

## ***Chapter Three***

### ***Rise of Hindu Nationalism in India***

## **Rise of Hindu Nationalism in India**

This chapter is an attempt to outline one of the foundations of this thesis. It tries to trace the origin of the rise of Hindu Nationalism in India through its various sections. The sections in this chapter start with providing a brief description of the ideas espoused by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, henceforth RSS, and its continued fraternal relation with the Bhartiya Janata Party, henceforth BJP. This is followed by sections that make an attempt to understand the fault lines that were used as a means to proliferate the acceptance of the idea of ‘Hindutva’ and thereby providing an alternate recourse on the discourse on Indian nationalism, which, as has been described in the previous chapter, could be viewed in light of the assimilating nature of globalisation that seeks to pervade national identities and a pushback of the national identities against it. This, though, is tougher than it may seem in a networked world but nonetheless desired, given the colonial history of India, that has had the effect of inculcating a suspicion against globalising forces, primarily located in the nations of the global north<sup>5</sup>.

If the Indian nation were to, nonetheless, accept globalisation as a reality of the modern world, it would have to be accorded greater space to influence global discourses, which as Jaishankar (2020) describes in his ‘The India Way’ would be akin to the India way but until then, identity assertions that are rooted in geo-cultural niceties would dominate the Indian mind, the influence of which are reflected in the form of the proliferation of, the so called, parochial ideas such as ‘Hindutva’(henceforth without quotes), evident from electoral results, in which, a party, that has been known to espouse the idea of Hindutva has been consistently victorious. The latter sub-sections in this chapter deal with the major events that contributed to the rise of the BJP to where it currently stands in the politics of India.

### **3.1. Hindutva and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)**

While Hindutva, is today conflated with the political ideas espoused by India’s political entities, that see themselves to the right, on the spectrum of political discourse, which is rather confusing, and convoluted with ideas that do not fit the mainstream understanding of the political right, it is nonetheless an assumed reference to political entities that associate themselves with the ‘Sangh Parivar.’ The ‘Sangh Parivar,’ a term that is used as a

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<sup>5</sup> A term used to describe nations that have power and resources to exercise hegemonic influences over world institutions, they constitute nations of North America, Europe, and Australia.

euphemism for the affiliates of the RSS, of which the BJP is also a part, espouse an idea of India that seeks to witness the coming together of India through, as Ghai (2010, p. 160), puts it "... "Hinduising" the Indian polity", she also notes that,

"...the BJP is both ideologically and organizationally connected to the broader Hindu nationalist movement. Ideologically, the BJP is committed to Hindutva – in its literal translation, "Hinduness" – equating religion with an exclusive conception of the nation."

The conception of 'Hindutva' being perceived as a means to attain an exclusive idea of Indian nationalism, has been a widespread understanding of what the current notions of Hindutva would seem to be. While these notions on Hindutva are being contested by both the protagonists and antagonists, depending on which side one would see themselves on, it would be fair to comment that Hindutva has reduced the perception of 'Hinduism' which was known to be, "...a way of life, an ancient tradition of religious thought and diverse practices. A uniquely inclusive culture... (to) the source of shrill and polarising rhetoric" (Purie, et al., 2018).

Although there is a wide array of thoughts on the discourse of the dichotomy between Hindutva and Hinduism, a relatively clear representation could be found in a comparison between two writings, one by Shashi Tharoor, in his, 'Why I am a Hindu' (2018) and in Subramanian Swamy's, 'The Ideology of India's Modern Right' (2018). What makes these two writings important to this discourse is the fact that Tharoor is a member of the Indian National Congress and Swamy, a member of the BJP. While there is an attempt by both to pander to the musings of their respective electoral constituents (Kumar A. , 2022), nonetheless, these constitute essential contributions that aid in facilitating the understanding of the Hinduism versus Hindutva discourse. A stark difference between the perceptions of the authors, on Indian nationalism stems from the fact that the reference point for them is different. While Swami looks at antiquity to trace rootedness of the given identity, Tharoor, in 'Why I am a Hindu' (2018) primarily looks at the post-colonial construction of it. In fact, in his subsequent writing, 'Battle of Belonging: On Nationalism, Patriotism and What it Means to be Indian' (2020), he introduces the idea of 'civic nationalism' which, while comparing it to 'ethnic nationalism' he notes,

"... Friedrich Meinecke had argued for a similar dichotomous treatment: Kulturnation versus Staatsnation. ... One that is linked to some immutable or

at least seemingly ineradicable form of belonging—tribe, caste, language—and the other, what might be considered a subscription model of belonging, a form of membership that is about agreeing on certain norms of behaviour. The former has a biological and physical basis; the latter is a mental and social construct. It is through the prism of these two broad categories, and the conflict that arises when one is sought to be transformed into the other...” (p. 33)

This thesis also makes reference to this distinction between ‘ascribed’ and ‘achieved’ identities in section 2.1 Conceptualising Identity. Jaffrelot and Therwath (2012) in their contribution to the ideas on the discourse of Hindu nationalism, comment,

“Hindu nationalism is an exclusive form of ethnoreligious nationalism which thrived in the first years of the twentieth century in reaction to the ‘threat’ the West (Christian missionaries as well as British colonizers) and the Muslim minority (allegedly related to a pan-Islamic movement rooted in the Middle East) were according to its leaders posing to the Hindus.” (p. 343)

While it is tough to ascribe the usage of the word Hindutva to Hindu nationalism, the exclusivist form of it, owing to the various other discourses on it, it is nonetheless understood that, it is used as such. While the presentation of it (Hindutva) in pedestrian discourse by agents, which also includes the media, is riddled with the problem of ignoring the nuances of it (Kumar A. , 2022), which might lead one to believe that it is probably a misrepresentation, Sahasrabuddhe in Purie, et al, (2018) on this notes,

“... ‘Hindutva’ was wantonly sought to be delinked from its etymology and its other religion synonyms, interpreted as an antonym of Hindu and propagated as the ‘ideology’ of Hindu civilisation, not as the ‘essence of Hindu civilisation’ but as a deviant construct. In truth, however, Hindutva simply means being a Hindu.” (p. 55)

The root cause of the rise of Hindu nationalism might be many and yet it is in the writings of Jawaharlal Nehru himself that motivations for the need for such a nationalism is probably evident. While he did articulate the need of the rising Indian middle class to cling on to,

“...some cultural roots ... something that gave them assurance of their own worth, something that would reduce the sense of frustration and humiliation

that foreign conquest and rule had produced. In every country with a growing nationalism there is this search apart from religion, this tendency to go to the past.” (Nehru, 1994, p. 341)

In going to the past, evidently, it was Nehru’s acknowledgment of the nature of the human mind to seek the past, in all its niceties, and to draw on religion is just another prerogative, not Nehru’s but indeed someone else’s. It is in this context, that, the researcher is inclined to situate the rise of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, henceforth RSS.

Hedgewar, a Telegu<sup>6</sup> Brahmin<sup>7</sup> by birth, was the founder of the RSS, founded in the year 1925 with the intention of fostering a sense of unity among individuals, transcending the “entrenched socio-cultural boundaries”, through “charitra nirman” or character building, to dedicate themselves to the service of the nation (Chakrabarty & Jha, 2020). In the initial days of the conception of the RSS, they “...did not seem to be inclined to include those who were not Hindus; the idea gained ground especially in circumstances leading to India’s dismemberment in 1947. (Chakrabarty & Jha, 2020, p. 161)” The RSS’s own documentation on its origins, as quoted in Basu, Datta, Sarkar and Sen (1993, p. 14), notes,

“A change was coming over the country. The aftermath of the 1921 movement had come to Doctorji [Hedgewar] as a shock. Indian Muslims had proved themselves Muslims first and Indians only secondarily so that when the Khilafat was given up in Turkey, they withdrew from the allied movement for national independence. The whole atmosphere was charged with Muslim fanaticism. ‘Allah ho A kbar’ and not ‘Bharat mata ki jai’ was heard everywhere. Soon there were Muslim riots in Bannu, Kohat, Multan, Nagpur, Kanpur and elsewhere. ‘These are not Hindu-Muslim riots,’ he would say. ‘These are Muslim riots because in every single case it is they who start them and go on the offensive.’ These riots culminated in the Moplah atrocity, completed with arson, loot, murder, rape and forced conversion. The nation was dazed. And Doctorji wondered: ‘Is it Khilafat

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<sup>6</sup> An ethno-linguistic community in India, who are, primarily residents of the states of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh in the country.

<sup>7</sup> A community which is accorded the highest status in the caste hierarchy, a practice endemic among the communities of the Indian sub-continent. In practice, caste hierarchy has been established as a means to consolidate power and hence lacks mobility- memberships are by virtue of the birth family that a person is born into.

(restoration of Khalif) or Akhilafat (catastrophe for all)? ...’ It became evident that the Hindus were the nation in Bharat and that Hindutva was Rashtriyatva. While wishful thinkers pretended not to see the writing across the national political firmament, the realist in Dr Hedgewar refused to dream up wishy-washy dreams. The truth was out. Only Hindus would free Hindustan and they alone could save Hindu culture. Only Hindu strength could save the country. There was no escape from the logic of facts. Hindu youth had to be organised on the basis of personal character and absolute love of the motherland. There was no other way. The agony of the great soul expressed itself in the formation of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. With five friends he started the day-to-day programme of RSS. The great day was the auspicious Vijaya Dashami day of 1925.”

While the creation of the RSS is rooted in reasons that resulted in the exclusion of the Muslims of India as part of the ‘Indian nation’ in the ideas of nationalism espoused by them, it was only in the year 2002, that there was a certain capitulation in this regard which led to the creation of the Muslim Rashtriya Manch. A lesser-known organisation, the Muslim Rashtriya Manch, is another affiliate organisation of the overarching ‘Sangh Parivar,’ created with the aim to facilitate dialogue with the Muslims of India (Raza, 2014). While the attempts to foment a unified idea of India, by the RSS, is quite evident from the activities that have been described in the previous paragraphs, there is also an existing discourse on the exclusivist nature of the idea of nationalism as espoused by the RSS. Pal and Chaudhary (2023), in this context comment that the RSS,

“... is a sprawling Hindu majoritarian organisation with paramilitary, advocacy, service provision and lobbying elements, which pursues the transformation of the Indian polity through ideological proselytisation, institutional penetration and the violent intimidation of opponents.”

Jaffrelot (2021, p. 14) in his analysis of the organisational structure of the RSS also shares a similar line of thought, he asserts that the organisation intends to be at the “...crucible of the Hindu nation” and facilitate the domination of the Hindus. In his analysis of the nexus between the RSS and organisations that are either affiliates or sympathise with the cause espoused by the RSS, Jaffrelot (2019, pp. 41-67) points out how the transnational network of Hindu nationalist organisations under the panoptic umbrella of the ‘Sangh Parivar’ seek

to transform India to a Hindu ethno-state, if not in the de jure sense then at least in the de facto sense for the time being, with the intention of eventually attaining the de jure status. Although the BJP and the RSS are separate organisations, the latter has had immense contribution in the electoral successes of the former (Ramachandran S. K., 2019). The BJP on the other hand, being "...the electoral manifestation of the Hindu nationalist movement" (Ghai, 2010, p. 160), in this regard, has also contributed its fair share to this recourse on the discourse of Hinduism through its propagation of Hindutva. It has done so by supporting,

"...calls for the destruction of the Babri Mosque, a sixteenth-century mosque in Ayodhya, ... (being) an ardent critic of India's form of secularism, ... (aiming) at Muslim personal status law ... (to push) for the development and implementation of a Uniform Civil Code." (Ghai, 2010, p. 160)

### **3.2. Mandalisation of the BJP and the consolidation of Hindutva**

The BJP, in its initial days was labelled as a Brahmin – Bania Party (Ghai, 2010, p. 162) owing to the membership of the party that was primarily upper-caste<sup>8</sup>. There was therefore a need to accommodate the upper-caste aspirations in the backdrop of the politics surrounding the implementation of recommendations of the Mandal Commission report<sup>9</sup>. When the protests by upper caste communities, against the implementation of the Mandal Commission brought the country to a stand-still, the BJP was forced to think of an alternate form of politics that would allow it to retain its traditional upper caste voter base and at the same time not alienate the middle castes. Sitapati (2020, p. 157), in this regard, notes,

"The figure of the protests was Rajeev Goswami, son of a Brahmin clerk from Punjab. After failing to draw attention to a nine-day hunger strike against the Mandal quotas, Goswami poured kerosene all over his body and set himself on fire. The RSS now demanded a suspension of the report. It argued in the pages of the Organiser: 'What V.P. Singh through Mandalisation of the society intends to achieve is a division of Hindus on forward, backward and Harijan lines.' The BJP's mostly upper-caste leadership agreed in private. In public, however, Advani chose not to stand

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<sup>8</sup> A categorisation of communities that are believed to be historically advanced in terms of the status they enjoy in the hierarchical system in the Indian society.

<sup>9</sup> The Mandal Commission report had recommended 27% reservation for India's 3743 backward castes who formed 52% of the country's population.

up to Mandal, calculating that alienating middle castes would reduce his party's potential voters to a numerical minority. He, therefore, sought a balancing act: his party would not oppose Mandal but wanted sub-categorization of castes and promised that the total reservations would not exceed 50 per cent."

The Mandalisation of politics that seemed to lead to the fragmentation of the Indian society on caste lines was in a way, a death knell on the Hindu nationalism's vision of India, as had been espoused by the RSS, and the BJP being the electoral manifestation of Hindu nationalism, had no other option but to pursue an entirely different political route, which would define BJP's politics for a very long time. Advani, who was the leader of the BJP at the time happened to attend a meeting organised by the RSS, called with the intention to garner support for the VHP's inauguration of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, the construction of which was to start, on the site of the sixteenth century Babri Mosque. It is here that the roots of Advani's conception of the idea of the 'rath yatra,' which would start on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1990 and end on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1990, just in time for VHP's inauguration ceremony, could be traced to. In mobilising support for the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, Advani had found a counter, not that he had a better option, to the fragmentation of Indian polity, which was a result of the Mandalisation, the 'rath yatra.' Sitapati (2020) in his documentation on this, has noted,

"It took him a few more weeks to put the two together. Advani was at home with his wife, talking to Pramod Mahajan, the ever-smiling former journalist who had quickly become the chief trend-spotter of the BJP. It was in the course of this discussion that it struck Advani what the diversion from Mandal would look like." (2020, p. 158)

Although the BJP came out with an effective response against the politics on caste, the writing on the wall was clear. The slogan '*vote se liya CM, PM; mandal se lenge SP, DM*'<sup>10</sup> is representative of the nature of politics, prevalent at the time, which was a result of the

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<sup>10</sup> A slogan that was used by communities who were placed in the middle of the hierarchical categorisation viz. caste, in the Indian society, classified officially as Other Backward Castes, to assert their representative rights on the employment opportunities in the government apparatus. While, through their majority in the electorate they had political power in the form of Chief Ministers and Prime Ministers who were part of the communities, the government apparatus was dominated by the upper castes and this was the status quo, these communities wished to change.



politics surrounding the implementation of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission report and the BJP, which, until this time, was a party of members, who majorly belonged to either the 'Brahmin' or the 'Bania' communities, had to adopt what came to be known as 'social engineering.' Jaffrelot (2015), in this context, notes,

“In January 1994, Hukumdev Narain Yadav was appointed as special invitee to the party's national executive board, and Uma Bharati, a Lodhi, became chief of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha (the youth wing of the BJP). The main advocate of the inclusion of an increasing number of low-caste members at all the levels of the party apparatus was K.N. Govindacharya<sup>11</sup>, himself a brahmin and then one of the BJP general secretaries. He called this policy 'social engineering.'” (p. 152)

By the 1996 elections, the election manifesto of the BJP, indicated that there was an acceptance of the electoral realities ushered in by the implementation of the Mandal commission recommendations and if BJP were to be successful electorally, it would have to accommodate Other Backward Class, henceforth OBC, sentiments. As a negotiation though, they promised reservations on the basis of economic criteria, for communities that did not fall in any of the listed categories that were defined as backward. The assurances that were advocated in the 1996 manifesto, are as under,

“1. Continuation of reservations for the Other Backward Classes till they are socially and educationally integrated with the rest of society; 2. A uniform criterion for demarcating the 'creamy layer'; 3. Flow of reservation benefits in an ascending order so that the most backward sections of the OBCs get them first; 4. Ten per cent reservation on the basis of economic criteria to all economically weaker sections of society, apart from the Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes and the Other Backward Classes; and, 5. Special programmes to provide education and vocational training as well as awareness campaigns.” (Bhartiya Janata Party, 1996)

What this 'social engineering' managed to achieve, was a consolidation of Hindu nationalism through the inclusion of all sections in the Hindu caste hierarchy under the ambit

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<sup>11</sup>Govindacharya's background could also be traced to the RSS, moving to the BJP only later. The movement of members from the RSS to BJP and back had been a standard practice then and is the practice now.

of BJP's political discourse. In fact, Uma Bharati, who became part of the BJP as part of the 'social engineering' project was among the forerunner leaders who was involved in vociferously encouraging the demolition of the Babri Mosque in 1992 (The Wire Staff, 2020). While the BJP had never managed to overshadow the INC until 1999, when it became the leading party in the National Democratic Alliance coalition government, that held power till May 2004 (Ludden, 2005, p. vii), it was through the 'rath yatra,'<sup>12</sup> between September and October 1990, the prelude to the demolition of the Babri Mosque, that the BJP got the opportunity to display its gusto in a politically charged atmosphere ushered by the 'Ram Janmabhoomi' movement and in return managed to fulfil their aim of mobilising the Hindu masses which would eventually lead to the cultivation of a committed vote bank that would aid in BJP's electoral victories in the future. The BJP, on their official website, describing their perspective on the Ram Janmabhoomi movement, write,

“... the BJP is the largest political party in the country, thanks to the journey that began from Somnath during the Navaratri of 1990. The procession that began with a handful of nationalists led by an uncompromising nationalist (Advani) is today a roaring stream of nationalist fervour.” (Bhartiya Janata Party, 2023)

### **3.3. Demolition of the Babri Masjid<sup>13</sup> and Rise of the Bhartiya Janata Party**

A consequence of the 'Ram Janmabhoomi' movement, that had the effect of evoking emotive responses across the country, the Babri Mosque was ultimately demolished on December 6, 1992 and this effectively played to the musings of the exclusivists within the Hindu nationalistic fold, backed by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, henceforth VHP and the BJP, who are all affiliates of the RSS under the umbrella of the 'Sangh Parivar' (Paul & Pegu, 2021). BJP's major contribution in this movement, the Ram 'rath yatra', starting at Somnath and ending at Ayodhya, was perceived as sites of the humiliation of the Hindus at the hands of the Muslim invaders and this did not fare well with the proponents that had campaigned for the preservation of the secular social fabric of India and it only worsened

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<sup>12</sup> Translated to 'chariot journey' in English, is symbolically rooted in Hindu mythology, where the Gods would go to battle for the preservation of 'Dharma' (simplistically equated with morality) against evil for the good of human kind. For instance, the epic Mahabharata depicted Krishna, the God, driving the chariot of Arjun, the warrior, and advising him on the dilemmas of warring against his own kith and kin for the preservation of 'Dharma.'

<sup>13</sup> 'Masjid' is term that is used to describe a Mosque, a Muslim place of prayer, in various Indian languages and in this context the former has been used to capture the essence of the movement that had taken place.

the anti-Muslim rhetoric (Jaffrelot, *The Hindu nationalist reinterpretation of pilgrimage in India: the limits of Yatra politics*, 2009). Cohen (2004, p. 18), on the selection of the sites, noted that "...Hindu nationalist politician LK Advani chose Somnath to begin his 'rath yatra' on September 25, 1990, in an attempt to mobilise Hindu sentiment." In this context, building on the ideas of Tagore, as described by Chakrabarti (2016) and Eriksen (1991) as have been outlined in a previous section 2.2 on Nation and Nationalism, the 'Hindu' nation had found its 'other'. Guha (2017, pp. 582-598) described the imagery of the 'yatra' as "...religious, allusive, militant, masculine, and anti-Muslim," and the inevitable result was the 'othering' of the communities that did not identify themselves as Hindu.

In the aftermath of the 'rath yatra,' the events that led to the demolition of the Babri Mosque, brought with it electoral gains for the Bhartiya Janata Party in the 1991 general elections - the 120 seats, an increase by 35 seats from its previous tally of 85 seats (Elections.in, 2022) but most importantly, it has had a definitive impact on the course that Indian politics would take in the years to come. Incidentally, the final verdict on the land dispute for the Ram Temple on the site where the Babri Mosque once stood, in Ayodhya came on November 9, 2019, at a time when the same Bhartiya Janata Party, was firmly entrenched in power at the Centre, right after its second electoral victory in the 2019 elections to the Lower House of the Indian Parliament. Jacobson (2023), on the implications of the judgement notes,

"...the 2019 judgement, which was a result of an appeal to the 2010 Allahabad High Court judgement that had ruled that the ... contested site belonged to the god Ram, and could not be divided ... justified the destruction of the Babri mosque ... rewarded Hindu majoritarian claims with a temple, which is in fact regarded as a landmark achievement in the making of India into a Hindu *rāṣṭra*, or nation."

Nonetheless, the judgement of the highest court on the land is hence, the law of the land. Consequently, the first phase of the construction started on March 2020 and the foundation stone was laid by Narendra Modi himself, the current Prime Minister of India in the BJP led NDA government (Sharma P. , 2020). Narendra Modi, a leader whose origins lay in Gujarat had been the Chief Minister of the state from 2001 to 2014 and has been the Prime Minister of India ever since (DH Web Desk, 2019). His ascent to power in Gujarat was immediately followed by the highly televised, Godhra riots of 2002, after which he resigned only to be re-elected again, with a greater majority (Embree, 2013, p. 234). While there are numerous

accounts of the role of the media, some suggesting a positive role in bringing the violence down at the later stages of the conflict, it was nonetheless a start of a certain narrative building. As Rajagopal (2007, p. 211) comments,

“... Godhra, however, dramatically brought Hindutva’s mythic world of marauding Muslims and helpless Hindus into the templates of reality television and live action news.”

Hibbard (2010, p. 171) on similar lines notes that during the riots, the media, without proof implicated the Muslims of Gujarat accusing them of conniving with Pakistani intelligence services and hatching a “deadly conspiracy” against the Hindus of the state – fabricated reports of the rape of Hindu women were published in the local newspapers and the television sensationalised the riots. Similar was the line of communication of the government agencies who also antagonised the Muslims of Gujarat (Embree, 2013, p. 233). While the Godhra riots were a localised phenomenon in the state of Gujarat but the implications of it were far reaching. Though it could not incriminate Modi of any wrong doing, it garnered popularity for the persona, viz. Modi, having been denied entry to countries who based their rejection of the award of visas to visit them citing his role in the 2002 riots (Ganguly, 2017, p. 138).

#### **3.4. 2014 General Elections and Rise of the new ‘Hindu Hriday Samrat’<sup>14</sup>**

The strings of Narendra Modi’s popularity, as has been mentioned in the previous section could be traced to the 2002 Godhra riots. Although, he had been a key figure in the BJP’s machinery, having organised Advani’s rath yatra in the 1990s, his stint in Gujarat as chief minister for twelve and half years propelled him to becoming BJP’s key candidate for the 2014 general elections. Hall (2022), in this regard takes note of Modi’s unique approach to governance and the careful cultivation of the ‘brand Modi’, he narrows it down to three elements,

“The first ... one that was energetic where normal ‘netas’<sup>15</sup> are indolent; clean rather than corrupt; technologically savvy rather than unapologetically luddite; and responsive to the people, not bound to special interests. The second was an open and unabashed friendliness to business, including the

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<sup>14</sup> ‘Hindu Hriday Samrat’ could be translated to King of the Hindu heart.

<sup>15</sup> The term ‘neta’ is used as a reference to an Indian political leader.

big, family-owned industrial conglomerates that dominate the Indian economy. And the third – and by far the most controversial – was the manipulation of identity politics both within Gujarat and between Gujarat and the rest of India...” (p. 194)

The image that he carried from his alleged involvement in the 2002 Godhra riots and light of the various developments prior, that were geared towards mobilising the Hindu vote bank, Modi came to be known with the sobriquet ‘Hindu Hriday Samrat’, a term that was formerly accorded to Babasaheb Thakrey, founder of the Shiv Sena, a political party in the state of Maharashtra, India (Vicziány, 2002). While this had been his political pitch prior to becoming the Chief Minister of Gujarat, he, in the context of the polity of Gujarat, started shifting his repertoires. First, was his push towards greater economic activity, evident from the initiation of the ‘Vibrant Gujarat’<sup>16</sup> convention and secondly, his sub-nationalistic pitch for Gujarat expressed through the sobriquet of Gujarati ‘asmita’<sup>17</sup> (Jaffrelot, 2016).

In Hindutva’s laboratory (Spodek, 2008), the state of Gujarat, election winning mechanisms were therefore readied and the ‘brand Modi’ which constituted “...business-friendly, technologically enabled Hindu nationalism (Hall, 2022, p. 196)” were developed to be implemented in the rest of India in the lead up to the 2014 elections, to the lower house of the Indian Parliament, the Lok Sabha. The anti-incumbency in light of the corruption scandals that the successive UPA governments before him were involved in, coupled with colossal spending on advertising space on various media did not fare well for the incumbents, viz. Congress and its allies, electorally. Estimates put the spending on 2014 general elections in India at US\$5 billion, which is US\$3 billion more than the 2009 campaign with most being spent by the BJP (Hall, 2022, p. 197; Kapur & Vaishnav, 2018, p. 2; Gottipati & Singh, 2014). While the Congress had also tried its best in playing the advertising game, evidence of which is available in the thirteen percent increase of advertising rates offered to media houses through the DAVP (Narisetti, 2021, p. 164), it could not match the, as Hall (2022, p. 197) puts it, “...war-chest (of the BJP) that allowed it to buy up advertising space in newspapers and on television, radio, billboards, and social media” acquired through “...Modi’s strong connections into the business community and into India’s far-flung diaspora, built up over two decades.”

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<sup>16</sup> Vibrant Gujarat is an investors' summit held by the Government of Gujarat every two years in Gujarat.

<sup>17</sup> Innate qualities, could be equated with the idea of soul.

As per data from the Election Commission of India (2018), in the 2014 elections, Modi, contesting from Varanasi, known to be at the heart of the Hindu civilisational identity (Choudhury C. , 2017), won with 5,81,022 votes. Runner up Arvind Kejriwal of the Aam Aadmi Party secured 2,09,238 votes and Ajay Rai of the INC managed only 75,614 votes. BJP had won the elections with a historic tally of 282 seats from its earlier tally of 116 seats and its main rival, the Indian National Congress was reduced to 44 seats from its previously held 206 seats. The National Democratic Alliance, under the leadership of the BJP formed the government with 336 seats in its kitty. In Varanasi, Modi, on a BJP ticket had won with a margin of 3,71,782 votes - a new Hindu Hriday Samrat had risen.

### **3.5. 2019 Elections and Beyond**

The period between 2014 and the 2019 general elections was marked by a reconfiguration of the Indian polity that was characterised by the rise of Hindu nationalism, "...a counter-revolution against Mandal's gains" (Jaffrelot, 2021). As has been described in section 1.1 Background of the Study, key machineries of the Ideological State Apparatus were razed and rebuilt, in order to establish control over the narratives, a period of transformation. Nonetheless, it was an era of the consolidation of the BJP and its ideas on India and its national character.

Schakel et. al. (2019) in their exploration of the crisis in the 'third party system' which is one of the phases of Indian party politics, characterised by, a competition between the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance and the Indian National Congress-led United Progressive Alliance, came to be known as binodal system (Arora & Kailash, 2013), note that post 2014, the electoral success of the BJP, while debatable, ushered in the possibility of the 'fourth party system' characterised by the re-nationalisation of the party politics but this time with the BJP at the helm instead of the Indian National Congress. This proposition of the emergence of the 'fourth party system' was suggested by Chibber and Verma (2018) and cited in Schakel et. al. (2019) who also pointed out that in the 2009 elections, though, there was a trend indicating a crisis of the 'third party system' owing to INC's electoral success which was linked to the re-nationalisation of party politics, with the Congress at the helm, but again in 2014 this changed, when the Congress was reduced to a fifth of its size in terms of seat share, in the lower house of the Indian Parliament. The trend towards re-nationalisation did pick up but under BJP and not the Congress. This could also be viewed through a visual representation borrowed from Mitra et. al. (2022), illustrated in Figure 4.

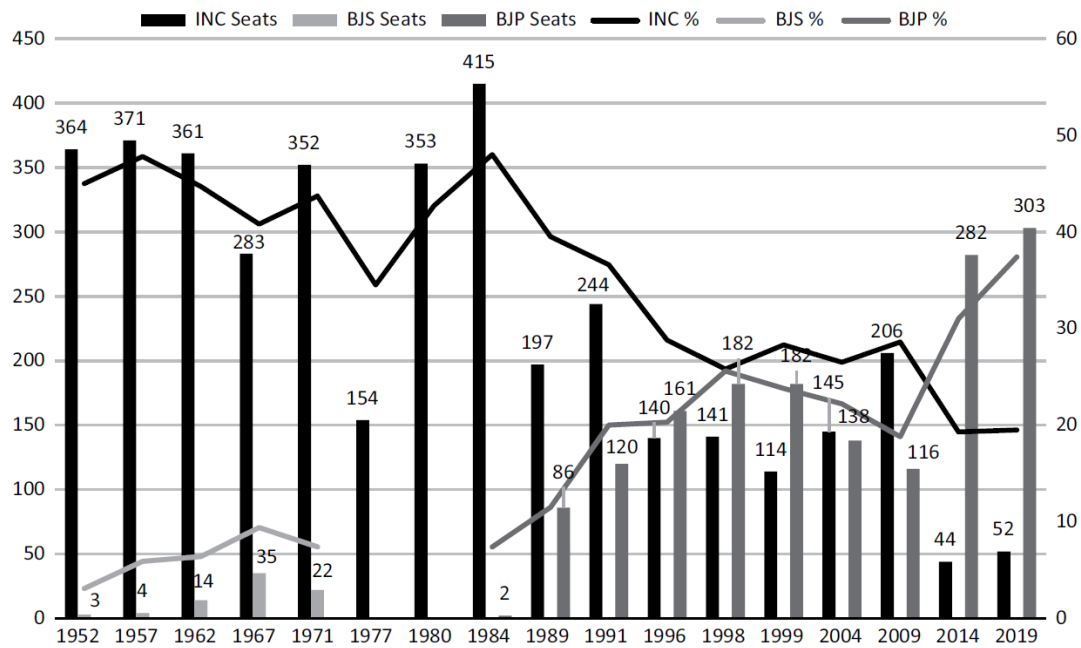


Figure 4: Lok Sabha Elections, 1952-2019, Seats and Percentage of Votes

Source: (Mitra, Schöttli, & Pauli, 2022, p. 67)

As indicated above, the 2019 General Elections to the Lok Sabha, lower house of the Indian Parliament, became a huge electoral success for the BJP, further entrenching them in the echelons of power. The BJP had managed to secure 37.4% of votes, a near 40% of the vote share was secured for the first time after 1989, when the Indian National Congress, had secured 39.53% (Team Plain Facts, 2019). As is evident from the visual representation, since the inception of the BJP, the INC has been consistently losing its voter base while the former is gaining. This depiction of the voter percentage if linked with the various political events that have been discussed in the previous sections could entail the path of how the BJP managed to dislodge the INC, a party that had been at the centre of the politics of India and had shaped the imagination of ‘India’ through their struggle for independence against the British rule on the Indian subcontinent (Chiriyankandath, 2016, p. 2) to a position where it did not have, even ten percent of the total number of seats in the Lok Sabha, which is required for formal recognition as the opposition party (Schakel, Sharma, & Swenden, Party Politics in India since the 2014 General Elections: BJP Dominance and the Making of the Fourth Party System, 2022).

As per data from the Election Commission of India (2021), in the 2019 elections, Modi, the Prime Ministerial candidate from the BJP, contesting from Varanasi, won with 6,73,453

votes. Runner up Shalini Yadav of the Samajwadi Party<sup>18</sup> secured 1,94,763 votes and Ajay Rai of the INC managed 1,52,456 votes. BJP had won the elections with a historic tally of 303 seats from its earlier tally of 282 seats and its main rival, the Indian National Congress secured 52 seats, a nominal improvement from its previously held 44 seats. The National Democratic Alliance, under the leadership of the BJP formed the government with 353 seats in its kitty, up from 336 in 2014. In Varanasi, Modi, on a BJP ticket had won 63.6% of the total votes he secured over total votes polled, in the parliamentary constituency. The performance of the BJP in the 2019 general elections to the lower house of the Indian Parliament indicates an expansion of its voter base, at the cost of regional parties, both socially and geographically (Kumar S. , 2020). They managed to succeed in constituencies where their performance had been dismal in earlier elections. As for the INC, its voter base remained largely intact.

### **3.6. Summarising Comments**

This chapter started with discussing the various discourses on the ideas that have, and are, shaping the actions of the BJP in their electoral musings which have evidently bore fruit in both national and regional levels. The BJP, through its push towards social engineering has seen a considerable rise in the representation from communities belonging to the various socio-economic strata of the Indian society. This has also translated to electoral returns in terms of votes. The latter sub-sections in the chapter dealt with the various events that led to the prominence of the BJP in the current political discourse. The next chapter describes the research methodology that has been adopted to conduct this investigation.

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<sup>18</sup> Headed by Akhilesh Yadav, this is a national party which is primarily dominant in Uttar Pradesh.