

Rise of Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) since 1990s

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ABSTRACT

The role that ideas play in shaping the dynamics of India's party system and by extension, underlying voter behaviour, has been surprisingly overlooked by most scholarly accounts of contemporary Indian politics. In this paper explores Bharatiya Janta Party BJP, as a heavyweight on Indian's political stage by focusing on three key issues Article 370, common civil code and Ram temple at Ayodhya. This paper also investigates the rise of the BJP in the 1980, and 1990s. Its brief stagnation thereafter and its recent ascendance under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. The BJP's rise has been gradual and in some ways, its victory in 2014 was a historical culmination of the battle over competing visions of Indian nationhood that has been waged for nearly the past two centuries. In this paper we focused on detailed accounts of how the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) – a party that was the precursor to the BJP, along with its ideological partners, namely the Rashtriya Swayem Sevak Sangh (RSS) and its affiliates belonging to the Sangh parivar – have used Hindu majoritarianism as a mobilizational plank in post-independence India. Building on this history, it is noteworthy that, since the 1980s, the BJP has been the principal carrier for two, sometimes overlapping, groups of ideological conservatism.

KEYWORDS: - Bhartiya Jana Sangh, Bhartiya Janta Party, Rashtriya Swayem Sevak Sangh, Narendra Modi.

I. INTRODUCTION: -

The Bharatiya Janta Party was officially founded in 6th April 1980, and the first general election it contested was in 1984, in which it won only two Lok Sabha seats one from Gujarat and second from Andhra Pradesh. Following the election in 1996, the BJP became the largest party in the Lok Sabha for the first time. It formed the government but the government it formed was short-lived¹. After the 1998 general election, the BJP-led coalition known as the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee formed a government that lasted for a year². Following fresh elections, the NDA government, again headed by Vajpayee, lasted for a full term in office. This was the first non-congress government to do so³. In the 2004 general election the NDA suffered an unexpected defeat, and for the next ten years the BJP was the principal opposition party. In 2014 general election Narendra Modi led the BJP as Prime Ministerial candidate and chief election campaigner got landslide victory, it won an outright majority in Parliament. From 1991 onwards, a BJP member has led the opposition whenever the party was not in power⁴.

Those who strenuously object to the politics of recognition and social classes who harbour deep misgivings about the prevailing politics of statism. In the later 1990s and early 2000s, the BJP emerged as the single-largest party in the Lok Sabha, storming to power on the back of pro Hindu majoritarian sympathies that were triggered by the divisive issue of building a Ram Temple at Ayodhya abolishing Article 370 and common civil code. After ruling India from 1998 to 2004 under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the party was unseated by their archival, the congress party from 2004 to 2014. The party's electoral struggler led-many observers to opine that the BJP might have hit an electoral ceiling; indeed, one prominent commentator penned a fatalistic column that mustered whether the BJP was "A Dying Party? Therefore, it came as a surprise to many political observers not least many within the BJP itself that the party roared back to power in 2014 with Modi leading his colleagues to India's first single party parliamentary majority in three decades.

The official ideology of the BJP is integral humanism, first formulated by Deendayal Upadhyaya in 1965. The party expresses a commitment to Hindutva and its policy has historically reflected Hindu nationalist positions. The BJP advocates social conservatism and a foreign policy centred on nationalist principles. Its key issues have included the abrogation of the special status to Jammu and Kashmir, Article 370 & 35A, the building of a Ram Temple at Ayodhya and the implementation of a Uniform Civil Code⁵. However, the 1998-2004 NDA government did not pursue any of these controversial issues due to coalition complusions. It instead focused on largely liberal economic issues, strengthening of national security, prioritising globalisation and economic growth over social welfare. During the BJP rule (1999-2004) India has experienced democratic backsliding.

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Lok Sabha seats 1984 to 2014 won by BJP

| Year | Legislature | Party Leader | Seats won | Change in Seats |
|------|----------------------------|----------------------|-----------|-----------------|
| 1984 | 8 th Lok Sabha | L.K. Advani | 2/543 | +2 |
| 1989 | 9 th Lok Sabha | L.K. Advani | 85/543 | +83 |
| 1991 | 10 th Lok Sabha | L.K. Advani | 120/543 | +35 |
| 1996 | 11 th Lok Sabha | Atal Bihari Vajpayee | 161/543 | +41 |
| 1998 | 12 th Lok Sabha | Atal Bihari Vajpayee | 182/543 | +21 |
| 1999 | 13 th Lok Sabha | Atal Bihari Vajpayee | 182/543 | - |
| 2004 | 14 th Lok Sabha | Atal Bihari Vajpayee | 138/543 | -44 |
| 2009 | 15 th Lok Sabha | L.K. Advani | 116/543 | -22 |
| 2014 | 16 th Lok Sabha | Narendra Modi | 282/543 | +166 |

The Bharatiya Janta Party won the 2014 general election with a absolute majority under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi who assumed power in May 2014. It is in power in 13 states, either on its own or with its allies. This rise of BJP can be attributed to various factors, including the party leadership, organisational skills, and effective ground work.

JOURNEY OF THE BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY

In 2013, when Narendra Modi, was declared its Prime Ministerial candidate, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), has managed to widen its geographical reach and strengthen its electoral and political supremacy across the country⁶. Today, the BJP is the richest, largest and most dominant political party in India with more than 10 crore workers. This expansion was made possible by the foundation (on 6th April 1980) that were laid following the party's first electoral defeat in the 1984 general polls. In this election party has won only 2 seats⁷. The party then decided to abandon the ideals of "Positive Secularism and Gandhian Socialism" that it had adopted in its inception in 1980, under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee who would later serve as Prime Minister and become the first non-congress Prime Minister who complete its full tenure in his office⁸. In the late 1980s and the 1990s, the BJP went back to the Hindutva ideology of its precursor, the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS). The electoral failure was seen as proof that the moderate policy of Vajpayee would not work. Vajpayee was replaced as BJP president by Lal Krishan Advani, who promptly revived the BJS' hard-live Hindutva as the core ideology of the party. He is a hard core Hindu. Advani used the Hindutva rhetoric of 'pseudo secularism' and muslim appeasement" to great effect in winning popular support among the Hindu, aided by the soft Hindutva politics in the Indian National Congress played then.

The next logical step was to join the RSS-backed Vishava Hindu Parishad (VHP) which was leading the Ramajanjn Bhoomi movement. Soon, Advani become the face of a country-wide campaign to build a Ram Temple at Ayodhya where the Babri Masjid once stood. The hard-line Hindutva politics paid rich electoral dividends in the next general election in 1989, when the BJP won 85 Lok Sabha seats, in the 1991 general elections it increased its strength to 119 and its vote share went up to 20.1 percent from 11.4 percent in 1989 and 7.4 percent in 1984. In the 1996 general elections, the BJP's seats in Lok Sabha went up to 161 and staked claim to form the government, as a single largest party, which was accepted⁹. Thus, the first ever BJP-led government was formed under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, but it lasted for only 13 days, Vajpayee parliament rather than face a vote of confidence he resigned in his office when he failed to garner the support of other non-congress, non-left political parties to muster a majority.

In the next general polls in 1998, the BJP obtained 182 seats in the Lok Sabha and formed a coalition government with 18 coalition partners, called the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) which lasted 13 months from when it lost a no confidence motion by a single vote. Thereafter, in September-October 1999, the BJP-led NDA won 270 seats in the general elections with the BJP once again getting 182 seats. Third time Vajpayee took oath as Prime Minister and his government lasted the full term (1999-2004), until the next general polls in 2004¹⁰. However, the BJP-led NDA lost the next two general elections (2004 & 2009) due to various factors making way for a congress-led coalition the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) to run the government until a series of scams, high inflation and unemployment and policy paralysis grounded. It in the 2014 elections. This time, the BJP was led by Modi a four time Chief Minister of Gujarat and the Party's Prime Ministerial candidate. He managed to capitalise on the popular discontent against the UPA government and won the party a majority, on its own, in Lok Sabha. The last time any party had won a majority on its own was when the congress won 404 seats in the 1984 elections that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi on 31st October 1984. Ever since Modi became Prime Minister, the BJP has been working like well-oiled electoral machine. It

has won state elections after another and is dominating the national discourse like no other party has done in recent memory¹¹.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF BHARATIYA JANTA PARTY

The BJP's origins lie in the Bharatiya Jana Sangh, popularly known as the Jana Sangh, founded by Syama Prasad Mukharjee in 1951 in response to the politics of the dominant congress party. It was founded in collaboration with the Hindu Nationalist Volunteer Organization, the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) and was widely regarded as the political arm of the BJP. The Jana Sangh's aims included the protection of 'Hindu' cultural identity (Sanskriti) in addition to countering what it perceived to be the appeasement of Muslim people and the country of Pakistan by the congress party and then Prime Minister Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru. The RSS launched several of its leading pracharaks, or full time workers, to the Jana Sangh to get the new party of the ground. Prominent among these was Deendayal Upadhyaya, who was appointed general secretary¹². The Jana Sangh won only three Lok Sabha seats in the first general election in 1952. It maintained a minor presence in parliament until 1967. The party minimised engagement with the public, focusing instead on building its network of propagandists. Upadhyaya also articulated the philosophy of integral humanism, which formed the official doctrine of the party. Younger leaders, such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Lal Krishan Advani also became involved with the leadership in this period, with Vajpayee succeeding Upadhyaya as president in 1968. After assembly elections across the country in 1967, the party entered into a coalition with several other parties, including the Swatantra Party and the socialists. It formed governments in various states across the Hindi heartland, including Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. It was the first time the Jana Sangh held political office, albeit within a coalition, this caused the shelving of the Jana Sangh's more radical agenda¹³.

In 1975, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi imposed a state of emergency. The Jana Sangh took part in the widespread protests, with thousands of its members being imprisoned along with other agitators across the country. In 1977, the emergency was withdrawn and general elections were held. The Jana Sangh merged with parties from across the political spectrum, including the socialist party, the congress (O) and the Bharatiya Lok Dal to form the Janata Party, with its main agenda being defeating Indira Gandhi. The Janata Party won a majority in 1977 and formed a government with Morarji Desai as Prime Minister. The former Jana Sangh contributed the largest tally to the Janata Party's parliamentary contingent, with 93 seats or 31 percent of its popular votes. Vajpayee, previously the leader of the Jana Sangh, was appointed the Minister of External Affairs, Lak Krishan Advani as Broadcasting Minister and Brij Lal Verma Industry Minister¹⁴. The national leadership of the former Jana Sangh consciously renounced its identity and attempted to integrate with the political culture of the Janata Party based on Gandhian and Hindu traditionalist principles. These days violence between Hindu and Muslims increased sharply, the other major constituents of the Janata Party demanded that the Jana Sangh should break from the RSS, which the Jana Sangh refused to do so. Eventually, a fragment of the Janata Party broke off to form the Janata Party (secular) the Morarji Desai government was reduced to a minority in the parliament, forcing its resignation. Following a brief period of coalition rule, general elections were held in 1980, in these elections the Janata Party won only 31 seats. In April 1980 shortly after the elections the National executive council of the Janata Party banned its members from being 'dual members' of party and the RSS. In response the former Jana Sangh members left to create a next-political party known as the Bharatiya Janata Party¹⁵.

SOCIAL BASE OF BJP

The Bharatiya Janata Party has been a major player in the northern, centre and the western regions of India from the 1970s onwards. When the 2014 Lok Sabha elections commenced, there was not much doubt about the power of the BJP as far as north, central and western India. The BJP almost double its parliamentary seats count in the northeast as the National Democratic Alliance bagged 18 out of 25 seats in the region in 2014 Lok Sabha elections. Among southern states, Karnataka is the only state in south India that followed the national trend of endorsing single party majority at centre. The BJP has registered its best ever performance in Karnataka won 25 of the total 28 seats, in 2004 when it won 18 seats. While it has still not made headway in Kerala, in Andhra Pradesh BJP vote share of 0.90 percent is lower than the 1.50 percent polled by the none of the above (NOTA) but in Kerala Party might not have succeeded in breaking a long standing 'political curse' of not winning a parliament seat in Modi wave¹⁶.

India represents a civilization of composites and syncretic culture. Thus India is a sangam (fusion) of different cultures where none loses its unique characteristic and qualities and yet forms a perfect union. This Ganga Jamuni Tehzeeb championed by freedom fighters like Sarojini Naidu is the soul of Indian nationhood. People of a vast and diverse land put up with a bunch of cow belt Brahmins, Banians and thanks dictating terms, before showing them their middle fingers¹⁷. The Hindu's upper caste hegemony spreading fear, anger, anxiety and hate while very meticulously converting a large section of the Hindu population also into a stable vote bank

blurring caste, class, region and regional distinction in the process. The BJP emphasizes Hindu nationalism and national integration. It believes that Indians are living in an era of nation states and welfare of the people largely depends on national efforts. India is one nation and Indians are one people, constituting and mutually accommodating plurality of religions, faiths, ideologies, languages, and interests¹⁸.

Eventually, the integral humanism forms the basic philosophy of the BJP which enshrines the political, social, economic, and religious developmental ideas of the party. The BJP considers this ideology as a doctrine in consonance with ancient Indian ethos. The integral humanism, being a part of Indian philosophy, builds up a new social order which is capable of resolving modern's conflicts and abolishing all types of exploitation in the society. This integral approach establishes a symbiotic relationship between the whole society and its individuals. It also recognizes the urge for freedom, on the part of both individual and the nation, as natural. Democracy is a device to uphold the rights of the people, which are not only confined to political participation to safeguard the people's rights but are also extended to economic and social spheres¹⁹.

The BJP's support base is essentially the same as that of the erstwhile Jana Sangha. It is a party of the urban educated Hindu middle classes professionals, small businessmen, and white collar workers. In Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan BJP is the ruling party with charismatic leaders Narendra Modi, Amit Shah. The BJP believes in Gandhian socialism. The party says that its socialism is inspired not only by Gandhi and Jai Prakash Narayan but also by a Deen Dayal Upadhyaya. It stands for positive secularism and clean government while laying emphasis on the Hindu idiom on its poll manifesto. The party stands for justice for all and appeasement of none. Policy of reservations for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes apply the same policy to the backward castes broadly in line with the recommendation of the Mandal Commission. The party also favours smaller and stranger states desires to abolish article 370, favours Uniform Civil Code and would like to establish Human Right Commission²⁰.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), was formally launched as an independent political organization in April 1980, after the split of the Janata Party on the RSS issue. Most of erstwhile Jana Sangha members along with a few others, left the Janata Party to form the BJP. Thus the BJP is a reinarnation of the Jana Sangha, the Hindu nationalist party founded in 1951 by Shyama Prasad Mukherji. The object of the Jana Sangh was the rebuilding of Bharat as a modern, democratic society in accordance with religious precepts. The party adopted four fundamentals one country, one nation, one culture and a rule of law that would determine its future course of action. The BJP's support base in urban educated Hindu middle classes professionals, small businessman and white collar workers farmers, OBC etc.²¹.

In the BJP's early years, the party attracted supporters mainly from Hindu upper caste communities. Starting in the late 1980s the political concern of OBCs and Dalit took on added political salience as some political actors began mobilizing to give voice to lower caste concerns. The BJP sought to broaden its electoral footprint by positioning itself as a vehicle for these groups' political ambitions²². One prominent RSS figure advocated for the party to recruit leaders from lower caste, a tactic that allowed the BJP to make inroads in multiple corners of the country, especially in north-western India. The BJP embraced this strategy for only a short while, however, before Vajpayee and other party leaders sought to reverse course and reassert upper caste dominance over the party's higher echelons²³.

After a string of electoral losses in 2004 and 2009, the BJP stormed back to power in 2014 by simultaneously maintaining robust upper caste support and bringing substantial number of OBC, Dalit and Adivashi voters into the fold²⁴. The electoral victory under Modi marked the culmination of a 'solve transformation' that the party's supporters had been undergoing for years²⁵. For the previous twenty years, the composition of BJP voters had been shifting as upper caste citizens made up an ever-shrinking percentage share of the party's base. The most sizeable segments the party's winning coalition was OBC's whose share of the BJP's total vote share outpaced that of the upper castes. The BJP also attracted a greater share of scheduled castes (SC) and scheduled tribes (ST) voters, than it had in previous contests²⁶. This political sea change is remarkable, whereas in the mid-1990s 45 percent of Hindu BJP voters were from the upper castes, 35 percent were OBCs and merely 20 percent were SCs and STs in 2014, the BJP's Hindu coalition boasted 44 percent OBCs, 31 percent from upper castes, and a full 25 percent SCs and STs.

II. CONCLUSION

When political parties seek to expand their reach, they often develop contradictory tendencies. If these contradictions are not adequately managed, they can become a key source of organizational degeneration. Can the BJP finesse its coalitions emerging tensions? Since coming to power in 2014, the BJP and the RSS have aggressively tried to shepherd India in a more conservative direction on questions of statism and recognition. To its core constituency, it continued to be a party of Hindutva; to the OBCs, it represented a vehicle of political power, a vehicle articulating and absorbing their democratic up surge, fear power seekers, it was a convenient platform offering the possibility of tactical use of the Hindutva weapon when required, for devout Hindus it

represented the religious assertion of the Hindu religion, to the new and upwardly mobilise lower-middle sections, Dalit, OBCs, ST Adivashi, the party represented new possibilities of economic benefit.

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