SPOTLIGHT

CONTENTS

THE 16TH LOK SABHA: INDIA'S LURCH TO THE RIGHT

HEBA AL-ADAWY

As jubilant supporters of what was once a fringe Hindu nationalist party celebrated the results of a nine-week election marathon, there was arguably some element of incongruity in the scenario. Holding face-masks of the controversial Narendra Modi (NaMo) and waving saffron symbols of lotus flowers were not merely members of the *Sangh parivaar* or hardline Hindu nationalists, but also young, liberal Indians as if rejoicing a crucial cricket victory. India finally delivered its verdict on 16th May, giving an overwhelming mandate to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Even Indian psephologists, whose reputation had wavered in the previous national polls, were caught surprised. Their projections of a 'Modi wave' not only came true but also surpassed expectations by decimating the era of coalition politics altogether. India's longstanding Congress party suffered a massive meltdown and was reduced to a mere minion with only 44 seats in the Lok Sabha — and 59 as United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition. Aam Aadmi Party's howling promise of a political overhaul, too, became a 'tinkling cymbal, sounding brass.' Meanwhile BJP managed to capture 282 seats

Heba Al-Adawy, MPhil (Oxon), is a Research Analyst at the Institute of Regional Studies.

on its own, giving Modi ample space to steer the ship without experiencing counter-currents from its allies. Indeed BJP's resounding victory marks the first time in 30 years, since the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984, that a single party has commanded such support across the country. It not only marks a symbolic end to the Nehruvian era of dynastic politics; but also the unprecedented rise of a Hindu nationalist party under a leader whose reputation has been tainted by charges of complicity in the Gujarat communal violence of 2002.

Voter fatigue and disillusionment with UPA's economic record, including the massive scale of corruption, only partially explain the results. They fail to account for India's reversion to single-party rule in 2014 as opposed to a more divided mandate given Modi's controversial communal past. While regional parties in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Orissa remained tough nuts to crack, the surge of voters in the Hindi belt (northern, central and western), amounting to approximately 32 per cent of the total electorate, allowed Modi to take home the trophy. Although many blame India's first past-the-post system for failing to represent the constellation of opinions in India, there is no denying that the 16th Lok Sabha, in many ways, signals the beginning of a new era in Indian electoral politics. The new Lok Sabha, in a break from the past two decades, showcased an inverse relationship whereby the existence of more parties actually led to lesser – and not greater – vote fragmentation. According to a study carried out by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, this weaker electoral competition existed alongside a surge in popular participation in the polls.[1] India logged a record high voter turnout in 2014 at 66.4 per cent of the total electorate. The figure is particularly impressive when matched against the recent decades, which showcased a declining rate of voter turnouts. Since its apex in 1984, when 64 per cent of the electorate voted Congress into power, voter turnout has fluctuated between 56 and 62 per cent with a relative stagnation at 58 per cent in the previous two polls (2004 and 2009). Meanwhile the vote share of regional parties,

which had risen from 49 per cent in 1999 to 52.6 per cent in 2009, dropped to 48.6 per cent in 2014. Having come a long way since the era of Congress hegemony, the 2014 elections indicate a shift away from federalization and towards a "re-nationalization" of Indian electoral politics.

The larger than life persona of Modi remains decidedly crucial to any analysis of the 16th Lok Sabha. But while the exact course of his tenure, from a structuralist point of view, remains difficult to predict, the seismic rise of Modi, nonetheless, begs the question: So what has prompted India's Lurch to the Right? Is this the beginning of a new era for India? Arguably Indian secularism — albeit a defining norm in the Constitution with its corollary set of checks and balances — has not been left untainted by secular parties occasionally pandering to communalism in order to capture vote banks. Does the 16th Lok Sabha, then, signal a mere shift in referents from secularism to development or a qualitative shift in the ethos of Indian mainstream politics?

The long road to Modi

For some of Modi's fiercest critics, the Indian scenario demands a retrospective glance at history. It is one that echoes the early warning signs of Sinclair Lewis in his political novel *It Can't Happen Here* (1935) — set in the context of rising fascism in post-World War II Europe. Still, more have likened the cult of Modi among the Indian electorate to the ideology of "Decisionism" that mobilized the German intelligentsia to defend the Third Reich in the 1930s. First expounded by political theorist Carl Schmitt, decisionism seeks to validate the form of the law (by exalting the right of the sovereign to deliberate) over the contents of the law. In both the Indian and German contexts, it speaks of a desire among the electorate for a sovereign leader who would take "bold decisions" following periods of indecisiveness or 'policy paralysis.'[2] Indeed, fascism may be too loaded a term for contemporary India, the contextual and regional

specificities may differ vastly, but for critics of this camp such an analogy serves to forewarn the dangers of blind support to populist leaders. Equally significant to them is the ideological affinity of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (the ideological parent of BJP) with Nazism in its foundational years.

But perhaps a better way to understand the current Indian predicament is to take a walk down the memory lane of the past few decades and examine the trajectory of Indian economic liberalization initiated in the early nineties. While the tenure of UPA I-II was characterized by a series of economic woes and upward inflation, causing much concern for a regional power that is aspiring for global prominence, it is useful to point out the absence of negative growth. Economic growth has been on the rise, albeit at a halted rate of 4.5% in 2012-13 compared to a high of 9.6% during the term of UPA-I in 2007. In fact, the Indian economy is likely to become the third biggest economy after USA and China according to purchasing power parity (PPP), a figure that takes into account relative costs and inflation rates in different countries. The statistic sets India apart from historical instances where mass economic depression has triggered right-wing politics. Equally important in India is the support base of modern urban middle class voters for Narendra Modi, also dubbed as the "aspirational class."[3]

What is significant about the Indian context, however, is that the economic growth has not been channelled in a redistributive fashion. In hindsight, one could argue that the loci of Indian politics began to shift three decades ago, when a balance of payments crisis forced the incumbent government to introduce structural economic reforms as part of their bailout plan with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1991. The neo-liberal policies included opening for international trade and investment, deregulation, privatization, tax reforms and inflation controlling measures. Though not all policies were enforced in their totality, today much of India's economic triumphs and woes can be traced back to

these reforms. While India gained its place amongst the rising economies of the world, the era of privatization also brought forth its social costs, concentrating wealth in the hands of a few and triggering a series of corporate land grabs as well as of natural resources at the expense of the lower echelons of society. Since 1991, income inequality has deepened, triggering debates over a more inclusive growth strategy. Some of the contradictions of India's growth story can be glimpsed in Arundhati Roy's evocative description:

In India, the 300 million of us who belong to the new, post-IMF 'reforms' middle class – the market – live side by side with the spirits of the nether world, the poltergeists of dead rivers, dry wells, bald mountains and denuded forests: the ghosts of (2,50,000 debt-ridden farmers who have killed themselves, and of the 800 million who have been impoverished and dispossessed to make way for us. And who survive on less than 20 rupees a day.[4]

In a country of 1.2 billion, Arundhati Roy asserts that the country's 100 richest people own assets that are equivalent to one-fourth of India's GDP. She moves on to juxtapose the image of an ordinary farmer (surviving on a mere 20 rupees) with one of India's leading business giants – Mukesh Ambani from Reliance Industries Limited whose business interests range from petrochemicals, special economic zones, fresh food retails to high schools, life sciences, stem cell storage services, and more recently, Infotel, a TV consortium controlling 27 TV channels in almost every regional language.

Neo-liberal policies initiated in the early nineties, on the one hand, led to the creation of an aspirational, urban middle class, wooed by promises of prosperity and upward mobility during NaMo's election campaign. At the same time, they rendered the plight of low-level labourers and farmers even more acute. Despite the statistics showcasing industrial growth, approximately 58 per cent of the population has depended on agriculture since 2001. While the size of the agriculture sector has remained relatively constant (53 per cent in 2012-13), the

share of agriculture in GDP has been steadily declining. By and large, agribusiness companies and their stakeholders have been the prime beneficiaries while landless rural families have increased from 37 per cent in 1987 to 55 per cent in 2005. The disastrous impact of food inflation can be gauged from the annual average of suicides committed by farmers, which increased from 15,369 in 2003 to 1,46,000 in 2012. In the last 20 years, casualization of the formal sector has also prevailed rampantly, with 65 per cent of the formal sector serving as contract labours, without security benefits, on less than a quarter wages of the permanent workers in similar positions. Between 1999-2011, labour productivity increased by 12.6 per cent while real income went down by 2 per cent, suggesting that workers were constantly asked to tighten the belt even as their productivity increased.[5] In the last five years, an unprecedented deterioration in the living standards of ordinary people coupled with rising inflation have catapulted longstanding grievances within the society to the forefront of electoral concerns. While BJP's mantra of development and "India Shining" has remained unchanged over the course of the past few elections, India's economic woes, particularly heightened after revelations of mass corruption scandals under the Congress-led UPA, created an environment in which the incumbent party could be severely delegitimized. The sheer weight of the incumbency factor allowed the BJP to exploit popular anger over the inconsistencies of "Brand India" – an image of a burgeoning regional power – versus the stark realities on the ground.

The 'Imaginaries of Social Justice'

One is tempted to question, at this point, the curious support base of Narendra Modi in the post-IMF reforms era, in that it marries people from all three tiers of the society — the corporate giants, the middle class and the marginalized. Ironically, the same neo-liberal policies that were responsible for widening income inequalities also allowed, through the initiation of privatization,

for the flourishing of Gujarat — the iconic model of economic development during BJP's election campaign. Notwithstanding the ideological differences and the strong rivalry between the Congress and the BJP, there is an oft-overlooked continuum in the policies and practices of the two parties. By 1991, when big businesses no longer required the protection of statist intervention, the Congress gradually reconstructed the role of the state to facilitate greater participation of the private sector. In hindsight, the model success story of Gujarat can hark back to the rules that were set out by the Congress and eventually outplayed by the BJP.[6] Even now, India's budget report released by Arun Jaitley, the new finance minister, reveals only incremental changes from the previous budget of the Congress Party Minister P. Chidambaram, alongside a number of perks for various interest groups. Owing to the similarities, the budget report has also been dubbed as a "Chidambaram budget with saffron lipstick."[7]

Does the 16th Lok Sabha, then, represent a collective delusion or false consciousness of the much-touted Gujarat model of economic development? In part, yes. In the run up to the polls, the topic of Gujarat remained deeply politicized, as supporters of Modi hailed its economic growth while his detractors argued that Gujarat's relative prosperity preceded the Modi era. Modi's public relations campaign, nevertheless, ensured that the success of Gujarat is packaged and sold as purely Modi's achievement. But for all its fame in economic freedom, it is true that Gujarat under the Modi regime has continually lagged behind in the social indicators of development such as the average rate of literacy, the infant mortality and life expectancy rates. Using the physical quality of life index for instance, Nagaraj and Pandey conclude: "The findings reinforce earlier research that reported a divergence between Gujarat's economic performance (which is almost at the top of the table) and its social development (which is close to the national average)."[8] In order to understand the rise of BJP, therefore, one must also place the elections in a semiotic universe where speeches and electoral

campaigns carried great meaning for the populace. Equally important in the analysis are the perceptions, or to use a phrase coined by Indrajit Roy, the "imaginaries of social justice" existing in India.

In one of the prevailing perceptions in the pre-election scenario, poverty was seen as a direct consequence of "bad politicians" alone. Revelations of mass corruption scandals under the Congress regime helped augment this view. Although not all scandals were limited to Congress MPs per se, revelations regarding the alleged involvement of Sonia Gandhi's political secretary in the 'chopper scam' (2013) and the real-estate empire of her son-in-law, Robert Vadra, seem to have sealed the reputation of the Congress government.[9] This colossal amount of money — metaphorically extorted from the sweat, blood and tears of Indian people, and siphoned away by politicians — made the current economic predicament seem even more atrocious. The concept of corporate corruption took a less prominent space in the imagination of the Indian populace, as well as the fact that income inequalities could also be a result of the *type* of economic growth chosen by India[10] For all the rampage against corruption and the promise of development, then, it mattered little that Modi's economic policies in Gujarat were, in fact, in continuum with a model of growth that favoured economic indicators over social ones.

Indrajit Roy explains that the collective fascination with Modi is the product of an electoral strategy that tapped into perceptions of social justice among impoverished Dalits and OBCs.[11] The identity of Modi as one of the members of the Other Backward Castes was effectively played upon during the election campaigns in stark contrast to the dynastic ties and elitism of Rahul Gandhi. For members of the Other Backward Castes, who represent approximately one-third of the Indian population and are mostly organized as smallholding agrarian communities, Modi's "rags to riches" story from a tea-vendor to an aspiring politician was not mere rhetoric. It served as an effective

means of political mobilization in a society where caste identities are relevant and can structure economic outcomes in significant ways. BJP also organized social justice forums on a regular basis for members of the OBC and Dalit communities in a way that would speak to their day-to-day struggles. Local leaders portrayed BJP as a party that eschews caste distinctions and practices equality despite the historically upper-caste and Brahminical character of the Hindu Nationalist movement. It is this strategy that lies at the heart of Modi's appeal among the more marginalized sections of the community. Although the urban to rural vote ratio was higher for BJP, Modi nevertheless succeeded in winning a considerable number of rural votes through the façade of enforcing radical equality via development.[12]

Hindutva development?

In many ways, the success of Modi and his popularity among the lower echelons of the Hindu community also represents the fruition of Rasthriya Swayamsevak Sangh's Sanskritization policy, i.e. the incorporation of the lower castes into the Hindutva fold. The RSS has long espoused an organic view of Hinduism where castes, for all the inequities, are considered harmonious components of the society. In 1990, the RSS was one of the most vocal opponents of the Mandal Commission, which called for positive discrimination and affirmative action on behalf of the Other Backward Castes. In response to the caste-based politics of the nineties, the RSS launched a new programme called "samarasya sangama", i.e. "the confluence of harmony", in which RSS workers adopted different villages and promoted the ethic of social assimilation among the Hindu sections of the community. Within this context, social welfare work on behalf of their co-religionists became the bedrock of the RSS strategy, especially in instances of natural disaster or of political conflict as an attempt to integrate poorer Hindus into the mainstream. In the ensuing years, the Sangh Parivaar has

gradually expanded its footprint by pursuing Hindutva welfare in a systematic and even institutionalized fashion. Within the context of job insecurity and economic informalization, Hindutva outfits have offered the promise of social mobility through politically ascendant organizations. They have equally offered a sense of rootedness and a communal identity, often by re-directing frustrations towards the "otherness" of religious minorities. Even in the state of Gujarat, Hindutva outfits have been crucial in absorbing and diluting the social backlog caused by neo-liberal policies in the post-1998 period. The efforts have not only been confined to the socially marginalized, but have also extended to public servants and government officials through various informal training camps and workshops. As one RSS official expressed: "We do not try to influence the government but it is a natural process. If a worker from the RSS goes into politics and is successful, his thoughts will enter the government."[13] Considered within this social milieu, the complicity of police and government officials in the violence of Gujarat in 2002 is not surprising. Oral testimonies have described how attacks on Muslim properties were often followed by graphic graffiti, stating: "Yeh andar ki baat hai, Police humare saath hai [the inside story is, the police is with us.]"[14]

In what Christophe Jaffrelot described as the "division of labour" within Hindu nationalism, the RSS has historically served as the ideological wing of the Hindutva movement whereas the BJP, among others, act as the political front.[15] Although the BJP exists as an offshoot of the RSS, it is true that the two have not always been in consensus in the past few decades, especially over BJP's economic policies inviting foreign direct investment. Beleaguered by claims of "double membership," BJP in the past has also felt the need to play a more pragmatic card and distance itself from the more vocal stances of the Sangh against caste reservation policies. For the 16th Lok Sabha, however, the figure of Narendra Modi — a sworn member of the Parivaar — represents a confluence of interests, or a reunion of the party with its ideological parent. In an incisive

criticism, Nikita Sud makes the argument that Modi's political ascent is no less dynastic than that of Rahul Gandhi:

> A tea vendor may or may not have come far in Indian politics, but the man blessed by the RSS from the day he entered politics certainly has. Rahul Gandhi may well be in politics today because of the Nehru-Gandhi family. But Modi's story would have been very different without the imprint of another family: The Sanghparivar."[16]

Despite Modi's consecutive victories in the assembly elections of Gujarat, his tenure has not been without opposition or contestations from various segments of the community. In describing the politics of Gujarat over the past decade, Sud aptly uses the phrase "development and deprivation" to convey Modi's authoritarianism and the systematic exclusion of certain socially and historically marginalized interest groups[17] In the "division of labour" between the BJP and the RSS, the latter has been successful in quashing out rebellion from a number of social quarters by infiltrating trade unions and farmers associations. While the same cannot be said about the Muslim constituents, the Hindutva agenda has nevertheless ensured that the discontents of development remain somewhat diluted.

It is through Modi and his policies that we see the materialization of *Hindutva* development in which economic liberalism and political illiberalism go hand in hand. While the context of economic insecurity in the eighties marks the rise of Hindutva sentiments, it is Modi who blesses the movement with a corporate flavour. During his time as a chief minister, for instance, many of the economic summits and "Vibrant Gujarat" events were held during Hindu festivals such as Utrayan or Navrati. In an attempt to bring economic enterprise and wealth creation into the Hindutva fold, ceremonies such as *chopda pujan* or the blessing of account books were also incorporated during Diwali. The initiation of the

Narmada water pipeline and the dam project in the Dangs were made to coincide with major events in the religious calendar. For the Narmada pipeline, ostensibly bringing water to the mythical "Saraswati", the state irrigation department organized a grand event of celebration presided by Narendra Modi and attended by approximately 1,500 Hindu priests. The dam project in the Dangs, i.e. the Pampa Sarovar, was also given religious symbolism in that it brought water from various Hindu holy spots. Adivasis from the Dangs and other parts of India were invited to take a dip in the waters, symbolically integrating them with the Hindu whole. 'Reconversion' ceremonies, inviting thousands of devotees, were also part of the programme. The *Kumbh*, which was held on 11–13 February 2006, received widespread coverage by the RSS mouthpiece, the *Organiser*. In its praise for the administration of the *Kumbh* festival, Modi's development agenda was sanctioned simultaneously. Narendra Modi was hailed for ensuring that his government provided adequate security, living facilities for the visitors, a newly built road network, electricity connections, and dams to replenish the lake in what was now the centre of a new Hindutva landscape.[18] Such events and traditions, in the words of Nikita Sud, served to "morally sanction[…] material gain, irrespective of means and without limits."[19]

It is this blend of Hindutva culture and economic enterprise that helps us understand Modi's diverse support base in the 2014 elections. Much in the same way, Narendra Modi also structured his campaign for the 16th Lok Sabha by appealing to middle class religiosity through an emphasis on soft Hindutva. Alongside promises of development were strong, patriotic slogans to put "India first" and revive "Brand India." The promise to clean the holy Ganges river was at once a religious obligation and a display of environmentalism. When Gujarat was held up as a model to be emulated elsewhere in India, therefore, its appeal did not merely lie in the statistics of growth, but also in the marriage of Hindu culture and enterprise that existed in the state. While the Hindutva agenda was relatively

diluted in the 2014 elections as compared to the previous two ones, it was not altogether absent. Rather, it existed as a subliminal undercurrent permeating through the liberal promises of prosperity and progress. Caste and communal mobilization was not the overarching strategy, but selectively employed where needed. Following the Muzaffarnagar riots in Uttar Pradesh, for instance, BJP candidates did not hesitate to exploit post-conflict polarization so as to gain the support of the upper-caste Hindus. Similarly, when BJP's main campaign manager for Uttar Pradesh described the Muslim town of Azamgarh as a "den of terrorists" or when Amit Shah asked voters to avenge Muslims through the ballot, they served as attempts to divide the electorate along religious lines. In the words of Bharat Bhushan, the BJP used a complex set of campaign strategies, taking religion, caste and other local factors into account: "Besides running a presidential-style campaign centred around Narendra Modi and his claims of good governance," he writes, "the BJP made ample use of communalism and, for good measure, also underwrote it with caste."[20]

Modi under spotlight

Any discussion of Modi's persona in determining the outcome of the 16th Lok Sabha elections would be incomplete without a mention of the media. If the axiom is true that there is no such a thing as "bad publicity," then the polarizing coverage of Narendra Modi also helped contribute to his victory, by ensuring that Modi remained an ever-constant talking point. One can also not dismiss the public relations enterprise that forms the backdrop of Modi's victory. The 16th Lok Sabha election campaign saw an unprecedented amount of funds flow to one party, which, according to an independent estimate, ended up spending more than Rs 5,000 crore on just advertising, second to that of President Obama in the 2012 presidential campaign[21] In actuality, the gradual makeover of Narendra Modi from an aggressive Hindutva nationalist to an icon of development dates back to

2007. The Gujarat violence of 2002 and the international condemnation of the administration's role had created a public relations crisis for builders of the neo-liberal 'Brand Gujarat'. An international public relations firm, APCO, was hired by the Gujarat government to market the state as a fertile ground for investment, with Modi presiding as a "business-friendly" administrator.[22] The efficiency with which Tata Nano, India's largest automobile manufacturer, was able to transfer its industry to Gujarat in 2008, particularly after its cumbersome experience in Communist-ruled West Bengal, further reinforced Modi's administrative credentials. Subsequently Ratan Tata, chairman of India's Tata Group, publicly praised Modi by proclaiming: "It is stupid if you are not Gujarat."[23]

As Indian industrialists leaned towards Modi one by one, they received exceptional compensations from the Gujarat administration in land prices, tax concessions and clearances from environmental and labour protection rules. By the 2009 general elections, a chorus for Modi as the PM had gradually emerged from the helm of business quarters. Unsurprisingly, then, Modi's campaign for the 16th Lok Sabha, spearheaded by India's business giants, also took a very early start. Among the sponsors and supporters of the campaign were also large sections of the Indian diaspora, particularly in the US where the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Council) has played a strong function in promoting a sense of Hindu identity and merging it with notions of market friendliness.[24] Modi was hailed as the messiah of a new order in a way that overshadowed the image of his own party or veteran comrades altogether. It was a strategy of "replicate and pervade"[25] in which Modi masks and holograms served as "evocative substitutes to his physical presence in mass rallies," while the electronic media, including regional language media, provided an unstinting coverage of the Modi factor. Much in the same way, Modi's campaign took full advantage of the social media with Facebook pages and vigilante groups ready to shoot down any criticism hurled towards their future leader.

Besides the external contribution to Modi's larger-than-life image, there is much to be said about Modi's own personality, his *pracharak* sense of discipline in work and his rousing oratory. While on the one hand, Modi is reputed to have a commanding and authoritarian personality with a take-no-prisoners approach in his ambition, he is simultaneously known for establishing personalized linkages with his constituents. When Modi promised to revolutionalise governance and administration through the use of technology in the 2014 manifesto, he had, in many ways, already proved his mettle. In the state of Gujarat, Modi was a pioneer of communications and technology, using audiocassettes, blogs, SMS and mobile ring tones to convey his election messages to his constituents.[26] Nikita Sud's anecdote from her extensive field study in Gujarat describes one such an approach to connect with the masses:

> In 2004 a group government Village Level Workers (VLWs)
> told me that they had recently completed a training module with
> the chief minister, […] I was surprised […] wondering how the
> highest authority in the State had managed to find the time […]
> why the many layers of government between this group and the
> chief minister — from the taluka development officer to the
> district collector and above — had not performed this task. Their
> reply was that these officials were also updating their skills,
> thanks to the chief minister. The latter had addressed VLWs and
> their bosses in all of Gujarat's districts via video conference.[27]

Through his dynamic speeches during the election campaign, Modi sought to symbolically displace the Congress outside the realm of the Indian national imagination. The Nehruvian dynasty, through the figures of Rahul and Sonia Gandhi, was reduced to puppetry in the hands of an external force. This external force was no other than a form of neo-colonialism, as evidenced by the institutionalized indifference of the Delhi government. In contrast, Modi chose to

fight his seat from Varanasi. The choice of Varanasi was not only to win over Uttar Pradesh which, as a state with the most number of Lok Sabha seats, was a crucial deal-breaker. But Varanasi, as the oldest city of India, was replete with metaphors of Hinduism. Modi was equally brilliant in weaving a tapestry of words and phrases to legitimize his agenda and de-legitimize that of his opponents. Institutional inefficiency and policy paralysis, for instance, represented the "government" of the Congress, whereas Modi offered a fresh promise of "maximum *governance,* and minimum *government*."[28] In other words, his promise was to *deliver*, rather than to deliberate. His campaign was at once futuristic in its approach and filled with a sense of historical justice towards past wrongs. By symbolically displacing the Nehruvian dynasty and propping up alternative, historical figures for inspiration, such as Malaviya, Ambedkar and Vivekananda, Modi sought to turn over a new leaf. In this new era, development was the catchword alongside strong and secure borders, social justice for the marginalized was symbolized by his own "rags to riches" story and the Hindu culture was reinvigorated as the spirit that subtly permeated the task ahead.

Conclusion

Is the 16th Lok Sabha the beginning of a new era for India? While the long road to Modi began much earlier, with the loci of Indian politics shifting with neo-liberal policies that both converged and contested with the Hindutva agenda, BJP's meteoric success would not have been possible without two major factors in the immediate run. Firstly, the tremendous failure of the Congress to reclaim its political space and salvage its reputation from corruption scandals, weakening economy and an elitist leadership; secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the aptness with which Narendra Modi, backed by his public relations team, used the existing fissures in society to sell himself as the saviour of India. In doing so, the appeal of Hindutva was not the sole strategy, albeit deeply relevant among his

base of middle class supporters, but also the strategic deployment of different referents for different constituents in the vision for a *Modi-fied* India.

That the 16th Lok Sabha marks a watershed moment in Indian history is evident, but it is also a scenario fraught with contradictions. In an emotional acceptance speech at the party headquarters, Modi waxed poetic, hailing the "temple of democracy" that was India and comparing service to his country as service to his mother.[29] Being trained in RSS, Modi is known for his *pracharak* sense of law and order where the nation state serves as a disciplinary space and an organic moral apparatus. The speech, not to mention his rare display of emotion, only helped him further settle into the hearts and minds of Indian supporters. On the international front, Modi stunned his wary South Asian comrades by extending to them a generous invitation to his inauguration ceremony on 26 May. Most notable in the vast audience of parliamentarians, India's business giants and Bollywood film stars and SAARC leaders was no other than the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif.[30]

But amidst optimistic slogans of a New and *Modi-fied* India are also some uncomfortable signs. The 16th Lok Sabha, for instance, represents a historic low in the number of Muslim MPs since 1952, a scenario that already tempers BJP's election mantra of inclusive development and governance. In what was perhaps a harbinger of times ahead, the albatross of communal disharmony reared its head on the eve of Modi's swearing-in. A small car accident was enough to unleash Hindu and Muslim mobs against each other in Modi's heartland of Gujarat. In another twist of dramatic irony, the 16th Lok Sabha — for all the pre-election rampage against corruption — holds the highest proportion of MPs with criminal cases against them. According to the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), 34 per cent of the new MPs face criminal charges based on the analysis of election affidavits filed before the Election Commission of India. This contrasts with 30 per cent of criminality in 2009 and 24 per cent in 2004. With the assets of

82 per cent of its members exceeding Rs. 1 crore each, the present Lok Sabha is also the richest compared to that in 2008 (58 per cent) and 2004 (30 per cent)**.**[31]

For Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) academic Zoya Hasan, the BJP has always displayed a characteristic 'double-speak,' in continuation of the "division of labour" between the BJP and the RSS. "As always, the BJP speaks in two voices," she writes, "in moderation and in polarisation."[32] Many believe that this trend is also likely to manifest itself during the course of Modi's term. Shobit Mahajan, for instance, writes:

> There won't be any official racism or communalism. The storm troopers will do their vandalism and intimidation while the administration treats them with kid gloves. Socialism and secularism will still be our official doctrine. The overt militarism will be missing but only because it won't be required. Maybe the use of the term "fascism" to describe the scenario painted above is inappropriate. But then, a rose by any other name…[33]

In many ways, the 2002 Gujarat violence represented a crystallization of the Hindu Rashtra project, long envisioned by the Sangh Parivaar. It was a moment characterized by widespread nationalist sentiments in Gujarat alongside a campaign to systematically exclude or terrorize Muslim minorities.[34] Although the spectre of the 2002 Gujarat violence continues to haunt the political tenure that lies ahead, many surmise that the scenario is unlikely to repeat again. Once the dust had settled over the Gujarat violence, its coverage in the international media proved to be detrimental for the corporate builders of Gujarat, instigating a makeover campaign for a "Global and Vibrant Gujarat." Many scholars have, therefore, cautioned that social disruption will be antithetical to the project of economic development promised by Modi. Mass expectations to deliver in the realm of economics may put pressure on the incumbent government to avoid any major eruptions of conflict, internally and externally. BJP's low representation in

the Rajya Sabha (Upper House of the Parliament) as compared to that of the Congress may serve as an additional check to some of Modi's legislative plans. That, however, may still not hinder the gradual (top-down) implementation of soft Hindutva in the socio-political realm of India.

Notes and references

1. Milan Vaishnav, Danielle Smogard, *A New Era in Indian Politics*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 10 June 2014.

2. MSS Pandian, Satyaki Roy, "Decisionism and the Cult of Narendra Modi: A Note," Economic and Political Weekly (EPW), Vol XLIX No 25, 21 June 2014.

3. <http://socialjusticefirst.com/2014/05/16/understanding-the-moderate-urban-middle-class-modi-supporter/>.

4. Arundhati Roy, *Capitalism: A Ghost Story*, Haymarket Books, (Chicago, 2014).

5. Sumantra Banerjee, "The Resistible Rise of Narendra Modi." *Economic and Political Weekly*, Mumbai, Vol.49, No. 18 (2014), 10-12; Parunjoy Thakurta, "India: An Economic Report Card of UPA," *Al-Jazeera*, 14 April 2014 <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/ 2014/04/india-an-economic-report-card-u-201441454643604515.html>.

6. Indrajit Roy, "Secularism deserves better champions," *The Hindustan Times,* New Delhi, 25 April 2014, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/comment/analysis/secularism-deserves-better-champions/article1-1212025.aspx>.

7. Eric Bellman, "Indian Budget Report Card," *The Wall Street Journal,* New York, 11 July 2014 <http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/ 2014/07/11/indian-budget-report-card-unsatisfactory/>.

8. R Nagaraj, Shruti Pandey, "Have Gujarat and Bihar outperformed the rest of India: A statistical note," *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol XIVIII, No.39, 28 September 2013.

9. Geeta Anand & Rajesh Roy, "Behind a real-estate empire: Ties to Indira

Gandhi dynasty," *The Wall Street Journal,* 17 April 2014; Dhananjay Mahapatra, "Chopper Scam: Recovering money paid to Augusta looks difficult," *The Times of India*, New Delhi, 22 March 2014 <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Chopper-scam-Recoveringmoney-paid-to-Agusta-looks-difficult/articleshow/32441745.cms>; Arun Mukhopadhay, "India: Dynasty, Corruption and Plunder," *Open Democracy*, 11 March 2012 <http://www.opendemocracy.net/arungmukhopadhyay/india-dynasty-corruption-and-plunder>.

10. "Is India on a Totalitarian Path? Arundhati Roy on Corporatism, Nationalism and World's Largest Vote," *Democracy Now,* 9 April 2014, <http://www.democracynow.org/2014/4/9/is_india_on_a_totalitarian_path >.

11. Indrajit Roy, "Neither development, nor identity; The Indian elections and the imaginary of social justice," Debating Development Blog, University of Oxford, 14 May 2014, <http://blog.qeh.ox.ac.uk/?p=615>.

12. Notes from Presentation by Christophe Jaffrelot, 22 August 2014; Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad.

13. K.C. Sharma, interviewed in Surat, 19 July 2004 as cited in Nikita Sud, *Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and the State: A Biography of Gujarat* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.177.

14. Nikita Sud, *Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and the State,* p.178.

15. Christophe Jaffrelot, *India's Silent Revolution: The Rise of the Lower Castes in North India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Christophe Jaffrelot, *Religion, Caste, and Politics in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Tapan Basu. *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags: A Critique of the Hindu Righ*. (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1993).

16. Nikita Sud, "Of Dynasties and Parivaar", 15 February 2014, *Tehelka.com,* <http://www.tehelka.com/of-dynasties-and-parivars/>

17. Notes from Jffrelot's presentation, op.cit., Nikita Sud. *Liberalization, Hindu Nationalism and the State: A Biography of Gujarat,* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.22.

18. *The Organiser*, 2006 as cited in N. Sud, op cit. ref.13, p.188.

19. N. Sud, op cit. ref(13) pg. 183

20. Arnab Neil Sengupta, "How will Modi change India" 17 May 2014, *Al Jazeera* <http://www.aljazeera.com/video/asia/2014/05/qa-india-power-shift-201451792516620940.html>.

21. "Anger, Aspiration, Apprehension", Editorial, *EPW*, 17 May 2014.

22. The BJP Fringe, Editorial, *EPW*, 4 May 2014, Vol XLIX, No.18.

23. Shilpa Kannan, "Gujarat State in the fast lane of Indian economy," *BBC News*, 26 February 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-17156917>.

24. "Negotiating the nation: diaspora contestations in the USA about Hindu nationalism in India," *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol 16 (4), 2010, pp 696-714

25. "The Fourth Estate than Vanished," EPW, Vol XLIX No 21, 24 May 2014.

26. Nikita Sud, *Liberation, Hindu Nationalism,* op cit. (ref.13).

27. Ibid, p.40

28. Shiv Visvanathan, "Narendra Modi's Symbolic War," 31 May 2014, EPW, Vol XLIX. No.21.

29. "Modi describes Parliament as temple of democracy," *Business Standard,* New Delhi, 20 May 2014

30. Jason Burke, "Narendra Modi sworn in as Indian PM in spectacular ceremony," *The Guardian,* 26 May 2014.

31. "16th Lok Sabha will be richest, have most MPs with criminal charges," *The Hindu,* New Delhi, 19 May 2014.

32. Zoya Hasan, "Development and Doublespeak", *The Hindu,* 11 April 2014.

33. Shobhit Mahajan, "Hail, Mr. Modi," *EPW*, Vol XLIX, No.24, 14 June 2014.

34. Nikita Sud, *Liberalization, Hindu State,* op.cit., (ref.13).

Figure 1: Election Results: Lok Sabha Seats

BJP+	336	+195
BJP	282	+166
SS	18	+7
TDP	16	+10
LJP	6	+6
SAD	4	0
RLSP	3	+3
AD	2	+2
NPF	1	0
SWP	1	0
AINRC	1	+1
NPP	1	+1
PMK	1	+1
HJC	0	-1
MDMK	0	-1
DMDK	0	0
IBJP	0	0
RPIA	0	0
RSPB	0	0
RSPS	0	0
Cong+	59	-175
Cong	44	-162
NCP	6	-3
RJD	4	0
IUML	2	0
JMM	2	0
KECM	1	0
RLD	0	-5
JKNC	0	-3

BOPF	0	-1
BVA	0	-1
MHD	0	0
SJD	0	0
Others	148	-20
ADMK	37	+28
TMC	34	+15
BJD	20	+6
TRS	11	+9
CPM	9	-7
YSRC	9	+9
SP	5	-18
AAP	4	+4
AIUDF	3	+2
PDP	3	+3
JDU	2	-18
JDS	2	-1
ILDF	2	+2
INLD	2	+2
IND	1	-8
CPI	1	-3
RSP	1	-1
AIMIM	1	0
SDF	1	0
BSP	0	-21
DMK	0	-18
AIFB	0	-2
AGP	0	-1
JVM	0	-1
VCK	0	-1

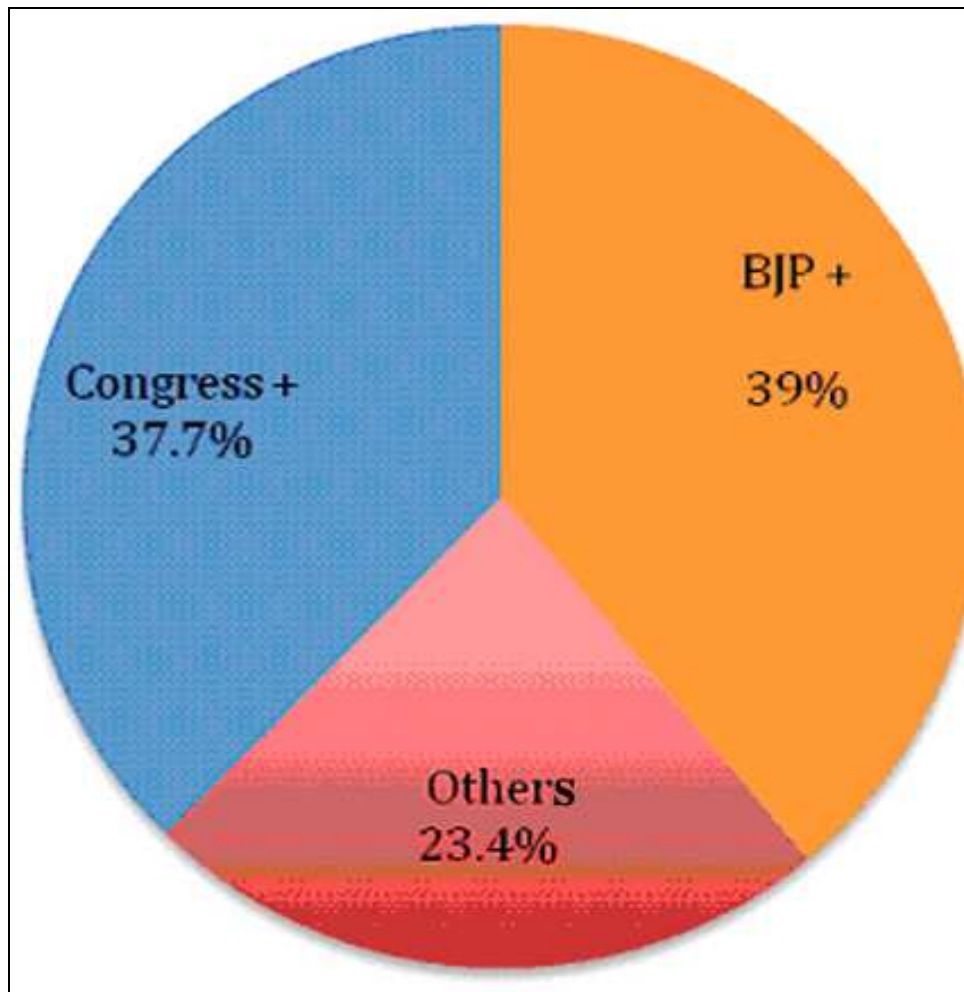(**Source**: www.indian-elections.com)

Figure. 2: Total Vote Share

Figure 3: Votes won & lost by key candidates in their constituencies

Candidate	Fighting From: Constituency	Won/Lost	Total Votes
Narendra Modi	Varanasi	Won	581022
Rahul Gandhi	Amethi	Lost	408651
Arvind Kejriwal	Varanasi	Lost	209238
Sonia Gandhi	Rae Bareli	Won	526434
L. K Advani	Gandhinagar	Won	773539
Mulayam Singh Yadav	Azamgarh	Won	340306
Rajnath Singh	Lucknow	Won	561106
Sushma Swaraj	Vidisha	Won	714348
Rabri Devi	Saran	Lost	314172
Arun Jaitley	Amritsar	Lost	380106

(**Source**: Figures 2 & 3: ndtv.com/elections)

Figure 4: BJP Support in Key States

Uttar Pradesh (80 Lok Sabha Seats)

Alliance	Results	Change
BJP+	73	+63
SP	5	-18
Cong+	2	-24
BSP	0	-20
Others	0	-1

Bihar (40 Lok Sabha Seats)

Alliance	Results	Change
BJP+	31	+19
RJD+	7	+1
JDU+	2	-18
Others	0	-2

Maharashtra (48 Lok Sabha Seats)

Alliance	Results	Change
BJP+	16	-5
Cong+	11	-14
MNS	2	+2
Others	19	+17
Awaited	0	

Delhi (7 Lok Sabha Seats)

Alliance	Results	Change
AAP	4	+4
BJP	2	+2
Cong	1	-6
Others	0	0
Awaited	0	

Karnataka (28 Lok Sabha Seats)

Alliance	Results	Change
JDS	8	+5
BJP	7	-12
Cong	7	+1
Others	6	+6
Awaited	0	

Assam (14 Lok Sabha Seats)

Alliance	Results	Change
BJP	7	+3
Cong+	3	-5
AGP	0	-1
Others	4	+3
Awaited	0	

Jammu and Kashmir (3 seats)

Alliance	Results	Change
BJP	3	+3
PDP	3	+3
JKNC+	0	-5
Others	0	-1

Madhya Pradesh (29 Lok Sabha seats)

Alliance	Results	Change
Cong	15	+3
BSP	8	+7
BJP	4	-12
Others	2	+2
Awaited	0	

Gujarat (26 Lok Sabha Seats)

Alliance	Results	Change
BJP	26	+11
Cong+	0	-11
Others	0	0
Awaited	0	

Punjab (13 Lok Sabha Seats)

Alliance	Results	Change
SAD+	6	+1
AAP	4	+4
Cong	3	-5
Others	0	0
Awaited	0	

Chandigarh (1 Lok Sabha Seat)

Alliance	Results	Change
BJP	1	+1
AAP	0	0
Cong	0	-1
Others	0	0
Awaited	0	

(**Source**: ndtv.com/elections)