CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

Given the BJP's continued linkage to the RSS, through the party's considerable reliance on the RSS cadres for staff and assistance in political mobilization, discussion about it often bristle with characterization such as communal and sectarian, fascist and semi fascist, and with accusations of having a hidden agenda to convert India into an authoritarian theocratic Hindu state. For long, most other political parties treated the BJP, as a political pariah even as they readily used, when convenient, its political support in their own drive to power.

As the Jana Sangh, founded in 1951, took part in the country's political process. It came to moderate its political stance and engage in forming alliance with other political parties. Eventually, in 1977, it merged itself into the hastily created Janata Party, which came to power at the Centre in that year following the electoral defeat of the Congress party. The Janata coalition collapsed in 1979. The former Jana Sangh leaders were not the cause of the collapse even though they were made the protest for it in the factional infighting, indeed, they tried hard to keep the party united. The bitter and humiliating experience at the hands of the some of the Coalition partners resulted in the revival of Jana Sangh in 1980, in the new incarnation of the Bharatiya Janata Party, but on the moderate platform of Secularism and Gandhian socialism. The BJP's moderate path was disrupted in the 1980's by external forces rather than from within.

Faced with threats to national unity on the part of religion based movements, the Congress party had turned to a softer position on Hindu Nationalism in order to attract political support for itself. At that point, the BJP took to a millitant course to prevent the erosion of its exclusive constituency. However, this course was soon exhausted while the political
process drove home the lesson that power at the centre, or even in the states could not be obtained or retained except on a wider and more inclusive political base. By the mid 1990’s the BJP had moderated its position and returned to an alliance building strategy. It is significant that the BJP came into power as part of a larger Coalition, in the formation of which the BJP had to give up its extremist planks.

The emerging political formation at Centre in India signifies a similar trend towards Coalition politics, which, in turn, manifests the dynamics of plural social base of Indian society. The unfolding of social processes leading to definition and re-definition of social belonging, contradiction and contest of identity, assertion of deprived groups and communities, enlarging circle of politics and its changing social map define the major trends of the emerging political formation. The last one decade, specifically, has heralded a new beginning in Indian politics announcing a rupture from the ‘established’ and dominant mode of political formation. It indicates a shift from ‘one party dominance’ to ‘multi party Coalitions’, from the dominant ideology of ‘nation-state’ and political ideology of nation building to the assertion of ethno-religious identities, resurgence of newly empowered social groups and re-alignment and re-configuration of castes and communities and formation of multiple ‘social enclaves’. Out of multiple forms of identities- caste, religion, region and language constitute the primary identity markers in India. These identities have most apparent political salience and potential for transforming into political constituencies. So far caste is concerned it has acted as a determining factor in Indian politics. The Question of language-region-identity and its articulation has resulted into formation of many regional groups and parties which have partly succeeded in tilting the balance in favour of federalization process. This constitute not only major partners in Coalitions but also dictate their own terms. The bargaining power of AIADMK, TDP, Trinamool
Congress or SAD (Badal) in Punjab during the BJP-led Coalitions from 1996 onwards substantiates this formulation.

In fact, the linguistic and regional aspirations of different groups have been ignored over the years. The assertions of these identities in the form of sub-nationalism, regionalism or nativism has been seen as fissipерous tendencies and against the interest of the nation. This perception has been shaped by the experience of the partition of India on the one hand and the western model based on the pattern of the nation building on the other, where co-terminality between language, ethnicity, territory is seen as a pre-requisite. As a result of this perception, the Question of regional-language identity has not been addressed properly. Different kinds of movements revolving around linguistic regional identities are the natural outcome of this reality.

In fact, the Indian National Congress had promised the redressal of this identity in independent India as early as 1920's. But after independence this issue was not taken up on priority basis and immediately. The prolonged movement by different linguistic communities led to re-organization of states on the basis of linguistic homogeneity within a region. But even in this case only the dominant linguistic communities could get their demands realised and other got neglected. The selective redressal of grievances of territorial community has caused resentment among those whose legitimate claims have not been met. This has resulted into strong movements grounded in one of these three-nativism, regionalism or ethno-nationalism.

Even today most of the movements do not question and challenge the sovereignty of the Indian nation state. The neglect of different regions, denial of the right of selfhood and encroachment on their cultural identities mechanical understanding and application of national identity, inequitable discrimination of resources and regional imbalance, and supression and repression by the state machinery are some of he important factors which have
led to the transformation of different regional movements into secessionist movements. The case of Punjab exemplify the same reality. The assertion of linguistic-regional identities and their articulation through a stable political party have added new dimension to the political formation.

Initially, the national parties were inhibited by the exclusivist agenda of the different parties, which in the opinion of the national parties appeared to be alienating to other competing regional groups and parties. But the emerging political formation has judiciously combined the regional and national aspirations through Coalitions. The regional parties are themselves not confined exclusively to the regional and linguistic identity articulation but many of them represent a complex mix of language, region, caste, ethnicity and religion. Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal), a regional party of Punjab is an example of the same.

The political significance of social Coalitions which have now almost compelled the political parties of different hues to define, locate and re-arrange their social constituencies from region to region. As a consequence, one witnesses the regionalization of electoral process and the party system. This has been re-inforced by last five Lok-Sabha elections since 1989. This study is restricted to the analysis and understanding of the factors and forces that have compelled a national party like Bharatiya Janata Party to enter into an alliance with a regional party in Punjab i.e. Shiromani Akali Dal (Badal).

In this context, we can say that there has occurred what may be referred to as the emergence of national-political significance of regional parties. They have now assumed critical salience in the formation of Coalition government or minority government at the Centre. This is quite evident from the process of government formation in 1996, 1998 and 1999. National-political significance has another dimension too. In the current phase of party politics and political resurgence of social groups, it has almost become inevitable and essential for
national parties to enter into pre-electoral alliance with regional parties in order to achieve at least a minimum winning status in a particular state or region. Alliance with regional party not only provides tactical advantage in mobilizing and increasing the percentage of vote share, but also helps national parties to expand their social base. This is evident from the extent and levels of alliance formation by the two national parties-BJP and Congress (I) in the 1998 and 1999 Lok Sabha elections. What does this signify? This only reinforces the legitimacy and representative efficacy of the regional parties. It is precisely, the reason that one witnesses the enhancement of the “Coalitions potential” and “Blackmail potential” of regional parties. Unlike the previous phases, they in combination with (as alliance partners) national parties occupy the centrestage of Indian politics. Nature and contents of national policies are greatly shaped by the regional groups.

Punjab Legislative Assembly Elections of February 1997 and General elections of 1999 have once again resulted in a federal Coalitions, and a close analysis of mandate reveals the fact that the on-going process of regionalization of parties and party system is an irreversible political reality. In fact, election 1999 is a reiteration of the outcome of general elections held since 1989. The political process is maturing towards multi party federal governance. Thus, the question of stability is addressed within the process itself. The Bharatiya Janata Party-led National Democratic Alliance commands a convincing legislative majority in the 13th Lok Sabha. The varying size of seats won by alliance partners of NDA, in all probability, would act as an inherent check on each other. Federal Coalition must be understood more than merely a Coalition government. It does also refer to the participatory upsurge of the peripheries-be it the state or the smaller political groups working through locally specified social Coalitions. It is perhaps the reason that the two major parties- BJP and Indian National Congress have been restricted and downsized
respectively to 182 and 114 seats out of 543 seats of Lok-Sabha while the "third space" won 247 seats and 48 percent of popular votes. It is this scale of representativeness of third space that the Bharatiya Janata Party and Indian National Congress will align, in future too, either with one or the other constituent of third space. It is this stabilizing non BJP and non Congress space that holds the ground for the formation of federal Coalitions in future also. Actually alliance with regional political formation acts in two ways:
   a. It helps the aligning parties to expand their respective social basis.
   b. And they in turn, helps them to gain a minimum winning status in the electoral competition.

Alliance has strategically paid rich dividend to Bharatiya Janata Party, in expanding its social base both horizontally and vertically. Another significant feature of the 1999 election is that the voters too rejected the over use of 'identity politics'. It is probably the reason that the Bharatiya Janata Party seem to be saturating around 182 seats. As a matter of fact "election 1999" have thus completed one phase of the rise of Bharatiya Janata Party to power. In this period the party underwent a geographical, social and political expansion. It has now reached a plateau of the electoral success and is now subject to the normal cycle of success and failure.

The Bharatiya Janata Party, from its inception, has been on the hot pursuit of the Punjab problem created by the Congress diplomacy to keep its hold on the state. It has been constantly reviewing the situation since 1982 and various resolutions have been passed year after year to apprise the public to the latest situation and position developing there. It has always seriously felt concerned at the state of affairs in Punjab. The leaders of Bharatiya Janata Party have been stating that the Sikh and non-Sikh sections of the Hindu society who have a common cultural heritage, who adore the great Gurus alike and are bound in relations of kinship and marriage should have been pushed as
it were, into two enemy camps, each eager to make a mountain of every mole
hill, may be cow-slaughter by Dal Khalsa or throwing of cigarette pieces in
Gurudwaras and other acts done to injure the sentiments of Sikhs. It has always
condemned the mischief mongers of both the sides. It believes that they have
only disgraced the religion.

The Bharatiya Janata Party has held Congress (I) squarely responsible for
increasing separatist and terrorist elements in the Punjab. A settlement
between Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India and Sardar Harcharan
Singh Longowal, President Shiromani Akali Dal was reached at in July 1985,
which is popularly known as Rejiv Longowal Accord. The Bharatiya Janata Party
pointed out certain shortcomings in this Punjab Accord. At that time it warned
the nation about the problems this so called Accord would pose in future.

The Bharatiya Janata Party has always identified and upheld the national
interest in its resolutions, statements and other programmes about the Punjab
problem without caring for political gains. The Bharatiya Janata Party has
impressed it upon our countrymen that the Sikhs living in other parts of the
country cannot and must not be held responsible for the heinous murder of
innocent people in Punjab.

The Bharatiya Janata Party in Punjab has been assiduously exerting to
maintain communal harmony. It has been of the view that the Punjab problem
was not created by Pakistan. But Pakistan has always taken advantage of the
situation in Punjab. It has always been giving suggestions to improve the
situation in Punjab. The Punjab BJP held a Jana Shakti Sammelan at Ludhiana
on February 14, 1988, as a positive step to reserve national integration and
social amity. Bharatiya Janata Party has always been actively co-operating with
the government in resolving the Punjab tangle which it considered as a national
problem although it has sharp differences with the Punjab policy pursued by
the Congress. In 1985, the SAD, the political party representing the interest of Sikh came to power in Punjab with a landslide victory.

Between 1987 and 1992 the state was under Presidents Rule. The Congress returned to power in 1992 largely because the Akalis have boycotted the polls that year. Finally in February 1997, in the assembly elections contested by all major parties, SAD came back to the power with a thumping majority (75 out of 117 seats, and BJP-18 seats) and thus ended a period of turmoil of more than ten years. However, in the election, the emergence of its alliance with the BJP raised many questions about its strategies and ideology. Are they viable at the national and regional level? Further, historical precedents do not speak favourably for the alliance. Thus after seeing how and why the Coalition government of SAD(B)-Bharatiya Janata Party came about.

In 1997, after four decades of the communalization of politics in Punjab, the coming together of the parties that had earlier encouraged the divide between the state’s two main religious communities, the Hindu and the Sikhs, though ideologically objectionable, seemed politically expedient. The most obvious reason of the alliance between the Hindu right, the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Akali Dal is anti-Congressism. This political strategy had already been tested in 1967, when the SAD allied with Jana Sangh (the predecessor of the Bharatiya Janata Party) after the elections.

The Congress party dominated Punjab almost continuously for four decades without being seriously challenged by an ever disunited Akali Dal. Historians will agree that 1984 marked a point of no return in Congress-Akali relations. The BJP’s attitude in 1984 in contrast to that of the Congress party, was more favourable to the Sikh cause. The Bharatiya Janata Party whole heartedly supported Operation Blue star. The Bharatiya Janata Party and Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh cadres did not participate in the anti-Sikh violence of November 1984. This largely explains why Delhi as a Union
Territory, became nine years later the experimental ground of a BJP-SAD alliance. The support of Sikhs was a decisive factor in the BJP's victory in the Delhi legislative assembly elections in 1993. The BJP, once at the head of Delhi's Govt., stood by the promises made to the Akalis (recognising in particular Punjabi as an official language for local government schools in Delhi). Thereby, it acquired a reliable ally, as testified by the achievement of the SAD (B) with the still born Vajpayee Government in May 1996.

The alliance of the Bharatiya Janata Party with the SAD (B) followed strategy of re-approachement in the difficult years between 1987-1992, the period when terrorism had reached a climax. During that time, the fact that members of the Hindu community were the prime targets of terrorist groupings (composed not entirely but predominantly of Sikhs) could have soured the relationship between the two parties but did not.

The 1997 Punjab legislative assembly elections brought about promising electoral party alignments. For the first time in the political history of Punjab, the alliance of SAD (B) with the BJP was struck before the elections. By underplaying the "Hindutava" slogan, the BJP deprived itself of one of the principal mobilizing factor. A new logic seemed to govern the party's electoral strategy. Coalition building, pre-electoral alliances and the game of numbers seemed to have gained ground over ideologies.

Numerous circumstantial factors made at first the future of this alliance uncertain. In particular, the rejection of the Bharatiya Janata Party at the national political level in 1996 and its strains in several states of the federation (such as Gujarat and Rajasthan) could have had negative impact on its political fortunes in Punjab. However, the rising credibility of the party as a national force undeniably attracted the Hindu vote in Punjab toward the Bharatiya Janata Party.
The motivations of the two partners, however differed: the SAD’s (B) principal objective was to take over power in Punjab but for the Bharatiya Janata Party, this strategy was not limited to the short term benefit of a regional victory. In the long run, the party was counting on Sikh votes in other state elections, where, as in Delhi they could make the balance tilt in its favour. The concept of the “Panth in danger” launched by SAD (B) in the late 40’s and recycled in the 80’s has been discarded, for it denoted a minority complex which did not, encapsulate the social and political aspirations of mid 1990’s Punjabi society. A new slogan, "Panth, Punjab, Punjabiyat" was coined at the Moga conference in 1996, a reflection of the common goal of unity for both Punjabi Hindus and Sikhs.

More than any slogan, the complementarity of the electoral strongholds of the two partners- the SAD (B) in rural Punjab, the Bharatiya Janata Party in urban Punjab explains the landslide in favour of the alliance (75 seats (SAD), 18 for its (BJP) ally, out of a total of 117 seats) in Punjab legislative assembly. Two conclusions can be drawn from these results. On the one hand, the voters seemed to approve of the secular plank of the alliance and the stand chosen by the SAD (B). On the other hand, the strong bonds of Punjabi-Hindus with the Bharatiya Janata Party have been re-affirmed.

For the BJP, these results represented a landmark before the national polls. The success of the alliance helped the BJP to elaborate new strategies at the all India level. Indeed, the 1998 General elections led the party to power at the Centre. Moderate Akalis (S. Surjeet Singh Barnala and S. Sukhbir Singh Badal) were rewarded for their support with two berths in the cabinet. However, the political strategies proved successful, the realities of governance showed a different picture at the regional level in Punjab.

In an electoral speech delivered on the eve of the Adampur (Punjab) poll, Badal had linked the results of the by-election to the "dignity of the Sikh
community”, thus violating the secular discourse which had won a massive mandate for the SAD (B)-BJP alliance in 1997. Communal amity and improved centre-state relations had been key elements in the alliance agenda. Thus the Congress victory in the Adampur assembly by-election was a pointer to the growing disenchantment of the Punjab people with the SAD (B)-BJP Coalition in power. This defeat was indeed a first for the alliance since the 1997 assembly elections and the 1998 Lok-Sabha elections.

Politically, the result of the Adampur by-election indicated perhaps a revival of the traditional social base of the Congress party (which had last won this seat in 1967). The voting trend showed that the Congress has regained most of its support among Dalits, Hindus and a section of Jat Sikhs. It also showed that the SAD (Badal) ally, the Bharatiya Janata Party has lost ground amongst Hindus. Considering that the main factor that had enabled the Congress party to rule Punjab in the past was the overwhelming support of Hindus and Dalits besides the support of a section of Jat Sikhs. This could indicate an upward trend for the Congress. While Adampur is the first indication of the Bharatiya Janata Party having started to lose ground after its alliance with the SAD (Badal). Where as the Akali Dal puts the blame on the central government having raised the prices of essential commodities and fertilisers, others judge the non-performance of the SAD (Badal)- Bharatiya Janata Party alliance to be responsible.

It may be recalled that the fall of the Vajpayee led BJP government at the Centre in April 1999 was not significant for the SAD’s political future. Indeed, the SAD (Badal) faithfully stood by its Bharatiya Janata Party ally during that political crisis at the centre. The Lok Sabha poll of October 1999 proved to be defeat for the SAD(B)-BJP alliance. The SAD (Badal)- Bharatiya Janata Party alliance managed to get just three out of thirteen Lok Sabha seats, whereas the Congress which had won no seat in 1998 Lok Sabha polls,
gained eight. Two factors seem to have provoked the defeat of the ruling combine. The first is the ‘anti-incumbency’ vote according to which the voters, when dissatisfied with the performance of a government, vote for the opposition party. The second factor, weighting equally and strongly in the re-definition of the balance of forces, is the negative outcome of the internecine feuds of the Akali Dal, the war 'within'. A closer look at the election results can however test the view that the thumping victory in terms of seats for the Congress party is a sign of its regaining lost ground in Punjab.

On the surface, the most significant outcome of the 1999 election is that it demolished the theory of infallibility of the SAD (B)-BJP alliance as representing the two dominant communities in the state. In Jalandhar, the Congress party won by a higher margin 267,709 as against 2,32,543 for the SAD(B). In Amritsar a former union minister but political lightweight Shri. R.L. Bhatia, defeated a political stalwart, the BJP’s state president S. Daya Singh Sodhi. In Faridkot district ( including district Muktsar )-the defeat of C.M’s son S. Sukhbir Singh Badal symbolises the rejection of Badal’s highly personalized government. The contest, however between the Congress candidate Jagmeet Singh Brar and Sukhbir Singh Badal was extremely tight (Badal lost by a small margin of 5148 votes, winning 4,13,306 votes aginst 4,18,454).

Where as the Bharatiya Janata Party feels two causes for the defeat of its alliance viz the anti-incumbency factor and the split in the SAD’s vote, the Congress party analysts tend to emphasize the impact of following three factors :

a. The ineffectiveness of the kargil electoral campaign of Bharatiya Janata Party.

b. The electoral adjustment of Congress (I) with left political forces.

c. A significant shift of Dalit votes from the Bahujan Samaj Party to the Congress (I).
In the elections to the Punjab Legislative Assembly held in the month of February 2002, Congress party got a majority and formed the government. The result clearly show that the Bharatiya Janata Party has got the biggest drubbing. The jolt received by the Bharatiya Janata Party is far greater than the one felt by SAD (B). Though the two somehow managed to complete its full five years term (1997-2002), despite inbuilt and inherent contradictions, scquabbles and ego hassles.

The results are pointer to several significant factors at play in the past five years right up to February 13, 2002 elections as much as certain facts that are loud and clear. The negative vote cast by electors shows a clear divide between the urban and rural voters. It also shows the erosion of BJP´s urban vote base as much as the Akalis retaining their rural electoral base besides the impact of performance and governance on the voting pattern.

The Bharatiya Janata Party Cabinet and Ministers of state had all the portfolios that anyone would wish or want to have as all dealt with urban constituents, covering a wide range-municipalities, employment, labour to food and supplies to health, family welfare, medical education and research to higher education to excise and taxation etc. but for one Mr. Tikshan Sud all others have lost with big margins. A postmortem of the elections will show the trouble or malice was Bharatiya Janata Party´s “internal politics”.

The Malwa region with 65 constituencies have returned the maximum number of Akalis to the 12th Vidhan Sabha though their strength has shrunk compared to 1997. Their score then was 44. It is around 30 this time in February 2002. The BJP, too should be indebted to the Akalis for winning as many as six seats in 1997, while its base is down to just one now. The Bharatiya Janata Party too, has been mauled in Majha area i.e. Amritsar and Gurdaspur where from it had won 7 seats in 1997 but failed to open its account this time.
The Doaba region, on the other hand, with a heavy concentration of SC’s, has been perceived as a Congress stronghold. This was ruptured and partially captured by the Akalis in 1997 when out of 25 constituencies, the Congress could win in just 5, surrendering as many as 13 to the Akalis and 5 to the BJP. In February 2002 the BJP has scored just two victories both in Hoshiarpur and the Akalis have settled with a single digit. If one looks at the performance of the SAD (B)--BJP combine separately, contesting for 90 assembly seats won 41 seats and its ally the Bharatiya Janata Party contesting for 24 seats managed to win only 3 seats polling 5.7 percent of the votes. The vote share of Bharatiya Janata Party was 7 percent below than that of the SAD (Badal) in the seats it contested. Thus, it is not that the SAD (Badal) performed too badly, but the alliance suffered mainly due to the poor performance of its alliance partners- the Bharatiya Janata Party.

Not since the time the party was reduced to few Lok Sabha seats in 1984 has it faced a crisis of this magnitude. A spring of electoral defeats, inner party tensions, splits in the state units, tension within the Sangh Parivar and a leadership crisis have contributed to an impression of imminent collapse. The leading party in India’s ruling Coalition is worried, demoralized and resentful. There is a feeling that unless the trend is reversed, Bharatiya Janata Party could face another round of electoral reverses next year, setting the stage for deluge in the Lok Sabha elections due in 2004.

Nothing seems to be giving right for the BJP. The misery following the devastating defeats in the three northern states including Punjab has been compounded by the humiliation that voters in Delhi, once a BJP bastion, heaped on the party in the recent Municipal elections where it managed to win just 17 out of 134 seats. In U.P., factional boundaries have followed the rout and everyone is taking a swipe at everyone else. In the recent Rajya Sabha elections, Bharatiya Janata Party legislators cocked a snook at the party high
command and resorted to brazen cross-voting. To cap it all is the sheer ineptitude of Narendra Modi government in Gujarat on controlling communal clashes for which the party and the government at the centre carry the can. The BJP’s fall from grace has been inevitable considering that its growth pattern was the dream of almost any political party—from nearly 2 seats in 1984, the BJP rose to 88 in the elections five year later, skyrocketing to 121 in 1991. By 1996 it had become the single largest party in the Lok Sabha with 161 seats. In the 1998 and 1999 elections, the BJP retained its largest party status winning over 180 seats each time. What then explains the swift decline?

Suddenly the party found itself without a mooring—ideological or political. This dilution of ideology heightened frustration, among the party leaders and cadres. The Bharatiya Janata Party Minority Morcha convenor M.A. Naqvi said, “When all the NDA allies have been following their agenda, why is only the BJP expected to set it aside ? The National Agenda for Governance is for the Government and the Bharatiya Janata Party is free to protect its own interest.”

If the ideological base has been eroded, the party is in a shambles structurally too. BJP head office at Delhi served as the nerve-centre of a streamlined political outfit that organized some of the best election campaigns the country has seen for the 1991, 1996, 1998, 1999 Lok Sabha elections. All that change after L.K. Advani stepped down as Party Chief. The avuncular but uninspiring Kushabhau Thakre, who took over from Advani, was replaced after one term by Bangaru Laxman. The new Party President lasted just a few months before the Tehelka scandal subsumed him. The image of the Bharatiya Janata Party President caught on camera taking wads of currency notes from a self professed defence supplier shamed the party and punctured BJP’s claim to be an upright “party with a difference”. His replacement K. Jana Krishna Murthy, has kept controversy at bay but has done little else.
The BJP could do with a much needed thrust and facilitation of a meaningful interaction with the Government Krishnamurthy has failed to do either. In a bid to protect his turf, he has spurned all offers of help from those who are in Government. He has run the party central office like a private fiefdom whose writ does not extend beyond its four walls. The crisis of leadership has permeated to the states, confronted by serious bouts of factionalism, the Bharatiya Janata Party leadership egged on by the RSS that insists on intrusive micro-management has reposed faith in the venerable elders who have neither the drive nor the imagination to lead a mass party.

The depletion of able leadership in the party would not have been so glaringly visible if Vajpayee’s stewardship had been something to talk about. Unfortunately, such skills, if present, remain hidden. Though a Jansanghi for over five decades and the founder President of the BJP: besides being its star campaigner, Vajpayee has, by and large, preferred to stay away from organizational matters, barring the occasional request to a State Party Chief or the Central Election Committee meeting to give a poll ticket to an acquaintance. The BJP, unlike the Congress, has not been able to effect a generational shift. It has a reserve of talented second-rung leaders but their services are grossly under utilized.

This tension at the helm combined with lack of cohesion and direction mean that instead of governance, the government is expending its energies on firefighting. So even as it is trying to soothe the allies irritations on the one hand, it is forced into placating the RSS rabble rousers on the other. It is an appeasement that has stretched to the Sangh Parivar right from the outset- the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch grappling with the government over the WTO, the Bharat Mazdoor Sangh lecturing it on disinvestment in the public sector, the VHP keeping up the chorus on Ayodhya and the Bajrang Dal indulging in its annual passion of Valentine’s Day bashing.
To begin with, the RSS, under Rajendra Singh toed a tame line, even moderating between the sulking saffron brigade and the Government. But after K.S. Sudarshan took over as the Sarsanghchalak in March 2000, the relationship soured as the RSS became more intrusive. In the National executive meeting of Bharatiya Janata Party held at Goa on April 12-14 2002, there was a lot of discussion, introspection and analysis about the strategy and line of action to be followed in future. A.B. Vajpayee in his speech said that true it is that the party’s hopes have been belied if one looks at the poll results of Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal and Punjab. The verdict of people in all these states was negative as far as Bharatiya Janata Party is concerned.

In Punjab it got the worst beating. There was anti-incumbency factor but it affected BJP more than Akali Dal which was the major partner. Delhi Corporation results has capped its electoral disappointment. The party has been worsted in the Corporation polls. It cannot be denied that public opinion was not exactly in favour of Bharatiya Janata Party. The party had to pay the penalty for some of the factors which were within its control and the rest which were not within its control.

In democracy and that too for a National party like BJP, poll reverses should make us go in for the factors which are responsible for our electoral reverses rather than rueing over the loss. This is not the first time we have had to face electoral defeat. The greatest setback for us was in 1984 when in Lok Sabha elections we manage to secure only 2 seats, one form Andhra Pradesh and one from Gujarat. At that time everyone especially our political opponents and critics predicted the demise of the party itself but history is witness as to how we retrieved the party from its peripheralisation and today we are the biggest political force. It is this determination, this acceptance of challenge to our very strength and existence which have been the hallmark of our party’s strength and character that will meet the situation now also. We will take the
corrective steps. Time has come to re-assess the situation, re-assert our stand on various issues and re-evaluate our strength and weaknesses.

L.K. Advani said at the Goa conclave during April 12-14 2002. "But the Bharatiya Janata Party needs to understand that the spectacular gains of our party made in the last decade of the 20th century was on the basis of the popular hope, the Bharatiya Janata Party -led government would not be just another government, not even just a better government, but a government qualitatively different - a government would be perceived by the common citizen as one that converted Swaraj into Su-raj. " A party with a difference” was our main slogan when the BJP was launched. It should be our mission to make our government, "A government with a difference.”

Let us accept that even though our government has been better than the Congress Governments, than the United Front and other Congress-supported governments, and that our ministers are acknowledged as upright and competent, both the government as well as the party have not been able to measure up to the very high expectations of the people. Indeed, The BJP has not been able to fully measure up to our own high ideals that inspired us to found the Jana Sangh and later on the BJP. This is the main factor responsible for the disillusionment of the people with the party. It is also the basis of the present state of demoralization among tens of thousands of our karyakartas.

A Coalition government comprised of diverse ideological groups has necessarily to draw up a minimum common programme of governance and run the government scrupulously on that basis. Indeed, a very large area of governance has nothing to do with ideology. It has, rather, to do with the formulation of good policies and programmes and their proper implementation. It has to do with responsive and responsible administration, with a high degree of transparency and accountability, and people’s enthusiastic participation at all tiers of the democratic setup.
Through these four years ")'(1999-2002), the BJP has scrupulously adhered to the common programme drawn up by the National Democratic Alliance. But sometimes, we betray a tendency to be rather apologetic about our party`s ideological moorings. Advani referred to the party`s guiding outlook on "enlightened cultural nationalism", positive secularism and social justice and harmony and deplored the party`s "apologetic" stance on all these issues which, he said, had contributed to the people`s disenchantment with it. For this our plan of action must deal with the following four urgent imperatives:

1. **Strengthen the Government**: especially by speeding up the process of implementing our various policies and programmes. We will have to devise the practical ways of energizing the bureaucracy to make it deliver what we have promised to the people.

2. **Strengthen the pro-growth**: pro-poor and pro-employment orientation of our economic policies.

3. **Strengthen the system of Information and Publicity**: so that the many remarkable achievements of our Govt. are effectively highlighted and our overall vision of Good Governance is better projected to the people.

4. **Strengthen the Party at all levels**: if necessary by inducting some of our talented colleagues in government into party work. We should also strengthen the party at the state level. If necessary, there should be some deterrent action in some cases of gross indiscipline.

As for the idea of pseudo-secularism that brought the BJP to power and persuaded secular parties to throw their lot with it, we have seen in Gujarat exactly what it means. It mens that a political party that openly rejects Secularism will openly target Muslims and openly deny them justice or protection under the Rule of Law. After Gujarat it is clear that the pseudo-secularism of one secular party is infinitely less dangerous than the open communalism of Advani`s Hindutava.
It is not clear how much the Bharatiya Janata Party will benefit from the polarisation of Hindu and Muslim communities by unveiling the Sangh Parivar's programme of action in Gujarat. The arguments are familiar enough, that the majority community is a victim, that nobody weeps for the Godhara Victims. The most crucial change so far has been the completion of the RSS takeover of the BJP. The control may not be as emotional as in the Jana Sangh days. But it is certainly as tight as the period between 1991 and 1999. After years of shadow-boxing and a bitter cold war Vajpayee has fully surrendered to the Parivar bosses without a whimper of protest. Began just before the Goa Session (12-14 April 2002), the process seems to now complete with the RSS establishment opening several channels right into what has hitherto been Prime Minister Camp. Normally, the Bharatiya Janata Party hierarchy is attuned to quickly scend the shifts in power eqnations. The change of atmosphere is so conspicuous. The man who was once the centre of the decision-making of both the Government and the organization is no more being viewed as a boon giver. What had forced the hitherto stubborn Vajpayee to finally give up ? The RSS, which was forced to eat the humble pie at the hands of Vajpayee for two years, struck at the challenger at the right time using the right tools. Vajpayee's undoing has been his own Government's all-round failures which had led to the defeat of the party.

The post Goa changed political strategy of Bharatiya Janata Party is essentially antithesis to the concept of Coalition. So far, Vajpayee has been taking the position that the agenda of National Democratic Alliance is our agenda. The party did not even issue its own election manifesto last time (1999). Recently Jana Krishnamurthi said that the Bharatiya Janata Party was still bound by the three contentious issues-Ayodhaya, Article 370, and Common Civil Code and the freeze would last only until
next elections to be held in 2004. The new doctrine of BJP allows the party to peddle the hard Hindutava at the organizational level even while the Government makes a show of following the agenda of NDA. Vajpayee had given weightage to the latter while under the new line the party may risk the Government if it comes to that. This new short term dual strategy is expected to give the party enough room for manoeuvring.

The BJP, it seems, has developed a new programme to buck the trend of recent heavy state election and by election defeats. It is trying to grab power in the states by any means it can, to try to tilt the balance away from a preponderent Congress presence around the country in contrast to its own puny representation. The objective seems to be to reverse the widespread impression that the BJP is on the decline, variously laid at the door of bad and venal governance and the astronomical levels of corruption. Far from trying to live down the ignominy of how the BJP grabbed power in Uttar Pradesh a few years ago, it seems, the party has decided that ends justify the means. The BJP’s new strategy was on display in the recent Goa assembly elections and the lengths to which it went to gather just enough support to form the government. And, in the recent Maharashtra political turmoil, in which political parties were reduced to enacting a farce-shunting M.L.A’s around the country like prize cattle, with charges of abductions flying around-the new BJP aggressiveness to grasp power was evident. L.K. Advani at a party meeting on June 7-8, 2002, at New Delhi, said that the party’s recent victory in Goa as ‘turn in the tide’ and said it had raised the morale of party workers and cadres across the country.

It now appears that the BJP has come to the conclusion that with power slipping away from its hands and the next General Elections not that far away, radical measures are required to rehabilitate the party.
In what sense does the BJP occupy the Centre of the Indian Political System? Electorally, it has reached a plateau and cannot claim to be a full fledged National Party because of its weaknesses in the South and in the East as well as among the lower castes. However, it does play a central role, as the pivotal force of the ruling Coalition, thanks to its mastery at making alliances. Ideologically, Vajpayee, now is in a stronger position than during its previous mandates, is probably willing to have the BJP returned to its first centrist incarnation—that of early 1980’s based on a moderate approach of politics. The advent of Coalition politics—and the attitude of RSS have contributed to this process. The new line is also well in tune with the expansion of the party beyond the Hindi belt and beyond the twice borns, a two fold evolution which implies some ideological dilution. One may, therefore, conclude that BJP is on its way to becoming the dominant party of India in the form of a catch-all party with (non-communal) nationalist and economically liberal leanings. This scenario can only unfold itself if the BJP meets important challenges. To be a centrist catch-all party it needs to accommodate people coming from all kinds of social background especially from the lower castes and give them due respect and responsibility. Secondly, for establishing as a pan-Indian party, the BJP needs to consolidate its position in states where it is still weak. It must gain more strength as the pivotal force of a large Coalition. Now, the compulsion of Coalition politics are not easy to meet. The BJP must try to mobilize the cadres. It must enforce discipline and stop intra party bickerings. It must try to manage in and all out bid to get majority of its own. Focus must be given on local issues.