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## **The Rise of Narendra Modi: A Joint Enterprise of Hindutva and Big Business**

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Ten years after the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) lost the general election in 2004, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is now scenting the prospects of a comeback. The combine of the BJP and Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) is making a determined bid to come to power at the Centre in the 16th Lok Sabha election. The RSS is salivating at the prospect of having Narendra Modi, an RSS pracharak, becoming Prime Minister of the country.

Whatever the outcome of the election, there is no doubt that Hindutva is witnessing a second coming, and that there is a shift among the big bourgeoisie in favour of the rightwing communal party, the BJP.

It is necessary to understand what has brought about this change in the political situation and to grasp what the change portends for the future trajectory of the political economy of the country.

In an article in *The Marxist* in 1992, we had stated that

“The BJP in its quest to function as a viable party of the right in the Indian political milieu has finally arrived at what it considers to be the key to success. Hindu nationalism articulated with an internal enemy – the Muslim minority – gives the BJP its communal character. Alongside this cutting edge to its platform is the right-wing character of its economic policy – support to the

liberalisation and privatisation drive. It is the combination of these two features which makes the BJP a unique political force at the national level – a right-wing communal party which represents the reactionary sections of the big bourgeoisie and landlords.” (Karat 1992, p. 19)

### **Emergence of a Hindutva Party**

In the period 1986-89, the BJP took on an aggressive Hindutva platform. Under the Presidentship of L. K. Advani, the BJP fashioned its discourse against secularism and traditional bourgeois democratic nationalism. The terms “pseudo-secularism” and “minorityism” were coined and used to condemn bourgeois secular parties and politics. The Ram temple movement and the advocacy of “cultural nationalism” to signify Hindutva marked the apogee of this Hindu majoritarian platform.

This aggressive communal policy led to a wave of communal violence in the period that began with L. K. Advani’s *rath yatra* and culminated in the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992.

The rise of the right-wing Hindutva forces coincided with the economic crisis of 1988-89, which was a product of the new economic policies of the Rajiv Gandhi government and the financial crisis that resulted from the liberalisation of that phase. The rise of Hindutva and the right-wing economic policy platform of the BJP also marked a turn away from the “Nehruvian” model by the ruling classes path and from an economic policy in which the state played a relatively significant role in directing investment.

The 1990s were the years in which this phase of the rise of the BJP occurred. The party emerged as the largest opposition party for the first time in the 10th Lok Sabha election in 1991. The Ram Janmabhoomi movement had already led to widespread communal violence and polarisation in the wake of Advani’s *rath yatra*. The Babri Masjid was demolished in December 1992. In the 11th Lok Sabha election in 1996, the BJP emerged, with 161 seats, as the largest single party in the Lok Sabha. In the 12th Lok Sabha election in 1998, it was able to form the first NDA government under A. B. Vajpayee (after a short-lived attempt in 1996).

The six-year rule of the BJP-led NDA government ended with the 2004 Lok Sabha election. The BJP failed again in the 2009 election to wrest

power. The BJP won only 116 seats and the share of votes won by the party vote dropped to 18.8 per cent.

The situation has undergone a significant change in the recent period. The BJP has become the major contender for power in the 16th Lok Sabha election. What accounts for the resurrection of the BJP's influence and its electoral strength?

### **Neo-Liberal Crisis Affects Congress**

The neo-liberal policies of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government have resulted in an economic crisis. After a period of high growth fuelled by debt financing and speculative bubbles, and consequent to the global financial crisis of 2008, the phase of growth ended and there was a slowdown in the economy, with the annual rate of growth of GDP falling below 5 per cent. Further, growth in the neo-liberal regime has been accompanied by joblessness and a lack of employment growth; the country has also witnessed unprecedented levels of inflation for a period of seven years. Agrarian distress has blighted the lives of millions of peasants. Two decades of liberalisation have resulted in widening inequalities and a tremendous concentration of wealth in the hands of a few.

A notable outcome of the neo-liberal regime has been the spread of high-level corruption. The corporate loot of natural resources and the venality of the ruling political class and bureaucracy became an endemic feature of Indian society. The middle classes, which had earlier benefited from liberalisation, have increasingly been affected by high inflation and corruption.

In the 1990s, a big section of the urban middle classes rallied around the BJP. In the elections of 2004, and more so in the elections of 2009, they turned to the Congress. But middle-class discontent grew during the UPA-II government, and by 2011, this section began to express its disgust and to protest against corruption and high prices. Discontent against the ruling establishment soon became widespread and began to spread to rural areas.

An important source of support for the Congress and the UPA government came from the big bourgeoisie. During the tenure of the UPA-I government, big business had, by and large, rallied behind the ruling party, that is, the Congress. Despite the reservations that the big bourgeoisie had about Left support to the UPA government, it was reasonably satisfied with the direction of economic policies. This period

proved to be a bonanza for big private corporations as a result of policies that enabled them to grab natural resources and public assets for a song. The tax concessions for big capitalists and the Mauritius route for the flow of capital in and out the country kept big corporates and financial circles happy.

### **Turning Point**

But 2010 marked a turning point, since slowdown set in after 2010-11. The rate of growth of GDP halved in the last two years of the UPA-II government. With the depreciation of the rupee by over 30 per cent, the cost of external debt servicing went up sharply for the corporates and profitability came down steadily.

Another feature of 2010 was the exposure of massive corruption scandals that involved the corporate sector. The telecom scandal, involving the allocation of 2G spectrum, illegal mining rackets, and the coal block allocations case all affected big private corporations, which included the Anil Ambani group, the Tatas, Birlas, Essars and Jindals. Anil Ambani was questioned by the CBI in the 2G spectrum case and an FIR was filed against Kumaramangalam Birla and Hindalco in the coal block allocation case. The entire corporate sector reacted with outrage against these anti-corruption cases. The big business houses that had benefited from the largesse provided by the clearances given by the UPA government now turned their ire against Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his government. The more public anger mounted against the big business-ruling politician-bureaucrat nexus, the more big business houses turned against their patrons in the government.

### **Gujarat Model: Big Business Support**

As the economic crisis deepened, industrial production fell steeply and the avenues to superprofits dwindled, the big bourgeoisie turned to looking for another political saviour. The quest did not take long. Corporate bosses homed in on Narendra Modi, the Chief Minister of Gujarat.

Ever since the communal pogrom of 2002, Narendra Modi had assiduously set about wooing big business houses to invest in Gujarat. The bi-annual "Vibrant Gujarat" summit meetings became the platform from which to showcase the "Gujarat model" sponsored by Narendra Modi.

By the 1980s, Gujarat had become one of the most capitalistically developed States in India. Under the neo-liberal regime, States were encouraged to compete against each other to attract private investment for infrastructure and industry. What Gujarat did under Narendra Modi was to provide the biggest concessions to private corporations to invest their capital, by means of cheap land allotment, provision of subsidised electricity, and tax concessions.

By the time of the fourth Vibrant Gujarat summit in January 2009, the corporate sector had rallied around this new Saviour and Redeemer. It was at this summit that Anil Ambani stated that "Narendrabhai has done good for Gujarat and imagine what will happen if he leads the nation. A person like him should be the next leader of the country." Sunil Mittal, head of the Bharti group, declared that "Chief Minister Modi is known as CEO, but he is actually not a CEO because he is not running a company or a sector. He is running a State and can also run the nation."<sup>1</sup>

From then on, at the Vibrant Gujarat summits of 2011 and 2013, the chorus only grew louder and was sung by larger numbers. Mukesh Ambani, Ratan Tata, Adi Godrej, Gautam Adani and the CEOs of other top industrial and banking companies declared their adulation for Narendra Modi and the Gujarat model. In the 2013 summit, Anil Ambani, in a nauseating panegyric, drew the lineage of Modi from Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel and called him the "King of Kings."

The big bourgeoisie is the most powerful strata of the ruling classes, which comprise the bourgeoisie and landlords of the country. It has grown enormously after liberalisation and has consolidated its leadership of the ruling class. The first time a substantial section of the big bourgeoisie shifted its support away from the Congress was in 1991, when important factions supported the BJP. On his first visit to Kolkata after the *rath yatra* in 1990, the Birlas feted L. K. Advani at lunch. An array of top industrialists attended the event. This public display of support and recognition was extended to the 1991 Lok Sabha elections, when, for the first time, sections of the big bourgeoisie saw the BJP as a credible alternative to the Congress. In the 1991 elections, the BJP outstripped the Congress side in raising resources and spending money.

## **Big Bourgeoisie for Modi**

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<sup>1</sup> Varadarajan (2014).

This is the second time – the first being in the 1990s -- that the big bourgeoisie has swung its support to the BJP. The difference, however, is that, in the current phase, there is near-unanimous support from big business and the corporate sector for Narendra Modi.

It is not only Indian big business that has endorsed Modi. The 2011 and 2013 Vibrant Gujarat summits were attended by the President of the US-India Business Council, Ron Sommers, who termed the development of Gujarat under Modi as “stunning.” Narendra Modi enlisted the services of a US lobbying and public relations firm, APCO Worldwide, to drum up support for the Gujarat model and to lobby with the US government and international finance capital. APCO, which has close links with Israel, has done a commendable job in marketing Narendra Modi and his Gujarat model.

The announcement of Modi as the BJP’s Prime Ministerial candidate caused stock markets to shoot up. The benchmark BSE Sensex and the National Stock Exchange Nifty gained 18 per cent from September 2013 to mid-April 2014. The share of Adani enterprises (owned by Modi’s closest ally, Gautam Adani) has surged by a whopping 114 per cent since the rally began in February 2014. The markets have categorically signalled who their leader is.

The announcement of Modi as the leader of the BJP’s election campaign saw a massive and sustained campaign in the corporate media, both television and print, to project Modi on a development and good governance platform. This unprecedented campaign is a result of the total backing of the corporate sector, which owns the bulk of the mass media in the country. At the same time, the corporate media have blacked out the communal aspects of the BJP campaign and the big role the RSS is playing in the campaign. At no time has an individual leader received such widespread saturation-coverage as has Modi since he embarked on his first rally in June 2013. This campaign explains the genesis of the “Modi wave,” which is then re-propagated by the very corporate media that created it. The impact and the appeal that Modi has among educated youth and sections of the middle classes in various parts of the country is a result of this media campaign.

### **Influx of Personnel**

In class terms, both the Congress and the BJP represent the interests of the big bourgeoisie and landlords. The shift towards Narendra Modi and the BJP by the big bourgeoisie has left the Congress enfeebled,

enhancing its electoral vulnerability. The shift by the ruling class is reflected in the flow of retired persons from the top echelons of the bureaucracy, security agencies, and armed forces to the BJP. For the first time, a retired Army Chief is contesting as a BJP candidate; also in the ranks of contestants are a former Home Secretary and a former Police Commissioner of Mumbai, who quit his job to stand. The retired chief of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), Sanjeev Tripathi, has joined the BJP.

The 1990-1 period saw a similar influx into the BJP from the personnel of the ruling establishment. The BJP's chauvinist nationalism and the call for a strong national security state, which rides roughshod over citizen's rights, is an attraction for these elements.

### **Gujarat: Hindutva Laboratory**

Narendra Modi's political and ideological life is determined by his being part of the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh. From 1986 to 1989, the BJP was moulded by the RSS. L. K. Advani has publicly owned the ideological and organisational links of the party with the RSS. The RSS began the practice of placing its cadres in the key organisational posts of the party at various levels. Narendra Modi, who became a pracharak (full time functionary) of the RSS in Gujarat in 1975, rose to become the State Organisation Secretary of the BJP in 1987. This is a post that acts as the bridge between the RSS and its political wing.

This is the period when Gujarat became the laboratory for the Hindutva experiment. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad became a mass organisation and its tentacles spread across the length and breadth of the state. The 1980s saw a series of major communal riots in Ahmedabad, Vadodara, Surat and other towns. The RSS-VHP combine succeeded in communalising large sections of the urban middle classes. Narendra Modi was reared and nurtured in this Hindutva enterprise.

### **RSS Pracharak as Chief Minister**

Even after Narendra Modi was shifted out of Gujarat to Delhi as a result of a setback due to factional politics in the Gujarat BJP, he never lost the trust of the RSS. In 1998, after Vajpayee became Prime Minister, Modi was promoted to the position of National Organisation Secretary of the BJP. This was the key position at the national level for maintaining links between the RSS and the party. When Modi assumed the Chief Ministership in October 2011, he became the first RSS

pracharak to become Chief Minister of a State. Other RSS men who filled key governmental positions, including L. K. Advani and Atal Behari Vajpayee, were swayamsewaks in the RSS, not full-time pracharaks.

The first phase of Narendra Modi's Chief Ministership between 2002 to 2007 was marked by all the virulent characteristics of a Hindutva fanatic. The Godhra train incident in March 2002 provided Narendra Modi with the perfect opportunity to sponsor massive "retaliation" against Muslims. The fact that he was able to avoid legal and judicial responsibility for the pogrom has only heightened his image among Hindutva followers. From then onwards, the road to becoming the champion and symbol of Hindutva was cleared. That he was unrepentant and unrelenting in his anti-Muslim crusade became evident in the assembly elections held in December 2002. His speeches were full of anti-Muslim rhetoric: "Ame Panch, Amara Pachees (we are five, we have twenty five). Can Gujarat implement family planning? Which religious sect is coming in the way"? Referring to the closing down of the relief camps, he asked, "What brothers, should we run relief camps? Should I start children-producing centres there?"<sup>2</sup>

After the Gujarat police killed Sohrabuddin and his wife in cold blood and criminal cases were filed in the matter of this false encounter, Narendra Modi, when addressing election meetings in 2007, would ask, "What did you want me and my men to do with a man like Sohrabuddin?" and the crowd would roar in answer, "*Kill him.*"<sup>3</sup>

The dark side of the Gujarat model has always been this Hindutva terror and violence against the Muslim minorities. In the wake of the horrific events in Gujarat in 2002, sections of big business reacted adversely. More than the communal violence, what put them off was the insecurity of life and property, which would adversely affect investment.

In February 2003, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), the premier organisation of industrialists, organised a meeting in Delhi with Narendra Modi, then the new Chief Minister of Gujarat. In this meeting, some of top industrialists, such as Jamshyd Godrej and Rahul Bajaj, expressed concern about insecurity in Gujarat, insecurity that would affect investment. Narendra Modi was furious at this criticism.

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<sup>2</sup> Mukhopadhyay (2013), p. 298.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 311.

He organised the industrialists of Gujarat to protest. A hundred companies from Gujarat threatened to leave the CII. Faced with this threat, the CII buckled and the Director General of the CII issued a letter of regret for the misunderstanding.<sup>4</sup> The class interests of the big bourgeoisie overcame whatever qualms were entertained by its more liberal members. Ratan Tata and Godrej have now come full circle, to a position of wholehearted endorsement of Narendra Modi becoming CEO of the country.

### **The Marriage of Hindutva and Big Business**

The metamorphosis of the RSS pracharak into the favourite of the private corporations is the most significant phenomenon of the 16th Lok Sabha election. The role of the big bourgeoisie in backing fascism as an extreme option is well known. That is what happened in Germany. In India, such a crisis situation has not yet developed for the ruling classes. But the mixture of Hindutva communalism and big bourgeois support is a potent and deadly one. It is a recipe for rightwing authoritarianism that spells danger for the secular democratic framework. Neo-liberal politics carries within it the seeds of authoritarianism. One of the attractions of Narendra Modi for big capital is the authoritarianism that characterises his leadership and personality.

The political career of Narendra Modi within the BJP is marked by his ruthless elimination of political rivals and those who do not accept his leadership. Haren Pandya, who was stripped of his ministership and legislative seat, ended up being mysteriously assassinated. Sanjay Joshi, a fellow RSS pracharak, was discarded by the BJP-RSS leadership from his post in the party on the insistence of Modi. Keshubhai Patel, Suresh Mehta, Gordhan Zadaphia, and others, and, in the latest instance, Haren Pathak, were isolated and driven out.

### **RSS Plans for Modi**

The ascent of Narendra Modi to the position of Prime Ministerial candidate of the BJP was a result of careful planning. After the RSS decided to dispense with the leadership of L. K. Advani in 2009, the organisational grip of the RSS over the BJP tightened. Amendments to the BJP Constitution were made over the last five to six years to facilitate this enhanced organisational control. The RSS played a direct role in the selection of Nitin Gadkari and Rajnath Singh as Presidents

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<sup>4</sup> Jose (2012).

of the party. The national organisation secretary is a direct RSS nominee. So are the two Joint General Secretaries working under him. The zonal organisation secretaries of the BJP are also posts filled by RSS men. An RSS Joint General Secretary acts as the Sangh's liaison with the BJP, a post presently occupied by Suresh Soni.

Nearly a year before the BJP formally declared Narendra Modi the Prime Ministerial candidate, Modi went to Nagpur for a meeting with Mohan Bhagwat, the RSS chief. Bhayyaji Joshi and the Sangh's liaison man with the BJP, Suresh Soni, attended the meeting. It is this meeting that set the course for what eventually happened in September 2013, when the BJP parliamentary board decided to declare Narendra Modi the Prime Ministerial candidate of the party.<sup>5</sup>

The RSS played a crucial role in overcoming the resistance of L. K. Advani to their choice. The Goa meeting of the BJP's National Executive in June 2014 made Narendra Modi the Chairman of the Election Campaign Committee over Advani's opposition, an act that resulted in Advani's short-lived resignation drama. The RSS organ *The Organiser* editorially hailed the decision: "The nation, especially the youths, is looking for decisive, credible and dynamic leadership and popular mood vividly exhibits the undisputable alternative in the form of Modi" (September 29, 2013).

Narendra Modi was to be marketed, in accordance with the ruling class prescription, as the *vikas purush*, the leader who would deliver development and "good governance." But the RSS planned a back-up for this campaign. The Hindutva agenda would be the mainstay of the BJP's election campaign while the corporate media-backed campaign would focus on the aforesaid development and good governance. *Moditva* thus became the signature theme – Hindutva modified by the corporate mantra of development and good governance.

The use of the communal weapon to disperse any threat to the ruling classes is a time-tested tactic. The BJP represents a reactionary response to the gathering crisis. The reserve force of the ruling classes, represented by communalism, is now being brought into play. The electoral defeat of the BJP in 2004 did not lead to any basic erosion of the strength of the communal forces. As the Political Resolution of the CPI(M)'s 18th Congress pointed out in April 2005:

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<sup>5</sup> Joshi (2013).

“The rise of the communal forces in the past one and a half decades and their six-year period in office has enabled the communal ideology and organisations to strike roots in different sections of society. It will be a mistake to underestimate their latent strength”. (Communist Party of India (Marxist) 2005, para 2.73)

## **Communal Game-Plan**

The RSS put in place its strategy for the Lok Sabha elections well in advance of the elections. Uttar Pradesh, followed by Bihar, became focuses of an intense communal campaign. Amit Shah, the trusted lieutenant of Modi, was assigned charge of Uttar Pradesh in June 2013, four days after the National Executive meeting in Goa. He had begun unofficially to go to UP as early as February 2012. Amit Shah was the Minister of State for Home in Gujarat and in July 2010, he was arrested and charged in the Sohrabuddin fake encounter case, and the killing of his wife and the subsequent murder of a witness. It is this hatchet man of Modi who oversaw the making of the blueprint for the communal campaign in UP. The BJP, which was not able to get more than 10 seats out of 80 in the 2004 and 2009 elections, had to achieve a breakthrough in Uttar Pradesh, the largest State of India and the State that had seen the first Hindutva wave in the 1990s.

The plan was to create the conditions for a recurrence of a communal polarisation. The election of the Samajwadi Party government in April 2012 set the stage for what was to occur. A systematic campaign was launched to the effect that the State Government was a government for the Muslims. Systematic anti-Muslim propaganda was conducted on issues such as that of cow slaughter, and to the effect that young Muslim lured Hindu girls away from their homes. From the first communal outbreak in Kosi Kalan to the final major riot in Muzaffarnagar, that is, in a space of two years, 27 major incidents of communal violence took place in the State. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad sought to raise the Ram temple issue by undertaking *shobha yatras*. The Vishwa Hindu Sammelan in December 2012 held in Allahabad declared Narendra Modi as the symbol of Hindutva. The same pattern of communal campaign and polarisation was attempted in Bihar, especially after the JD(U) broke the alliance with the BJP.

## **Halt the BJP**

In all spheres of government, the NDA Government of 1999-2004 led by A. B. Vajpayee was an undiluted failure. It represented a period of

setback to the nation with respect to domestic and foreign policy. Its economic policy was disastrous for the people of India; indeed, with regard to rural India, the years of NDA government represent the worst period of crisis with respect to production and human development in the post-green revolution era. The decisiveness with which the electorate threw the BJP out in 2004 reflected the utter bankruptcy of the party in government, and showed up its claim of "shining India" to be a mockery of the vast masses of India's people.

The contours of what a BJP-led government headed by Narendra Modi would look like have emerged – an authoritarian government with a strong emphasis on a national security State; the infiltration of the RSS into all institutions of the state and the communalisation of the educational system and cultural institutions. This will be accompanied by a savage attack on welfare measures and the livelihood needs of the vast masses of the working people and the poor in order to serve the interests of a big-business-driven model of development.

In the course of the election campaign and midway through the polling process, it has become clear that the Congress and the UPA is losing ground steadily. In such a situation, the electoral battle to defeat the BJP and to implement suitable tactics after the election to prevent the BJP from coming to power are of crucial importance.

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