

BJP Manifestos: What Changed between 2014 and 2024?

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ABSTRACT

In 2024, the BJP fell short of a majority but formed the government at the centre. Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister for the third consecutive term. The success of the BJP is attributed to the charismatic leadership of Modi and the organizational and electoral strategy of Amit Shah which have been talked about a lot in media. What has been less talked about are the manifestos of the BJP whose careful and in-depth analysis reveals how it changed the electoral strategy and tuned the issues in response to changed situations. This article analyses three manifestos of the BJP i.e., 2014, 2019 and 2024 in a comparative framework beginning with the design of the cover page to slogans and issues and seeks to underline how the BJP shifted the strategy and issues for the electoral successes that followed. It goes to suggest that the BJP lost its script in using the turf of the caste which was not its strong ground and, instead of setting the agenda, exhausted its electoral campaign in responding to the allegations of the opposition.

Key Words: *BJP, Modi, Hindutva, Ram Mandir, Vikas and Virashat*

INTRODUCTION

The politics of India in the last four decades has evolved and revolved around the issues and agenda of the BJP. The BJP, which is the reinvention and revival of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh, which merged itself into the Janata Party for a short term, kept Hindutva at the core of its ideology. Protection, preservation, and extension of the Hindu culture and civilization; protection against onslaught coming from non-Indic religions through religious conversion, a powerful self-reliant economy and military prowess were the cornerstones of the party's ideology which made it different from other political formations (Puri,1980). The abrogation of Article 370, protection of the cow, stoppage of religious conversions, the uniform civil code, promotion of Hindi, Sanskrit and other Indian languages, were some of the key cultural-political agendas of the Bhartiya Jan Sangh which it reiterated again and again in it

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manifestoes (Party Documents, 1951-1972). ‘Jahan Huye Balidan Mukherjee Ye Kashmir Hamara Hai’ was the slogan that the Bhartiya Jan Sangh (BJS) and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) took to the masses for years (Pathak, 2023). Issue of the protection of cows and the campaign against the Bangladeshi infiltration, religious conversions continued to find a place in the manifestos of the BJS and the BJP for decades. The cow protection campaign in which Sadhus participated in large numbers with the BJS also could not become a national outrage despite the killing of Sadhus by the police in protests in Delhi, and the BJS failed to create political capital out of it. The BJS faction, which had merged into Janata Party, finally came out to form the Bharatiya Janata Party in 1980 with Atal Bihari Vajpayee as its first president in Mumbai. BJP, which experimented with Gandhian Socialism, relegating Deendayal Upadhyay Integral Humanism to a margin, fared poorly in the election of 1980 and then in 1984 when the party got only two seats in the Lok Sabha.

The fortune changed only after the Rajiv Gandhi government at the centre turned the judgement of the Supreme Court on the Shah Bano case to appease the radical elements within the Muslim society; and to assuage the feelings of Hindus, got the lock of the Ram Temple opened through a judicial verdict in 1989 (Mishra, 2000). The BJP aligned itself with the Ram Temple Movement and combined it with the national security issue of the changing demography of several states of India that was rooted in infiltration from Bangladesh as well as the call of Swadeshi to make India self-reliant again (Pai, 1998). These issues hit the Congress very hard electorally. The buckling under the pressure of radical Muslim organizations convinced even the fence sitters that the party did it all for Muslim votes. They saw merit in the BJP arguments of the Congress playing the policy of Muslim appeasement to seek their support in elections. But the opening of the gate of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, as a strategy to balance the politics, proved very detrimental to the party as the Muslims shifted their loyalty to the regional leaders like Mulayam Singh and Lalu Prashad Yadav who were extremely vocal in favour of the Muslims on the issue of Ayodhya. Lalu Prashad Yadav stopped the Rath Yatra of Advani in Bihar and Mulayam Singh ordered to fire bullets at Kar Sevaks while crossing Sarayu to enter Ayodhya for Kar Seva (Dutta, 2019). Mulayam became Mulla Mulayam for Hindus but a hero for the Muslims. So was the case with Lalu Prasad Yadav who, for the Muslims, emerged as the true warrior of secularism and the Congress paid the price of getting relegated to the margins in both Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Hindus, on the other hand, gravitated towards the

BJP. This gave the BJP an edge in politics and it emerged as the largest party in the Lok Sabha and formed the government which lasted for 16 days only in absence of support from any other parties. The BJP again formed the government which lasted for 16 months with the support of its allies. However, the important point to observe here was that the party, which was untouchable for the non-BJP political formations, won friends in the parliament. But the government could not complete its full term. Even in the third term, the BJP had no majority on its own but Vajpayee ran a successful coalition government which could last for a full term. But the party decided to go for early polls due to a massive mandate in the Assembly elections of MP, Chhatisgarh and Rajasthan in November 2003 (Singh, 2013). However, the party lost to the Congress, which could not cross even 200 seats in the parliament, but formed a coalition government under the leadership of Manmohan Singh in 2004 and then in 2009. Advani, whose image got dented because of depicting Jinnah as secular during his visit to Pakistan, was the PM candidate of the NDA but the BJP further went down to 114 seats in the parliament (Rai, 2006).

The last two years of the Manmohan Singh government were charred by massive corruption charges in defense deals, license allotments for mines, commonwealth scams and for many more such wrong reasons which captured national headlines and badly dented the image of the government. Swami Ramdev and Anna Hazare's movement against corruption and black money became the talk of the town and the villages (Anikivi, 2015). The BJP supported this movement both overtly and covertly and the clean image of Manmohan Singh eventually got tarnished in the eyes of the masses.

It was amidst the scams and the policy paralysis, the unemployment and inflation, the frequent terror attacks in the country and the absence of a credible leadership that the opportunity was born for the BJP, in general, and Narendra Modi, in particular, to exploit the situation (Palshikar, 2014). The BJP and its leader Narendra Modi succeeded in dethroning the UPA government. The people gave a clear mandate to the BJP and it was the first time after a gap of 36 years that a political party singularly got the majority in the Lok Sabha, though the BJP formed the government with its coalition partners. 'Acche Din Aane wale Hain' (Good fortunes are to come) became a national slogan in no time (Pinto & Kar, 2014). A corrupt and a weak government charge that the BJP levelled against the Manmohan Singh government was well received by the people which can be measured from the fact that the Congress party could not win even 10 percent of the total strength of the Lok Sabha and therefore could not be entitled to the position of the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha (Sen, 2014).

The BJP not only repeated its success in 2019 but crossed over 300 seats on its own strength and secured over 374 seats with its allies. The nationalist euphoria, generated from the attack on Pakistan in response to the Pulwama attacks, largely worked in favour of the BJP. But the 2024 parliamentary elections, which were initially being seen as a cakewalk and a smooth sailing for the party, which claimed to get 370 seats on its own and over 400 with its allies (*Abki Bar Char Sau Paar*), fell flat (Hali, 2024). The BJP could barely manage to get 240 seats; though with the support of old and few new allies, it came into power for the third consecutive term. In a way, this was also a historic achievement as after the Covid pandemic, no government in the world could win the election. They were defeated all over, even in the first world. In that sense, Modi becoming the Prime Minister was indeed a success. To unpack this further, the present paper is a qualitative comparative analysis of the three BJP manifestoes i.e. of 2014, 2019 and 2024 in terms of understanding the ideology, the organization, the issues and leadership styles so as to know first, whether there has been a shift in the position of the party and second, how the BJP has kept its electoral strategies changing in order to connect with the masses.

As the leadership style has been the most popular issue talked about even by the opposition, it would be worth to start from here. The opposition has been attacking the PM that his style of functioning is that of a dictator and he pushes the agenda without consulting the opposition (PM Modi Behaving Like a Tin-Pot Dictator: Derek O'Brien, 2024). He does not respect the opposition government and does not even consult them. This seems far from the truth. The PM has always prioritized cooperative federalism and has the distinction of not dismissing any opposition government on this pretext or the other. He has always given an audience to the opposition leaders, including Mamta Banerjee, who did not lose any opportunity to use the most undignified terms for the PM. But within the BJP, he certainly has emerged as the tallest and the most unchallenging leader. And it is visible everywhere- from the manifesto to the speeches of the leaders who attribute everything to the leadership of Prime Minister Modi.

BJP UNDER THE MODI LEADERSHIP

Thus, the first most visible change in the BJP has been the leadership. In 2014, the leadership of Narendra Modi was challenged by none other but his mentor Lal Krishna Advani who despite doing very poor in the 2009 election, again wanted to be projected as the Prime Ministerial candidate of the BJP.

His people in the parliamentary board were very vocal against Narendra Modi. They did not want him to be declared as the Prime Ministerial candidate. Those who are privy to the internal news within the BJP know it very well that Sushma Swaraj, an Advani loyalist, who later became the foreign minister in the Modi government, vociferously opposed Modi's candidature. In another case, Modi had donated Rs 5 Crores to Bihar to fight against the flood in the state and the posters of Modi-Nitish were pasted on walls all over Patna where the BJP national executive members were assembled and Nitish Kumar was to host a dinner in their honor (Nitish Returns Rs 5 crore Gujarat Aid, 2013). Despite being part of the NDA, Nitish abruptly not only declared to decline the donation but in order to snub Modi, he cancelled the dinner too (When Nitish Cancelled The Modi Dinner, 2014). Reports later came that it was done on the behest of the Advani camp.

But Modi had the full backing of the RSS. Therefore, despite the opposition from the Advani camp, Narendra Modi became the in-charge of the election's campaign of 2014 and subsequently the Prime Ministerial candidate of the BJP (Asrar, 2014). For the first time, a sitting Chief Minister of a state who was reckoned to be a provincial leader, had made an orbital jump and was challenging the settled leadership of the party's national leaders. Narendra Modi, by then, had become the poster boy of the ideology of Hindutva and was running a successful government in the state whose model of development earned the appreciation from all quarters, not only in India but from abroad too.

Through the reality of vibrant Gujarat, Narendra Modi crafted a new image of himself as a forward-looking, development-oriented leader as opposed to the typical branding of him as a communal Hindu leader by the opposition who had gone to the extent of writing to the US government to refuse the VISA to him so that he may not visit the USA (Lakshman, 2016). However, by 2013, Narendra Modi had already established several milestones, one after another, to be emulated by the other chief ministers of India. Shining wide roads and state highways, growing industrial complexes, water canals and irrigation facilities, the reality of accessing electricity 24x7, 100 per cent electrification and electricity reaching all villages had earned him a rare distinction of an achiever and a performer among the comity of chief ministers and leaders who are largely known for politicking and inefficiency (Narayan, 2014). The annual investment meets of Gujarat became international news. It had become the favored destination for people in business. The SMS of Modi to Ratan Tata to shift the Nano car factories to Gujarat in wake of Nandigram and Singur

controversy had caught the national and international attention (Tata Motors Ltd Shifted To Gujarat From Singur Because of Law And Order, 2011).

And, therefore, the declaration of Modi as a Prime Ministerial candidate of the BJP electrified its cadres and those of the RSS's hardcore followers who were unhappy with the BJP after Advani's fiasco in Pakistan on the issue of Jinnah. BJP cadres wanted a change, a leader who could push the nationalist agenda. So did the RSS, which had seen how the Congress government attempted to implicate its leaders in the terror attacks. This was the same time when the term 'Bhagwa Aatankwad' was coined by the Congress to advance the arguments that it is not only Muslims who indulged in terrorism and terror attacks but even the right-wing organizations engaged in attacks against Muslims (Dharmani, 2013). Digvijay Singh launched the book which hypothesized that Mumbai attack was the handiwork of the RSS (RSS & 26/11: Digvijay Flags It Off Again This Time In Mumbai, 2010). The organization now needed a powerful leader who could galvanize the masses and cherish the ideology of Hindutva. The organization had no faith in Advani who was forced to resign as the president of the party. Needless to say, Advani was not even consulted and the BJP declared Narendra Modi as the Prime Ministerial candidate in the Goa conclave in 2014. The script was already decided and done with, which is evident from the fact that before the elections could be declared, Modi had already done one round of election rallies in over 114 constituencies of India (Narendra Modi's Electoral Milestone: 437 Rallies, 3 Lakh km, 2014). And his meetings drew a huge crowd. The response of the crowd, with echoes of chants and cheers of 'Modi-Modi' for a few minutes, the moment Modi arrived on the dais or rose to address the audience, showed the connect that he had established with the masses and it was certainly not orchestrated in any sense of communication. Modi followed the policy of consensus and team leadership in his approach.

The cover page of the BJP manifesto of 2014 had all three stalwarts and former presidents of the party such as Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani and Murali Manohar Joshi along with the incumbent president Rajnath Singh (BJP Manifesto, 2014). The first three were the undisputed top three leaders of the party for whom there was a popular slogan "Bharat ke Ye teen Dharohar, Atal Advani Murali Manohar." (Tiwari, 2014). Besides them, all the four Chief Ministers of the BJP ruled states were on the front page along with Sushma Swaraj and Arun Jaitley. Jaitley was an Advani man in Delhi but he had stood like rock behind Modi, assisting him in the legal matters. These Chief Ministers were charismatic leaders and had considerable following and

organizational control in their states.

This got replaced now in 2019 and the 2024 respectively. Modi, by now, had become a brand for the BJP who between 2024 and 2019 won state after state. Narendra Modi had chosen to contest from Varanasi to influence the voting in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. And it paid well. In the parliamentary elections of 2014, Nitish Kumar had dissociated from the NDA and fought elections alone. The result was clear. People voted Modi and JD(U) was defeated badly. This forced Nitish Kumar to come back to the NDA fold and form the government with the BJP in the state. The BJP, along with its allies, won over 73 seats in Uttar Pradesh in the parliamentary elections of 2019 and defeated the Congress-SP combined, reckoned to be a formidable one in legislative Assembly elections of 2017. There were many new states where the BJP had never come in power but won the elections and formed the government in states like Assam, Tripura, Haryana and it also bounced back into power in Karnataka as well as in Maharashtra with its ally Shiv Sena had become a big brand and his presence in the elections made a huge difference as the BJP snatched victory from the jaws of possible defeat in some of the legislative assembly elections in states (From Economy to Politics: How India has Changed during 9 years Modi Government, 2023). The result was that it finally marked the end of the Advani-Joshi era of the BJP, who were then sent to the *Margdarshak Mandal* and a new team of leadership came up in the BJP (BJP parliamentary board rejigged; LK Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi dropped, 2014).

In 2019, there was no more photographs of Advani, Joshi or Rajnath Singh or even the Chief Ministers of the BJP states, though in the 2024 party manifesto, Jagat Prakash Nadda figured (BJP Manifesto, 2019). The absence of the photo of the BJP president Amit Shah in the 2019 election manifesto was not because Amit Shah, out of respect, did not want his photograph to be with Narendra Modi; it was because the party wanted to ride on the credibility and popularity of the Prime Minister which was unchallenged despite the Rafael controversy and Rahul Gandhi's aggressive tirade against the Prime Minister with the slogan "Chowkidar Chor Hai" (Chowkidar chor hai' new slogan in India: Rahul Gandhi, 2018). People did not believe it. Further, Modi has never been discourteous like Indira Gandhi in public with the constitutional dignitaries and even in the party, he has never sought to bypass the protocol. On several occasions, he said that when he was made the election in-charge, he used to report every day in the evening to the then president of the BJP, Rajnath Singh.

Though it sent the message to the political commentators and the opposition to press the charge that a one-man show had now engulfed the BJP which used to take pride in collective leadership but this was purely a strategy of the BJP to cash in the popularity of the PM. Rahul Gandhi and the opposition called him Shahanshah (emperor) and a dictator but it did not dent the image of the PM (Shahenshah enacted a law in Parliament against truck drivers, says Rahul Gandhi on truckers strike over criminal laws, 2024). The Congress raised the issue of Rafael in hopes that as Bofors had worked for the opposition in denting the image of Rajiv Gandhi, 'Chowkidar Chor hai' will do the same against Modi on the issue of the Rafael jet fighters' purchase from France. But the surveys published by agencies showed that the PM's popularity was not just intact but went up marginally (Narayan, 2019).

The second change was the tagline of the BJP- 'Shreshtha Bharat with Sabaka Sath Sabka Vikas' (BJP Manifesto, 2019). The manifesto of 2019 carried this but in the 2024 manifesto, it was missing. Further, the cover page of the election manifesto of 2014, which was titled as 'Ek Bharat, Shrestha Bharat', was changed to 'Sankalp Patra' in 2019 and 'Modi ki Guarantee' and 'Phir Ek Baar Modi Sarkar' in 2024 (Venniyoor, 2024). In the 2014 manifesto, the photographs of the founding icons of the Jan Sangh such as Shyama Prashad Mukherjee and Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay were placed on the second page of the manifesto. But they did not figure at all in the election manifesto of the BJP in 2019 and 2024. Does this mean that the party discarded these icons or moved away from the ideology which these stalwarts cherished and propagated? Or did Modi deliberately did so to prove that he was larger than these icons?

The speech of the Prime Minister on the occasions of the birth anniversary of both Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay and Shyama Prashad Mookerjee do show that it was not ill-intended but it was just to cash in the rising international image of the PM in the elections. In the 2014 manifesto, there was a preamble underlining the commitment to certain goals and values such as to promote a vibrant participatory democracy, a pro-active, pro-people and transparent governance, promoting a globally competitive economy, connecting villages and providing them quality life with all basic and modern amenities and to create a 'Brand India' (BJP Manifesto, 2014). There was no such pledge in the 2019 and 2024 manifestoes which directly came to the issues at hand after messages of the Prime Minister and the incumbent and former President of the BJP, Rajnath Singh, who was the chairman of the Manifesto committee (Rajnath to head BJP's LS manifesto committee; Sitharaman made convener, 2024).

The slogan ‘Sabka Sath and Sabka Vikas’, which was the tagline of the BJP on the front page of the 2014 manifesto, was missing on the cover pages of the manifestoes of 2019 and 2024. The coinage of the term was intended to break the post-Godhra image of Narendra Modi in order to stop the polarization of the Muslim votes against the party and to assure the Muslims that the coming of the BJP into power was not going to harm the interests of the Muslims. Zafar Sareshwala, who was a prominent Muslim businessman and an intellectual from the state of Gujarat, became a popular TV face in those days. He was invited on almost all channels and spoke in favour of Modi in the press, highlighting how communal riots had become alien to the state and the Muslims’ prosperity went up in Gujarat under the leadership of Modi (Wajihuddin, 2013). The Sacchar Committee and Rangnath Mishra Committee reports, which stated the poor conditions of Muslims in the left and Congress governed states, provided political ammunition to the BJP to attack the opposition that they did not aid and assist the Muslims by promoting their education and wealth but only exploited their presumed fear of the BJP for electoral gains (Unnithan & Mishra, 2006). Although by 2019, Modi subsequently became as much accessible to Muslims as he was for any other community and ensured that nothing was done to harm them physically yet, he did not walk the extra mile, like the Congress, to assuage their identity feelings. And he publicly but politely declined to wear the skull cap when a Muslim person attempted to place it on his head on the dais of a function (Langa, 2011). The opposition criticized and alleged that this act of Modi was a disgrace to the community and was not secular in intent (Unnithan, 2018). The BJP countered this by arguing that if the Muslims cannot place *Tilak on their forehead* quoting Islam, and yet, they are secular, why is it essential for a Hindu to wear the skull cap to be secular? (Mahmood Madani backs Narendra Modi for not accepting skull cap, 2014). Modi always drew a line between governance and politics. In governance, he ensured that no Muslim fell victim to the state apparatus but in politics, he refused the Congress style of wearing the skull cap and throwing Roja-Iftar parties to the Muslim elites to make inroads in their constituencies for electoral purposes. But he always attended the functions of the Bohra Muslims of Gujarat and appreciated their contribution to the economy of the state, thus, standing apart from the other political parties via his divergent approach (Saiyed, 2023).

Before ‘Sabka Vishwas’ became the catch line to reach out to the Muslims in 2019, the BJP, on the instructions of the Prime Minister, had launched a programme to reach out to the Muslims and share the vision of the PM. In the parliamentary board meetings of the party, he cautioned the leaders

of the BJP who loosely spoke against the Muslims. The Muslims were the disproportionately larger beneficiaries of the programmes of the policies of the government, like the Ujjwala Yojana or the Prime Minister Awas Yojana (Minority communities benefitted most from welfare schemes under Modi govt, 2023; Ujjwala has led social change, 45% of beneficiaries dalits and tribals: PM, 2018). He hoped that the Muslims, who were beneficiaries of the government policies, could be drawn towards the BJP. And therefore, he asked them to work with him. Further, he raised the issue of the Pasmada Muslims who constitute the largest proportion of the overall Muslim community but are poor, illiterate and deprived. It was interpreted as a clever political design to divide the Muslim community so that they could not make a united choice against the BJP. The BJP also hoped that a big chunk of the Muslim women would vote for the party to showcase gratitude in return for making triple Talak or Talak-e Biddat, an illegal and a punishable offence. The BJP propagated that it intended for the liberation of Muslims women and their children from being tortured by their husbands who could, at any time, divorce their wives in one go for want of new and young wives. Muslim women celebrated it and appreciated it also. The BJP expected that it would bring a change in the voting patterns of Muslims. The Muslim women would vote for the party; if not all but certainly a substantial proportion of their population. But the voting pattern showed that irrespective of the social and sectorial subdivisions within the Muslim community, they voted against the BJP (Mandal, 2024). And the BJP feedback system made it known to the Prime Minister who, in the second leg of the election campaign of 2024, started making scathing attacks against the mindset of the Muslim community without naming the Muslims (PM Modi made Islamophobic remarks in 110 campaign speeches: Human Rights Watch, 2024).

As the BJP campaign of 2014 was aimed at defeating the opposition and form the government, the manifesto started with those issues which were very close to the heart of the people. The party depicted the UPA-I and UPA-II regimes, as the 'Decade of Decay'(BJP Manifesto, 2014). As scams, corruptions, price rise, unemployment, the issue of black money and policy paralysis were the rallying points for the people against the government, the manifesto of 2014 started with these issues. The Anna Hazare movement against corruption and black money had generated a mass hysteria against the government in which Narendra Modi appeared as a beacon of light. His statement that if black money parked in the foreign countries was brought back, everyone will be getting 15 Lakhs in their account, became an election issue (PM Modi's promise of 'Rs 15 lakh in each account' an idiom: Amit Shah,

2015). This continued to be a discussion point for years to come and later on, the opposition twisted it to suggest that ‘look how the Modi Guarantee is an empty slogan as he could not deliver on the commitment to give 15 lakhs to all Indians, neither could he bring back the black money of Indians stashed in the foreign banks’. The BJP had also accused the Congress government of not maintaining the double digit growth rate, which was at the time of the Vajpayee government, that nose-dived to 4.8 percent during the UPA regime, promoting ‘jobless growth’ (No reform in UPA growth story as GDP up just 4.8 per cent, 2013). The manifesto promised to transform the employment exchange into a Career Centre and assured a corruption free government, self-employment, technology enabled e-governance, policy and technology driven minimum government and maximum governance etc. These were very catchy assurances and a completely new narrative for the Indian electorates which focused on the vision of a developed India. And, people believed Narendra Modi because he had cultivated such an image of a deliverer in Gujarat as the Chief Minister.

The 2019 and 2024 manifestos also talked about these issues but they were more in the form of what had been done and achieved so far, and what it intends to do in the next five years to come. As the Pulwama issue had generated anger against Pakistan and Modi responded to the issue by striking at Balakot in Pakistan, a mood of national masculinity in favour of the BJP had already swelled. The BJP sought to cash it in the 2019 elections and therefore it started the manifesto with the caption ‘Nation First’; a commitment which the BJP and the BJS had spoken of always. Zero tolerance against Terrorism, primacy to the National Security, self-reliance in the defence sector, combating Left wing extremism, Citizenship Amendment bill to tackle the illegal infiltrators from Bangladesh- these occupied the first few pages instead of a talk on price rise and unemployment which figured in the 2014 manifesto (BJP Manifesto, 2019). ‘Make in India’ in the defence sector was projected to tell the electorates how the Congress party neglected the security of the country and how the BJP was committed to make India a strong nation both economically and militarily.

In the 2019 Election manifesto, special reference was made to the manufacturing of the most modern weaponry systems like AK-203 automatic rifles in factories at Amethi (BJP Manifesto, 2019). But by 2024, the issues had changed, and the issue of defence got placed on page 38 of the manifesto, where it extensively mentioned how the BJP government worked hard to keep the defence of India strong and far more robust. It recalled the surgical strikes of 2016 and the air strikes of 2019, the creation and appointment of the Chief of the Defence Staff, which no previous government dared to do, and

the robust infrastructure along the Indo-Chinese border to match the prowess of the enemy which remained neglected for decades under the leadership of the Congress party (BJP Manifesto, 2024). Modi earlier had introduced the concept of treating the last village along the borders as the first villages of India and was committed to the laying of the optical fiber, to providing 24x7 electricity and availability of the basic amenities in these border villages so that the people of these villages don't fall prey to the Chinese rumors and tactics. It also mentioned the elimination of Left-wing extremism. In the 2024 Election Manifesto, the party placed the statistical data before the country that there was a 71% reduction in insurgency in the North-East and 52 percent reduction in the left-wing extremism (BJP Manifesto, 2024). It also placed the abrogation of Article 370 as one of the major achievements of the government and highlighted how the state (presently a UT) has returned to normalcy after a substantial reduction in terror activities (BJP Manifesto, 2024). On 25th January, the Home Minister had held a press conference in which it was stated categorically that after the abrogation of Article 370, there was no case of stone pelting in the valley, there was reduction in terror activities and casualties from both the civilians and the armed forces (Union Home Minister and Minister of Cooperation, Press Information Bureau, 2024). The manifesto of 2024 also talked about the Citizenship Amendment Act and the National Register for the Citizen, both of which are intended at going hard on the illegal infiltrators and aim at sending them back to their countries, including the Rohingyas from Burma.

DID BJP SIDELINED THE ISSUE OF RELIGIOUS CONVERSION?

Another shift in the BJP manifesto was the absence of any direct mention of any opposition to the religious conversions and the use of the term cultural nationalism which had been a term perennial to almost all the manifestos of the BJS and BJP. This term was replaced by the 'preservation and promotion of civilizational ethos and cultural heritage and its ancient wisdom'(BJP Manifesto, 2019). Thus, the party firmly made it clear that it would not sideline its cultural and ideological agenda. The manifestoes of 2014 and 2019 clearly mentioned the BJP's commitment to building the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya and in the 2024 Manifesto, it proudly owned the fulfilment of its commitment on the subject. The party clearly stated that unlike the Congress it does not see the 'cultural values' as hurdles to the progress of modern India but as being 'essential to our future' (BJP Manifesto, 2019). In line with this, the party committed to both the protection of all Indic languages and dialects and the promotion of Sanskrit for which it announced 100 Panini fellowships. In

the 2024 election manifesto, the BJP coined a very popular phrase- ‘Virasat Bhi, Vikash Bhi’ in which it elucidated how it renovated Kashi, Kedarnath and Ujjain Mahakal temples besides many others. It remained, however, silent on the complete liberation of the Kashi and Mathura temples. The manifesto of 2019 promised to ‘conserve Bharatiya Faith and Bharatiya culture’(BJP Manifesto, 2019).The spirit of opposition to religious conversion of Hindus was very much enshrined in it. Obviously, it was intended to send a message to the Hindus that the BJP was conscious of the concerns of the Hindus that the religious demography in several states of India was and is being changed by design to change the political and cultural narrative of the state and it will do its all to stop it.

Modi, otherwise also, led by example. He showed that it was not essential to discard the religious identity in order to be secular even if you are the head of the government, something which the Nehruvian secularism had sought to underline. He visited almost all the important temples of India and his media team ensured that it was shown on the TV, if not broadcasted live. This was before 2014 and it continued even to this election. In the 2019 elections, on the last day of voting, he went to Kedarnath and sat for meditation for hours and it was telecasted live (Chowrasia,2024). In 2024 also, he went to Kanyakumari in Kerala and chose the famous temple there at Vivekanand Rock for 24 hours of meditation (Chowrasia, 2024). The opposition criticized it on the grounds that it was intended to influence the Hindu voters in the election. But this was not the first time that Modi had resorted to his commitment to the faith he believed in and flaunted his Hindu identity. The saffron dhoti with the yellow kurta and the tripund on the forehead gave several chances to the photographers to capture this image on their cameras. He reached out to the masses through the twitter message that on the suggestion of the spiritual gurus he would undertake a special 11-day ritual before participating as *Yajman* in the consecration ceremony at the Ram Temple at Ayodhya (PM Modi Begins Special 11-day Ritual Before Opening of Ram Temple in Ayodhya, 2024). He was not shy of his Hindu identity. Rather he flaunted his identity during all Pujas- whether it was the inauguration of the Kashi Vishwanath temple or while performing Puja in the temples of the South (Kumar, 2023).

Interestingly, the 2014 election manifesto dedicated one page to addressing the concerns of the minority. The issues discussed there in demonstrate that ‘minority’ means Muslims as the manifesto talked about issues that largely dealt with the Muslims such as Madrasa modernization, empowering Waqf boards and taking steps ‘to remove encroachments from the unauthorized occupation

of Waqf property’ (BJP Manifesto, 2014). Conversely, the government in its third term has tabled bills in the Parliament to make changes in the Waqf Board laws, to preserve and promote Urdu etc. It also highlighted that it will ensure that there is no place for ‘perpetrators or exploiters of fear’ (BJP Manifesto, 2014). Interestingly, the 2024 manifesto talks about minorities again but it mentions linguistic minorities; it does not talk about religious minorities. In the 2019 elections manifesto, there was no separate page or headings on the minorities. Accordingly, there was no discussion on Madrasa education or preservation of Urdu. On the contrary, the manifesto talked about working towards the implementation of the Uniform Civil Code. In the 2024 election manifesto as well, no page or even a single paragraph is dedicated to the substance which could give the sense of Muslim appeasement. On the contrary, it went hard on the practice of Triple Talak by calling it a ‘barbaric act’ and how the BJP emancipated the Muslim women from this medieval barbarism (BJP Manifesto, 2024).

The BJP manifesto of 2024 did not use the term ‘Muslim’ at all except for this one instance in which it talked about how the practice of Triple Talak was stopped by the BJP government for the benefit of the suffering Muslim daughters. The BJP had hoped that this would help in bringing the Muslim women to its fold and expected that they would vote for the party. But the voting pattern of Muslims as such completely belied this hope. Muslims en-bloc voted against the BJP not as usual but far more aggressively than earlier (Sharma & Kidwai, 2024). On the contrary, the Congress party used the term minority 15 times in their manifesto and promised several social, economic and cultural policies for them in case the party was voted into power. Minority for the Congress, for all practical purposes, means Muslims only. It used this term 18 times in 2014 and 11 times in 2019 (Congress Manifesto, 2014-2024).

One reason why the BJP succeeded in 2014 was because of the promise to change the country and it had made an emotional appeal to the electorates to give it five years, as they have voted for the Congress for over 50 years and it had stayed in power. The first three pages mentioned price rise, unemployment, jobless growth, corruption, black-money, poor delivery, policy paralysis and the BJP manifesto promised to deliver on these issues if voted to power. The Prime Ministerial candidate Narendra Modi, who led the election campaign, invoked and addressed the aspirations of the young people and impressed upon them to compare how our leaders failed the nation in the last 70 years. The younger generations, exposed to the developed countries of Europe and America through the world of the internet, could easily connect with the

accusations of Modi. In the 2014 manifesto, Murali Manohar Joshi echoed Modi's election speech that democracy and demography were dividends and instead of crying on it, they need to be used for the good of the nation. And the only way was to educate, skill and make them employable (BJP Manifesto, 2014).

This led to programmes and projects like 'Skill India' and 'Start up India', Mudra loans, loan to street vendors; funding young entrepreneurs accordingly became the pathways to employment generation. The 2014 election manifesto promised to make India a 'knowledge powerhouse' and committed to take up the skill enhancement in mission mode through 'skill mapping', the launch of National-Multi Skill Mission, responsive industry-responsive manpower, vocational training etc. (BJP Manifesto, 2014). Modi emphasized on self-employment through the start-up programmes and it paid off well as well. In the last 10 years, India could be home to 115 unicorns i.e. the companies which have a valuation between 1 billion to 10 billion (Mitter, 2023). In the 2019 election manifesto, it informed that 17 crore entrepreneurs had availed the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana and it aimed to increase it to 30 crores in the times to come (BJP Manifesto, 2019). It also promised to start the 'Seed Start-Up Fund' with Rs 20000 crore to empower the youth entrepreneurs (BJP Manifesto, 2019). Modi bypassed the traditional pathways and sought to write a new grammar of development which attracted criticism as well. He focused on Swadeshi with modifications with the sole purpose of making India as a manufacturing hub and positively impacting the global trade to Bharat's benefit (Nandi, 2024). Therefore, be it defence or the toys industry or the semi-conductor clusters, he emphasized on indigenous production. For instance, from the contract to the Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) to the manufacturing of the combat aircraft to starting work in all the ordinance factories is a case in point.

After 'Nation First' that dealt with security of the country, the first issue which the election manifesto of 2019 discussed was the issue of the farmers with the caption reading as "Doubling Farmers Income". This topic ran into a few pages in which the BJP promised to initiate several policies and welfare schemes for the farmers which intended to increase the productivity of the crops to ensure the maximum profit. 'Pradhan Mantri Kishan Samman Nidhi', which was restricted to the farmers having 2 acres of land, was now extended to all farmers; pensions for all marginal farmers who crossed the age of 60, crops insurance policy, Kishan credit facility and many more such plans and policies for the farmers were announced in the manifesto (BJP Manifesto,

2019). It talked of sufficient warehouse facilities for the farm products, not only on highways, but also close to the villages so that there is no wastage of the crops the farmers have produced and so that they could sell them at their ease. It also covered issues like the digitization of the land records intended at reducing the land disputes in villages and the Blue Revolution to promote fisheries and so on. But there was no discussion on the Minimum Support (Price MSP) in the manifesto, neither in 2014 nor in 2019, though Modi as a Chief Minister in Gujrat had backed the Swaminathan Committee reports on the MSP (Prabal, 2024).

In the 2014 election manifesto, a discussion on agriculture was started at the bottom of page number 27 and ran over the entire page 28. It talked about 'increased investment in agriculture and rural development', promised to expand rural credits and 'increase the farmers' income' but did not make any pledge to implement the Swaminathan report (BJP Manifesto, 2014). In the 2024 election manifesto, it is mentioned that how there has been an unprecedented increase in the MSP for major crops and it committed to follow this into the future also. But again, instead of being led by the masses, the party decided to follow the fair principles of financial prudence. It listed out how the BJP government assisted the farmers by giving them Rs 6000 every year as part of the PM Kishan Samman Yojana. It mentioned about schemes like fair insurance of crops and quick payments to the farmers in case of damage to their crops, the launching of Krishi satellite and the positioning of Bharat as a nutri-hub in the times to come (BJP Manifesto, 2024). It also listed out how much the BJP government did for the farmers and how committed it is to their betterment. But it resisted the option of bending before the illogical demands of the farmers that wished to coerce the government to make the MSP legally binding for all crops. It genuinely wanted to change the farm sector by bringing in the three farm laws, making it more market oriented but they had to be withdrawn due to the farmers' protests. The Prime Minister made it clear that these laws were withdrawn not because they were bad but simply because the farmers were on the roads. And this is no more a hidden fact that both the Aam Adami Party and the Congress had their minds behind it to seal the political fortunes of the BJP.

In fact, by the time the BJP entered the parliamentary elections in 2024, it hoped that the performance and delivery will work for the party in the election combined with the emotional euphoria that the Ram Temple had generated a few months back. This was not without reason. In the last ten years, over 50 crore people were linked to the banking system through the Jan Dhan Account

(PMJDY Accounts Cross 50 crore, Deposits Exceed Rs 2 lakh crore, 2023). Money was being transferred directly to the same number of people. 80 crore or even more than that were getting free rations since 2020 (Free Ration To The Poor Will Be Extended For 5 years, 80 crore will Benefit: Modi, 2023). 34 crore citizens were given health insurance under which they could avail treatment up to Rs 5 Lakhs, four crore beneficiaries got pukka houses and 14 crore received fresh drinking water through the Jal Jeevan Mission, 25 crores came out of poverty, 10 crore women benefited from the Ujjwala Yojana. 11+ crore benefited from the Kishan Samman Yojana (Negi, 2024). The list is too high to accommodate all statistics and arguments here.

But what was the most striking feature of the manifesto of 2024 was that it was Modi centric. Modi was given a place in the manifesto of 2014 only two times followed by 33 times in 2019 and 73 times in 2024. Critics, even from within the Sangh Parivar, raised the voice that individual-centric policy and programmes do not go in consonance with the style of functioning of the RSS and its ancillary organizations (Vaidya, 2024). But the matter of fact is that be it 2014, 2019 or 2024, it was the Modi-Shah duo who led the campaign and took the party to the victories through the electoral strategy. Yogi Adityanath, Shivraj Singh Chauhan and Hemant Biswa Sharma really worked as second engines or double engines. The BJP sought to make the parliamentary elections a form of presidential one. The campaign of the party had hoped that the beneficiaries would do good for the BJP by showing their support but that did not happen. The BJP failed to get the number which it had in the 2019 elections.

CONCLUSION

In the 1990s, the politics of the country had four discernable strands, all four cross-cutting each other. There was a Mandal movement which aimed at giving primacy to the caste politics. Second was the Mandir movement, which sought to unite Hindus, and it countered the first one. The third was Swadeshi and it called for economic nationalism on which both the left and the right converged. And the fourth was the policy of the free market which sought to get rid of the license permit raj and de-bureaucratize the domains of economy. The beauty of Narendra Modi was that he merged all four streams into one and made the party almost invincible. He redefined social justice by really giving a dignified life to the citizens of Bharat in the form of giving them houses, toilets, free ration and Chulha for cooking and an adequate representation in the council of ministers to the people who were at the margins of society in terms

of the social and political domains. It dented the caste politics which reflected in the BJP victory in UP and Bihar. Further, he continued to be the poster boy of Hindutva through the building of the Ram Temple, the renovation of Kashi and the Ujjain temple and many such initiatives. Thirdly, he never shied away from foreign investment and always welcomed the foreign companies to invest in Gujarat but at the same time he never left any opportunity to make 'Make in India' a true campaign on the ground. He called upon the people of the country to use Swadeshi to the maximum extent possible. The breaks in the supply chain during the Covid pandemic and the Indo-China tensions in the 2020s had made him realize that depending on others would be catastrophic for the national interest.

The BJP sought to reinvent and project itself as a centrist party in the election manifesto of 2024. It attempted to break the typical image of a Brahman Bania urban centric cow belt party. For the first time, in its manifesto, the party openly mentioned that in the cabinet formation, it would give 60 percent representation to the MPs coming from the OBC, SC and ST communities. When the cabinet formation was made, the party had projected that it had given a fair representation to the sections of society which, so far, were not represented and were at the margins in terms of the decision making at the highest level. If one compares the caste representation in the cabinet of the Manmohan Singh government to that of the BJP, the latter's claim was not untrue. In 2014, before going to elections, there were only two members from the SC community, Sushil Kumar Shinde and Mallikarjun Kharge whereas one from the OBC community- Veerappa Moily in the UPA II government led by the Congress party. Contrary to that, in the Council of Ministers of Modi, there are 29 OBC ministers including 2 from SEBC, 10 from the SC community and 5 from the ST community. Never in the history of India was such a large representation given to these sections of the society. But this too did not work for the BJP. These ministers could not counter a false campaign that the victory of the BJP in the 2024 election would end the reservations for the Dalits and the backward castes. It is here that the BJP made the mistake. Caste is the turf of the regional parties. The BJP was destined to fail after it ignored Hindutva and nationalism as the core of its election agenda. In fact, it failed to set the agenda, which it did in 2014 and 2019. This time, its entire campaign remained focused on countering the Congress and the opposition on issues such as the reservation and the supposed threats to the Indian constitution. And thus, it lost the plot of victory.

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