

The Resurgent India

A Monthly National Review

May 2019



“Let us all work for the Greatness of India.”

- The Mother

Year 10

Issue 2

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SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

(Full of Promise and Joyful Surprises)

Botanical name: Gaillardia Pulchella

Common name: Indian blanket, Blanket flower, Fire-wheels

Year 10

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A Declaration

We do not fight against any creed, any religion.

We do not fight against any form of government.

We do not fight against any social class.

We do not fight against any nation or civilisation.

We are fighting division, unconsciousness, ignorance, inertia and falsehood.

We are endeavouring to establish upon earth union, knowledge, consciousness, Truth, and we fight whatever opposes the advent of this new creation of Light, Peace, Truth and Love.

— The Mother

(Collected works of the Mother, Vol. 13, pp. 124-25)

THE LOK SABHA ELECTIONS 2019: NATIONAL CONSOLIDATION IN A RESURGENT INDIA

PART I

The decisive victory of PM Modi-led Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) heralds a new beginning in Indian politics. This victory is much more massive than the one secured in 2014, with the awakened public psyche ensuring an unprecedented mandate for the Modi government. ***With these elections, Narendra Modi stands as the biggest mass leader in the world and BJP the biggest political party.***

At a time when the entire world is undergoing fragmentation and disturbances – including India’s neighbourhood – India shines bright like a beacon of guiding light. That the entire nation – in the world’s biggest democratic election – could overcome all kinds of divisive internal and external forces to stand behind a leader who it sees as the one who is taking the country towards a path that may lead to the true glories of Indian culture, is nothing sort of a miracle.

The Indian election has indeed stunned the whole world. It has also shown hope to countries who are struggling with preserving their own culture against an intensified onslaught of jihadi ideology, as evident from the Buddhist backlash in Sri Lanka, Nepal’s fight against missionaries and Myanmar’s struggle to preserve its Buddhist ethnic dominance. For all these neighbours, ***a strong India, guided with full certainty by the principles of her culture and dharma, is a pillar of light to follow, since India has always exercised immense political and cultural influence in her immediate neighbourhood.***

These elections, thus, are a true boost not only to India’s

internal future path, but also to the world, which is increasingly riven apart by factionalism. Indian elections have brought home the true meaning of nationalism once again.

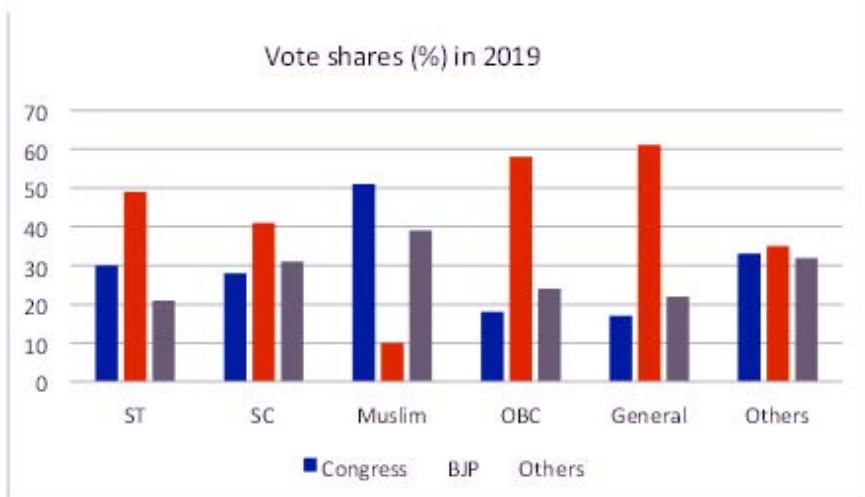
BREAKING WITH THE PAST

The 2019 elections mark a complete break from the past politics of the country. The process had already started in 2014, but now there is a seal upon it. Indian politics and the cause of national unity took a beating from 1990 to 2014, when regional fiefdoms and minority vote bank appeasement guided Indian political calculations. The vitiated atmosphere ensured that the poor and the marginalized stay where they were, even as selfish commercial interests guided national policies, while giving out doles to the poor and ensuring that they remained confined to their caste divides. Caste isolationism ensured that religious perversity also set in. Unholy coalitions like, for instance, Muslims and Jats would be formed by regional chiefs to nurture their vote-banks.

The rise of Narendra Modi and with him the BJP on the national stage, broke these old social coalitions crafted by the reservation-era regional parties and Congress. In place of caste divide, there was a massive Hindu consolidation, cementing the rise of the spirit of one powerful nation, with the uniting of the Indian Hindu identity taking precedence over all other loyalties.

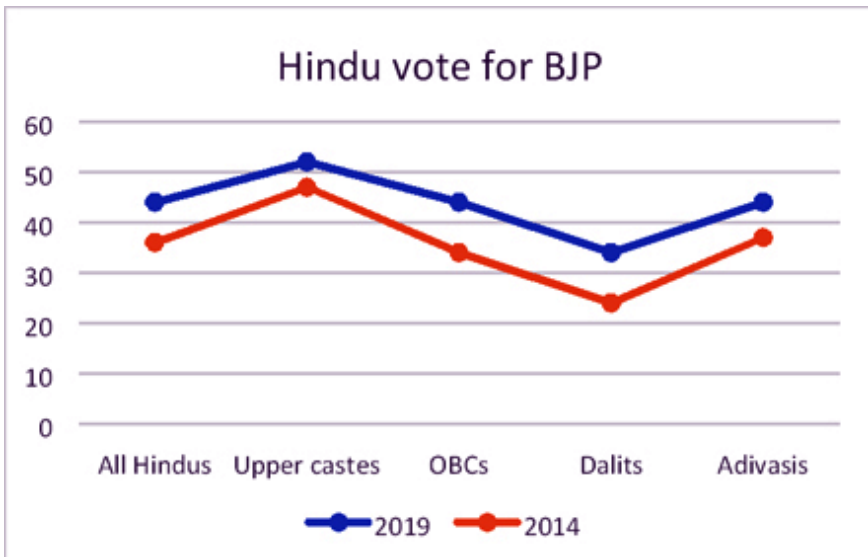
This is reflected in the verdict given to the BJP, which is the most massive since the 1984 elections. The BJP won 303 seats on its own, garnering 37.5% of the vote share, much more than the 31% vote share and 282 seats of 2014. The BJP's vote and seat dominance is similar to the Congress's of the 1980s, when the latter was at one of the peaks of its dominance under Indira Gandhi.

The NDA, as a whole, received 45% of the vote share and 353 seats, compared to the 38% vote share it received in 2014. Even at the peak of its power, when Nehru was the Prime Minister, Congress's vote-share hovered around 40-45%, touching the highest of 48% in 1984 after the assassination of Indira Gandhi.



*With the NDA matching these levels now, the message is clear – the old era is over for good. **With these elections, the BJP has become a pan-India party. It has won 46% of the seats in east India, 56% in the north-east, 87% in the Indian heartland, 90% of the seats in western India, and, 24% in southern India.***

The wave of Hindu consolidation in these elections ensured that no other political party stood a chance against the BJP. While in 2014, 36% Hindus had voted for the BJP, this time the number rose to 44% for the BJP, while the NDA received 51% of all Hindu votes.



It is clear that Hindu vote for the BJP has increased across all castes. The most significant increase, however, has been among OBCs and Dalits, at 10% each, followed by tribals at 7%. The upper caste vote increased by 5%.

*The BJP's successful broad-based Hindu social base, transcending caste and class divides, is a formation whose basis lies strongly in the non-dominant Dalits, Adivasis and non-dominant backward classes. **These Dalits, Adivasis and backward classes, who have always been more assertive, historically, about Hindutva, have led Hindutva movements such as the Ayodhya movement of the 1990s, have now found a natural base in the current BJP, unlike earlier times. Thus, the 2019 elections are aptly summed up through the fact that "Narendra Modi's victory is Hindutva 2.0 – and Dalits & OBCs form its backbone"** (Prakash, 2019).*

India has absorbed what she had to from the political past

and now a beginning has been made. The effort and the rewriting of old equations is humungous. The caste equations developed painstakingly to exploit people's caste loyalties are seen to be breaking in favour of the rise of oneness of the Hindu religion and a nation based on Sanatana Dharma.

This was very much in evidence in the 2019 election results, as we will see in the subsequent sections. First, we will look at general, country-wide trends and, in the subsequent sections, we will look at the specific state-wise trends of these elections.

THE GENERAL COUNTRY-WIDE TRENDS IN THE 2019 ELECTIONS: COMMUNITY-WISE TRENDS

Dalits, Adivasis and Backward Classes

The nationalism and anti-casteism that the BJP stood for has found resonance across the categories of rural-urban, caste and class, and especially among young voters who have not been touched by the politics of the past. One of the sharpest increases for the BJP's support base was among the Dalits, who form one of the important bulwarks of Hinduism, but have been relegated as a deprived votebank for a long time, with Congress and various regional parties, historically trying their best to club them with the Muslims, and other backward classes.

In 2009, BJP's Dalit support base was only 7%. In fact, in 2009, the BJP itself, unbeknownst to many, was staring at an acute existential crisis. Its countrywide vote share was at an all-time low at just 18.8%, with its 'moderate' leadership having given in to complacency, liberalism and intellectualism, distanced from the RSS cadre and its ideological core spirit of Hindutva. The leadership was busy compromising with Pakistan, striking friendships with the liberal media, focusing on an illusory economic GDP number and inaugurating

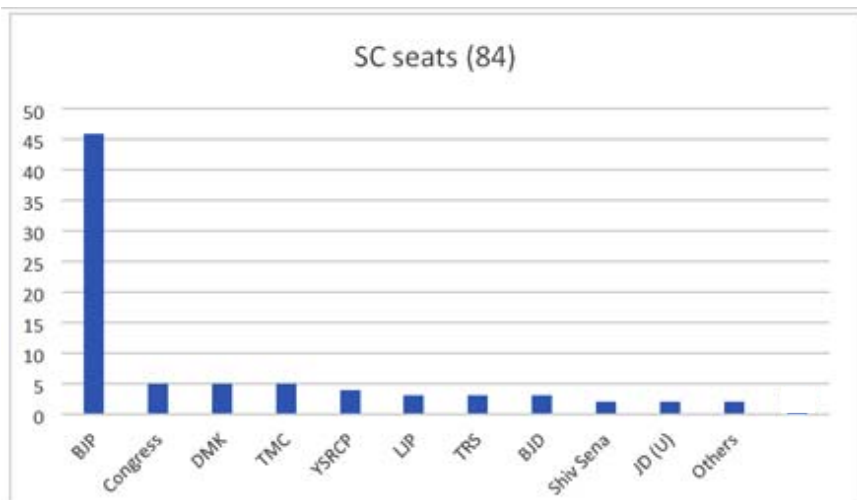
dialogues with Kashmiri terrorists. This was reflected in its growing decadence and its alienation from the RSS, which had stopped campaigning for the BJP during the later 'moderate' Advani-Vajpayee years.

As a result, the party's vote share fell from 24% in 1999 to 22% in 2004 and then sharply to 18.8% in 2009, while the Congress's vote share reached a high of 28.8%. This was an existential crisis, as the performance had been amongst the most unprogressive since the party first started contesting elections in 1984. ***The fact that Congress, despite targeting the Hindus and relentlessly painting them as terrorists and despite running the country in such a way that it become a haven for frequent terror attacks, corruption, Left-wing intellectualism and home to Pakistani sleeper cells, could yet outperform the BJP in 2009. It showed that the BJP, under its earlier moderate leadership had completely abandoned its core basis of Hindu Nationalism.***

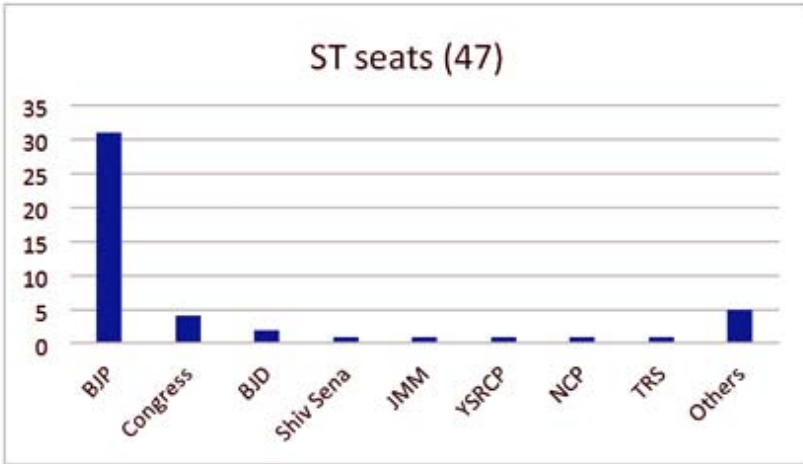
It was only in 2014 that a clean break was made with the increasingly decadent and complacent past, after Narendra Modi took over – a backward caste Hindu who wore his religion and nationalism proudly on his sleeve – and the party vote share increased sharply from 18.8% to 31% in 2014. Today it is at an all-time high.

It was in 2014 that the new Modi-led BJP took along with it Dalits and other nonpowerful lower and backward classes. ***Thus, BJP's Dalit vote-share increased straight from 7% in 2009 to 17.7% in 2014 and then to 34.2% in 2019. Each of the two times, the progress was more remarkable and sharper than the last. Similar trend can be observed in the case of the Adivasis as well. In 2009, the BJP's Adivasi or ST vote share was 28.8%. It sharply increased to 38% in 2014 and then reached an all-time high of 42% in 2019.***

The BJP's overall performance in the reserved seats has also improved. **While in 2014, more than half of the reserved seats were won by the BJP, in 2019, this number increased further.** In 2014, the BJP's tally in the reserved seats was 51%, when it won 67 out of 131 reserved seats. In 2019, this number stands at 59%, as it won 77 out of 131 reserved seats. In contrast, the Congress – portrayed as the main opposition national party to the BJP – saw its reserved seats tally reduced from 12 in 2014 to just 9 in 2019.



Overall, out of 84 SC Lok Sabha seats, BJP won 46, while others lagged behind at single digit numbers. In 2014 elections, BJP had won 40 of these seats.



In the ST seats, the BJP's performance has been even better, retaining nearly 65% of these seats. In 2014, the BJP had won 27 ST seats, compared to 31 this time.

In states like Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan and Gujarat, the BJP won all the reserved seats, while in Bihar, the NDA won all the reserved seats. ***In Uttar Pradesh, which has the highest number of SC seats at 17, the BJP won 14, while Mayawati's BSP could win only 2, whereas earlier – in pre-2014 polls – Mayawati used to get a maximum of these seats. The largest number of ST seats are from Madhya Pradesh – at 6 – where the BJP saw a clean sweep.***

Besides the reserved SC seats, there are 24 Dalit-dominated seats. In all these seats which were majorly dominated by Dalits, the BJP increased its tally from 7 in 2014 to 14 seats in 2019, while the Congress increased its tally from 3 in 2014 to 6 in 2019. This shows that not only has the party's Dalit base remained intact, but has also improved significantly, as it won 14 out of 24 Dalit-dominated seats.

The BJP's rise in the reserved seats as well as the ability of the party to corner the majority of Dalit, Adivasi, backward class as well as upper caste vote share, besides getting full support of traditionally inward-looking communities like Jats, shows that a new consolidation is underway. The party has also managed to make inroads among the Yadavs of UP and Bihar, who have traditionally gone with the SP and RJD respectively. In case of Jats, a staggering 91% Jats of UP voted for the BJP in 2019 elections, defying all expectations, while in Haryana, every second member from the Jat community voted for the party, thereby defying speculations of having to rely on a 'non-Jat' coalition.

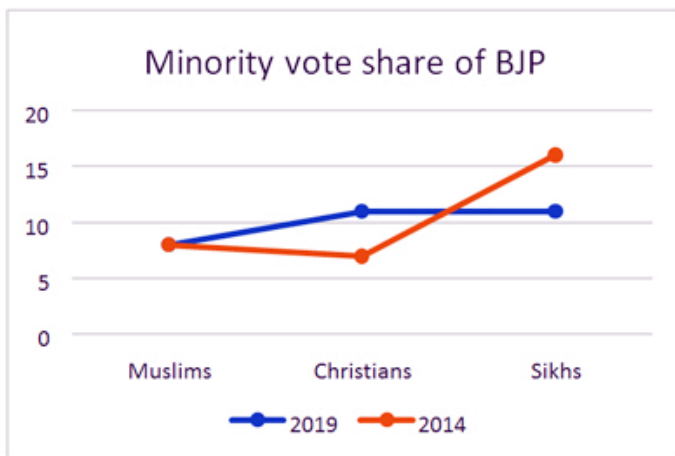
These numbers show that the backward castes have finally found the party of their choice, willing to channelize their nationalism and commitment towards the political Hinduism. ***Historically too, the populous backward castes have been the bulwark, maintaining the Hindu unity in the country, against hostile influences, even as the upper castes continued to remain divided and put the self above the nation and dharma.***

Despite best efforts to convert the oppressed Dalits to Islam or Christianity or even Buddhism and despite Dalit stalwarts like Ambedkar forming their own political party, the Dalits have simply refused to segregate themselves from the spirit of India. Ambedkar, during the first general elections, lost from the reserved seats that he had fought for in order to give Dalits a voice. The paradox of Dalit voters is that their natural instinct has always been Hindu majoritarian and conservative, and now they do, indeed, form a substantial part of the population. ***Together Dalits, OBCs and STs form more than 75% of the country's population.***

No political party that claims to represent India can do so by ignoring this vast Hindu population, as parties like Congress have always done. In West Bengal, this fact is brought out with sharp clarity. The BJP's core new voter base is formed by Dalits (such as Matauas, Namasudras, low caste migrant Bengali Hindus from Bangladesh etc.) and tribals from poor areas and jungles which earlier used to be the strongholds of Maoists. **The BJP has not managed to pull off a stunning performance in Bengal on the back of an intellectualized 'bhadralok' or upper caste, urban Bengali support, which has been not so supportive, but because of the poor and low-caste Hindus, who have laid down their lives for the national cause, celebrated and propagated Hindu festivals and are at the core of the changed Bengali landscape.**

Minority Community Votes

In the face of the fact that a nationalistic consolidation of Hindus took place, even in the case of the minority communities, the BJP was broadly able to retain – even increase – its vote share. But Sikhs have been an exception.



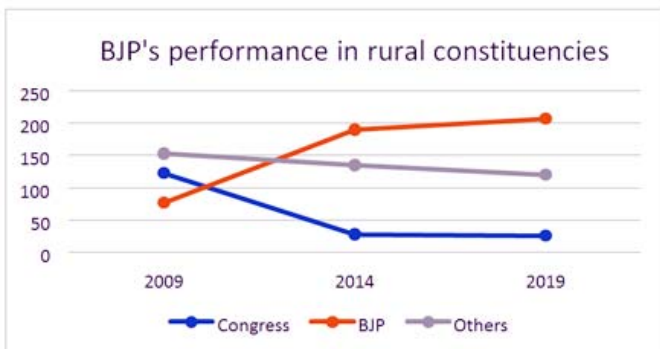
BJP's vote share among Muslims remained the same at 8%. Among Christians, it actually increased from 7% to 11% between 2014 and 2019. However, among Sikhs, BJP's vote share got reduced from 16% to 11% between 2014 and 2019. The reason may be BJP's alliance with SAD in Punjab and the recoil of Jat Sikhs from SAD. A detailed case study of Punjab in the later part of the paper will analyse this.

Rural India: BJP's New Driving Force

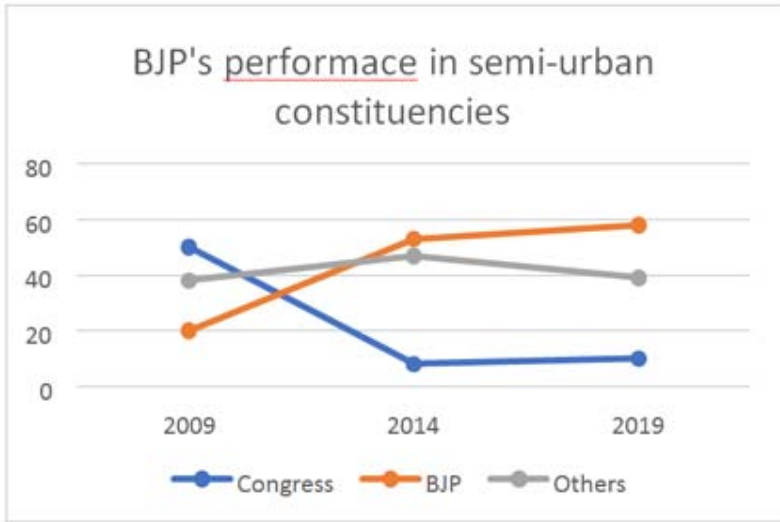
Other than vastly increasing its OBC, Dalit and Adivasi vote, the BJP has also increased its tally across rural, urban and semi-urban areas significantly, but most among rural areas. In a reversal from the pre-2014 years, the BJP now no longer falls, even remotely, within the bracket of 'Brahmin-Bania' party – a tag which stuck to it till 2014.

Now, instead, Congress and BJP fortunes have reversed. In this election, BJP's rise has been powered by rural votes, while Congress has seen an increase in its urban, upper caste votes and seats.

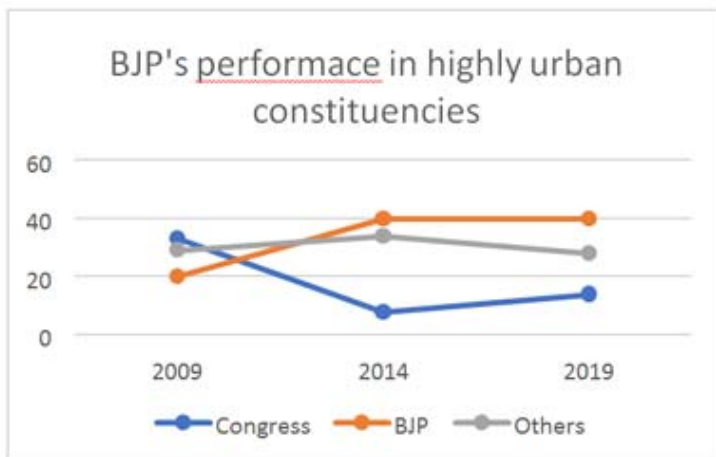
In the rural areas, the BJP's seat share has gone up from 77 in 2009 to 207 in 2019.



In case of semi-urban areas, the BJP's seat share has gone up from 20 in 2009 to 58 in 2019.



In urban constituencies, the BJP's performance has gone up from 20 in 2009 to 40 in 2019 but remained practically unchanged between 2014 and 2019.



It is, thus, clear that the ***BJP has shown the most marked improvement in the rural constituencies. The rural seats are the ones where the party has seen a sharp rise of 17 seats between 2014 and 2019, whereas in semi-urban seats the rise has been of 5 seats and in urban seats the number has remained unchanged. Rural seats are also the only ones where there has been a decline in performance of Congress and other parties. In both urban and semi-urban seats, to the contrary, the Congress has seen a rise.***

It is, thus, clear that the rural India – the poor and the marginalized castes and classes have powered the BJP's rise. The elections show that the BJP is more popular in the SC/ST constituencies and in poorer constituencies than in the richer ones. At the same time, it is less successful in highly urbanized, ultra-educated constituencies, where it has managed to retain its 2014 performance but not made any extra gains this time.

In the so called highly educated constituencies, the BJP's performance is little better than the Congress with the BJP ahead by 15 seats, whereas in the less educated constituencies, the BJP's performance outstrips the Congress's performance by a very wide margin of 56 seats.

The Farmer Vote

Besides factors of caste and religion, another big myth punctured by this election was the one related to farmer anger.

In this election, the BJP also managed to increase its share of seats in the farmer dominated constituencies, especially across western India. ***Overall, the NDA's tally in farmer dominated seats has increased from 153 in 2014 to 194 in 2019. This completely bursts the myth that farmers were unhappy with the government. The farm crisis – which is a structural***

problem – was blown out of proportion by the opposition. The spectacle of thousands of farmers brandishing red communist flags, marching on the streets of Mumbai and Delhi to take part in protests, were craftily used by the opposition and media to create a false atmosphere of farmer anger against the Modi government.

In recent years, especially, since the 1980s, the ‘farmer’ itself has become an independent identity and powerful political lobby. In particular, amongst the spectacular farmer-related outcomes of 2019 was the defeat of powerful ‘grassroots’ farmer, Raju Shetti of Swabhimani Paksha, from Hatkanangle in Maharashtra, which is a farmer dominated constituency and is part of the ‘sugar heartland’ of western Maharashtra, the traditional stronghold of NCP and Congress politicians. Shetti, after breaking away from the BJP in 2017, had formed an alliance with the Congress and NCP in the run up to 2019 elections.

Instead of standing up to the powerful politicians of the ‘sugar lobby’, Shetti went along with them, thereby undermining the logic of farmers’ welfare. He lost to Shiv Sena candidate by a margin of 96,000 votes in this traditional farmer stronghold. Moreover, as it also emerged, the younger generation of voters refused to subscribe to the traditional, feudal loyalties of their parents. Thus, the children of farmers, inspired by Modi’s nationalist campaign, often preferred to go for the BJP.

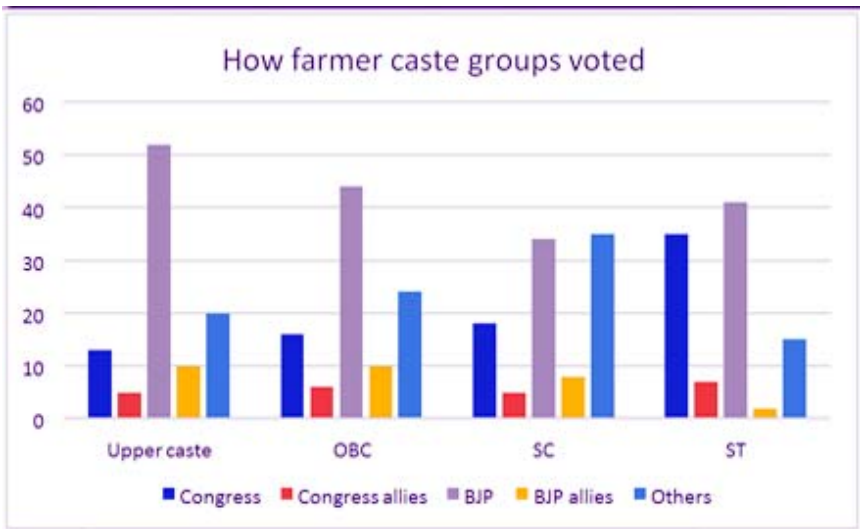
Not only this, even in 2018 assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh, major farmer constituencies went with the BJP. In Mandsaur, which became a hotbed of controversy following the conflict with the farmers, the BJP was voted for in 2018 assembly polls, with 7 out of 8 farmer constituencies staying with the BJP.

As farm observers have put it, ***the farmers are not farmers***

when they vote – they are proud Hindus or nationalistic Indians.

Moreover, a very important factor was the immense progress of rural development works that have been undertaken under this government. The numerous social schemes and the broad effectivity with which they were delivered directly benefited major sections of the rural poor. These rural poor sections work as agricultural labour, rather than directly owning land. This class, along with the land-owning farmers, overwhelmingly went with the BJP.

This was evident in Gujarat as well. While in 2017 assembly elections, the BJP had not done well in major rural seats such as Banaskantha, in 2019, it more than made up for this. Similarly, in western UP, where the SP-BSP alliance was supposed to pose a challenge and where myths about farmer anger were being spread, the BJP performed exceptionally well, more so than in eastern UP areas.



From the above data, it is clear that the BJP enjoys maximum support among farmer groups, cutting across caste lines. In the case of SC and ST farmers, the margins appear to be a little close, but instead of voting for the Congress, the SC farmer vote got divided between BJP and 'others'. For instance, the Prakash Ambedkar-led Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi played a role in some seats in Maharashtra in taking the vote away from Congress alliance. Thus, instead of eating into the BJP vote share, the presence of others reduced the opposition vote share, which indicates the level of trust that the BJP enjoys, despite the myths of farmer anger against the government.

Having assessed the broad community-wise trends across the country, especially with regard to Dalits, Adivasis, rural areas and farmers, it is clear that Modi's performance in rural development, coupled with appeal to a Hindu national consciousness rising above caste and working for the nation, formed the basis of the BJP's inclusive redefining of Hindutva politics, leading to its massive victory.

These general trends are confirmed when we see how the vote shares were determined state-wise.

CLEAN SWEEP IN NORTH INDIA: THE RISE OF INCLUSIVE HINDUTVA

The clean sweep by the BJP in the northern states, trumping the most wily opposition alliances and 'gathbandhans' in traditionally fertile casteist states like UP, has finally closed the lid on the coffin of Mandal era caste based politics.

Uttar Pradesh Leads the Way

UP is the most important state attesting to the change that has propelled the BJP to victory in 2019. BJP has posted one of

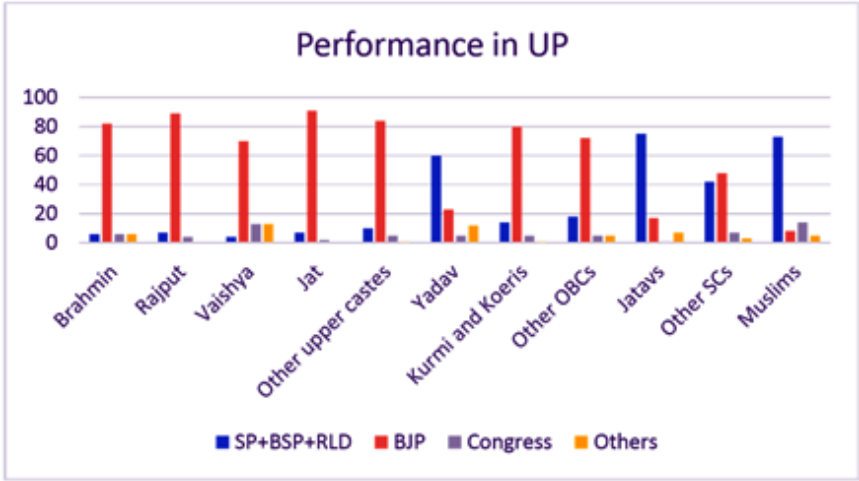
its best performances in UP in 2019, regardless of the 'mahagathbandhan' between BSP and SP and the Congress opposition. All caste equations and alliances failed.

The counter-intuitive alliance of SP and BSP was bound to end in a failure. Across UP, and even in other states like Bihar, it is the Yadavs and the landed OBCs who have been the main tormentors of Dalits. For the SP-BSP to even assume that Dalits will shift their votes to a Yadav leader or that Yadavs would shift their vote to the BSP has been proven a myth.

As a result of this impractical and baseless alliance – formed on the basis of myths of secularism and pluralism – the alliance lost. The BJP, on the other hand, retained its vote base nurtured since 2014 which cut across various sections of Dalits, upper castes and OBCs, leaving out only the powerful Jatav Dalits (who support BSP), the Yadavs and the Muslims.

In fact, not only did the BJP strengthen and retain its core voter share, but also increased it from 2014. In 2014, the party, at 71 out of 80 seats, had a vote share of 42.6%. In 2019, the party, with 62 (64, if we count the seats of BJP ally, Apna Dal) seats had a marked increase in its vote share to 49.5% – a 7% increase in the vote share.

The BSP vote share remained the same at roughly 19% between 2014 and 2019, although it increased its seats from 0 to 10. The SP, on the other hand, saw a decline in its vote share from 22% in 2014 to 17.9% in 2019, while retaining 5 seats in both the elections. In the current election, the alliance failed completely, managing to secure only 15 seats.



Not only did the BJP transcend caste divides to win over UP, having been doing this since 2014, but this time, several powerful leaders also received the shock of their lives. The SP patriarch, Mulayam Singh Yadav, who had, in 2014, won from his Mainpuri seat by a comfortable and wide margin of 5 lakh votes, this time managed to win only by a very narrow margin of 96000 votes. Dimple Yadav, his daughter-in-law, lost from her Kannauj seat.

More significantly, the almost de facto face of the largest opposition party, Rahul Gandhi, lost the Gandhi family bastion, Amethi, to BJP's Smriti Irani by a margin of 55000 votes – an unprecedented blow to the Gandhis. Worse, even though Priyanka Gandhi's entry in UP just 5 months before the elections was hyped beyond all measure, the Congress happened to perform badly in whichever seats she had campaigned, thus, turning out to be a damp squib. The 'secular' parties imagination that Indians in this day and age would vote or fall for someone just because she happened to 'look' like her powerful

grandmother or happened to be charismatic and pleasing, has been proven to be an infantile imagination.

Sonia Gandhi herself did not perform well on her Rae Bareli seat. She won by a margin of just over a lakh votes, which was much lower than the previous winning margins of 4-5 lakh votes. And this was the case when neither the BJP nor the SPBSP campaigned in this seat, with the latter not even fielding any candidates in Amethi and Rae Bareli.

This tells a lot about the complete discrediting and rejection of the opposition. It is almost certain that the increase in BJP's vote share in UP in these elections has happened by increasing its voter base and substantially denting the mahagathbandhan. The Jats, on whom the RLD's Ajit Singh was banking, voted wholesale for the BJP, with 91% Jats choosing the party. This shows that the unholy alliance that Ajit Singh had sought to build between Jats and Muslims in western UP failed to materialize and even backfired in the wave of Hindu consolidation.

Similarly, in the case of Yadavs, even though 60% Yadavs voted for the mahagathbandhan, there were dents in the SP's traditional Yadav voter base. This time 3/5th of the Yadavs voted for the alliance, whereas in 2017, 3/4th of the Yadavs voted for the Congress-SP alliance, indicating that the Yadav support has marginally come down.

While Yadavs, Jatavs and Muslims together form around 40% of the state's population, the consolidation of the other 60% non-Yadav OBCs, non-Jatav Dalits, Jats, and upper castes behind the BJP was solid.

The UP feat – being repeated and bettered by the BJP since 2014 and was seen even in 2017 assembly elections – evokes a

clear sense that things in the country have changed. UP itself has changed since 2014. Prior to that, the state used to be a cauldron of competing caste fiefdoms. Muslims were very much the kingmakers and minority appeasement was rampant. The non-Jatav Dalits and the non-Yadav OBCs were an oppressed other half of the state's population, which the BJP sought to unite across caste and class lines.

These groups – along with others – also benefitted immensely from Modi's rural development programmes and social welfare schemes, which, in hindsight were much more effectively implemented than programmes of previous governments. Houses and toilets were built, LPG connections were given out, rural electrification was achieved, and bank accounts were opened which eventually had balance as well. Demonetization – much reviled in the urban areas – was a huge success in rural India. Regardless of the inconveniences it brought, it was viewed as an empowering redistributive step by the poor. Loopholes in implementation may have been there, but all the promises were achieved and a coverage or realization of more than 80% was achieved in all welfare programmes.

Moreover, these works were carried out without any discrimination on the basis of caste or religion. As a result, even the Muslims voted for the BJP, albeit in small numbers. The push came from Muslim women, who have largely supported the party, due to its stand on Triple Talaq Bill. This time, even the women – across religious divides – voted for the BJP in large numbers, as compared to previous elections.

Above all these rural development works lay the larger message of national unity and the rise of Sanatana Dharma. ***None of these welfare initiatives would have yielded any payoffs had they not been thoroughly linked to the larger idea of progress***

and pride of the nation. Before every development initiative was launched, Modi made sure it was launched in the form of a campaign or a mass movement of sorts, so that not only the mechanical material benefit, but even the larger national message behind it went out to the people. Right from Swachh Bharat programme to providing LPG connections to BPL households in the name of woman of the house, Modi made sure that people were made to feel as if they were contributing to the rise of India as a powerful nation on the world map.

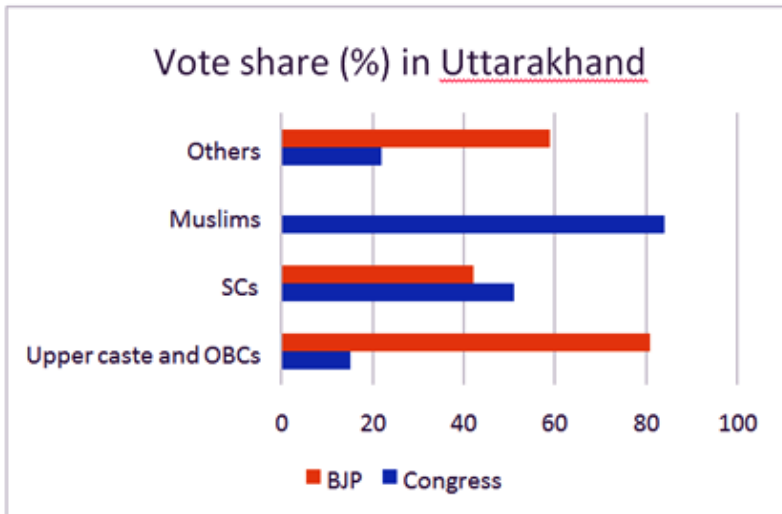
As a result, these material schemes did not end up looking like typical welfare doles. The approach was sharply opposite from the approach taken by the previous governments, where these schemes were treated as welfare handouts to the poor people, which did not generate any sense of national participation or belonging.

What happened in UP was replicated in other states as well. In other north Indian states, the BJP had a near clean sweep.

Higher Mandate in Uttarakhand

In Uttarakhand, the party won all the five seats. Its vote share crossed the 60% mark, a rise of 30 percentage points from its 2014 vote share and it also improved its victory margins in all five seats, securing a margin lead by over 2 lakh votes in Haridwar and Almora and of over 3 lakh votes in Garhwal, Nanital-Udhamsingh Nagar and Tehri Garhwal.

In Uttarakhand, what worked was the massive consolidation of upper castes and OBCs behind the BJP, while the SCs were almost evenly split between Congress and BJP, with BJP taking a lead. The Muslims entirely went for the Congress.



Overall, in Uttarakhand, the BJP had a vote share of 61% while in 2014 it was 31%, while the Congress had a vote share of 31% in 2019 while in 2014 it was 21%.

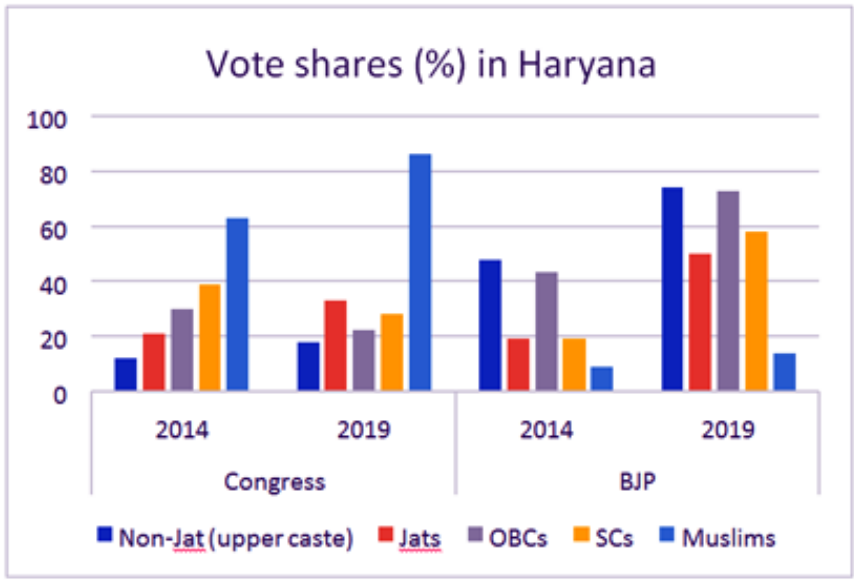
Haryana’s Bold Defiance of Caste Logic

In Haryana, it was again a clean sweep. The BJP won all the 10 seats in the state. While in 2014, the BJP had won 8 seats and had a vote share of 34.7%, this time it not only won all the seats, but increased its vote share massively to 58%. The INLD’s vote share came down from 24.4% to just 1%, spelling its complete rout.

Even more significantly, the Congress which was hoping to make a comeback saw its veteran former Haryana CM, Bhupinder Singh Hooda, losing to BJP’s RC Kaushik by over 1.6 lakh votes in Sonipat. Hooda’s son also lost the Congress’s traditional nine-time stronghold, Rohtak, which he held till 2019, by a margin of just 2600 votes, to BJP’s Arvind Sharma.

The BJP has come a long way from 2009 elections, when it failed to win even a single seat in Haryana. In 2014, it swept the state and improved substantially, but in 2019, it crossed all expectations, sweeping away all carefully nurtured caste-based vote banks.

What is interesting is that the Hooda family and INLD's Chautala family are both staunch Jats and this time they lost massively from Jat strongholds. ***This election also proves that developments which took place before the election – such as split in INLD and internal conflicts within Congress and rise of new formations – would have had no impact, since BJP won more than 50% vote share in Haryana in nine out of ten seats. Thus, the message is clear – the opposition did not lose because of lack of alliance or internal divisions, but because there is a fundamental positive change on the ground among the people.***



It is significant that while the Congress's biggest rise in vote share in Haryana has come from the Muslims, the BJP has gained across all castes. The BJP's Jat vote share increased from 19% in 2014 to 50% in 2019. Its SC vote share increased even more, from 19% in 2014 to 58% in 2019, while its non-Jat upper caste and OBC vote shares also increased by 30-40% range from 2014. Interestingly, the BJP's Muslim vote share also saw a substantial 5% increase, from 9% in 2014 to 14% in 2019.

Traditionally, the main fault line in Haryana has been between Jats and non-Jats. This divide has formed the basis of the entire politics of parties like Congress and INLD. The BJP, in the past, used to suffer because of this obstacle. The Haryana CM from BJP, ML Khattar, is himself a Punjabi instead of a Jat. Yet, this time, defying all expectations, and dispensing with the need to consolidate non-Jat coalition, the Jats themselves moved towards the BJP. Like in UP where 91% of the Jats had voted for the party, in Haryana as well every second person from the Jat community voted for the BJP. Thus, what happened in Haryana defied all caste logic – the upper castes (non-Jats), Jats, OBCs and SCs together voted overwhelmingly for the BJP.

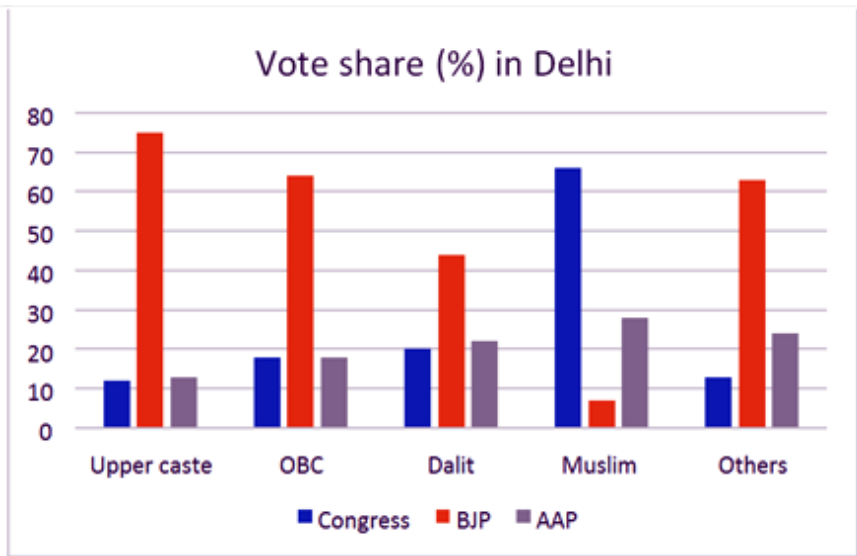
Clean Sweep in Delhi

In the neighbouring Delhi, BJP repeated the same feat. The party swept all seven seats, and that too, with over 50% vote share in all seats, thereby clearly showing that even if the AAP and Congress had formed an alliance, it would not have been able to dent the BJP, since the latter's vote share is more than the vote share of AAP and Congress combined.

Not only this, but the ruling AAP ended up in the third position in all seats. In the north-east Delhi seat, BJP's Manoj Tiwari defeated veteran Congress leader and three-time CM,

Sheila Dixit.

The BJP's vote share was 56% in 2019 as compared to 46% in 2014 when it had again swept all 7 seats. The Congress's vote share was 22.5% in 2019 having improved from 15% in 2014 and AAP's was 18% in 2019 having suffered a massive decline from 33% in 2014 elections. All over the country, AAP managed to win only 1 seat, from Punjab.



It is, thus, clear that major chunk of upper castes and OBCs went for the BJP, while in terms of the Dalit vote, around 44% Dalits voted for the BJP, while only 20% voted for Congress and 22% voted for AAP. Muslims went almost en masse for the Congress. In Delhi, among the college-going students, BJP performed very well, securing 7 out of every 10 votes.

The poor and the rich, both, stood overwhelmingly for the BJP in Delhi.

Massive Improvement in Himachal Pradesh and Jammu

Besides Delhi, the BJP also saw a clean sweep in other north Indian states such as Himachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir. In Himachal Pradesh, it is the sheer magnitude of the BJP's victory that is surprising. The party not only swept all 4 Lok Sabha seats in Himachal Pradesh, but did so with over 69% vote share. In states where BJP has swept all seats, it has got the highest vote share in Himachal Pradesh at 69%, followed by Gujarat at 62%.

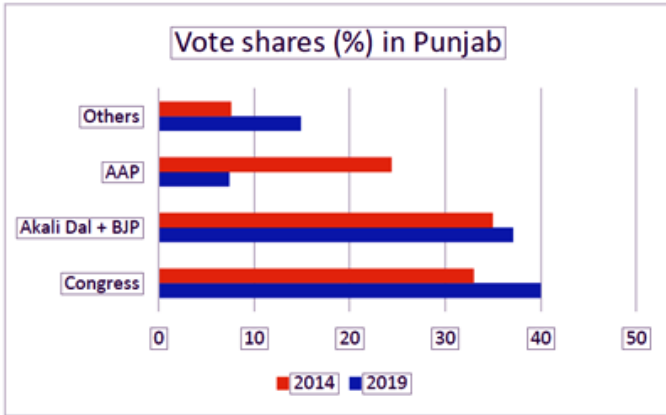
In Himachal Pradesh, Congress's vote share declined by over 13 percentage points from the 2014 level of 40%.

In Jammu and Kashmir, the BJP won three seats – 2 in Jammu and 1 in Ladakh, while the 3 seats of Kashmir went to Abdullahs-led National Conference. Mehbooba Mufti's PDP was nowhere in sight, having been relegated to third position in most seats it contested, including Mufti's Anantnag constituency in south Kashmir. In Jammu, the party won by massive 3 lakh plus margins in both the seats.

The religious consolidation in Jammu was immense, with 87% Hindus having voted for the BJP and 90% Muslims having voted for the Congress.

Complex Equations in Punjab

In the case of Punjab, the state was the only outlier among northern states where the Congress managed to do well, as was expected, since the BJP has never had an independent presence in Punjab and has mostly contested elections in alliance with Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD).



While the SAD-BJP alliance’s seat share fell from 6 in 2014 to 4 in 2019, it managed to actually increase its vote share from 35% in 2014 to 37.1% in 2019. As per the seat-sharing formula between SAD and BJP in Punjab, the BJP fields its candidates on 3 out of 13 Lok Sabha seats and 23 out of 117 assembly seats. In the 2019 elections, both the SAD and the BJP won 2 seats each, with SAD vote share being 27.4% and the BJP’s vote share being 9.6%. The BJP won Gurdaspur with a 50% vote share against Congress’s popular face and old hand, Sunil Kumar Jakhar. Its candidate was Bollywood actor Sunny Deol. The other seat that BJP won was Hoshiarpur, where its candidate was Som Parkash, while SAD won Ferozpur and Bathinda.

The Congress, on the other hand, under the popular leadership of Captain Amarinder Singh, increased its seat share from 3 in 2014 to 8 in 2019, and increased its vote share from 33% in 2014 to 40% in 2019.

The worst drubbing was, perhaps, received by AAP. Not only did the party reduce its seat share from 4 seats to just 1 in 2019, but also suffered a deep loss in its vote share, from 24.4% in 2014 to just 7.4% in 2019. The only seat that AAP won was of Sangrur by Bhagwant Mann.

Vote shares (%) in Punjab:

	Congress		SAD- BJP		AAP		Others	
	2019	2014	2019	2014	2019	2014	2019	2014
Hindu	48	33	44	26	2	30	6	12
Hindu upper caste	41	26	58	25	0	26	0	13
Hindu OBC	61	34	24	18	5	42	11	6
Dalit	58	42	27	15	3	30	12	13
Sikh	38	34	35	40	11	21	16	5
Jat Sikh	37	23	33	48	12	23	17	6
Dalit Sikh	35	47	26	31	15	17	25	5
OBC Sikh	38	38	40	34	4	24	19	5

Source: Lokniti-CSDS post-poll survey

Curiously, detailed vote share analysis and 2014 and 2019 comparisons show two things:

First, Congress has mainly received support in Punjab from non-upper caste and upper caste Hindus. Among the Sikh community, it has only received good support from Jat Sikhs. Among the non-Jat Sikhs, its vote share has risen by only 4%. This is much less when compared to the huge margins that have been awarded to it by the Hindus.

Even more interestingly, the Congress's vote share has actually fallen among the Dalit Sikhs and has remained at the same number among the OBC Sikhs. This means that Congress does not enjoy as much popularity among non-Jat, Dalit and OBC Sikhs. Its major voter base is mainly Hindus and Jat Sikhs.

Second, the results also show that the Hindu vote is fragmented. Compared to 2014, the SAD-BJP alliance has handsomely increased its vote shares among Hindus, upper

caste Hindus, Dalits, Hindu OBCs and Sikh OBCs. The alliance's vote share fell among all other communities of Sikhs, except for OBC Sikhs.

Third, major Sikh vote share – among all Sikh castes – have gone majorly to the 'others' category, instead of to the Congress, BJP and AAP. Sikhs have been deeply disenchanted with the SAD. Jat Sikhs used to be the traditional vote base of SAD. They now got divided between Congress and 'others'.

The results show that there is deep disillusionment prevalent among Sikhs. The community and their once thriving state of Punjab has been short changed and cheated and the SAD and the Congress – and their ruling dynasts – are equally to blame. The state stares at a bleak future, with its future younger generation destroyed by the illegal drugs funneled through Pakistan. Not only is this generation punished, but the corrupt system disallows capable measures to curb this illegal trade.

Momentous life-time effort needs to be put in and old ties discarded if Punjab is to be brought back again and if Sikhs' future is to be secured. In this sense, the talks within Punjab's BJP unit to contest the 2019 state assembly polls alone – taking inspiration from their success in Haryana – might be a better decision. A new alternative is needed and the fragmentation of Hindu and Sikh votes show that people of the state are also searching for a radical overhaul of Punjab politics. Given the state of affairs in Punjab, it would be apt to say that this was more of a vote of despair than of victory.

To be continued.

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THE LISTING OF MASOOD AZHAR AND INDIA-CHINA RELATIONS

The listing of Pakistan-based terrorist Jaish-e-Mohammad's (JeM), Masood Azhar, as a global terrorist under the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) 1267 Sanctions Committee has cemented a diplomatic victory for India on the global stage. The listing follows after deadly Pulwama attack carried out by JeM on Indian forces in Kashmir and the subsequent February 2019 Balakot strikes by India inside Pakistan. Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba's (LeT) Hafiz Saeed, Azhar had become India's most wanted terrorist and the country's main enemy.

Azhar's JeM has carried out some of India's deadliest terror attacks – barring the 26/11 Mumbai attacks by LeT – such as the Parliament attacks of 2001 and the J&K assembly attacks of 2001. Recently, it has become active once again with the Pathankot attack of 2015, followed by Nagrota attack of 2016 and Pulwama in 2019 – all in Kashmir.

While Hafiz Saeed was listed in 2008, without opposition from China, Azhar's listing as a global terrorist had proven to be a challenge for India, even though the JeM had been listed as a terrorist organization way back after the Parliament attacks. Unlike most other cases, in Azhar's case, China – a permanent member of UN Security Council – always ended up blocking the listing citing 'technical reasons' such as lack of consensus among parties concerned or insufficient information.

Thus, while the attempts to list Azhar have been made since 2009, they have consistently failed for the last 10 years. It is also a fact that regular and persistent attempts to list Azhar began to be made only after the 2015 Pathankot attacks. Prior to that, after attempting to get Azhar listed in 2009, India had

become complacent and left the issue pending. The fact that China has blocked the move to list Azhar four times in a row further compounded the challenge for India.

Thus, this overdue listing sends out an important message to the citizens as well as to other countries – that India is firm and sure in the delivery of its positions, especially where it concerns national security. In the aftermath of the Pulwama attack, India had promised a strong response on both military and diplomatic fronts, and with Azhar's listing, this has become complete.

From Pakistan's point of view, the present issue and the successful listing has implications for India's security scenario as well as foreign policy and should be seen in the context of wider regional developments. While the listing itself is only symbolic and will have little effect on Pakistan-sponsored terrorism against India, it has certainly imposed costs on Pakistan for acting in a recalcitrant manner. ***The international situation and India's position in it has changed in such a way that it would no longer be possible for Pakistan to 'bleed' India and get away with it cost-free – as the Balakot strikes, FATF (Financial Action Task Force) grey-listing due to terrorism and the recent Azhar listing showed.*** In the present situation, Pakistan realizes that it will have to face military and diplomatic costs.

This is compounded by the fact that Pakistan itself is facing challenges in terms of separatist groups operating through its Baloch and Pashtun populations, while it is becoming increasingly costly for it to actively support the Kashmir insurgency. Its growing interlinkages with China, its dwindling financial independence and international isolation and irrelevance, have all changed the regional factors in the last few years.

Moreover, the significance of Azhar's listing after persistent efforts by India shows that India's relationship with her partners has reached a stage where the country can no longer be easily dismissed or satisfied with half-measures. The tough actions taken by the government in Balakot were a game-changer in pushing the Azhar listing as well.

Prior to strikes like Balakot (2019) and Uri (2016), India used to rely solely on 'diplomatic' pressures to force Pakistan to crack down on terror groups within its territory, as was seen after the 2001 Parliament attacks and the 2008 Mumbai attacks. However, the increasingly tough response towards Pakistan and refusal to engage in futile talks has contributed in strengthening India's position as a strong global power.

It has also disposed other countries – like France, UK, US, China and Russia – more favorably towards India. The listing could be made possible after China lifted the 'technical hold' it had placed on it for the last few years. The rapid improvement in India-China ties after the Wuhan summit of 2018 and the series of economic and political measures to engage with each other after Wuhan, including cooperation in South Asia, has helped in moving China to allow the listing of Azhar. Pakistan was also forced to come on board with China.

AZHAR AND CHINA: A PECULIAR BACKGROUND

The precise reasons for China blocking the move to list Azhar so persistently in the past and agreeing to it now, remain shrouded in mystery. But one thing that is clear is that the changed India-China relationship over the past one year has played a major role in facilitating China to overcome its compulsions and list Azhar. ***The informal Wuhan summit between the leaders of the two countries opened a new chapter***

in their relationship and infused a shared cultural-political direction and positivity where there was previously a mechanized and distant approach in the past.

The Wuhan summit infused life into a relationship where the past was marked by suspicion. After Wuhan, not only did India drop its public pressurizing of China on the Azhar issue but also gave the other country a lot of space and understanding. Even after the Pulwama attack, when China once again put the listing on hold due to ‘technical issues’, the Indian response was positive and warm as was the Chinese commitment that the listing would be accomplished in time – as it was done.

At the same time, we must clarify why the listing was overdue on China’s part and why the country had to keep Pakistan in loop before arriving at a final decision. ***The background reasons for putting the listing on the backburner for so long are more complex and historical than mere India-China rivalry or China trying to helm in India. In fact, the myth of India-China rivalry was not a factor at all in the entire Azhar episode.***

Thus, the widespread tendency to paint China in a negative light for putting the Azhar application on hold till recently is misplaced. At the very outset, it should be clear by now that the China-Azhar issue involved factors other than the sole focus on India. ***Had China meant ill towards India, then it would never have approved of Hafiz Saeed listing in 2008, it would not have allowed Pakistan to be put on the grey list of Financial Action Task Force (FATF) for terror funding and it would not have publicly reprimanded Pakistan after Balakot strikes and supported India. Moreover, over the last one year, China has collaborated with India on every other issue and has not blindly supported Pakistan diplomatically on substantive issues in***

conflict with India.

All these issues – especially public listing of Pakistan on FATF and Pulwama condemnation – have been much bigger than getting an infirm and bed-ridden terrorist listed. Therefore, the Azhar listing and the reasons for its past blockades have nothing to do with any deliberate obstructions on the part of China.

The explanation for China's behaviour lies in three main directions –

First, historical politics of terrorist organizations in the Af-Pak (Afghanistan-Pakistan) region and its impact on China;

Second, China's traditional poise and the Chinese psyche of not buckling under pressure and of honouring commitments, regardless of how the world paints it;

Third, China's recently transforming relationship with India which added a new dimension to the Chinese approach towards the Af-Pak region.

THE AF-PAK POLITICS: BRIEF ANTECEDENTS OF AZHAR AND CHINA

The Af-Pak region has been marked by rising terrorism during the last four decades. The entry of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in 1979 and the ensuing jihad to dislodge the Soviet-backed government led to the growth of new terrorist outfits that have only increased over the last 40 years. This jihad was supported by the United States and gave birth to Taliban. Pakistan as an ally of United States, played an important role in this.

By 1989, the jihadists – calling themselves Afghan freedom fighters – had acquired control and the United States exited the

region. Between 1990 and 1996, there was a flux in the country as competing factions of militant outfits and prominent Afghan leaders sought to take control of the government. In this ensuing flux, Taliban, with Pakistani support, easily managed to capture Kabul and establish an Islamic government. They ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, until the 9/11, after which US once again entered the region and eliminated their ranks, installing the civilian government of Hamid Karzai in Afghanistan.

This entire period, especially up to 1996 saw the immense strengthening of Pakistan and Pakistan-sponsored terrorists. Even though the later Taliban leadership got divided within their ranks and even rebelled against excessive interference by Pakistan, these skirmishes did not diminish Pakistan's prime king-maker position in the terror nexus of the Af-Pak region. Also, being a US ally gave it full power to act with impunity.

In those peak times, Pakistan – with its newfound power – intensified its policy to 'bleed India by a thousand cuts'. The post-1989 situation has been the worst ever in Kashmir, completely changing the face of terrorism, giving birth to the likes of Yasin Malik and leading to the genocide and exodus of Kashmiri Pandits.

It was during these developments in the Af-Pak region that Maulana Masood Azhar emerged as a key player. Azhar had played an important role in the Afghanistan jihad and had subsequently gone on to train and recruit Muslims for jihad in other countries such as Somalia, Sudan and Bangladesh as well. After 1990 and the settlement of the Afghan issue, he focused his attention on waging war against India. ***Azhar has been known to have substantial influence on the terrorist organizations in the region, including both the factions of Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as with al-Qaeda.***

Within this terror network of Af-Pak we must also factor in the parallel anti-China Uighur Muslim movement in China's Xinjiang province which shares borders with the Af-Pak region. This region of China began to see disturbances from the late 1970s onwards, in the post-Mao era when Deng Xiaoping had taken over and had started opening up the Chinese economy. As a result of this regional globalization, China's Uighur Muslims began to be radicalized, directly with support of Pakistani Islamic extremists. Thus, parallel to the jihad in Afghanistan, China was going through its own problems with its increasingly militant Uighur population.

The Uighurs, after imbibing the teachings of jihad from Pakistani mullahs, revolted multiple times against China, between 1980 and 1987. ***In 1990, the Uighur Muslims declared their purpose of waging a jihad against China for the establishment of the East Turkestan state in Xinjiang. They carried out a violent armed rebellion against the police. China blamed the incident on foreign interference and alleged that the terrorists were being trained in the Af-Pak region.***

In its subsequent positions, China has held that the Uighur Muslims had even fought alongside Pakistan Taliban in Pakistan's North and South Waziristan, and that they plan to make the Gilgit region in Pakistan a gateway for the transmission of militants to Xinjiang.

Another watershed came after 9/11, when China prevailed upon the United States to detain some Uighurs in Guantanamo Bay and later, in 2009, widespread riots took place between the majority community of Han Chinese and the Uighur Muslims. There were also increasing attacks by Uighurs on the civilian population.

To deal with this problem of Uighur Muslim terrorism, China adopted a practical approach. On the one hand, it decided to contain Muslims within its own territory by imposing severe restrictions and internment camps. On the other hand, ***China decided to ensure that the terrorists and countries in the Af-Pak region do not train Uighur Muslims or use them against China. While relations with Pakistan were already cordial and were further deepened to contain Pakistan's radicalism, China also engaged with the Af-Pak terrorists like Taliban and Masood Azhar's JeM, which had an expansive terror network and which had even fomented unrest against the Pakistani government on one occasion. Keeping Azhar's JeM in loop, along with Taliban and others, has been vital for China to ensure peace in Xinjiang.***

In 2000, China became the first non-Muslim country whose senior diplomat had talks with Taliban's Mullah Omar. China managed to extract an understanding out of Mullah Omar that Uighur Muslims would not launch attacks in China but will continue to remain within Taliban ranks.

Thus, China ensured, largely, that Uighurs and other Muslim fundamentalists and terrorists based in the Gilgit region do not foment unrest in Xinjiang. ***An Uighur Muslim living in Gilgit said about China that, "They keep us under scrutiny, even by extending friendship and giving incentives for the community."*** (Jaffrey, 2015). It is important to understand China's attitude here in order to understand how the country approaches issues. ***Despite the fact that the Uighurs created havoc and challenged sovereignty of China declaring jihad, yet, China deftly and ruthlessly contained the movement without losing its grit or patience.***

This delicate situation in the Af-Pak region and China's direct

connection with it helps to explain why China has been reluctant to sanction Azhar. In case of China's readiness to sanction Hafiz Saeed in 2008, there was not much of a problem, since the LeT was solely focused on Kashmir, rather than being involved in Af-Pak. But Azhar's JeM was a major player in Af-Pak.

However, this delicate balance started unravelling about a year ago, when China-Pakistan cooperation started deepening. Pakistan was already bearing the brunt since 2007, when it acted against terrorists at its Lal Masjid in 2007 for abducting Chinese girls. After that episode, a number of enraged terrorists combined to form the TTP to wage war against Pakistan. However, the balance with the Uighurs has largely been maintained due to China's cautious approach.

But for the past year, the rise of Islamic State in Afghanistan and the radicalization by JeM's ally, TTP, has shaken things for China. The changing face of terrorism in Af-Pak has made Azhar less relevant than before and made all delicate bargains struck with Af-Pak terrorists increasingly meaningless. China also realizes that its rise on the world stage and the open account of its hostilities with Uighur has made it an inevitable target of terrorists and, therefore, with the new realities, the old practical approach needs to be gradually changed. Last year, TTP sent out a message saying that all those foreign countries who cooperate with Pakistan will be on their hit list. Even the Islamic State declared that it plans to avenge China's treatment of Uighur Muslims, and declared that China was on the same list as India, United States and Israel. In 2015, it called out to China's Muslims to "wake up" and "take up weapons."

At the same time, Azhar, though still powerful among the ranks of TTP allied terrorists, was weakening in health, while the Taliban has been engaged in talks with the US, limiting its

attacks only to Afghan forces. China has also become more ruthless in its treatment of terrorism as witnessed by the lodging of a million Uighurs in internment camps in China. This changing dynamics makes the past reasons for China supporting a block on Azhar ban much less relevant, regardless of what Pakistan thinks.

The Af-Pak dynamics, thus, makes clear why China refused to support a ban on Azhar and how this attitude gradually dissipated, with changing regional factors. Besides these historical reasons, there were also deeper reasons at play.

INDIA-CHINA RELATIONSHIP AND THE GLOBAL DYNAMICS

One of the other major reasons that China acceded to India's demands was the positive relationship built in the aftermath of the Wuhan summit between India and China. They initiated a landmark '2+1' format in which India and China would engage jointly with a third country, such as Afghanistan. China also refused to accept Nepal's bid to marginalize India's role in Nepal, sending a firm message on its post-Wuhan commitment. In the subsequent interventions of both India and China in Africa, China once again offered a cooperative approach in order to dissipate the public perception that the two countries were competing, even though China's investments in Africa are much larger in size than India's.

There was little need for China to actively engage with India in these kind of cooperative partnerships as token gestures, since it was already on a better footing. Yet not everything is viewed from a 'strategic' or calculative perspective and China – as is evident from its relationship with Pakistan – values long-term relationships.

At the same time, there were other factors at play as well. China's rise on the world stage has arrived. It is fast overtaking the Western world in technological and scientific fields as well as in newer applications to military, cyberspace, outer space and in economy. The deep discomfiture of the Western world with China is quite evident. Regardless of the internal divisions between America and Europe and within their own countries, they are all united against China. Their politicians – from whether left-wing or right-wing – and their self-proclaimed progressive media and intellectuals, regardless of their own differences, share the common fundamentalism towards China.

This was made most clear in a recent racist speech of ***Kiron Skinner, the chief of policy planning in the US State Department, when she said that, "When we think about the Soviet Union and that competition, in a way, it was a fight within the Western family. Karl Marx was a German Jew who developed a philosophy that was really within the larger body of political thought...That's not really possible with China. This is a fight with a really different civilization and a different ideology. And the United States hasn't had that before. It's also striking that it's the first time we will have a great power competitor that is not Caucasian."***

Nobody – least of all a government representative – has portrayed the exact Western attitude towards China as clearly as was done by Ms. Skinner recently. In the Western worldview, even the Cold War pales before the US-China rivalry, since Russia was a part of the 'Western family'. The 'fight' is taking the shape of a civilizational fight – that's how the West sees it. For the West, countries like India, China and Japan are allies as long as they do not undermine the modern era dominance of the West. This dominance is now breaking.

And the US-China trade war is just the start of American project to disrupt and obstruct China. The US is leaving no stone unturned to harass China – from the arrest of Huawei’s founder’s daughter to openly, along with Europe, branding China for theft of intellectual property. When Trump decided to suddenly revoke his commitment towards trade talks and imposed the pending 25% tariff on \$300 billion worth of Chinese imports, he did it, humiliatingly, when the Chinese representative was still in the middle of the talks with the Americans. Yet, China did not lose poise and responded evenly in kind much later.

Unfortunately, even as the ‘Western family’ stands united with regard to China, the ‘East’ is a divided house. The US by striking a chord through the joint partnership of India, Japan and Australia has successfully entered the troubled waters of Indo-Pacific to settle scores with China. India being a prime and powerful country in the Indian Ocean Region is the natural centre-point of US interventions, which had begun during Obama’s time and continued under Trump. The US is seeking to replicate its intricate relationship with Japan with India this time, with help from Japan, Australia and South Korea. Europe does the same thing.

All this is being done to ‘contain’ China. And the Azhar episode is nothing but a small event in these unfolding changes. Even as China stares at bleak prospects in the West, it is seeking to keep a united house in Asia and Eurasia and is hence deepening ties with not only India, but also its traditional rival, Japan, and Russia. The BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) forms an important material part of these interrelationships.

The strengthening revival of terrorism in the region – this time, with terrorists openly calling out China, unlike the relief China managed between 1997 and 2012 – and the dangerous

forays by US with India, has made the Azhar issue the first easy obstruction to be dispensed with. ***Thus, it is not that the US is a great friend of India and, therefore, decided to box China into a corner at the UN Security Council to compel the latter on the Azhar issue through various threats. Neither is it that China was cowed down by the threat of US, France and UK threatening to further publicly condemn China unless it sanctioned Azhar – since China has already been so much vilified and misjudged that compared to that, mere accusations over Azhar would pale.***

Rather, given the factors discussed above, China's decision to finally sanction Azhar showed that the time was right and that relationship with India was at a stage where things had to be taken forward, instead of allowing to lapse. Thus, China sanctioned Azhar simply because it was India's demand and not because of the Western pressure.

THE INDIAN ATTITUDE

However, as usual, Indians have not grasped this. In keeping with their suspicious attitude towards China, ***undue and excessive credit is being given to the role played by US and France in bringing China around. This is despite the fact that China is waging much bigger battles with these powers than the much smaller Azhar issue – in these battles, it has borne the brunt of being accused of theft, cheating, indebting countries and violating humans rights of Uighurs besides supporting Pakistan, North Korea and Iran. When it has not cowed down in the face of these accusations, it is highly unlikely that diplomatic pressure over Masood Azhar would have 'pressurized' China to change its view. China did this for India and the Indian government alone recognizes this, as is evident through the positive attitude of the Indian government.***

The attitude of the Indian government has remained positive towards China since after the Wuhan summit and continued to be so despite repeated refusals by China to sanction the terrorist. ***Regardless of whether the Indian popular opinion grasps it or not, the government fully realizes the value of India's relationship with China.***

The natural compatibility in the India-China relationship – not hinging on a mercantile give and take – is unlike the India-US relationship. Last year, in the run up to India signing the COMCASA agreement with the US on secure information sharing, the preceding months were fraught with tension, as India, till the last minute continued to doubt the US's intentions. Besides this, the US has kept up pressure on India to cut itself off from Iran and Russia, besides taunting India on not doing much in Afghanistan and on keeping high tariffs. Multiple times, unlike China, the US has also dragged India to the WTO dispute settlement mechanism to subvert India's trading restrictions that seek to protect domestic industries in solar cells and other areas.

For all practical purposes, the India-US alliance has always been and continues to look unnatural and fraught with tensions. ***The US expects a give and take on every issue. Right after Azhar was successfully sanctioned, the US sent a message to India to indicate that it now expects India's reciprocity in defeating Iran, thereby putting India in a precarious position, threatening its ties with a neighbour with whom India has shared centuries of common history and cultural exchange and one that continues to be India's basis for practical dealing with Pakistan and Afghanistan.*** But the US does not care. For the latter, it has always been transactional and mercantile.

India has rarely had to face such situations with partners

like China, Russia and Iran. Most recently, after PM Modi won the most resounding victory for the second term, China was among the first countries to send its congratulatory message. This was a first for China as well, since as per the conventional Chinese protocol, China wishes the newly elected heads from other nations only after the results have been fully declared. Yet, in this Indian election, China's message came early on. It was also not a short message, but a proper letter on fostering cooperation between the two countries.

This is a message that China has repeatedly emphasized in the past as well, even going as far as calling the Doklam stand-off of 2017 a conflict between “brothers” and a minor episode in “2000-year-old family” ties. As the Chinese ambassador to India has also emphasized, “China and India should also join hands to build an Asian Century, a new type of international relations and a community with shared future for mankind to embrace various booming civilizations.” (Zhaohui, 2019).

And yet, we continue to doubt China, even as the West has started playing the game of civilizational competition with China and deploys the policy of divide-and-rule in Asia.

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India of the Ages

“India of the ages is not dead nor has she spoken her last creative word; she lives and has still something to do for herself and the human peoples. And that which must seek now to awake is not an anglicised oriental people, docile pupil of the West and doomed to repeat the cycle of the Occident’s success and failure, but still the ancient immemorable Shakti recovering her deepest self, lifting her head higher towards the supreme source of light and strength and turning to discover the complete meaning and a vaster form of her Dharma.”

– Sri Aurobindo

(Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo, Vol. 20: p. 444)