the country. A separate pamphlet was also issued depicting these issues. This apart, he explained and reminded the voters that it was the Congress(I) which for the first time in 1986 granted the support price of Rs. 1.30 per kg. for apple, Rs. 2.30 for orange, and *Kinu* and Re. 1.00 per kg for "*galgal*". Later on it was raised to Rs. 2.30 for apple, 3.65 for "*kinu*" and orange and Rs. 1.20 for the "*Galgal*". He denounced the BJP as a divisive force creating communal tensions in the country. Most Congress(I) workers in the state were optimistic and took the Lok Sabha poll as a full time rehearsal for the imagined Vidhan Sabha elections. They gave an impression that the BJP government would be sacked after Congress(I) came to power at the centre. Among the veterans, the former Union Minister and Yuvraj of J&K, Dr. Karan Singh, also addressed public meetings in the Hamirpur constituency and emphasised that only Congress(I) could form a stable government in the country. He, among others, has a family connection with Hamirpur.

But the Congress(I), as usual, was riven with factionalism in almost all the four constituencies. Its top leaders tended to be bent upon pinning down each other. Had the party worked unitedly it would have improved its position further.

Having the BJP in mind, the Janata Dal leader, Mr. V.P. Singh, blamed "the ruthless group of politicians" for dividing the country along caste and religious lines.¹⁵ The Janata Dal, however, banked upon the Mandal factor which, as mentioned, was important in Hamirpur and Kangra parliamentary constituencies. But this party had no cadre in the state to make the campaign effective. In some constituencies like Shimla, the Janata Dal workers themselves seemed to have stopped support to their official candidate. It seems that the aim of the Janata Dal was

much less to win than to make Congress(I) lose the constituencies of Kangra and Hamirpur where the OBC voters (mainly Ghiraths) were concentrated. The Janata Dal candidates largely cut into the Congress(I)'s vote bank. Otherwise, the BJP's anti-Mandal line would have surely won the Congress(I) most of the Ghiraths and Bahti votes. In the past also they had supported it during most elections.

Voter Turn-Out

Though there were multi-cornered contests in all the four seats, the real fight remained confined between the BJP and the Congress(I). As the election date was approaching near, the contests in most areas became closer between these two parties. The fight also became quite intense between the Congress(I) and the BJP. Most other candidates failed to make their presence felt. Almost 90 per cent of the popular votes in the state were cast in favour of these two major rival parties. In all there were 46 candidates including the nominees of these two parties. Factually speaking, only 11.05 per cent popular votes were cast in favour of the remaining 38 candidates who contested as nominees of J.D., J.P. and independents.

The intense fight between the two parties also resulted in an appreciable participation of the voters. As much as 57.39 per cent of the voters exercised their franchise in the state. The highest polling (61.29 per cent) was recorded in the Mandi Parliamentary seat where the former Congress(I) Union Minister, Mr. Sukh Ram, and the BJP's sitting MP, Thakur Maheshwar Singh, locked horns against each other.

However, polling this time remained considerably lower in comparison to the previous parliamentary elections held in November, 1989. In 1989, it went as high as 63.29 per cent. One of the reasons was that the BJP, which earlier failed to get any seat in the 1984 parliamentary poll, made it a point to mobilise as much support as possible in favour of its candidates in 1989. It had also sensed the anti-Congress(I) current in the state. Besides, in some constituencies such as Kangra, stalwarts like Mr. Shanta Kumar also entered the fray as the BJP nominee which became another factor to attract people towards the party in a greater

number. As much as 69.58 per cent of the electorate in the Kangra parliamentary seat exercised its franchise in 1989. But this time the percentage of poll in this constituency did not exceed 55.81 per cent. In the neighbouring constituency of Hamirpur too, polling went as high as 64.59 per cent in 1989. The BJP nominees in these two constituencies polled 46.33 per cent and 48.58 per cent votes respectively. The polling in 1989 was almost like the assembly elections during which the voting percentage tends to go higher than the parliamentary elections. During the 1985 and 1990 assembly elections polling, for example, came to be as high as 70.36 and 67.62 per cent, respectively.

Poll Verdict

Both the major parties won two seats each in the 1991 parliamentary poll in Himachal Pradesh. The Congress(I) retained Shimla and wrested Mandi from the BJP. Previously in 1989, the BJP had managed to snatch three seats from the then ruling Congress(I). But while in power it lost one seat to the same Congress(I) in 1991. It indicates that the BJP had become a victim of its own populist promises and politico-administrative lapses to which the Congress(I) also owed its defeat in 1989. Incidentally, almost similar verdict was witnessed in the other BJP ruled states like Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh.

Regionwise, in Himachal Pradesh the ruling BJP lost both the Lok Sabha seats falling in the upper Himachal, known as the apple-potato belt. Its victory was confined to the Kangra and Hamirpur constituencies where the BJP enjoyed some traditional support base right from the very beginning. But a close examination of facts would show that even in these areas its performance slumped considerably. In both the seats the number of votes cast for the BJP this time in comparison to the 1989 poll tended to have declined. Moreover, the margin of victory in these two constituencies also thinned down. In the areas in the other two constituencies in which the Congress(I) emerged victorious the margins were quite large. The Congress(I) improved its position in both the seats considerably as compared with the last parliamentary poll in 1989. Constituency wise performance of different political parties in the following table (Table-III) itself explains this clearly.

Table - III

**Comparative Performance by different Political Parties in the
Parliamentary Elections of 1989 and 1991 (Number of Votes)**

<i>Constituencies</i>		<i>Congress</i>	<i>BJP</i>	<i>J.D.</i>	<i>Other parties and independents</i>
Shimla	1989	2,01,912	1,44,922	60,418	13,492
	1991	2,09,406	1,62,546	15,765	16,862
Mandi	1989	2,06,095	2,34,164	-	24,688
	1991	2,33,380	2,06,753	18,112	11,373
Kangra	1989	1,75,943	2,35,147	74,983	21,504
	1991	1,63,641	1,74,457	75,905	11,431
Hamirpur	1989	2,05,854	2,37,429	-	45,471
	1991	2,02,232	2,05,970	12,265	31,807
Total	1989	7,89,804 (41.96%)	8,51,662 (45.25%)	1,35,401 (7.19%)	1,05,155 (5.59%)
	1991	8,08,659 (46.16%)	7,49,726 (42.79%)	1,22,047 (6.97%)	71,473 (4.08%)

Source: Government of Himachal Pradesh, Election Department, *Report on Lok Sabha Elections 1989 and 1991*.

The above table reveals that the BJP's support base in the state had faced a decline to the tune of 2.46 per cent from 1989 to the 1991 parliamentary polls. Whereas in the case of Congress(I) the percentage of votes had gone up from 41.96 per cent in 1989 to 46.16 per cent in 1991. The erosion of BJP's support base would have even gone little higher had the Janata Dal nominees in Kangra and Hamirpur not contested in 1991. The major reasons for the decline of the BJP's mass base were failure of the party to fulfill past election promises; use of police force against the apple growers; increasing dissatisfaction among the state government employees; invitation to outside business entrepreneurs to establish factories etc. and a general anti-establishment attitude which commonly develops against the less satisfying or non-performing systems.

In as many as 32 assembly segments out of the total 68 in the four parliamentary seats of the state, the Congress(I) this time (1991) took lead over the other groups. It was only in twenty seats during the 1989 parliamentary poll. Interestingly enough, in

the case of the February 1990 assembly poll its tally was reduced to nine seats only. In 1989 and 1990 it was mainly the non-performance of the Congress(I) whereas this time it was of the BJP.

Notes and References

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