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## **COMMUNAL HINDU POLITICS IN INDIA : FOREIGN POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

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In this paper an attempt has been made to speculate upon the implications for India's foreign policy if hypothetically the Hindu communal parties that have made noticeable gains in the past few assembly and parliamentary elections ever make it and come to power in the centre. Such a contingency, though in the peculiar Indian context is only a probability, deserves academic attention.

The phenomenon of Hindu chauvinism has its cultural and sociological roots. But our concern here is with its contemporary political connotations. Based upon populist expressions like Hindutva (Hinduness), Hindu Rashtra (nation), Hindu nationalism and so on, the upsurge of Hindu communal politics can be understood as the phenomenon of political mobilisation of the Hindu masses by stoking the latent distrust in many of the Hindu mind about the non-Hindus of India, most notably the Muslims, and then to translate that distrust into votes at the hustings to capture the reins of power. In this game the party in the forefront is the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) aided directly or indirectly by several other groups of which mention may be made of the following: the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS),

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the Viswa a Hindu Parishad (VHP), the Bhartiya Sadhu Samaj, and the Shiv Sena. The Bajrang Dal which is also militantly active in this regard is actually the youth wing of the VHP. Since the RSS, the VHP and the Sadhu Samaj have no direct political ambitions and the Shiv Sena's political clout is primarily confined to the state of Maharashtra and to some extent Goa the party to be really watched is the BJP. As such what we would analyse here is the foreign policy outlook of the BJP and more particularly its concept of South Asian regional security.

The ideological orientation of the BJP insofar as its domestic agenda is concerned has been subjected to scholarly investigation both in India and elsewhere. But the foreign policy outlook of the party has received little attention. As a result there is some misunderstanding among many of the commentators that once the party comes to power India's relations with the Islamic world in general and those with Pakistan in particular would plummet. My own research based on the scanning of party literature from its inception in 1980 to the present does not lead me to that conclusion. On the contrary, it shows that while the party has a heavily Hindutva-loaded agenda to come to power its external orientation is balanced to the Muslim world and conciliatory to Pakistan. In any case, unlike the Congress party, it attaches considerable importance to South Asian regionalism based on mutual respect for one another and shedding India's so-called "big-brotherly" stance.

### **The Background**

The BJP came into being in April 1980 as a result of a split in the Janata Party on the issue of dual membership--whether a Janata Party member could as well retain his RSS membership. The BJP, however, was not a new party. In all practical purposes it was a continuation of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJP) which was created in 1951 with its core membership drawn from the RSS and the Hindu Mahasabha.



The strategic change in the name--from the Bharatiya Jana Sangh to the Bharatiya Janata Party--was probably not without purpose. Although the BJP leader L.K. Advani later attributed this change to purely technical reasons.<sup>1</sup> It may be surmised that probably the word "sangh" (meaning "union") common to both the Bharatiya Jana Sangh and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh tended to associate one with the other and hence was deemed as a political liability in the then context of Indian politics.<sup>2</sup>

### Two Phases

For the purposes of our analysis we may divide the BJS-BJP continuum of 1951-93 period into two phases--the first from 1951 to 1977 and the second from 1977 to 1993. Although the BJP came into being in 1980, the rationale for making 1977 as the dividing line is the fact that it was for the first time in 1977 that the party, as a partner in the Janata Party, shared power at the centre with its leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee allotted the External Affairs portfolio in the Morarji Desai cabinet. Since first as theorists and then as practitioners of foreign policy political parties seldom show much consistency, in any country for that matter, an analysis of the post-1977 phase of the BJS/BJP would give us a better opportunity to understand its foreign policy outlook for during the two phases it shared power at the centre (from 1977 to 1980 directly as a partner of the ruling Janata Party and from 1989 to 1991 indirectly as a supporter of the National Front government but keeping off governance). Currently, since May 1991, it has served as the leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of the Indian Parliament, making it imperative upon it to project its position on various national issues with more circumspection.

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1. See Advani's interview in the *Times of India* (New Delhi), 5 June 1989.

2. On this point, see Shiva Chandra Jha, *Indian Party Politics: Structure, Leadership, Programmes* (New Delhi:Deep and Deep, 1989, p. 235. It may be noted that following the victory of the Janata Party in 1977 the mood was upbeat. In April 1977, the RSS leader Balasahab Deoras held talks with Sikandar Bakht of the defunct BJS and Jammāt-i-Islami leaders Mohammad Muslim Bhopali and Afzal Hussain in order to facilitate a rapprochement between these two arch enemies. Following this, the Jammāt opened its membership to non-Muslims and the RSS to non-Hindus. This had at least some symbolic importance for communal harmony. See Theodore P. Wright, Jr., "Muslims and the 1977 Indian Elections: A Watershed?," *Asian Survey* (Berkeley), 17 (12), December 1977, p. 1220.



### The Jana Sangh Heritage

Before analysing the phase beginning in 1977 it would be useful to draw the main contours of the foreign policy stance of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh in a nutshell. It may be noted that on major questions such as non-alignment, nuclear weapons, relations with the Middle Eastern states, dealings with Pakistan, and so on, the BJP was not at all in tune with the Congress party which was in power. From the start it pooh-pooched the idea of non-alignment and although it did not say so categorically, in the Cold War its sympathies clearly lay with the United States. Even after the signing of the Indo-Soviet treaty of 1971 which was a potential anti-Pak alliance in the context of the Bangladesh crisis the party could not be full-threaded in its support of the treaty. It welcomed the treaty "to the extent it counters the continued American arming of Pakistan, deters Chinese intervention in Indo-Pak affairs and the isolation of India" but emphasized that "in the immediate context, its touchstone would be the contribution it makes to the freedom of Bangladesh". In any case, the party argued that "for better or for worse, the Indo-Soviet Treaty has put an end to India's non-alignment."<sup>3</sup>

On the nuclear question the party was in favour of India going nuclear. After the Chinese nuclear detonation in 1964 it ridiculed the Indian government for its "pseudopacifist inhibitions" and called it "jejune in the extreme to argue that China's nuclear threat can be faced by mobilising world opinion against it." The party was critical of the argument that a nuclear programme would not be economically feasible. Arguing that "no price can be considered too high where the country's defence is involved," it found India's policy of nuclear abnegation as "suicidal" and considered it "imperative that an all out effort be made to build up an independent nuclear deterrent of its own."<sup>4</sup>

3. Central Working Committee Resolution 13 August 1971. See Bharatiya Jana Sangh, *Party Documents*, vol.3, "Resolutions on Defence and External Affairs" (New Delhi: Bharatiya Jana Sangh, 1973), p. 158.

4. Central Working Committee Resolution, 4 December 1964. *Ibid.* pp.7-8.



On the matters of the Middle East, the Jana Sangh was in favour of peaceful coexistence of the Arabs and the Jews, to which India could constructively contribute only if, in the party's reckoning, India recognised the state of Israel.<sup>5</sup> It may be contextual to mention here that some Muslims in India certainly felt strongly for Palestine and against Israel. One Indian Muslim writer went to the extent of arguing in favour of building a united front of Indian Muslims with the international Islamic brotherhood to wage a Jihad against Israel and expected the Indian government to accord the necessary facilities in this respect.<sup>6</sup> There is no evidence in the BJP literature to show that the party reacted to this kind of Muslim hatred against Israel.

### **Pakistan Policy**

On the issue of Indo-Pak relationship the party's disagreement with the government was more over the form than over the substance. Since the very origin of the BJS could be traced to the worst ever Hindu-Muslim carnage that the Partition had brought in its train, its avowedly anti-Pakistan stance was part and parcel of its foreign policy outlook from the beginning. Two questions that particularly concerned the party were, one, the Kashmir issue, and the other, the communal situation in East Pakistan.

In respect of Kashmir, barring the rhetoric, there was essentially no conflict between the BJS and the ruling Congress party. Pakistan's political claim on the State on communal ground was rejected equally by both. The nuance was over strategy. For example, besides claiming Kashmir to be an integral part of the Indian union the BJS also asked for the total integration of the state into the union of India by abrogating the Article 370 of the Indian constitution. The Congress thought it prudent to go slow in this regard for there were both constitutional and emotive impediments. In any case, the nuances in the respective positions of the BJS and the Congress

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5. Central Working Committee Resolution, 30 June 1967. *Ibid.*, pp. 137-38.

6. Abdkul Moghni, "Jihad for Palestine and Indian Muslims," *Radiance*, 5 October 1969, p. 11. Cited in, Moin Shakir, *Muslims in Free India* (New Delhi: Kalamkar Prakashan, 1972), p. 86.



with regard to Pakistan in general and Kashmir in particular must not be viewed in terms of the former's Hindu nationalistic posture and the latter's secular political commitments. Both were based on India's legal claims over Kashmir.

Ironically, it was the Congress party, its secular projections notwithstanding, which was generally viewed by an average Hindu as a party strong and committed enough to safeguard the Hindu interests. In the competition between the Congress on the one hand and the BJS-RSS-Hindu Mahasabha combine on the other for support among the Hindus the latter were with the Congress. In the 1946 provincial elections it was the Congress which faced the challenge of the Muslim League, and not the Hindu Mahasabha. The Mahasabha's performance was rather dismal. In the fifties and sixties, such political platforms of the BJS as Hindi to be the national language, anti cow slaughter, and so on, were primarily oriented to the popular sentiments in the Hindi belt where the Congress leadership at the district levels were equally committed to the same causes. As a result, the BJS failed to develop any particular constituency of its own distinct from that of the Congress. B.D. Graham, whose book on the BJS has so far been the most well-researched, has elaborated on this point.<sup>7</sup>

Equally ironical was the fact that in spite of BJS's avowed anti-Muslim rhetoric the party was not anti-Muslim per se insofar as its foreign policy orientation was concerned. The strong pro-Bangladesh position that the party took during the East Pakistan crisis of 1970-71 showed that it was not indiscriminately anti-Muslim. It was merely anti-Pakistan because that country represented a political philosophy which was a permanent impediment to the emotional integration of Indian Muslims to the Indian mainstream. The Muslim-majority Bangladesh became a favourite nation for the BJS simply because of the fact that its creation had mocked at the two-nation theory which was the *raison d'etre* of the Pakistan state. In a resolution passed at the party's All India Session at Udaipur on 2 July 1971

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7. B. D. Graham, *Hindu Nationalism and Indian Politics: The Origins and Development of the Bhartiya Jana Sangh* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 255-57.



it declared that the developments in Bangladesh were "the logical sequel to the creation of the monstrous absurdity called Pakistan on the basis of Two-nation Theory."<sup>8</sup> Evidently, the party was not against all Muslims of the Indian subcontinent but only against that variety of Muslims who stood for the ideology of Pakistan. It was the hope of the party that if Pakistan disintegrated the reunification of India could not be far off.

### **Did BJS Have a Strategic Doctrine?**

From the party literature it is not quite clear as to what exactly was the party's strategic doctrine. One of the basic disagreements between India and the United States was that the latter viewed its security in a global scale in which it mattered little if its arms-relationship with Pakistan jeopardized South Asian regional security. For India that aspect itself was crucial and as such the American strategic tie-up with Pakistan was not only not a friendly act but also an affront pregnant with dangerous consequences. According to Jawaharlal Nehru, India's defence perimeter did not start at the frontiers of India but at the frontiers of the region. The BJS was ever alive to the danger posed by Pakistan and China and advocated adequate response thereto but its natural sympathy with the United States in the Cold War prevented it from seeing the problem from this perspective, notwithstanding the fact that it did show its displeasure at the US arms aid to Pakistan.

What followed from this was an unspoken, yet discernible, pro-West tilt as opposed to the government's pro-Soviet tilt without conceptually integrating it into the party's strategic doctrine, if any. For example, the BJS's position on Israel and the West Asia question was largely correct but it failed to put it in a coherent frame. A better relationship with Israel would have removed some of the misgivings in American mind but even that was not specifically stated. In short, both the global and regional strategies of the BJS remained conceptually blurred and its different threads were difficult to be reconciled into a coherent alternative.

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8. *BJS Documents*, op.cit., pp. 153-54.



### The Janata Experiment

The BJS was a prominent constituent of this political experiment. In the cabinet of Morarji Desai two important ministries were given to two stalwarts of the party. Atal Bihari Vajpayee became the Minister of External Affairs while the charge of Information and Broadcasting was given to L.K. Advani. The record of the party as a partner in the ruling coalition (it had actually merged into the Janata Party) demonstrated as a partner in the ruling coalition (it had actually merged into the Janata Party) demonstrated that it is one thing for a party to hold a particular foreign policy position while in the opposition but quite different to translate that posture into a policy when in the government. On almost all important matters, whether it was the question of nuclear deterrence, relations with the Soviets or the overall issue of the Superpower confrontation, the Janata policy was a case of continuity of the earlier Congress position. It was only in its neighbourhood diplomacy that there seemed to be a departure both in style and projection.

This departure, however, did not mean that the party implemented its jingoistic posture *vis-a-vis* Pakistan which it had advocated during the past two decades. It was on the contrary. Vajpayee's emphasis was on mutually beneficial bilateralism with neighbours "to clear cobwebs of suspicion, remove misunderstanding, and banish the fear of interference." He clarified that "in seeking cooperation from, and offering it to, our neighbours, we have never imposed ourselves upon them. We have gently tried to explain to them the mutuality of advantage in bilateralism allowed the irresistible logic of geography to assert itself."<sup>9</sup>

One scholar has argued that many of the achievements of the Janata government, such as the Farakka agreement with Bangladesh, the Salal Dam agreement with Pakistan and the efforts to harness the hydroelectric energy of the common rivers between India and Nepal, were not actually its achievements for steps had already been taken in those directions by its

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9. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, "India's Foreign Policy Today," *International Studies* (New Delhi), 17, 1978, pp. 381-82.



predecessor Indira Gandhi government.<sup>10</sup> While this is true, it may still be emphasised that during the Janata regime the regional relationships were much more relaxed. This author's conversations with scholars from Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka have left the impression with him that they were all happy with the way the Janata government treated their countries with dignity and sovereign equality. Moreover, had the Janata's regional policy been merely a continuation, and on specific matters sheer culmination, of the earlier Congress policy the latter would not have taken the party to task during the 1980 elections for its total failure in that respect. Indira Gandhi's main criticism against the Janata party's foreign policy was that it had allowed India's regional pre-eminence to be diluted -- "even a tiny state like Bhutan is sneering at us," were her words at the poll campaigns. In any case, during the succeeding Congress regime (1980-89) India's relationships with its regional neighbours were certainly not better than those during the Janata period.

### **Enter the BJP : International and Domestic Settings**

As noted above, the BJP came into being in 1980 as a reincarnation of the erstwhile BJS with a new political thrust to broadbase its appeal. Did it represent a new orientation in its foreign policy outlook? An answer to this question is necessary because here is a party which does not only have oppositional and limited ruling experience but also entertains the change of coming to power on its own.

Before an answer is attempted it would, however, be useful to keep in mind the broad characteristics of the period between 1980 and the present in both its international and domestic contexts. Internationally, the period has been of seminal importance starting from the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979, which led to the Second Cold War, and ending with the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1990. A long chapter in the history of international conflicts thus saw its height and then its total dismantling.

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10. S.D. Muni, "India and Regionalism in South Asia," in *ibid.*, p. 496.



Domestically also, the period was of considerable importance as the Indian political system came under strain of a kind not experienced before. The politics of the country was rent asunder by both vertical and horizontal forces with contradictory implications for nation-building. While the movements in Assam, Punjab and Kashmir threatened to divide the country vertically, the backward classes movements and the Hindu nationalistic politics threatened to divide the nation horizontally. With this there was a systematic erosion of value-based politics. Most of the political parties which were in the process of an organizational decay found themselves inadequate to meet the challenge and simply indulged in existentialist politics adding to further complications. Primordial loyalties to caste and religion were evoked for electoral purposes without any consideration of their long-term implications for national integration. In short, while on the international front the danger of a global conflict receded, on the domestic front the chance of political instability increased. It is against that backdrop that one would have to analyse the foreign policy stance of the BJP.

### **The Afghan Crisis**

In December 1979, the Soviets massively intervened in Afghanistan. It was the time when the Janata government, which had emphasized on "genuine non-alignment", had spent itself and elections for a new parliament were imminent. Following the elections which returned Indira Gandhi's Congress party to power India took a stand on the matter which in all practical purposes was pro-Soviet.<sup>11</sup>

How did the BJP respond to the Soviet intervention and Indira Gandhi's "pro-Sovietism"? While the party did not assail India's friendship with the Soviets it deprecated Indira Gandhi's support for the Soviet intervention and asked whether India's friendship with the Soviet union was not firm enough to enable it to take a more independent stand. As "a friend of the Soviets", Vajpayee warned them of having taken a wrong step.<sup>12</sup> National Executive

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11. For details of Indian response, see Partha S. Ghosh and Rajaram Panda, "Domestic Support for Mrs. Gandhi's Afghan Policy: Soviet Factor in Indian Politics," *Asian Survey*, 23(3), March 1983, pp. 261-79.

12. *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), 21 January 1980.



of the BJP declared : "It is highly regrettable that instead of raising a powerful protest against the Soviet interference in the affairs of Afghanistan, our traditional friend and non-aligned neighbour, the attitude adopted by Mrs. Gandhi's Government on this issue right from the beginning has resulted in lowering of our prestige in the eyes of the world, reducing our credibility among non-aligned nations and isolating us from our neighbours."<sup>13</sup>

### Relations with Pakistan

The BJP's original position was that of peace and friendship with Pakistan. It pleaded that both the countries should bury the hatchet and build a new era of durable peace because the "welfare of the many millions of our two countries is what is at stake." As such "a mutual agreement, between our two countries, about non-use of force can no longer be put aside. It is an essential first step."<sup>14</sup>

The attitude, however, gave way to a tough line as situations in Punjab and Kashmir worsened and more and more evidence started pouring in about Pakistan's involvements in these secessionist movements. In the meeting of its National Executive held in July 1986 the party noted with alarm "reports about massive infiltration of Pakistani-trained terrorists from the border districts of Poonch, Rajouri and Kupwara."<sup>15</sup> Ridiculing the Rajiv Gandhi government for its claim that "a new climate" had been created in the Indo-Pak relationship it demanded of the government clear-cut exposition of its policy towards Pakistan in respect of the latter's nuclear ambitions, aid to Punjabi and Kashmiri terrorists, involvement in narcotics smuggling and forward military moves in Siachin.<sup>16</sup>

13. See A.M. Zaidi, (ed.), *The Annual Register of Indian Political Parties: Proceedings and Fundamental Texts, 1980* (New Delhi: S.Chand and Co., 1981), p. 650. Emphasis added. (Quoted hereinafter as Zaidi's Annual Register).

14. National Executive Resolutions of August 1982 and February 1983. See, Zaidi's Annual Register, 1982 and 1983, pp. 146 and 58-59, respectively.

15. Zaidi's Annual Register, 1986, p. 118.

16. National Executive resolution, June 1989. Zaidi's Annual Register, 1989, I, pp. 136-37.



### South Asian Regionalism

Considering that the major challenge facing the world was economic, the BJP strongly pleaded for South Asian regional cooperation "for the benefit of the collectivity of South Asian nations." Regretting the way the Indo-Nepal trade agreement was renewed by the Indira Gandhi government in early 1983 the party condemned the "overbearing attitude" of the government which "needlessly antagonises our neighbours." Arguing that during the Janata period India's relations with its neighbours were "most cooperative and constructive" the party urged upon the government "towards working for a zone of peace in the entire South Asian region. Such a quest and Nepal's urgings for its declaration as a zone of peace are not contradictory. Our quest for peace is not selective."<sup>17</sup> In this stand was hidden a clear perceptual hiatus between the BJP and the Congress insofar as their respective sub-continental strategic doctrines were concerned.

In course of time, however, BJP's enthusiasm for South Asian regionalism was considerably dampened by its concern for illegal immigrations from neighbouring states. In January 1987, the National Council of the party passed a resolution detailing the infiltrations of Bangladeshi and Pakistani nationals into India changing the communal composition of several border districts.

In the opinion of the BJP this massive influx of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis is a clever move not only to shed excess population but also to create a thickly populated belt of aliens along the Indian side of the international border threatening the national security. It is really unfortunate that enlightened public opinion has not yet taken full cognisance of this phenomena (sic) endangering the nation. The BJP takes this opportunity to warn the nation against the political dangers of this silent population invasion.<sup>18</sup>

17. National Executive resolution, February 1983. Zaidi's Annual Register, 1983, pp. 58-61.

18. Zaidi's Annual Register, 1987, pp. 62-73.



That the BJP's continuous reference to Bangladeshi infiltrations paid the party its political dividends was evident from the fact that it increased its votes in West Bengal from 0.5 percent to 11.4 percent between 1987 and 1991, a noteworthy success if compared to the jump from 7.4 percent in 1984 to 21.9 percent in 1991 at the national level.<sup>19</sup>

About the Superpower linkages with the region BJP's position with regard to the US-Pak strategic tie-up was visibly different from that of its precursor, the BJS. The latter was more critical of the Indian government for letting the United States come closer to Pakistan but in the BJP phase it was critical of the US for endangering South Asian security. Indeed the Soviets were not spared either for their contribution to complicating the situation by intervening in the non-aligned Afghanistan. Interestingly, the party continued to plead with Pakistan to delink its arms relationship with the United States and jointly work for South Asian security. Even in Afghanistan the party strongly pleaded for a regional initiative.

It was against this background that a shift in BJP's attitude towards Israel was notable. It "unequivocally" condemned Israel's brutal action against the PLO in Lebanon" and rejected all its "attempts at regional hegemonism."<sup>20</sup> "Israel certainly has a right to exist, but not as an expanding regional power, with freedom to define its own concept of secure frontiers," noted the National Executive of the party in February 1983.<sup>21</sup> What was missing in these statements was an exhortation to the Indian government to accord full diplomatic recognition to Israel and to play the role of a honest broker in the conflict between the Arabs and Israel which was so much characteristic of the BJP phase.

Like the BJS, the BJP too did not articulate its doctrine of regional security. Following Indira Gandhi's enunciation of the so-called Monroe Doctrine for India in the aftermath of the anti-Tamil riots in Sri Lanka and

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19. Amulya Ganguli, "Out of Touch," *Seminar* (New Delhi), No. 399, November 1992, p. 24. For a report on Bangladeshi infiltrations and BJP's reactions thereto, see, *India Today* (New Delhi), 15 February 1993, p. 71.

20. National Executive Resolution, August 1982. Zaidi's Annual Register, 1982, pp. 148-49.

21. Zaidi's Annual Register, 1983, pp. 60-61.



the possibility of the latter enlisting the military support of extra-regional powers it was expected of the BJP to participate more seriously in the national debate on the matter. But the party dismissed the issue merely by saying that the party was "concerned at reports that ... the government of Sri Lanka contemplated inviting foreign troops in the region. Such a development has a significance beyond the internal situation in Sri Lanka." Without referring to the strategic doctrine announced by Indira Gandhi the party simply said that her government had "singularly failed" in safeguarding the lives of "its citizens." Incidentally, the BJP showed its utter ignorance about the problems faced by the Sri Lankan Tamils and the Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka. It confused one with the other.<sup>22</sup>

### **Communalism and Foreign Policy**

Following the debacle of the BJP and the landslide victory for the Congress in the 1984 general election which was largely attributed to the massive Hindu support for the Congress made the BJP realise that the so-called Hindu vote which it had chased since 1951 and which had remained largely elusive was not actually a chase after a wild goose. As one perceptive commentator wrote:

It was not just the ignominious election result but the reasons why they lost which set the BJP leadership thinking. While the BJP was trying to shed its Jana Sangh past, the Congress (I) under Indira Gandhi had successfully nurtured a saffron-tinged constituency which first came into evidence in the Jammu elections in 1983. The BJP lost its 'natural constituency' both in the Jammu and the Delhi elections that year, but it got a drubbing in the 1984 general elections when the Congress (I) led by Rajiv Gandhi won an unprecedented mandate by raising the specter of national integration at the hands of minority secessionist. .... The fact that Muslim fundamentalism had indeed grown and been nurtured by even well meaning secularists came in handy as propaganda tools for the BJP which was trying to regain the old Jana Sangh constituency and adding many more numbers to that support base. The five years of Rajiv rule, characterized by the rise of a new middle class in urban and semi-urban India coupled with a complete inability to tackle the systemic crisis facing the country, made it easier for the BJP to attract the middle class vote.<sup>23</sup>

22. National Executive Resolution, Patna, 1921 August 1983. *Ibid.*, pp. 95-97.

23. Manini Chatterjee. "Seeds of Fascism," *Seminar*, No. 399, November 1992, pp. 19-20.



This realisation of the BJP was put into political strategy by L.K. Advani who became the party president in 1986. Using such catchwords as "minorityism", "pseudo-secularism," and so on, he launched a massive attack on the Congress to wrest from the latter its lost Hindu constituency. Making maximum political capital out of Rajiv Gandhi government's reversal of the Supreme Court verdict in the Shah Bano case the party argued that it was this "minorityism" of the Congress that had fanned Hindu reaction. Blatantly arguing that a section among the Hindus has been asking "that minorities in India should be treated exactly as minorities are treated in Pakistan or in the Gulf countries, as second class citizens," Advani cleverly articulated:

My party repudiates this approach because we regard it contrary to our tradition and political values. But there is need also to reject the cult of minorityism which the pseudo-secularists in the country are aggressively promoting. Let us all remember Sardar Patel's concluding words in the Constituent Assembly when the question of minorities was being discussed. He said: "In the long run, it would be in the interest of all to forget that there is any thing like a majority or a minority in this country, and that in India there is only one community."<sup>24</sup>

Did this tactics to communalise Indian politics for electoral gains found its reflection in BJP's foreign policy stance? Such a link is difficult to discern because the party never really conceptualised this connection nor followed it in practice. Of course, at rhetorical level the party's Hindu nationalistic card and criticism of Rajiv Gandhi's foreign policy did merge at times. One may refer to these statements in this context. "Face to face with prospects of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, we search on telephone for an Afghanistan policy, and by an ill thought-out initiative with President Zia. Never since the days of the Islamic Summit of Rabbat, in the sixties, has the nation suffered as humiliating a diplomatic rebuff as this

24. Presidential Address at the fourth Plenary Session of BJP, 8- 10 April 1988. Zaidi's Annual Register, 1988, p. 51.



juvenile telephone diplomacy of Rajiv Gandhi."<sup>25</sup> Or, "President Ershad announces his decision to convert Bangladesh into an 'Islamic Republic' we sit silently unconcerned about the fate of 15 million Hindus there; our only response is to cancel a cricket tour."<sup>26</sup> Or, "the ultra-racists in Fiji staged a military coup and succeeded in driving the secular Bavadra government out from power. Immediately after this subversion of democracy, Rabuka himself a diehard Methodist Christian established his own military government, abrogated the Constitution, suspended the political rights of Indo-Fijians and declared Christianity to be the official religion of the State. He went on spreading hatred against religious customs and practices of the Indo-Fijians and blamed them for the poverty in Fiji. Rabuka later on took a solemn vow to convert the entire 3.5 lakh population of Indian origin to Christianity."<sup>27</sup>

Besides these and some other minor references, the BJP's communal card which was so aggressively displayed in the domestic politics was not used to project its foreign policy priorities. For example, it stood firm in its demand for a Palestinian state and what was even more noteworthy it continued to plead for better ties with Pakistan. The communal component in this relationship figured only in the context of Kashmir. The 1991 BJP Election Manifesto invited Pakistan "to come forward and resolve our disputes in terms of the Shimla Pact and meanwhile develop cooperative economic and media relations."<sup>28</sup> Earlier, after having attended the funeral of

25. Fourth Plenary session of BJP, 8-10 April, 1988. Zaidi's Annual Register, 1988, p. 57. The reference to the Rabat Islamic Conference had a communal overtone. In that conference India's request for participation was rejected on the ground that it was not an Islamic state notwithstanding the fact that it contained more Muslims than all Muslim countries except Indonesia and the then undivided Pakistan. The BJP meant to say that in the Afghan conflict India was not being heard simply because the initiative there had gone to the Islamic forces.

26. *Ibid.*

27. BJP's National Executive resolution, 7 October 1988. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

28. BJP Election Manifesto 1991, p. 36.



Zia-ul Haq in 1987, Atal Bihari Vajpayee had urged utmost restraint in dealing with Pakistan. "Even if there are some pinpricks from Pakistani side," his advice was that "we should ignore them."<sup>29</sup>

### **Hindutva and India's International Image**

It may be relevant to speculate as to what kind of image India would carry in the world if it became an avowedly Hindu "fundamentalistic" state. Although in the modern world it matters little as to what religious ideology a state represents if the other attributes of power in the modern sense -- a strong economic base, integration into the global economic system, a powerful military base, political stability and so on -- are there, still the question may not be altogether dismissed as irrelevant. Iran's Islamic revolution or Pakistan's Islamic orientation during the Zia-ul Haque regime did indeed influence their foreign policy outlook. Moreover, at a time when scholars like Samuel Huntington is talking about conflicts between civilizations to be the future trend replacing the phenomenon of conflicts among nations there must be something more in the question than what generally meets the eye. In a recent interview Huntington said that "the conflicts among civilizations will be increasingly central: the West and Islam, Islam and Hindu civilizations in India, Islam vs. the Slavic Orthodox Russian civilization, China and Japan as civilizations. These are going to be the major entities among which international relations will take place."<sup>30</sup>

29. Dilip Mukherjee, "Shared Perspectives; Parties Define Foreign Agenda," *Times of India*, (New Delhi), 29 April 1991. One must, however, make a distinction between the BJP led by Vajpayee and the same led by persons like L.K. Advani or Murli Manohar Joshi. The BJP under Vajpayee (till 1986) projected a Gandhian image of societal harmony but ever since Advani and Joshi have taken over its one point strategy has been to display the Hindu card to gain electoral victories. See Chatterjee, *op.cit.*, pp. 17- 21. See also G.M. Telang, "Policy-Making in BJP: Constitutionalists vs. Engineers of Mass Frenzy," *Indian Express* (New Delhi), 29 January 1993.

30. *Time* (Chicago), 28 June 1993, p. 67. In a speech delivered at the 27th general conference of the UNESCO in January 1994 the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak castigated this theory of civilizational conflicts as retrograde. Seemingly unhappy with its anti-Islamic thrust he said: "The erroneous way of posing the question... has been accompanied by a thesis which is no less erroneous or slanderous, than Islam--as a religion and a culture--has become a factor of dissension and hostility between people, that it sows the seeds of hatred and rancour between Muslims and the rest of mankind is thus likely to become an instrument of a new polarization reminiscent of the polarization which caused the world so much suffering during the Cold War." Excerpts of the speech were reproduced in *Times of India*, 27 January 1994.



There are several interpretations of Hinduism or Hindus as a people. One view among them is what the Western orientalists generally hold. It is by and large sympathetic towards Hinduism as a philosophy. Actually it was their research into the ancient Hindu traditions that had helped early Indian nationalists in the nineteenth century to articulate their concept of Indian nationalism based on the "glorious" Hindu past.<sup>31</sup> These nationalists were no longer apologetic about the failures of Hinduism to withstand foreign incursions into their "Mother India" but on the contrary boldly highlighted their wealth in their philosophical and cultural traditions to prove that in spite of all adverse circumstances their faith was still a living reality.

This was, however, not the case with the Western imperialists and their ideological protagonists. Rudyard Kipling provides one of the best examples who believed that it was the burden of the White race to civilize the uncivilized non-whites among which Indians, virtually meaning the Hindus, figured prominently. He quoted Lord Macaulay who had said: "Whatever the Bengalee does, he does languidly. His favourite pursuits are sedentary. He shrinks from bodily exertion; and though voluble in dispute, and singularly pertinacious in the war of chicane, he seldom engages in a personal conflict, and scarcely ever enlists as a soldier. There never, perhaps, existed a people so thoroughly fitted by habit for a foreign yoke." Agreeing with this broad generalisation Strachey wrote: "It has often been said, and it is probably true, that Bengal is the only country in the world where you can find a great population among whom personal cowardice is looked upon as in no way disgraceful. This is no invention of their enemies; the Bengalis have themselves no shame or scruple in declaring it to be a fact." Contrast this with his opinion about Bengali Muslims: "It cannot, however, be applied to the northern and eastern districts, where the majority of the population is Mohammedan. The Mohammedan peasantry of the eastern portion of the province are men of far robuster character than the Bengalis of the western

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31. See Partha Chatterjee, "History and the Nationalization of Hinduism." *Social Research* (New York), 59 (1), Spring 1992, pp. 130-49.



districts; it was among them that the sepoy who fought under Clive at Plassey were chiefly recruited, and the maritime districts supply thousands of intrepid boatmen and lascars to the mercantile marine."<sup>32</sup>

In recent times some Western scholars have presented a psycho-analytical view of the Hindus. The essential argument here is that Hindu psychology is strongly narcissistic which militates against the growth of group action and as such nationalism, although this aspect has not been specifically mentioned. One scholar who dwelt upon this theory in detail finds that whether it was the Maratha diplomacy during the nineteenth century or the Congress policy during the nationalist movement the narcissistic character of the Hindus came in the way of a pragmatic approach. He writes: "The Olympian impartiality of the narcissistic psyche, and its tortoise-like self-isolation, seem to show themselves in this indecisiveness and unwillingness to enter an alliance.... The non-aligned policy of the present period evidently springs from the same impulses, and has much in common with the attitude of the Maratha leaders of the eighteenth century."<sup>33</sup>

Did India's policy of non-alignment really have anything to do with India's Hindu tradition when its propounder, Jawaharlal Nehru, actually gave a damn to any religion and was himself an agnostic. Bandopadhyaya believes that the policy indeed had its roots in the country's Hindu tradition. His theorization is as follows:

32. Sir John Strachey, *India: Its Administration and Progress* (London, 1903), p. 411. Cited by Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, "National Character and International Relations," *International Studies*, 15(4), October-December 1976, pp. 549-50. Bandyopadhyaya reflects: "Was the emergence of Bangladesh at least partly due to this fearlessness of the Muslim population of erstwhile East Pakistan? President Yahya Khan of Pakistan had likened his military operation in recalcitrant East Pakistan to the killing of mosquitoes. Although the Indian military intervention played a decisive role in the emergence of Bangladesh, the prolonged resistance to the Pakistani forces offered by the 'mosquitoes' of East Pakistan was definitely a contributing factor."

33. P. Spratt, *Hindu Culture and Personality: A Psycho-Analytic Study* (Bombay: Manaktalas, 1966), pp. 64-65.



In India the culture and belief system of the great majority of the people is dominated by non-polarized, non-dialectical categories of thought. From the metaphysical non-duality of the Creator and the cosmos, God and man, through the ethical non-duality of good and evil, to the empirical non-duality of different religious, cultural, social, and even political systems, the world view of the Hindu consists of an amorphous mass of relative truths and realities, all reducible to one ultimate Truth and Reality. The inconceivably complex structure of the caste system is perhaps the greatest example of the external social manifestation of this culture and belief system. Whether the decision makers are true Hindus, fully sharing in this system, or marginal Hindus not subscribing to it fully, or non-Hindus belonging at least partially to a different culture and belief system, or a completely agnostic group of persons rejecting the fundamental postulates of this system, it would be difficult for them, for the reasons stated earlier, to ignore it completely in formulating the broad strategy of India's foreign policy. It was in this sense that Jawaharlal Nehru, who declared himself to be an agnostic and was at any rate not more than a marginal Hindu, considered non-alignment as the basic strategy of India's foreign policy to have been virtually predetermined by various factors, including the cultural. For the non-recognition of the absolute duality of phenomena, coming down through India's trackless centuries to constitute an essential attribute of the Indian national character, would be inconsistent with the acceptance of bipolarity as the global reality. In the Indian perception, neither of the two Super Powers represented truth or falsehood, good or evil, in absolute terms.<sup>34</sup>

Is it then that the Hindu world view presents an enigma to the West, or for that matter, to all non-Hindus? Pakistan's perception of India probably springs partly from this fear of the unknowable. A.I. Akram, who had served in the Pakistani army as a Lt. General and who was the President of the Institute for Regional Studies, Islamabad, wrote in 1983 that Kashmir was not "the" problem between India and Pakistan. It was rather the "symptom" of a deeper problem. If there were no Kashmir, there could be something else, for the problem had its psychological and historical roots embedded in the "Hindu" heritage of India and the Islamic heritage of Pakistan.<sup>35</sup>

34. Bandyopadhyaya. *op.cit.*, pp. 552-53.

35. Lt. Gen. (Retd) A.I. Akram, "Shadow Over South Asia," *Regional Studies* (Islamabad), Winter 1983, pp. 11-13. Also see Brig. Abdul Rahman Siddiqi (Retd), Editorial: "Seminar on Security Futures of South Asia", at University of Illinois, USA, *Defence Journal* (Karachi), July 1984, p. 4.



Currently, the *Regional Studies*, the quarterly journal of the Institute of Regional Studies, is serializing a long paper on "Understanding India" which aims at "an integrated statement on the Indian Mind." In the first piece dealing with the "Religious Dimension" (so far only two pieces of a total of four have been published) the author Prof. Abdul Qayyum's problem to grapple with the Hindu mind is quite noticeable. Pending the final analysis of his paper till its full appearance some of his statements may be quoted to highlight his problem:

[For Hindus] the Vedas are timeless, not composed by any human being, words emanating from the realm of revelation outside the temporal order.... This legend and mythology originating in many minds and proliferating over the ages pass for revelation. The "collective amnesia" of the Hindu mind and its indifference to history sanctify the Vedas as revealed scriptures, laying the foundations of a mystic faith that recognises no prophets. Howsoever disconcerting to the outsider, the contradiction causes no distress to the believer on the intellectual or spiritual level of his consciousness.<sup>36</sup>

Again,

Seen in its historical sequence, Hinduism started off as a primitive, animistic, shamanistic faith (Vedic), suddenly soared high into the highest realms of philosophy (Upanishadic), found the air there too thin to breathe, descended into a swamp of myth and mythology (Ramayana, Mahabharata), dreamt one last great dream (Bhagavad Gita), and eventually wandered off into a jungle of cults and cultic rites (Shiva-Parvati, Durga-Kali, Krishna-Radha). The mind that underwent this perilous journey could hardly integrate the many contradictory experiences and so never quite succeeded in articulating a coherent view of its religion and its religious practices.<sup>37</sup>

And then the ultimate dilemma,

The trouble with Hinduism is that even as a particular faith it is not just one religion but many religions, not merely because of its diversities in space but even more because of the autonomy of each of its many contradictory scriptures (in relation to one another and, alas, also within

36. Abdul Qayyum, "Understanding India: The Religious Dimension - I." *Regional Studies*, 8 (4), Autumn 1990, p. 10.

37. *Ibid.*, 9(1), Winter 1990-91, pp. 23-24.



each). It is not just amorphous in practice, it is also highly elastic doctrinally. The Hindu devotee can stretch his Hinduism anyway he pleases; it won't snap. he can demand of it as many concessions as he needs; they are granted. He can even take a few liberties (as frequently as he pleases); Hinduism is not offended. It loses nothing by conceding; it is already so encroached upon as not to be violated by further encroachments.... Splintered God and the splintered Man are brought face to face in Hinduism in a relationship of baffling complexity: all the diversities that span any two opposites, all the pluralities that beset a mind bowing in the many directions of its many gods.... The unity of Hinduism lies in the Hindu's unlimited capacity for faith, and not in the oneness of the object of his faith.<sup>38</sup>

### Conclusion

It is neither easy to write on the foreign policy outlook of a party which has never captured power at the national level nor is it easy for the party itself to project its outlook in a consistent and coherent manner, obviously for the same reason. Since its prime aim remains as to how to come to power it tends to criticize the party in power on all accounts and in this game foreign policy also becomes a target of attack. From our discussion above we see that although the BJS/BJP did have a clear ideological hiatus with the Congress on the question of nation-building their difference on foreign affairs was more on form than over substance. Whatever differences were there, say over their respective attitudes towards the Soviet Union, they got blurred once the party as a constituent of the Janata Party had to deal with foreign affairs in actual policy terms. Vajpayee remarked: "Whether one is in Opposition or in the Government, the question of foreign policy so naturally connects us to the promotion and protection of national interests, which detached from the play of domestic politics or the cut and thrust of Parliamentary debates, provides a quality of permanence to foreign policy."<sup>39</sup>

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 24-27. Abdus Sabur of the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies put it succinctly in one of his conversations with this author. According to him Hinduism is extremely inclusionist in terms of ideas but exclusionist with regard to social organization; Islam is exactly the opposite.

39. Quoted by Shivaji Ganguly, "Continuity and Change in India's Foreign Policy," *India Quarterly*, (New Delhi), 34(1), January- March 1978, p.57.



It is also evident that howsoever the BJP might have made "Hindutva" one of its major political planks it has only marginally related it to the projection of its foreign policy priorities. Whatever communal colour it might have given to the Kashmir and Punjab problems and in whatever way it has assailed the Pakistani government in this regard it has never deviated from the argument that it is in the interest of both the countries to normalise their relations. In this regard, barring the rhetoric, there is hardly any difference between the attitudes of the BJP and the Congress.

There is no evidence to suggest that the party has been siding with the West in the latter's diatribe against the Islamic fundamentalists although in BJP's popular image that strategy may fit in well. Also, in this context it seems that the respective positions of the BJP and the Congress which were somewhat different in the 1950s and 1960s have become more or less identical now. Lately, the BJP has become a staunch champion of the Palestinian state while the Congress has actually established full diplomatic relations with the Jewish state of Israel. For neither, the two positions are really contradictory, and reasonably so.

On one point, however, there seems to be a clear difference of emphasis between the BJP and the Congress. On matters relating to South Asia the BJP is closer to the theory, unlike the Congress, that India's image abroad would in the ultimate analysis depend upon how harmoniously it carries the region along. The party never fails to highlight the point that during the Janata regime India's neighbourhood diplomacy was at its best. In the understanding of the Congress India as a nation has global ambitions and it matters little, therefore, whether its small regional neighbours are carried along or not. It has been the feeling of the party that India's neighbours are generally insensitive to its strategic priorities and as such more than India it is they who have to change their regional security outlook so as to make the SAARC a success.

In the final analysis, the current Hindutva phenomenon in Indian politics has hardly anything to do with India's foreign policy. In any case, whosoever rules the country, whether it is the Congress, the BJP, or any



other, some of the nations would habitually view India as a Hindu nation just because of the fact that it is predominantly Hindu. They would completely ignore the fact that India has a 15 percent minority population which is well represented in the highest echelons of power. For instance, it would matter to Pakistan little if the Hindu chauvinistic BJP comes to power for it never really appreciated the secular stance of the Congress either and treated its emphasis on one Indian nationalism as Hindu nationalism by other means. It may even be argued that the transformation of India into a Hindu state may actually be welcome in Pakistan for it would give legitimacy to the creation of Pakistan on the basis of the two-nation concept. Theoretically also, sectarianism of one kind thrives on the success of the sectarianism of another kind.