

CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION- RELIGION AND POLITICS IN INDIA: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

- (a) The Interface between Religion and Politics**
- (b) The Role of Religion in Indian Politics**
- (c) The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism**
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(a) The Interface between Religion and Politics

Religion is a mystery among human beings. If there were no religions, it would have been necessary for man to invent and establish it. Man could not remain without a creator of the phenomenal world of many fold things. Since the primitive times, human behaviour and attitudes have been conditioned by many beliefs in mystical or supernatural powers and that there was no getting away from imaginative ideas or peculiar dreams, ultimately from some sort of religions which have been the very texture of human being.¹

According to B.R. Ambedkar, “to ignore religion is to ignore a live wire. Religion is an institution or an influence and like all social influences and institutions, it may help or it may harm a society which is in its grip.”²

Religion is a belief or a faith in something that is purely theoretical (ideal) partly practical and that something gives satisfaction, utility or a benefit to the believer.

Religion or what we call “Dharma”, is not one alone. Today we have dozens of institutionalized religions like Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism, Judaism, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, Bahaism and a lots of minor and modern religions in the Indian society.³

The religion in its institutionalized form is unwelcomed. Every person has right not only to entertain such religious belief and ideas as may be approved by his conscience but also exhibits his belief and ideas by such overt acts which are sanctioned by his religion. Today the conditions prevailing are such that people are stepping into the mass carnage in the name of religion, e.g. latest being the Godhra incident (Gujarat riots of 2002). The painful memories of religious riots after the demolition of Babri Masjid still lingers upon the minds of people. Religion has become such an important issue that other issues like poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, population explosion, corruption and environmental pollution have lost their due attention.

¹ Jatava, D.R., *Religions in Modern Society the Puzzling Issue*, New Delhi, National Publishing House, 2000. p. i.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

India has a history of fragile intercommunity relationship. Secular and communal political forces have always been in struggle for power against each other for many centuries.

The religion based politics ideology and mass mobilization have always challenged secular forces in Indian society.

The constitution of India recognizes India as a Secular State and has provided many fundamental rights for the cultural development of different religious and minority communities. The constitution of India does not differentiate among its citizens on the bases of their religious belief. The state extends full protection against discrimination to every religious group.

The secular character of the State is under threat from the practitioners of religion based politics. The majority of Indians are believers of religion and in a multi-religious country the believer of one religion follow the path of distance from the believers of other religions. Another face of Indian reality is reflected by religious hostility and opposition against the believers of one or the other religion. Thus Secularism and communalism are the realities of India and these two ways of life are involved in confrontation with each other. The rudest shock comes from the manner in which the government and the country are allowing themselves to be pushed off the edge of secularism into the abyss of communal reaction, falling back to the frightening atavism of stagnant, dark and medieval ethos of the Hindi-speaking areas.

If we go into the historical background of the problem then we find that there was a close interaction between religion and politics from the Indus valley civilization to the advent of Islam, the second from the advent of Islam, to the Indian Mutiny of 1857, the third from 1857 to India's Independence in 1947 and the fourth from 1947 onwards. While there was close interplay between religion and politics during all these phases, the nature, the intensity and the dynamics of this interaction was different during each of these phases.⁴

During the first phase, the Indian continent consisted of Hindu civilization. There was no other religion and there was no inter-religion rivalry. Whatever

⁴ Sharma, T.R., "Religion and Politics in Modern India: A Historical Overview" in Moin Shakir (ed.), *Religion State and Politics in India*, New Delhi, Ajanta Publications, 1989, p. 41.

challenges came to Hinduism like the branching off of Buddhism and Jainism came from within. However, interaction between religion and politics was very intimate. The state power was generally in the hands of Kashtriya.⁵

On the eve of advent of Islam, the country consisted of numerous small and big Hindu kingdoms. Their rivalries and occasional battles were seen merely as battles between the two political entities, without any religious overtones in them.⁶

From the beginning of the eleventh century till the end of fourteenth century the Muslim rulers used their religious identity to muster support in order to maintain their political power. The very fact that they vanquished Hindu rulers in bloody battle that alienated large segment of Hindu population from political powers. Some of these battles were projected as Jehads (holy wars) against the infidels.⁷

The Muslim rulers lost their power and position with the advent of British East India Company. The company had engaged in numerous battles big and small against the Muslim and Hindu rulers in order to establish its foothold in India. By 1856 A.D. the English became the masters of the whole India. They deprived the Indians of their political, economic, social and religious rights. The Hindus and Muslims stood unitedly in their effort to fight against the British rule. Therefore the company soon evolved a strategy to exploit the religious identities of the Indians to secure its political power. There were many overt and covert ways in which religious identities of the Indians were used by the British to serve the political interest of the British rule.

During British rule the Christian missionaries adopted undignified methods to spread Christianity in India. They made violent attacks on Islam and Hinduism. They began to assault Hindu and Muslim religious beliefs, customs and traditions and condemned Hindu gods and Muslim prophet. They began to convert the Indians to Christianity by offering them jobs, rewards and promotions etc. The activities of the missionaries perturbed the people.

The English government taxed lands belonging to temples and mosques or

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

charitable institutions. It hurt the religious sentiments of the people. In 1850, Lord Dalhousie passed a law, which enabled a convert to Christianity to inherit his ancestral property. These interference in the social and religious life of the Indian also led to the revolt of 1857. After the mutiny of 1857 the East India Company's rule came to an end and the Government of India passed into the hands of the British Queen and her Parliament. During the revolt there were ample instances of the Hindu- Muslim unity against the British. Such a thing was considered harmful to the imperialistic designs of the English. They sabotaged this unity by a policy of Divide and Rule.

After the revolt of 1857 the Muslims started harbouring hatred and mistrust against the Hindus because of the role played by the Sikhs and Gorkha soldiers in suppressing the revolt and in perpetrating excess upon them. In later years the English made capital of these differences and fanned the Hindu Muslim mistrust so that the two communities might never come together and thus the British Empire would stay larger in India, without any challenge from any quarter what so ever.

Another subtle way of driving a wedge between the Indian people and promoting the identity of each as a distinct religious group was to record their religion in the decennial census. Towards the end of the nineteenth century when national consciousness began to acquire organized form in India, the British introduced with remarkable calculation and foresight, newer and newer methods of dividing the Indians along religious lines. In 1906 they successfully managed large scale communal clashes between the Hindus and the Muslims in many parts of the country. The early years of the twentieth century saw the founding of the Muslim League on the one hand and the Shri Bharat Dharam Mandal on the other. In 1920s a Sikh religious body Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee was set up to manage the Sikh shrines. Gradually SGPC began to be used as spring board for capturing political power. In 1909 the British introduced communal electorate in a big way and in 1919 they further extended it. This policy of the British ultimately put the Hindus and Muslims on opposite sides of the political barricade. The Muslims were given higher representation in Legislative bodies than their numerical strength in the population warranted. Where they were in minority they were given 30 percent seat in the Legislative Assembly; where they were in

majority they were given an absolute majority in the Legislature.⁸

While the British rulers were trying to use the religious divisions of the Indians for consolidating their political power in India, the leaders of Indian national movement like Tilak and later Gandhi also found it more convenient to mobilize mass support against the British rule by using religion. They used religious slogans and symbols. With the blessing of the British government the Muslims cultural organization also increased their religious activities.⁹ The net result of these British policies was that an element of Hindu- Muslim conflict gradually enveloped the national movement. The British government attempted to pitch the Muslim League against the Congress which for all practical purposes amounted to pitching the Muslim community against the Hindus. The success of this policy of the British was to use the religious identities of Indians to blur the thrust of the National Liberation Movement which succeeded a great deal when there broke out serious riots between the Hindus and Muslims particularly in Bengal and Punjab. During the entire British rule religion and politics continued to be closely linked. Religion was used much more to serve political interests than the use of politics to achieve religious objectives. The interplay of religion and politics was qualitatively different from what it had been during the period of Muslim rule in India or during the earlier period of Hindu rule.¹⁰

India witnessed a great bloodbath in 1947 when it got divided apparently on religious lines. More than a million people were slaughtered when the State of Pakistan was created.

The close affinity between religion and politics continued even after 1947. Infact the interplay between religion and politics was further been strengthened by some new factors; the first is the existence of religion based political parties. The number of such parties has increased with the passage of time. Such political parties make use of religion for political ends. These do not subscribe to secular form of politics. Hindu Maha Sabha, Ram Rajya Parishad, Jana Sangh (later BJP) have all sought to mobilize political support by involving the religious sentiments of Hindus. Similarly Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh which was founded in 1925

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

by Dr. K.B. Hedgewar has become a major political factor in the Hindi speaking Northern states of India.

While ostensibly confining its activities to cultural spheres, the RSS operates at the political level through its various front organizations such as the Bhartiya Janata Party, Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh and Akhil Bhartiya Vidhyarthi Parishad. In recent years, it has been making use of a much wider front organizations that is the Vishwa Hindu Parishad.¹¹

Similarly the Indian Union Muslim League, Jamaat-e-Islami, the Majlis-e-Ittihad-ul-Muslimeen have like wise exploited the religious sentiments of the Muslims. These parties have taken on themselves the responsibility of protecting and defending the Muslim community from the alleged tyranny of the Hindu Majority. These parties have often opposed the secular measures by invoking imaginary fears in the minds of Indian Muslims, who have some apprehension of Hindu dominance.

The Akali Dal which is an organization of the Sikhs has always taken the position that religion and politics are inseparable. It has become a part of Sikh ethos and Sikh psyche that religion is not safe unless it is defended by the political might of the State power. It has always stood for a Panthic "government i.e. government that serves the Sikh faction". Pre-eminence of Khalsa is one of its avowed goals.¹²

The other political parties who at the regional as well as at national level maintain apparently secular posture and do not publicly justify the use of religion for political purposes are very few. At least in theory, these vehemently oppose the use of religion to achieve political goals and consider religion as a private affair of the individuals and do not approve of its intervention in public affairs. The Indian National Congress and its various splinter groups, the CPI, the CPI (M) and the Janata Party all advocate and emphasize the delinking of religion with politics. However compulsions of electoral arithmetic often compel these parties to compromise their principles and make use of religious symbols and slogan in their political battles.

¹¹ Roy, Ajit, "RSS and Its Cultural Ideological Roots" in Moin Shakir (ed.) *Op. cit.*, p. 57.

¹² Sharma, T.R., *Op. cit.*, p. 52.

While nominating candidates for elections to the national Parliament, State Legislatures and even local bodies, all these political parties are forced to reckon the demographic spread of the electorate in terms of religion. Thus in a predominantly Muslim constituency these parties look for a candidate belonging to the Muslim community. In Sikh or Hindu dominated constituency Parties likewise look for a candidate belonging to the dominant religious community in that constituency. Similarly in their election campaigns Parties liberally make use of religious slogans and symbols and make highly emotive appeals to religion in their public speeches on the eve of election in their door to door election campaign.¹³

Since Independence the interface between religion and politics has acquired a still newer form and various political parties found it more convenient to mobilize support in their electoral battles with the help of religious factors.

If we look back we observe that during the first three decades of post-independent India, social division on communal bases were contained because religion based parties had a marginal presence in the politics of India. The post-partition period except for the immediate aftermath was marked by the absence of major communal riots. There was communal peace during 1950-60 because in the aftermath of the partition, Hindu communal forces were kept in check by the national leadership, even as the partition had left Indian Muslims weak and leaderless. Moreover an accommodation was worked out between the Muslim and the Congress that certain symbols of Muslim culture would be protected. Besides, constitutional guarantees were also given to all minority religious groups. The three central symbols of Muslim Identity were Indian Muslim- Muslim Personal Law, a proper status for Urdu and the Aligarh Muslim University.¹⁴

However from 1964 onwards there was an upward trend in communal riots in India. The 1960's was the worst decade when large number of riots were triggered off during the period 1965-67, outbursts of violence recorded were 515 in which Muslims had suffered at the hands of rampaging communal mobs headed by RSS volunteers.

Muslims broke away from the Congress during the Emergency (1975-77)

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁴ Chander, Prakash, *Coalition Politics in India*, New Delhi, Anmol Publication, 2000, p. 7.

over the issue of forced family planning drive. Their votes were decisively splitted than ever before. During this period the RSS and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad stepped up the other issues, such as the scrapping of special constitutional provision for Jammu and Kashmir; the scrapping of Muslim Personal law; the point that Muslims bred faster and would overtake the Hindu population in India and Muslims were the source of riots and so on.

During Emergency large number of RSS activists were arrested and sent to Jail. When Janata Party came to power in 1977, the RSS as well as Bhartiya Jana Sangh became part of the ruling coalition. It was the first instance when they became part of a national ruling coalition. After the 1980 General Elections success the Congress made positive attempts to win over this powerful Hindu political factor.

The 1980's experienced not only the growth of social divisions on religious basis but it also witnessed the emergence of religion based politics as a central factor in elections and public affairs. Thus the Indian States had to grapple with the new form of religion based politics to safeguard democracy and secularism.¹⁵

During this phase the religion based parties had evolved new strategies and organizational structure to promote their political goals. The 1980's witnessed the emergence of a new communalism which was militant and aggressive in nature.

On April 5, 1980 the ex-Jana Sangh inaugurated a new political party, the Bhartiya Janata Party, which saw itself as the Janata Party's heir. For its then President Atal Bihari Vajpayee it was imperative above all to avoid any comparison with the Jana Sangh, which had been condemned to an existence on the very fringes of mainstream politics. In this spirit the BJP welcomed Janata Party leaders who had no previous association with Hindu Nationalism like Ram Jeth Malani, Shanti Bhushan and Morarji Desai.¹⁶

In order to remain the whole sole entity at the national level the BJP's interest collided with the Hindu Nationalist culture of the RSS on which it continued to be heavily dependent. The party did well in the Assemblies Elections

¹⁵ Bhambhri, C.P., *Politics in India 1992-93*, New Delhi, Shipra Publication, 1993, p. 51.

¹⁶ Jaffrelot, Christophe, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement and Indian Politics, 1925-1990s*, New Delhi, Viking, 1996, p. 315.

of 1980 where the RSS network was fairly strong and where the Jana Sangh had a good support, but the party suffered heavily in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The BJP suffered its worst ever defeat in the 1984 General Elections where it won just two seats. Its debacle in the Election led BJP to drift towards Hindu Nationalism. As a result agitational Politics was emphasized, electoral strategies professionalized and public relation functions were upgraded, because it was necessary for the majoritarian democracy.¹⁷ There was no looking back for the BJP thereafter. The main reason for its success was the adoption of ethno-religious mobilization strategy. These strategies helped BJP in capturing the power.

The VHP's first step towards ideological devotionism was in November 1983, the Ekatmata Yatra (Pilgrimage of one soulness). The Yatra marked a shift in the Hindu nationalist strategy of ethno-religious mobilization. Till then the only symbol that had been manipulated for political purposes was the cow. The Ekatmata Yatra introduced a new ideological devotionism: its formal appearance as well as its name were intended to present it as a religious pilgrimage or procession. Its deities- Ganga and Bharat Mata were expected to arouse religious veneration. The two idols were installed on a Rath, which enabled devotees to worship them and honour them with offerings.

The Yatra was marked by three processions journeying from Kathmandu in Nepal to Rameshwaram in Tamil Nadu, from Gangasagar in Bengal to Somnath in Gujarat and from Haridwar in Uttar Khand to Kanya Kumari in Tamil Nadu. It was joined by 69 other columns setting off from starting points in the interior distributed water from the Ganges and refilled their tanks with holy water either at temples on the way or from other sacred rivers enroute. This mingling was intended to symbolize Hindu Unity.¹⁸ The Ekatmata Yatra was a big success. The receptivity of the people the procession encountered was probably due to religious sentiment as well as to the emergence of a Hindu feeling of vulnerability and its correlative reactions. The Yatra was without the co-operation of any political party it was none the less part and parcel of the effort to construct a 'Hindu vote' which could pressurise the government of whatever hue, to defend the interest of the

¹⁷ Organizer, February 1985, p. 1.

¹⁸ Jaffrelot, Christophe, *Op. cit.*, p. 360.

majority community. This aim became clearer by the movement initiated in 1984, to bring about the return to the Hindus of Ramjanambhoomi, the birthplace of Lord Ram at Ayodhya.¹⁹

The revival of the Ayodhya issue by the Sangh Parivar changed the very course of Indian politics. Since 1950 the issue of Ayodhya was not in the limelight of Indian political system, but the arch light was felt when in 1984 the first Dharam Sansad unanimously adopted a resolution demanding the liberation of the site of Ayodhya. In May-June (1984) the VHP formed a militant wing, the Bajrang Dal under the leadership of Vinay katiyar. The Organization spread throughout Uttar Pradesh. Its members were taught how to be bold'. As storm troopers the Bajrang Dal was at first used by the VHP on the pretext of liberating the Ram Temple.

Sri Ramjanambhoomi Mukti Yagna Samiti was founded on July 27, 1984 under the leadership of the Mahant Avidyanath. On September 25, 1984, it launched a procession which set off from Sitamarhi in Bihar with the mission of liberating the temple of Ayodhya. The procession was marked by the Hindu Nationalist slogans. Saints and Sadhus from all parts of the country came to take part in the Liberation Movement. Mahant Avidyanath preached that the people should vote only to those parties which explicitly promised to give the Hindus their sacred places back.²⁰

In 1983, Gulzari Lal Nanda founded the Sri Ram Janmotsav Samiti (Society for celebrating Ram's Birthday) and brought many Hindu organizations including the RSS under one roof. In 1984 on the occasion of Ram Navami along with VHP, he demanded the return of Ram's birthplace to the Hindus at a ceremony in which Karan Singh, Dau Dayal Khanna and Ashok Singhal were present.

However this liberation movement got suspended due to the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi. In the 1980's the most important factor responsible for the communization of Indian Polity was the Punjab Problem. It was with the purpose of ousting the Akalis as being the protector of Sikh interests that the erstwhile Chief Minister of Punjab Giani Zail Singh with the encouragement of Mrs. Gandhi

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

²⁰ *India Today*, October 31, 1984, p. 70-71.

and her younger son Sanjay Gandhi, promoted a little known Sikh Priest called Sant Bhindranwale to challenge the Akali leadership. Through Bhindranwale the capture of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee (SPGC) was attempted. Even though that attempt failed, Bhindranwale emerged as a fundamentalist factor in Sikh Politics.²¹

He attacked not only the peace and prosperity of Punjab, the amity of Punjab's two communities, Hindu and the Sikhs and to the nations secular fabric but also threw a challenge to the traditional Akali leadership headed by Harcharan Singh Longawal. The extremist threatened not only Hindu innocent common folk who crossed Bhindranwales trait but also Sikhs in the administration who did not serve the purpose of Bhindrawale.²² The Akali agitation had, by this time been usurped by Bhindranwale and his followers especially as the centre and Akali leadership could not come to any agreement about the Akali demand.

June 5, 1984, was the black day in the history of Indian Republic, the Indian Army had to go in for a military operation to deal with political extremist entrenched in a place of religious worship. The operation 'Blue Star' was designed to smash communal extremism. This widened the base of Sikh fundamentalism and terrorism. For fairly a long period the followers of the Bhindranwale indulged in selective killings not only of politically important people such as Sant longawal and others, but also of innocent Hindus who were shot in buses on the streets and so on. The purpose was to start a communal conflict. Gradually Hindus began to organize in towns where they had a substantial majority. The Hindu Shiv Sena was formed and it exhibited some retaliatory force in places such as Hoshiarpur in Punjab.²³

The aftermath of the army action in the Golden Temple (Amritsar) complex was that the whole Sikh community was marked by deep emotional overtones which ultimately resulted in the form of assassination of Mrs. Gandhi on October 31, 1984 by her Sikh body guard. Its reaction in Delhi and other parts of the country was lynching and burning of Sikhs on that day- Gurudwaras in Delhi went up in flames, shops belonging to Sikhs were robbed and burnt, their homes looted.

²¹ Chander, Prakash, *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

²² *Economic and Political Weekly*, July 13, 1985, p. 1187.

²³ Chander, Prakash, *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

Some Congress leaders such as Jagdish Tytler, Ajit Panja, Bhagat Singh and Sajjan Kumar etc were alleged to have played a role in inciting and arousing communal patience of the rioter.²⁴

After the post assassination riots Sikhs from Delhi and other States started shifting to Punjab. This forced migration of Hindus from Punjab to Delhi and Haryana. The anti-Sikh riots widened the gulf between, the Hindu and the Sikh community and this ultimately poisoned the political scenario of the country with the religion being used as an instrument instigating the public for political interest. Political Hinduism had almost become synonymous with the Indian nationalism. The elections of 1984-85 were implicitly fought from this ideological platform by the Congress.

During mid-eighties the increased reliance on communitarian symbols helped to draw religious categories into the political areas. The most dramatic event in this competitive process was the central government decision to allow the Hindu worship inside the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya. This accelerated the mass mobilization organized by the Bhartiya Janata Party, Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh and Vishwa Hindu Parishad as part of the effort to change the political discourse and control the state in the name of Hindutva.²⁵

The BJP filled the political vacuum that was created by the decline of the Congress by providing a Hindu Nationalist alternative against the Congress. Its climb to national power was facilitated by the Ramjanambhoomi campaign.

The Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid was put to archlight in order to draw the attention of the people from Shah Bano case. The Supreme Court Judgment of April, 1985 was seemed to criticise Islamic Law and Quranic concepts in granting maintenance rights to Shah Bano (a 69 years old Muslim woman was divorced by her husband after 43 years of marriage). Muslims everywhere considered this judgment as an assault on the Shariat which in their opinion, makes no such provision in the event of a divorce. The Muslim community took to the streets to register their protest and accused the Supreme Court of sacrilegious trespass.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Chandra, Kanchan and Parmar, Chandrika, "Party Strategies in Uttar Pradesh Assembly Election", *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 1, 1997, p. 215

This forced Rajiv Gandhi government to introduce Muslim Women Protection of Right on Divorce Bill in May 1986. This was done in order to stem the rising tide of anger over the Shah Bano verdict which was losing the Congress party its Muslim votes. The electoral defeats of the Congress after the momentous Supreme Court Judgment were sharp reminders of this. The Muslim vote tipped the balance in favour of the opposition parties.

The victory tasted over the Shah Bano issue encouraged Muslim reaction in several different ways. In January 1987, Syed Shahabuddin editor of 'Muslim India', and a member of Parliament called upon Muslims to stay away from the Republic Day celebrations on January 26. This was followed by a call for an all India strike on February 1, 1987 the first anniversary of the day when by an order of the District Magistrate, the gates of Babri Masjid were thrown open for Hindus to offer worship in the Mosques inner sanctum.

During 1989 General Election campaign Rajiv Gandhi the then Prime Minister of India made communal appeal to win Hindu votes. He started his electoral campaign of 1989 in Faizabad the constituency in which the town of Ayodhya is located with the promise of creating a Ram Rajya, using language in several ways resembling to that of BJP. However this strategy of the Congress failed and in 1989 Congress was voted out of power.

Janata Dal government with the support of BJP and the Left parties was formed at the centre. The future of the National Front coalition was shadowed with the V.P. Singh's announcement in September 1990 that his government intended to implement the Mandal Commission's recommendation of 27 percent reservation of educational seats and government jobs for the OBC communities. The Sangh Parivar and the BJP criticized this report because they feared that a flat rejection of the Mandal formula would endanger the party's protracted drive to attract support from lower caste groups. Later BJP withdrew its support from the National Front Government.

To counter the Reservation policy of V. P. Singh for the sake of political benefits, the BJP under the leadership of L.K. Advani organized a Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya. But L.K. Advani on way to Ayodhya was arrested in Bihar on behest of Laloo Prasad Yadav, the then Chief Minister of Janata Dal

government. In protest the BJP withdrew its support to Janata Dal government at the centre to which it was a partner and thus V.P. Singh's government collapsed.

The BJP began to touch new heights, especially in the Hindi heartland in 1990 when L.K. Advani took out Rath Yatra for arousing mass hysteria among the Hindus. The promulgation of the implementation of Mandal Commission report had created great enthusiasm among the lower caste Hindus and they were going to lend massive support to V.P. Singh's Janata Dal but the BJP wanted to win over these low caste Hindus. The BJP had no economic or welfare programmes for them which V.P. Singh had. So it played the Mandir card in order to consolidate its base among Hindus.

L.K. Advani's Ram Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya was a huge success. He became an instant hero and wherever he went during his Rath Yatra, he attracted large number of people. And not only Advani but also other leaders like Sadhvi Rithambara and Uma Bharti also became star attraction as they spewed poison against Muslims. They projected Muslim as the pampered minority and responsible for keeping the Congress in power.

The BJP fought the 1991 General Election unrestrainedly on the theme of Hindutva. The 1991 Election campaign was marked by an unprecedentedly sharp and communal tone, and on numerous occasions election rallies sparked off communal violence that sometimes escalated into full-scale riots. In between these political upheavals the then Congress President Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated by LTTE militants in Tamil Nadu. Due to his assassination Congress succeeded in extracting a considerable "sympathy effect" (Congress (I) government was formed with P.V. Narasimha Rao as the Prime Minister), but could not prevent the BJP from emerging as the second largest party in the country with 119 seat in the Lok Sabha.²⁶

The BJP was also able to win a majority in the simultaneous State Legislative Assembly Elections in Uttar Pradesh. After a thoroughly communalized election campaign that had divided the electorate deeply along community and caste lines. Once in office, the BJP government became entangled

²⁶ Hansen, Thomas Blom, *The Saffron wave Democracy and Hindu Nationalism in Modern India*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1999, p. 166.

in the web of legal and bureaucratic intricacies that the issue had produced, and faced the prospect of dismissal if the court had ordered directing a stay on any construction activity at the site were violated.²⁷

In June-July 1992, the RSS embarked on an intensive campaign for Kar Seva and temple construction. However, the Kar Seva proved disappointing to the RSS and the VHP both in size and nerve, and the RSS opted instead for a settlement with the central government that was carried out directly between VHP sadhus and the Prime Minister. For three months the BJP kept a very low profile on the entire Ayodhya issue and passed no resolutions.²⁸ But after three month, six thousand Sants and Sadhus were gathered by VHP in Delhi Dharma Sansad, to discuss the Ayodhya problem. December 6, 1992 was fixed for Kar Seva. The symbolic Kar Seva was allowed by the central government. Thousands of para military troops were sent to prevent the Kar Sevaks from physically attacking the Babri Masjid. On December 6, 1992 more than 200,000 people had assembled, ready to perform Kar Seva.

In the afternoon of December 6, 1992 the Babri Masjid was demolished by Kar Sevaks. Throughout the afternoon the important members of Sangh Parivar shouted slogans from the stage and encouraged the massive congregation of Kar Sevaks to go on with the demolition.

The BJP cabinet in Uttar Pradesh resigned on the same afternoon, and in the evening para military troops started to clear the area. L.K. Advani resigned as leader of the opposition in the Lok Sabha in response to what was widely seen as his public humiliation. Large- scale riots broke out in protest in cities all over India. On December 8, L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi, Ashok Singhal and several other VHP leaders were arrested. On December 11, the RSS, VHP and the Bajrang Dal were banned. Less than a week later the BJP run State governments in Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan were dismissed on the grounds that they were unable to maintain law and order and prevent riots from raging. The demolition of the Masjid led to the political banishment of the Congress at the centre as well as in Uttar Pradesh.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 182

In the 1996 General Elections the Congress party was badly routed out. The Ayodhya issue swayed the Muslim votes from the Congress to other political parties. In this election the BJP emerged for the first time as the largest political party in India. The BJP's systematic use of communal rhetoric had antagonized both Congress and the Left political forces to the extent that no coalition was possible. The United Front coalition came to power with the support of Left, the Congress and other regional parties. Its life was short, in that course only, the country had the experience of two Prime Minister (I.K. Gujaral and H. D. Deva Gowda). It was a different matter that no party was in position to form the government in 1996, 1998 or 1999 on its own.

The BJP worked harder in 1998 and succeeded in putting together a 24 party coalition named as the National Democratic Alliance. Atal Bihari Vajpayee formed government on March 19, 1998 but his government again fell just being short of vote in April 1999 because one of the allies pulled out of coalition (Jayalalitha AIADMK).

In the 1999 General Elections Atal Bihari Vajpayee captured the mantle of power at the centre under the coalition of National Democratic Alliance. BJP and its allied Parties had won 301 seats. Major coalition partners of BJP were Shiv Sena (15), JDU (21), TDP (27), Trinmool Congress (8), BJD (10), Lok Dal (5). Whereas Congress had bagged 138 seats. Its major allied partners were RJD (7), AIADMK(10). Other Parties bagged 104 seats. On October 13, 1999, 70 member Vajpayee government was sworn in. Being in coalition the BJP had to compromise on most of the issues that had been at the heart of its campaigns for more than a decade; the imposition of uniform civil code, the scrapping of Kashmir's special constitutional status, the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya and so on.

In spite of all these compromises, the VHP mounted pressure on Vajpayee government to handover 67 acres of undisputed acquired land to it for construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya with March 12, 2002 as deadline. BJP warned that if VHP refused to abide by the judicial verdict on Ayodhya it would have to face legal consequences. On February 18, 2002 L.K. Advani the then Home Minister said that the court verdict on Ayodhya would be final. In retaliation the VHP warned of Hindu backlash against those opposing proposed Ram temple

construction at Ayodhya.

During those upheavals 58 people were killed and 43 injured on February 28, 2002, when a coach of Faizabad-Ahmadabad Sabarmati Express carrying Ram Sevaks was allegedly set on fire by a group of people on the outskirts of Godhra railway station in Gujarat. Immediately, several cities and towns of Gujarat State were in flames. The most unfortunate part of this riots was that the whole State government machinery blindly supported the rioters emotionally, politically and administratively.²⁹

The Godhra riots proved too costly to the BJP when the party was dismantled out of power at the centre during 2004 General Elections. The party leaders were profusely apologetic over the Gujarat riots but the then Prime Minister topped it off with the offer to recruit two lakh Urdu teachers and allotted Rs. 74 crore for modernizing Madarsas. This was a long journey for a political party that coined the word pseudo-Secularism and flayed minority appeasement.³⁰

Critics argued that nothing had changed and that it was a tactical shift designed to win elections. According to them the VHP and Bajrang Dal were the true faces of the party all of whom were run by the shadowy R.S.S. Events like demolition of the Babri Masjid, its resultant riots and the Muslim massacres in Gujarat were too close and compelling to be ignored.³¹

In the 2004 General Elections the Congress and its allies bagged 216 seats whereas the BJP and its allies mustered 187 seats. The support of 61 members of the Leftist Parties brought Congress to the desirable majority. The Congress Party with the help of its coalition partners formed National Progressive Alliance.

After the 2004 General Elections it was observed that the Hindutva ideology was thoroughly discredited and no amount of efforts could revive it. The people felt cheated by the promises made by the Sangh Parivar and the BJP regarding the construction of Ram Temple at Ayodhya. According to L.K. Advani “the passions have a tendency of subsiding they cannot be sustained for too long a period, for not only do they harm the country, they harm the party as well” (L.K.

²⁹ *The Hindu*, New Delhi, March 7, 2002.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

Advani's admission that the BJP was diluting its ideology).

According to L.K. Advani "a country as vast and pluralistic as India, can not be ruled only by an ideological party. Advani went on saying that "if aspire to become a ruling party in India, we cannot be limited as an ideological party. To rule India, we have to be inclusive".³²

After it's debacle in the 2004 General Elections the BJP once again tried to catapult the electorates with its "aggressive Hindutva" Platform. But the people had rejected the party's new emphasis on a return to sectarianism. The people had rebuff the BJP's charge of "minority appeasement" be it the Sachar Report or the India- Pakistan peace process or the demand for deployment of security forces in Jammu and Kashmir.

(b) The Role of Religion in Indian Politics

The relation between religion and politics goes far back into the history of mankind. Religious symbols, ideas and institutions have been used by the ruling classes in order to perpetuate their control over political system. The subordinate classes on their part have been inspired by religious teachings and messages to revolt against injustice and oppression. Thus, the connection between religion and politics runs deep³³.

No part of Indian life is without the presence of religion. This has given rise to the feelings of communalism. In politics religion is used to mobilize all sections and classes of a religious community for achieving political and economic goals. It is a modern phenomenon which took root half way through the British colonial presence in India in the second half of the nineteenth century.³⁴

Communalism has been an integral part of Indian politics ever since the British introduced the principle of electoral representation in public institutions. Since then religion and communal identities have been exploited and encouraged for electoral purposes. Communalism was deeply rooted in Indian polity during the

³² *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, May 11, 2004.

³³ Basu Partha Pratim, "Religious Cleavage, Politics and Communalism in India" in Rakhahari Chatterjee (ed), *Politics India: The State-Society Interface*, New Delhi, South Asian Publishers, 2001, p. 259.

³⁴ Mukherjee, Aditya., "Colonialism and Communalism" in Sarvepalli Gopal (ed.), *Anatomy of a Confrontation, The Babri Masjid-Ram Janambhoomi Issue*, New Delhi, Viking, 1991, p. 165.

later phase of the National Movement. Unfortunately the history of Indian National Movement is also a history of communalization of Indian society.³⁵

The emergence of anti-imperial consciousness in India was much linked to religious revivalism. In order to arouse anti-British feelings among the masses the militant leader's of the Congress like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Aurobindo Ghosh and Lala Lajpat Rai etc. used religious platforms and festivals like Kali Pooja, Ganesh festival and cow protection societies etc.

When Mahatma Gandhi took over as leader of the Nationalist Movement he had realized that to counter the powerful British Rule, mass mobilization and a sense of unity was required among people from various communities and sects. He therefore attempted to develop amity and harmony among various religious communities, particularly between Hindus and the Muslims. However he never attempted to develop a secular image of the Congress or the movement on scientific basis. Though he had tried to create communal harmony on the basis of equal respect to all religions but he had never realized that his own utterances, actions and use of vocabulary like "Ram Rajya" and cow protection could be misinterpreted by the elites and people from other religions.³⁶

The political parties which were reorganized having communal ideologies had centered their programmes around communal goals. During the pre-independence period the Muslim League was having Islamic State as its goal and the Hindu Maha Sabha had stood for a Hindu Rashtra. Both parties had explicit religious and communal goals. On the basis of these religiously defined goals both mobilized their supporters.³⁷

V.D. Savarkar a Hindu fundamentalist had worked with the objective to unify and revitalise the Hindu community and to establish India as a Hindu Rashtra. He had pleaded for a strong Hindu Nation based on the principles of Hindutva and a non-discriminatory Nation state based on the principle of one person, one vote. Those were obviously intended to further the cause of a Hindu

³⁵ Panikkar, K.N. (ed.), *Communalism in India History Politics and Culture*, New Delhi, Manohar Publications 1991, p. 7.

³⁶ Narang, A.S., *Indian Government and Politics*, New Delhi, Gitanjali Publishing House, 2005, p. 529.

³⁷ Panikkar, K.N., *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

state in India. The emphasis on the Hindu Militarization Movement was based on the language of hatred and violence directed against an imagined Muslim theocratic community. Savarkar's slogan of "Hinduize all politics and militarize Hindudom" exposed the myth of Hindu non tolerance of other religious communities.³⁸

Infact the history of Hindu communal mobilization could be traced back to the pre-independence days. The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS), the premier Hindu organization founded in 1925, was outwardly a cultural outfit engaged in disseminating the Hindu culture. But its concept of Hindu nationhood exhibited an explicit anti-Muslim slant. It also called for the establishment of a Hindu State as well as the militarization of the Hindus to achieve this goal. Similarly the Hindu Maha Sabha represented the forces of Hindu revivalism in the political domain. It raised the slogan of 'Akhand Hindustan' against the Muslim League's demand of separate electorates for Muslims.³⁹

Since the National Movement had to mobilize the support of all classes and communities against foreign domination, the leaders of different communities could not press for principle of secularism firmly for the fear of losing the support of religious minded and obscurantist groups. This was the major cause that led to the partition of India. During 1940s Mohammad Ali Jinnah (Muslim League) had led a powerful Movement, which was intended to advance the interests of Muslims after the withdrawal of the colonial power from the sub-continent. The idea of Pakistan which came from the Muslim League platform in 1940 at Lahore session had actually been conceived ten years ago by Mohammad Iqbal in 1930. At League's annual conference at Allahabad, Mohd. Iqbal had expressed his dreams of a consolidated North-west Indian Muslim State. It then came from Rahmat Ali, a Cambridge student, in a more precise and forceful way. Neither Mr. Jinnah nor Mr. Zafrullah Khan then had considered it practicable. However, on March 23, 1940, the Muslim League passed a resolution at its Lahore session. The text of the resolution ran as under: "Resolved that it is the concerted view of this session of

³⁸ Patnaik, Arun and Chalam, K.S.R.V.S., "The Ideology and Politics of Hindutva" in T.V. Sathyamurthy (ed.) *Region Religion Caste Gender and Culture in Contemporary India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998, vol. 3, p. 266.

³⁹ Basu, Partha P., *Op. cit.*, p. 265.

the all India Muslim League that no constitutional scheme would be workable in this country or acceptable to Muslims unless it is designed on the following basic principles, viz. that geographically contiguous units are demarcated into regions which should be constituted with such territorial readjustments as may be necessary, that the area in which the Muslims are numerically in majority should be grouped to constitute Independent State". The League resolved that the British government before leaving India must effect the partition of the country into Indian union and Pakistan. The basis of League's demand was its "Two Nation Theory" which first came from Sir Wazir Hasan in his presidential address at Bombay session of League in 1937. He said, "the Hindus and Mussalmans inhabiting this vast continent are not two communities but should be considered two nations in many respects".⁴⁰

The period preceding the formation of Pakistan witnessed some of the most gruesome and violent Hindu-Muslim riots, which hastened the division of India. The Muslim League leaders and the bulk of the wealthy and influential Muslims went across to Pakistan. Those who stayed back were either committed to Indian nationalism and secularism and were consequently prepared to adjust to the changed circumstances or were too poor and weak to be embroiled in any kind of politics at all. After partition, the Congress under Jawaharlal Nehru distanced itself from Hindu organizations and the new constitution provided for the freedom of religion as well as protection of all minorities.⁴¹

The primary task before the Indian leadership was therefore to contain Hindu communal aggression and channelize it into nation building activity. At this stage Muslim sectarianism or communalism was not perceived by it as a significant challenge.

Keeping in view the importance of religion, the framers of the Indian constitution had opted India to have a Secular and Democratic Structure. Jawaharlal Nehru in this regard had objected strongly any efforts to perpetuate "a complete structure of society..... by giving it religious sanction and authority". He wanted that Indian constitution should "protect all religions, but does not

⁴⁰ Agarwal, R.C., *Constitutional Development and National Movement of India*, New Delhi, S Chand and Company Ltd., 1997, p. 169.

⁴¹ Chander, Prakash, *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

favour one at the expense of others and does not itself adopt any religion as the state religion” He believed that “religion is all right when applied to ethics and morals but it is not good if mixed up with politics.”⁴²

There was originally no specific provision in the constitution which would declare India as a secular state. The forty second amendment Act, 1976 had added in the preamble the word ‘Secular’ and since then it is read: “we the people of India, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic and to secure to all its citizens: Justice, social, economic and political; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, Equality of status and opportunity; and to promote among them all. Fraternity, assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation.

The word Secularism carries a specific meaning in the Indian context which differs from the sense in which it is commonly used in the west at the conceptual level and also in practice. According to Jawaharlal Nehru “Secularism does not obviously mean a State where religion as such is discouraged. It means freedom of religion and conscience; including freedom for those who may have no religion. It means free play for all religions, subject to their not interfering with each other or with the basic conception of State. It means that the minority communities from religious point of view should accept this position. It means even more, that the majority community from this point of view should fully realize it. By virtue of numbers as well as in other ways, it is the dominant community and it is its responsibility not to use its position in any way which might prejudice secular ideal”⁴³

The state is permitted to make laws regulating or restricting any activity that may be associated with religious practice related to social welfare and social reform. Article 26 similarly guarantees religious denominations and their section a right, subject to public order, morality and health, “to establish and maintain religious and charitable institutions, to manage their religious affairs, to own and to acquire property and to administer it according to law”. Article 27, prohibits the state from compelling any person” to pay taxes, the proceeds of which are

⁴² Kapur, A.C., *Select Constitution*, New Delhi, S. Chand and Company Ltd. 1997, Part-II Government of the Indian Republic, p. 65.

⁴³ Gopal, *Jawahar Lal Nehru, An Anthology*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1983, p. 327.

specifically appropriated in payment of expenses for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religious denomination.

The interests of Minorities are also protected (Article 29 clause 1) in order to dismantle the structure of social discrimination. The minorities have right to conserve their language, script and culture. No citizens can be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the State or receiving aid out of State funds on grounds of religion, caste language or any of them (clause 2). They have their right to establish and administer educational institutions and the State cannot discriminate against any of them in granting aid on the ground that it is under the management of a minority, whether based on religion or language (Article 30 clause 1 and 2).

India is a secular State and the State does not recognize any religion as official. However, in practice the Indian State does not dissociate itself from religion. It recognizes all religions and their social practices. The Indian State not only regulates the places of worship it also patronises some places of worship. All important temples of India from Tirupati to Vaishno Devi have management boards with government functionaries working in co-operation with the Temple priests. Ministers and Chief Ministers openly identify themselves with places worship by becoming Chairman or Presidents of the management board of these institutions. State government have frequently exercised their power to take over the management of places of worship and to reconstitute or dismiss their management board.⁴⁴

The politicians openly identify themselves with places of worship for electoral gains. After Independence when the then President of India Rajendra Prasad wanted to attend the consecration ceremony of the Somnath temple the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had advised him not to associate himself with the activities of the temple. In 1950s Rajendra Prasad had also participated in the holy bath at the Kumbh Mela in Allahabad. Since the State administration was busy in making arrangements for the President's holy bath, lakhs of devotees who had gathered at Allahabad could not be regulated which resulted in stampede at the

⁴⁴ Bhambhri, C.P., *Op. cit.*, p. 24.

mela site and death of many people.⁴⁵

After Independence, the first major Political Party to develop on the Hindutva lines was the Jana Sangh founded in 1951. It grew out of an estrangement between the RSS and the Hindu Maha Sabha (1907). The objective of the Jana Sangh was the rebuilding of India as modern democratic society, while removing foreign cultural influences as much as possible. The Jana Sangh had adopted policies that were symbolically important to its Hindu constituency advocacy of Hindi language and Ayurvedic medicine, protection of the cow. "Four fundamentals" guided the party one country, one nation, one culture and the rule of law. The Jana Sangh was regionally concentrated in the Hindu heartland of North India. It had participated in coalition governments in five States between 1967-71. It was also the part of the Janata Party in 1977 and 1980 General Elections.⁴⁶

Muslim communal organization, after independence chose to maintain a low profile, the Muslim League was disbanded and till 1962, Muslims in general had voted for the Congress. The religious political leadership within the community continued to attach importance to the question of safeguarding the Shariat (Muslim Personal Law), but they were equally concerned to come to terms with India's secular and democratic regime. Support for the Congress rested on the conviction that it alone could provide a stable democratic government and ensure the prosperity and progress of all citizens without any distinction of caste and creed.⁴⁷

But this understanding faced a setback in the early 1960s in view of the party's poor performance in containing organized communal violence and its failure to expand educational and promotional avenues for the newly emerging Muslim middle class. It stimulated the revival of the Jamaat-i- Islami in north India, Muslim League in Kerela and the Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen in Hyderabad. A Muslim Majlis-i-Mushawarat was founded in 1964 as a confederation of several Muslim political groups. It took up the issues on behalf of the community and put forth demands like revision of textbooks with "Hindu bias" introduction of

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁴⁶ Sharma, Aditi Dey, "The Party System: National" in Rakhahari Chatterji (ed.), *Politics India: The State-Society Interface*, New Delhi, South Asian Publishers 2001, p. 66.

⁴⁷ Basu, Partha P., *Op. cit.*, p. 262.

proportional representation, protection of Muslim Personal Law, recognition of Urdu as second language in North Indian States and preservation of the minority character of the Aligarh Muslim University.⁴⁸

The distance between the Muslims and the Congress widened further during the Emergency of 1975-76 when there was forced sterilization drive which was particularly directed towards Muslims. Then Jhuggi clearance, slum removal, police firing on Muslims and suspension of civil liberties, which included the banning of Muslim organization such as Jamaat-i-Islami were the core issues.⁴⁹ All these atrocities fuelled the process and the community played a significant part in bringing about Congress's debacle and catapulting the Janata Party to power in the General Elections of 1977. Muslims did not endure with Janata Party for a long period of time and soon they turned to Congress during the 1980's General Elections.

Communalization of Politics during 1980s was the outcome of the policy of appeasement followed by different political parties and the division of the sections of the people on religious lines which had resulted into communal riots. As a result the Congress party shifted its ideological posture i.e. Secularism to court the votes of the Hindu chauvinism and the notion that India's unity was in jeopardy.⁵⁰ The ascendancy of the Congress during 1980s was largely attributed to the growing importance of religion in Indian politics. During the first six weeks after Indira Gandhi had returned to power, she had visited dozens of temples situated all over India. In 1983, she had attended the inauguration of Satyamitranand Giri's Bharat Mata Mandir and took part in the ceremonies marking the centenary of the Arya Samaj.⁵¹

The resurrection of Hindu communal activities, extended periods of bloody Hindu-Muslim rioting. A growing feeling among urban based Muslim professionals and service classes was that their economic and educational interests had been systematically neglected by successive Congress governments. The

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

⁴⁹ Hasan, Mushirul., "The Changing Position of the Muslims and the Political Future of Secularism in India", in T.V. Sathyamurthy (ed.), *Op. cit.*, p. 222.

⁵⁰ Mehra, Ajay K., Khanna, D.D., Kueck, Gert W. (eds), *Political Parties and Party Systems*, New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2003. p. 33.

⁵¹ Jaffrelot, Christophe, *Op. cit.*, p. 330.

Hindu tinge in Congress electoral strategies after Indira Gandhi's come back in 1980 also fomented a sense of alienation among a large sections of Muslims. This set the stage for Muslim organization to explore alternate means for channelising their discontent. This process culminated in the consolidation of an extremist-communal ideology within the community.

The consolidation of an extremist communal ideology within the Muslim community led the Hindu communal strategist to consolidate its base in India.

As a result the 1980-84 phase saw a diversification in the activities of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh. Not only was the Vishwa Hindu Parishad strengthened and its activities widened, the VHP was treated as a mass front by the RSS so that those Hindu who hesitated to identify themselves with the RSS could also join in the spreading of the Hindu political message. The regions where the RSS was not looked upon with favour, other organizations were floated, for instance the Hindu Front in Tamil Nadu.

Another important political development of 1980s was the transformation of the Jana Sangh into the Bhartiya Janata Party. The dual membership of the Janata Party and the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) issue caused split in the Janata Party the break away group with RSS link was named as BJP. The political mantle of the Bhartiya Jana Sangh which was inherited by the BJP had rapidly augmented its parliamentary strength from 02 seats in 1984 to 118 in 1991. It captured power at the centre in the 1998-1999 General Elections under the banner of National Democratic Alliance.

The arrival of the BJP at the centre took place mainly due to two reasons: The organizational decline of the Congress and the disintegration of the socialist bloc. The Congress had begun to flirt with Muslim and Hindu fundamentalists in the 1980s on the Muslim Personal Law and the Babri Masjid issues. In the process, it lost the credentials as a secular party. Mandal Commission Report destroyed the caste coalition which the Congress had inherited from the days of the freedom movement.

Besides the creation of Bhartiya Janata Party another important religious upheavals of 1980s was the conversion of scheduled caste Hindus to Islam in

Meenakshipuram (Tamil Nadu) in January 1981, that shocked the Hindu communalists mind. Shankaracharyas and other religious leaders protested against it. Hindu Sammelans were organized to face this new threat from Islamic fundamentalism. Counter conversions were also arranged in Rajasthan and other places in North India within short span of time. The Meenakshipuram conversion gave political Hinduism a popular tool to attack Muslims and the Christian Missionaries and indeed all minorities alike. The VHP and other front organizations launched a self-respect movement among Hindus which was symbolized in the form of stickers saying 'I am not ashamed to be a Hindu'. This campaign took deep roots among Hindus.

Political Hinduism became synonymous with Indian Nationalism. The method's of political Hinduism during 1980s was the Ekatmata Yagna and the Ram Janaki Rath Yatra in 1984 sponsored by the VHP and aimed at protecting and preserving India's National integration and demanded restoration of Hindu Temples converted into Mosques by Muslim rulers in the past and clamoured for building a temple at 'Ramjanambhoomi in Ayodhya where a Mosque constructed by Babar stood in place of temple.

Moreover in 1980, the Congress government introduced a bill seeking to revise the constitution of Aligarh Muslim University. The bill created storm amongst the Muslims who regarded its provision as anti-communal. The sole autonomy of the community over the University was threatened by it. The reservation expressed by Muslims infact led the central government to propose within a very short time a second and then third draft bill, which was finally voted into law in 1981, it reaffirmed the university's Muslim identity and accorded it considerable autonomy.⁵²

All those events were primarily responsible for deliberately destroying India's democratic political fabric and resorted to communal idiom of politics by pandering to the Hindu Majority for political gains. The benefits of the activation of Hindu vote bank were later cornered by the BJP in a bigger way.⁵³

The communal monster not only engulfed the Hindus and Muslims but the

⁵² *Ibid.*, 334.

⁵³ Basu, Partha P., *Op. cit.*, p. 271.

Sikh community as well. Punjab Politics had a communal dimensions even before, Independence. The Sikh Gurudwara Reform movement of the 1920s brought into being the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee, a central managing committee for the Punjab Gurudwaras for the control of Sikh shrines and its vast resources, and the Akali Dal, the political movement which piloted the Gurudwara reform campaign and became the principal political organization of Sikhs in Punjab before and after Independence.

Even before Independence, a section of the Sikh leadership demanded a Sikh State within the Indian union in which Sikhs would predominate. After Independence, the Akali leaders called for inclusion of the Sikhs in the general process of the reorganization of the States. The demand was finally conceded by New Delhi in 1966. Yet three issues were left unresolved the status of the capital city i.e. Chandigarh as the joint capital of Punjab and Haryana: the status of some mixed Hindi and Punjabi speaking territory in which Hindus were predominant and division for irrigation purposes of river waters which ran through the territories of both States. This provided the background for the adoption by the Akali Dal of the Anand Sahib Resolution (1973) in which basically secular regional demands were carefully punched with some religious demands of the Sikh community.⁵⁴

When Congress (I) returned to power at the centre in 1980, it sought to upstage the Akalis by playing communal card, i.e. resorted to religious appeals for quick mobilization of political support.

With the purpose of outdoing the Akali as being the protector of Sikh interests, the then Chief Minister of Punjab Giani Zail Singh with the encouragement of central leadership promoted a little known priests Sant Bhindranwale to challenge the Akali leadership. A band of armed bigots assembled around him and carried on criminal activities indiscriminately, while the Congress(I) administration paid no heed to it. In course of time, however Bhindranwale raised the secessionist demand of Punjab from the union of India and creation of a Sikh Sovereign State as Khalistan and directed his onslaught against Hindus in general.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

Ultimately on June 6, 1984 Indian Army stormed the golden Temple (the haven of Bhindranwale brigade). The operation 'Blue star' did cost the loss of lives of both Sikh civilians as well as of Indian soldiers. But more serious was its cost in terms of the embitterment of the entire Sikh population which gave Sikh militancy a new vigor. This entailed the assassination of Mrs. Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards on October 31, 1984 followed by massive anti-Sikh riots in North India. After Indira Gandhi's assassination her son Rajiv Gandhi was sworn in as the Prime Minister of India who in September 1985 reached an accord with the Akali leadership to settle the outstanding issues and bring peace to Punjab, but that accord didn't bring any positive result. Indiscriminate killings by Sikh militants continued unabated despite State machinery efforts to curtail the violence. It was only in the 1990s that the State limped back to normalcy.⁵⁵

By the end of the 1980s the religion had spread its tentacles within the three major Indian communities Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs and stormed the centre stage of Indian Politics. Within this period the growth of communal organizations with militant overtones was also significant. There were about 500 such organizations with an active membership that ran into several millions. The Hindu Manch was activated after the highly publicized conversions to Islam by Harijans in Meenakshipuram at Tamil Nadu in 1981. The Shiv Sena (SS) got activated for the cause of Hindu migrants from Punjab. The Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh considerably strengthened itself by spreading the Shakhshas (branches) in every corner of the country. All these bodies combined with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Virat Hindu Sammelan which were at the apex of several right wing organizations that had emerged as the greatest champion of Hindu communal causes and were the forefronters to launch liberation campaign for Babri Masjid along with other 450 Mosques in North India.⁵⁶

The Shah Bano verdict of 1986 and the decision to open the locks of Babri Masjid at Ayodhya for which Rajiv Gandhi's government was considered responsible gave the Bhartiya Janata Party an immense opportunity to reassert that Indian culture was synonymous with Hindu culture and that non-Hindus could live

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

⁵⁶ Hasan, Mushirul., *Op. cit.*, p. 217.

in India only if they accepted this equation. Those two decisions of Rajiv Gandhi government not only marked a turning point in the history of Hindu-Muslim relations but also accelerated the pace of communal polarization in post-independent India.

Out of the two historic issues i.e. unlocking of the gates of Babri Masjid and the Shah Bano case, Muslims were badly disgruntled with the Congress. The Congress support to Supreme Court decision in the Shah Bano case marked the beginning of linking religion with Politics.

Shah Bano a divorcee from Indore approached the judicial magistrate in 1973 for a maintenance allowance from her former husband and the Magistrate ordered Ahmad Khan, her estranged husband, to pay her the same. Khan challenged the order in the Supreme Court on plea that the Shariat does not require him to pay maintenance beyond the end of the Iddat (three months following the divorce). The Supreme Court did not agree, it upheld the maintenance order under Section 125 of the Indian Penal code. The verdict created much furore and the arch conservative Muslim took to the streets in protest. It was also a victory to the Hindu Nationalists who regarded the Muslim Personal Law as violating national unity and human rights. Muslim conservative organizations especially Jamaat-i-Islami and Jamaat-i-ulema-i- Hind, agitated and fought for their community rights and finally the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi government passed the Muslim Woman's Protection of Rights (on Divorce) act in 1986, amending the constitution to ensure their rights.⁵⁷

The Shah Bano verdict communalized the Political process. The controversy generated by the Muslim Women Bill was criticized as it had highlighted the role of government in permitting the growth of fundamentalist movement, and then making use of it in arousing sentiments among large sections of the people against the so called appeasement of minorities.

It was further criticized that the Congress government had succumbed to the fundamentalist pressures because it was losing its Muslim votes. The Muslim vote bank had tipped the balance in favour of the opposition parties. Important

⁵⁷ Basu, Partha P., *Op. cit.*, p. 263

Congress leaders had advised the Prime Minister against the dangers of a confrontation with the fundamentalists. The decision to bring the Muslim Women Bill was part of the strategy, to reverse the rising tide against the Congress party's effort to woo the Muslims.⁵⁸

No heed was paid towards the progressive opinion raised against the bill and the government refused to withdraw the bill on the dubious plea that it was formed in deference to the wishes of the conservative Muslims only. Within the government the then Cabinet Minister, Arif Mohammad Khan resigned in protest against the government. According to him the government had given credence to the views of only the conservatives and ignored the secular and progressive opinion in the community.⁵⁹

According to the then Law Minister A.K. Sen, "the consistent policy of the government that in the matters pertaining to a community priority would be given to the leaders of the community. This statement assumed that Muslims constituted a self-contained and monolithic community whose interests were represented by the Muslim MP's and a section of the Ulema. The massive outcry against the bill forced the Congress to rework its defence by shifting the blame on the Muslims.⁶⁰ The Muslim Personal Law Board had also pressed hard for the annulment of the judgment. Rajiv Gandhi government passed the Muslim Women Protection of Right (on Divorce) Act in 1986.

The discord over the Babri Masjid gave the Muslim community a further rallying point. It was in early 1986 when a District and session Judge in Faizabad ordered that the Uttar Pradesh government should unlock the gates of the Babri Masjid- Ramjanambhoomi Temple thus enabling devotees to offer darshan and Puja in the disputed structure. Both the UP and the central Congress government took no action to reverse this decision, thereby strengthening the impression that the margin of manoeuvre for Hindu nationalist organization had broadened.⁶¹

The Hindus were permitted to worship the idol of Ram inside the Mosque.

⁵⁸ Hasan, Zoya., "Changing Orientation of the State and the Emergence of Majoritarianism in the 1980's" in K.N. Panikkar (ed.), *Communalism in India History Politics and Culture*, New Delhi, Manohar Publications, 1991, p. 146.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁶¹ Jaffrelot, Christophe, *Op. cit.*, p. 370.

But soon after the Hindu Nationalists claimed the right to build a temple on the site and the RSS identified the issue as an opportunity to work for a new mobilization of the Hindus. This development gave a fresh impetus to its agitation.⁶²

On February 3, 1986, a writ was filed by Mohammad Hashim in the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court against the unlocking of the Babri Masjid. On February 5, 1986, the Babri Masjid Action Committee was set up by a number of Muslim leaders, including Syed Shahabuddin and Imam Bukhari. It organized Satyagrahas in Uttar Pradesh in April 1986, then in Delhi in August seeking a return to the *Status quo* ante at Ayodhya. The VHP responded by organizing at Ayodhya a Shri Ram Maha Yagna (Great Sacrifice to the Lord Ram) lasting for five days from October 11. The growing tension in the State sparked off riots at Aligarh, Muzaffarnagar and Faizabad. The Babri Masjid Action committee's proposed march was suspended when the State authorities promised that Muslim leaders will also be member of the team for discussion to solve the dispute.⁶³

The laying down of the foundation stone for the Ram Temple in Ayodhya on November 9, 1989 was a dangerous turning point in the history of Independent India. The seeds for a disintegration of a secular vision of the country were sown on that day. Even though the court at Allahabad had decided in favour of maintaining the Status quo at Ayodhya. A meeting was held in Lucknow on September 27, convened by the then Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Narayan Dutt Tiwari. The meeting was attended by Buta Singh, Ashok Singhal, Dau Dayal Khanna, Nritya Gopal Das and A vaidyanath. The meeting was concluded by authorizing the Shilanyas in exchange for a promise by the VHP to respect property right as required by the court judgment.

The BJP rather than the Congress was the beneficiary of 'Ayodhya strategy'. The BJP since 1989 had emphatically proclaimed its commitment to

⁶² On January 25, 1985 a lawyer from Ayodhya U.M. Pandey, who was not even a party to the civil suits filed in the 1950s which were still pending, lodged an application with the local magistrate (Munsif) for the gates of the Babri Masjid to be unlocked so that there would be no restriction of the celebration of Puja and darshan. The Munsif refused to hear this application in the absence of the court record, which rested with the High Court. On January 31 an appeal was made to the District and Session Judge of Faizabad who ordered on February 1, that the mosque should be unlocked.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 372-373.

Hindu interests and to the formation of a Hindu State to differentiate itself from other political parties.⁶⁴

The late eighties witnessed communal politics at its height in India. The worst debacle in 1984 General Elections forced BJP to play communal card with a vengeance and was successful in creating a mass hysteria on the issue of Ramjanambhoomi- Babri Masjid.

The results of the 1989 General Elections marked a decisive break through for the BJP which emerged as the third largest party in the country. The BJP got 89 seats in Lok Sabha because of seat adjustment with the Janata Dal and the Left Parties. The Hindu Nationalism played a variable role in bringing BJP to power.

After the formation of the National Front coalition government (1989) for which the BJP and the Left Parties had promised conditional support, the VHP relaunched the Ramjanambhoomi Movement. It turned into an agitational movement after the Prime Minister V.P. Singh decided to implement the Mandal Commission Report. He was sure that this implementation would foment caste divisions in the Hindu community from which the BJP was attempting to build up a vote bank. The RSS reacted strongly to what it considered an attempt to exacerbate the internal division of the Hindu nation.

The BJP could not condemn V.P. Singh's decision for the risk of alienating the OBC's who comprised 52% of the Indian population but to endorse it would certainly compromise its traditional support among the upper castes. The BJP reacted to V.P. Singh's decision by expressing its approval of quotas based on economic criteria rather than on caste. The Mandal affair created a favourable context for L.K. Advani to undertake his Ram Rath Yatra for the construction of Ram Temple at Ayodhya. The Rath Yatra as had been expected was able to strengthen the Hindu solidarity. V.P. Singh who was anxious not to lose the parliamentary support of the BJP, tried to negotiate with the Hindu Nationalist forces till the last possible moment. He called a meeting of all political parties but that was boycotted by the BJP-which pronounced in favour of respecting the status

⁶⁴ Basu, Amrita., "Mass Movement or Elite Conspiracy? The Puzzle of Hindu Nationalism" in David Ludden (ed.), *Making India Hindu Religion Community and the Politics of Democracy in India*, New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 59.

quo at Ayodhya. On October 17, L.K. Advani had announced that the BJP would withdraw its support from the V.P. Singh's government if the latter placed a prohibition on the building of the Ram temple. The BJP finally withdrew its support from the National Front government when L.K. Advani was arrested in Bihar by the then Chief Minister Laloo Prasad Yadav. The BJP launched a Bharat Bandh, a national protest movement. This sparked off anti-Muslim violences in many places. The Hindu nationalist leaders and organs presented the Ayodhya movement as the means of uniting all Hindus in such a way as to defuse the OBC's demand.

The V.P. Singh's government was further weakened by a split in his party (Janata Dal). The breakaway group was called as Janata Dal (Socialist). On November 7, his government lost a vote of confidence in the Lok Sabha. Following the resignation of V.P. Singh, Chandra Shekhar the leader of the Janata Dal (S) formed another minority government. He held office with the support of Congress (I). However on March 6, 1991 Chandra Shekhar had to resign after Congress (I) withdrew its support. In the 1991 Lok Sabha Elections the BJP launched an aggressive campaign and tried to wrest electoral benefits from the Ayodhya affair. In the elections, BJP won 119 Lok Sabha seats. It also won control of four State governments, Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and most importantly Uttar Pradesh. The increase in votes of BJP saw the increase in Hindu-Muslim riots. Between January and June 1991, just before the Elections there were 13 major riots claiming 135 lives.

The demolition of Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992 by the members of Sangh Parivar transformed the terms of the strategy of ethno-religious mobilization that the RSS-VHP-BJP combination had been pursuing for almost a decade. The demolition marked the peak of the BJP's militant activism. The Hindu Nationalist Movement probably gained in popularity because of the demolition of the mosque. The demolition resulted in communal riots in many parts of the country.

In the aftermath of the Mosque's demolition the Hindu Nationalist Movement was immensely benefited from a 'Ram wave' in North India. The BJP rode high in the nineties. It tried to capture power by implementing a policy of 'one nation, one culture'. According to it, the Hindus have a special privileged

position and the various multiple minority groups had to accept so called Hindu way of life. Since the believers of 'one nation and one culture' practiced the politics of targeting and confronting other cultural groups, they launched a powerful movement against the Babri Mosque and succeeded in demolishing it.

The Mandir-Mandal and L.K. Advani's Rath Yatra helped the BJP to consolidate and expand its upper caste Hindu base. From two seats in 1984, the BJP's tally in Lok Sabha went up to 120 in '91, 161 in '96, 182 in '98, 182 in 1999 and 139 in '2004. The electoral consolidation in favour of the BJP was halted when the United Progressive Alliance (Post electoral alliance formed by the Congress, Left Parties and regional parties after the 2004 General Elections) came to power in 2004.

Throughout the BJP's reign at the centre and in States the Sangh Parivar aimed to implement the ideology of Hindu cultural nationalism as propounded by the Sar Sangh Chaalk whom the BJP pay its obeisance. For example the Saraswati Vandana was made compulsory in government run schools and offices during BJP rule in Madhya Pradesh and in Uttar Pradesh, the order of singing saraswati vandana was protested by the minorities which ultimately led to its suspension.

In 2000, the NDA- BJP coalition government at the centre had appointed a National Commission for the Review of the Constitution because BJP believed that the Republican Secular constitution of India was not in conformity with the ideology of the practitioners of Hindu Raj.

The BJP and the Sangh Parivar always criticize Muslim's Madarsas (Islamic School). They believe that Islamic education imparted in these institution encourages anti-national activities. The Sangh Parivar always wants that these Madarsas must be shut down. Whereas the Sangh Parivar (RSS) itself is involved in large school education programme for the promotion of Hindutva consciousness among the Hindu children (These schools are Saraswati Vidhya Mandir and Sheeshu Mandir). Besides these the Sangh Parivar activists always target the Muslims visiting the Holy Mecca for Haj with the support of government subsidies while huge amount of money is spent on Hindu ritualistic festivals (Kumbh Mela). The Sangh Parivar had brought into active public life Saints and Sadhus to spread the message of Hindutva. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad and other leaders of the

Sangh Parivar have always maintained that every activity regarding the movement for Ramjanambhoomi should be decided by Dharam Sansad or Sant Sammelans. During the decade of 1990's the Sangh Parivar with the full patronage of BJP government activated all religious and mythologically associated Saints and Sadhus to take message of Hindutva to the masses of India. The discourse of Hindutva and the instruments for the spread of the message of the Parivar's ideology of Hindutva had been actively supported by the BJP government.⁶⁵ The real goal for the Sangh Parivar was to create a complete Hindu-Muslim divide and in the pursuit of this objectivity they tried to project the temple mosque dispute as a conflict between two religious communities.⁶⁶

The Indian Constitution has made India as Sovereign Democratic Republican State and the State was the legitimate guarantor of the 'rule of law' and the rights of citizens, irrespective of their religion, faith or creed. The basic structure of the constitution was threatened if priests and not an elected Parliament become the real representatives of the 'General will' of the people of India. Elections provide legitimacy to democratic governance with the mandate that public affair was managed by its institutional mechanism. In an elective democracy priests had no authority in public affairs. India was witnessing a complete subversion of constitutional democracy by the emergence of anti-constitutional centres of power represented by the priestly class.

The tragic happenings in the Gujarat State (Godhra riots 2002) under the BJP government was the outcome of the Hindu- anti-minority agenda persuaded by Chief Minister Narendra Modi. The Sangh Parivar in Gujarat was fully engaged in exercising State power for the purposes of establishing Hindu Rashtra before the beginning of riots.

In February 2002 the State of Gujarat witnessed the worst communal riots that ever took place in the State. The riots were sparked off when the Sabarmati Express carrying Kar Sevaks was set on fire allegedly by some youths belonging to the minority community.

The State witnessed the communal holocaust between the Hindu- Muslim

⁶⁵ Bhambhri, C. P., *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

community because the State apparatus was controlled by fanatic Hindus. The State apparatus was used by the BJP government to either physically liquidate or completely terrorize and marginalize the minority communities. According to VHP International General Secretary Praveen Togadia, the Godhra carnage was the proof of Hindu awakening. Even the National Human Rights Commission Report on Gujarat stated 'that there was a comprehensive failure of the State machinery to protect the constitutional rights of the people of Gujarat'⁶⁷

No help was provided to Muslims, their properties were burnt and they were hacked to death by the Hindu fanatics. The riots, which were sparked in February 2002, continued till April 2002. The secular face of India was put to shame on the world scenario.

There was no law and order in the State when it was burning, the Sangh Parivar wanted elections to be held during such a disturbed situation. The Sangh Parivar wanted the newly awakened Hindus of Gujarat to vote for the Hindu Party which would teach lesson to the minorities. The VHP's Kendriya Margdarshak Mandal warned Muslims that "if continue to take the country towards partition, they would have to stay in refugee camps like in Gujarat".⁶⁸

The Gujarat pogrom changed the outlook of Muslims and the feelings of insecurity overtook the feeling of being an Indian citizen. No one could deny the fact that the community was oppressed and subjected to discrimination. The community was directionless.

When UPA (United Progressive Alliance formed in May 2004) government was formed at the centre it decided to implement some of the recommendations of Rajendra Sachar Committee. The seven members committee headed by Rajendra Sachar, a former Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court was set up to go into the social, economic and educational status of Muslims. The committee, which submitted its report on November 17, 2006 was set up in March 2006. The report came against the backdrop of the Prime Minister's (Manmohan Singh) observation that Muslims should get a "fair share", triggered a debate. He felt the need to devise innovative plans to ensure that minorities particularly the Muslim minority

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

is empowered to share equitably in the fruits of development.

The UPA government assurance that it would implement the recommendations of Sachar committee had created a ray of hope for the discriminated Muslim minority, while on the other hand Sangh Parivar along with BJP had raised the serious question mark on the very formation of the committee, calling it as unnecessary and being against the interest of the Nation.

Sachar Committee had submitted its report in November 2006. The committee found that the Muslims were way behind the national averages in most of the parameters of social developments, its economic status had been sliding seriously its representation in jobs, bank loans was abysmal and its representation in the political process had been very poor and was worsening on the top of that. In sum and substance, Muslim community was under represented in most of the areas of society. The committee had recommended that an 'Equal Opportunity Commission' should be set-up, a national data bank should be started, a nomination procedure should be started to ensure their participation in public bodies. It was a matter of conjuncture whether the UPA government was really serious about it or was it a mere replay of the earlier broken promises.

(c) The Emergence of Hindu Nationalism

The quest for India's National identity through the route of Hindu religious Nationalism began in the nineteenth century and continued ever since. In recent years, however, it has received an unprecedented boost from those communal forces which brought a virulent version of Hindu cultural chauvinism to the centre stage of contemporary politics.

The roots of Hindu Nationalism go back to the second half of the nineteenth century. The Arya Samaj which was founded in 1875 by Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) created a new aggressive and militant spirit among the Hindus in the northern part of India. During the twentieth century, the Samaj became the starting point for a movement of reconversion of Muslim or Christian converts to Hinduism.

Those emerging ideas later became fundamental principles of the Hindu Mahasabha and of the Jana Sangh. Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920) was the main

ideologue of neo Hindu Nationalism. He introduced the Shivaji and Ganpati festivals in which the patriotic songs were sung. The liberal ideas of some of his associates in the Freedom Movement were vehemently criticized by him. He continued the campaign against cow slaughter which was initiated by Swami Dayananda.

The concept of Hindutva was first articulated by V.D. Savarkar (Hindu Mahasabha) in 1923. It encompassed the entire gamut of cultural, social, political and linguistic aspect of Hindu life. According to him "India should belong to only those whose forefathers were born in India and who had not embraced any faith whose origin could be traced beyond the borders of India. The religions that originated on Indian soils were Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism. Only their adherents, therefore were eligible to be called Hindu".⁶⁹ This militant characteristic of Hindu Nationalism found expression in Savarkar's slogan: "Hinduise all politics and militarise Hindutva"⁷⁰.

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was founded by Dr. Keshav Hedgewar in 1925 at Nagpur. Since 1940 it was headed by M.S. Golwalkar. According to him the word Nation was the compound of five distinct factors fused into one indissoluble. The famous five unities were, Geographical (country), Racial (Race), Religious (Religion), Cultural (Culture) and Linguistic (language). India was the Land of Hindus and was the terra firma for the Hindu Nation alone to flourish upon----- . We must bear in mind that so far as the Nation is concerned, all those who fall outside the five fold limits of that idea had no place in the National life, unless they abandon their differences and completely merged themselves with the national race'. He further had added, "there is a triangular fight, we Hindus are at war at once with the Muslims on the one hand and British on the other"⁷¹

The concept of Hindu Nationalism was strengthened more with the formation of the Ram Rajya Parishad in 1948 by the members of Princely states. It was the most orthodox Hindu Party. The party aimed to return to the glorious days of Rama's rule, where everybody was contented, prosperous and religious. The

⁶⁹ Ghosh, Partha S., "The Congress and the BJP: Struggle for the Heartland", in Ajay K. Mehra, D.D. Khanna, Gert W. Kueck (eds.), *Op. cit.*, p. 226

⁷⁰ Hartman, Horst., *Political Parties in India*, Meerut, Meenakshi Mudranalya, 1984, p. 112.

⁷¹ Ghosh, Partha S., *Op. cit.*, p. 227.

party was against any reform of the caste ridden society. But soon the Ram Rajya Parishad vanished.

A new party, the Bhartiya Jana Sangh was founded in 1951 to give impetus to the Hindu ideology. The Jana Sangh was the political expression of the cultural renaissance. The Jana Sangh stated its fundamentals as 'one country, one nation, one culture and the rule of law'. The Jana Sangh stood for 'Bhartiya Sanskriti' which meant ancient Hindu culture. According to its ideology Indian Nationalism and Hindu Nationalism were one and the same thing and who soever tried to distinguish between the two was working against the interest of India's Nation building. The Nationalism finds its first expression in the religious and communal nationalism of the majority community.

The Congress under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi believed that India being socially plural, Hindu Nationalism itself would not be enough to build the National Movement. Moreover because of the fact that the Hindus themselves were stratified on caste and sectoral lines the conceptualization of Hindu Nationalism itself was problematic. As a result the Congress decided to identify itself with all communities and caste groups both individually and collectively so as to represent the cross section of the Indian masses. Both the Hindu and Muslim traditionalists found an equally important place under its canopy though they sometimes talked at cross purposes. This strategy was never implemented which treated Indian and Hindu Nationalism as one and the same thing. For example the Hindu Mahasabha which represented the Hindu nationalistic ideology, also found a place in Congress strategy.⁷²

However with the introduction of liberalization of the economy during the Janata Party government (1977), the Congress could no longer rely on its customary vote bank which cut across regional, caste and religious differences. As the Congress Party's Parliamentary majority foundered, the Hindu majority became more and more assertive. The uncertain political situation compelled the secularist Congress to appropriate the advantages of Hindu nationalism. That is why the ascendancy of the Congress during 1980s was largely attributable to the growing importance of religion in Indian Politics.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 226.

The Janata Party split into factions was because of the association of some of its members with the RSS. The members of the former Jana Sangh who had links with the RSS were not prepared to give up their associations and hence they along with some others founded a new party which came to be known as the Bhartiya Janata Party. It declared the Gandhian socialism as its guiding philosophy. This declaration evoked heated controversy among the delegates, because people brought up and trained in a different atmosphere could not easily digest the Gandhian ideals.

By the mid eighties the party seemed to have reached an impasse. The tactic of openness, intended to make it heir of the Janata Party and thus an alternative to Congress by virtue of a socio-economic “people-oriented” programmes had not enabled it to enlarge its base and its policy of making alliances had misfired.⁷³

The ideological dilution manifested by the BJP and its electoral reverses seemed to have substantially added to the RSS’s doubts. Whether it was capable of promoting the Hindu Nationalist cause. Some sections of the RSS did not approve the BJP’s effort to attract Muslims. It argued that the Congress (I) was successful in the 1984 General Elections because it had acted as Hindu Party.

According to B.K. Kelkar “the political ideology is or at least should be the main justification of its existence. BJP should therefore shed the politics of alignment and focus on its ideology and political strategy to promote correctional and creative politics. The Hindu vote going to be politically important in the coming decade. The political parties feel shy about the usage of the word “Hindu”. But BJP should have no shyness or complexes and organize it on the idea of Hindu renaissance”⁷⁴.

During 1987 the RSS did not support the BJP unconditionally because the latter wanted to show to its workers that it believed in Hindu consolidation and high moral values. As a result, in order to remain the sole entity at the national level the BJP’s interest collided with the Hindu nationalist culture of the RSS, on which it continued to be heavily dependent. The programme and strategies of the

⁷³ Jaffrelot, Christophe, *Op. cit.*, pp. 318-319.

⁷⁴ Kelkar, B.K., “BJP and the Crisis of Political Alignments”, *Organizer*, April 10, 1988, p. 7.

BJP during 1980-87 were based on the moderate Hindu nationalist ideology. As a result the BJP shifted from a 'mixed strategy' to one based exclusively on ethno religious mobilization. The strategies helped BJP in capturing power at the centre in latter years.⁷⁵

The increasing prominence of religious symbolism in Indian Politics in 1980s was initiated by the Congress Party in order to secure and consolidate a perpetual Congress majority in national electoral politics. The political manipulations in Punjab in the 1980s and the subsequent creation of a "Sikh menace" paid off in the massive victory of Congress in 1984 General Elections due to the wave of sympathy and national rage in the wake of the assassination of Indira Gandhi . The then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was targeted for desecrating the Holy "Golden Temple" of the Sikhs at Amritsar, which had given asylum to the Sikh separatists and terrorists.

The massive victory of the Congress after the 1984 General Elections demonstrated how the Hindus felt concerned about their Nations territorial integrity which seemed to be endangered by the non Hindus whether they were the Sikhs of Punjab, the Muslim of Kashmir, the Christians of the North-East or the Muslim settlers in Assam

The BJP did not take much time to realize that the illusory 'Hindu vote' that it unsuccessfully chased for decades had ultimately materialized but it was grabbed by the Congress. Its own strategy of broad basing its support with an emphasis on Gandhian principles failed miserably as the result of the 1984 parliamentary elections demonstrated. It captured only two seats with 7.68 percent votes. As a result the BJP shifted from a mixed strategy to one based exclusively on ethno-religious mobilization.⁷⁶

In the race for the 'Hindu vote' the Congress could not match the BJP rhetoric because of its secularist image. The Congress was in a dilemma. If it went in favour of the Hindus it might alienate the minorities which had traditionally supported the party. If it did not do so, the BJP was waiting to take advantage of the situation by making further inroads into the Hindu vote bank. It was against

⁷⁵ Jaffrelot, Christophe, *Op. cit.*, p. 328.

⁷⁶ Hansen, Thomas Blom, *Op. cit.*, p. 148.

this background that two controversies came in handy for the BJP, one was the Babri mosque issue and the other was the Shah Bano case.⁷⁷

The BJP reacted to Shah Bano controversy by raising the question of a Uniform Civil Code which carried appeal amongst the Hindu classes. In order to counter this, Rajiv Gandhi's regime opened the shrine of Babri Masjid and allowed the Shilanayas at the Ramjanmbhoomi site at Ayodhya.

Similarly the issue of Ayodhya was not on the scenario of the Indian Political system since 1950, but the arch light was felt when in 1984 the first Dharam Sansad unanimously adopted a resolution demanding the liberation of the site at Ayodhya. In May-June 1984 the VHP established a militant wing, the Bajrang Dal under the leadership of Vinay Katiyar, who had been organizational Secretary and RSS Pracharak since 1980. As a main strike force the Bajrang Dal was at first used by the VHP on the pretext of liberating the Ram Temple.⁷⁸

On July 27, 1984 Ramjanambhoomi Mukti Yagna Samiti was founded under the leadership of the Mahant Avidyanath. On September 25, it launched a procession which set off from Sitarmahi in Bihar with the mission of liberating the temple of Ayodhya. The procession was marked with the Hindu Nationalist slogans. Saints and Sadhus from all parts of the country had come to take part in the Liberation Movement. Mahant Avidyanath asked people to vote only for those Political Parties which explicitly promised to give the Hindus their sacred places back.⁷⁹

The core of the dispute (Ramjanambhoomi-Babri Masjid) was a small platform, inside the mosque, allegedly constructed on the site of Ram's birth place and worshipped by the Hindus. In 1949 the Hindu Mahasabha members installed sacred Ram Lala idols inside the mosque. The Masjid was again sealed off for worship and a title suit was filed by local Muslims, demanding the removal of the idols and reopening of the Masjid for worship. In 1985 the Local Court in Faizabad ordered reopening of the Premises. There was little doubt that swift action was promoted by the Congress leadership as another transparent attempt to

⁷⁷ Ghosh, Partha, *Op. cit.*, p. 230

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Organizer*, April 22, 1984, pp. 1-2.

accommodate the rapidly growing constituency for Militant Hindu Nationalism. The main reason for the success of the Sangh Parivar was the adoption of ethno-religious mobilization strategy. These strategies helped the BJP in enhancing its electoral gains. As a result the Congress party during its electoral campaign in 1989 in Faizabad openly appealed to communal sentiments among Hindu voters and promised Ram Rajya (Rule of Rama) if re-elected. This strategy failed and Congress was for the second time in Independent India voted out of power at the hands of Janata Dal's anticorruption slogans, and by the Hindu communal campaign of the BJP deriding the "Pseudo secularism" of the Congress.⁸⁰

The Results of the 1989 General Elections marked a decisive breakthrough for the BJP, which emerged as the third largest party in the country. It yielded as many as 89 seats out of 543 seats in the Lok Sabha because of the seat adjustment with the Left and center coalition the National Front.⁸¹

The unexpected electoral gains made by the BJP in the 1989 General Elections opened the possibility of the BJP, RSS-VHP coalition (Sangh Parivar) using the Hindu card much more vigorously than before. The relation between the National Front and the BJP reached a breaking point with V.P. Singh's announcement in September 1990 that his government intended to implement the Mandal Commission's recommendation of 27 percent reservation of educational seats and government jobs for OBC communities. Within the Sangh Parivar and its upper-caste constituencies there were widespread apprehensions regarding the Mandal formula, which was opposed on the pretext of its inclusion of certain Muslim communities in the OBC category. At the same time, it was obvious that a flat refection of the Mandal formula would jeopardize the Party's protracted drive to attract support from lower-caste groups. The BJP encouraged by strong forces in the RSS and the VHP, dissociated itself from V.P. Singh and embarked more strongly than before on the platform of Hindutva and the Ramjanambhoomi agitation in order to oppose what was seen as the dangerously divisive effects of the Mandal formula on a prospective Hindu majority nation.⁸²

During 1991 General Elections the BJP embarked more aggressively on the

⁸⁰ *India Today*, October 31, 1984, pp. 70-71.

⁸¹ Hansen, Thomas Blom, *Op. cit.*, p. 150.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 163.

theme of Hindutva. Had it not been the assassination of Congress President Rajiv Gandhi during the course of the 1991 General Elections the Congress would have fared very badly. Almost half the number of constituencies went to the polls after the tragedy, the sympathy wave made some significant difference in favour of the Party. The BJP's growth was noticeable. From 89 Parliamentary seats it improved its position to 120 seats in 1991 General Elections. Its gain was in the entire Hindi heartland. This gain was largely on account of the Ram temple agitation and the tirade against the so-called 'minorityism'. For the first time since Independence the government at the centre and U.P. belonged to competing parties (P.V. Narasimha Rao led Congress government at the centre and Kalyan Singh led BJP government in Uttar Pradesh).

The Babri-Masjid was demolished during the tenure of Kalyan Singh in Uttar Pradesh on December 6, 1992. The Babri Masjid was demolished by a mob belonging to the Hindutva Parivar, which included some top BJP leaders L.K., Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti. The Rao government at the centre did little to prevent the demolition. Large scale riots broke out in cities all over India. Leaders who instigated the mob at the Babri Masjid site were arrested. The BJP run State government in Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh were dismissed on the grounds that they were unable to maintain law and order and prevent riots from raging.

All these legal repression worked as an instant energizer for the BJP and the Sangh Parivar. The RSS had clearly sensed that inspite of the government actions against the movement, the demolition of Babri Masjid had created a sort of Hindutva wave, a wave of untrammelled pride in Hindu strength. The triumphalism came out in frequent comments in this period about "teaching the minorities a lesson," "do not take on the Hindu wrath". These fragments of Hindu nationalist gained enormous popularity and ubiquity fueled by the fear of violent Muslim reactions.⁸³ The demolition of the Babri Masjid marked the end of the so-called Ramjanambhoomi campaign orchestrated by the Sangh Parivar (1985). The BJP, the Chief Parliamentary representative of Hindu communalism, was at least temporarily without a central issue around which it could mobilize the masses.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 164

In order to strengthen its declining base the members of Sangh Parivar did indulge in violent activities in order to revitalize the Hindu nationalism concept. For example the attack on Christian Missionaries in India by the member of Sangh Parivar. The Christian Missionaries were accused of converting Dalits and Hindus to Christianity by offering them financial assistance. These events were deplored as bringing disrepute to Hinduism and killing its secular spirit and mutilating the history of multi-lateral culture of India.⁸⁴

Similarly the Godhra Train carnage on February 27, 2002 and its aftermath was first of its kind since the time of partition in 1947. The whole government (state) machinery failed to stop the carnage.

The emergence of Hindu nationalism has only heightened communal tension and poisoned the atmosphere of the country. It is still the reigning concept of Indian Political system.

(d) The Genesis of Muslim Politics

Since Independence Muslims in India are in dilemma. The Muslim community has always been used as a 'vote bank' by various political parties and once the election was over, no one cared for them. They are left with the sole option of voting out a party in self-defence. Muslim Politics does not move beyond the game of survival wherein they vote a party to protect their very identity only. This is indeed frustrating for the Muslim community. Muslims in India are victims of the worst kind of communal violence but they are also at the lowest rung of the development in the country. Their literacy rate is abysmal. Their job representation in both public and private sector is shockingly low. Their representatives in legislative bodies also dwindle. They are no longer willing to vote merely for their security but want growth and development as well.⁸⁵

The post partition Muslim generation is impatient to match up with others in terms of development. It has contributed no less than any other community or caste to the national development index in every walk of life. Yet it suffers from all manner of problems ranging from security to unemployment. This generation of Muslims wants empowerment and is rightly disappointed with all political parties.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 184

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

The history of Muslims political consciousness and their political participation is that in the beginning of the 20th century Muslims formed Muslim League with the patronage of the British government. Till the Non-cooperation Movement both the Muslim League and Congress were very close. In later years the Muslim League became a mass organization and more anti Congress and communal in approach. In 1940, the Muslim League demanded a separate sovereign State for Muslims and as a result Pakistan was formed. However Muslims in India due to lack of dynamic leadership became the most backward in all walks of life. Their drawback is that they are not politically united. Though few efforts were made but they were all futile.

In the post Independence era in order to strengthen the Muslims politically a convention of Muslim leaders were held at Lucknow in 1964, Muslim leaders of all shades of opinion joined hands together to solve their problems and an organization came into existence known as Majlis-e-Mushawarat⁸⁶. That convention was presided by its President Dr. Syed Mahmood, a veteran Congress Muslim leader. A number of resolutions were passed at the convention. The main resolution was to remove Muslim grievances. It was also decided to constitute a committee consisting of Jamate Islami, Muslim League, Jamaatul Ulema and Tamir-e-Millat of Hyderabad and leaders of other Muslim organizations. It was expected that with the formation of the organization (Majlis-e-Mushawarat) there will be a unity among all the Muslim parties in order to boost political action at all levels.⁸⁷

The Majlis-e-Mushawarat presented a number of demands regarding the Status of Urdu, restoration of the Minority character of Aligarh Muslim University, the Preservation of the Muslim Personal Law, the revision of the text books etc before the government.

Some of the federating units of the Mushawarat were not in favour of its taking part in active politics especially in contesting elections. Dr Faridi, a prominent Muslim leader of Uttar Pradesh was of the view that the opposition

⁸⁶ Abid, Mohammad, *Politics in Uttar Pradesh 1950-1980*, Aligarh, Kitab Ghar Educational Publisher, 1986, p. 159.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

parties of secular outlook should be supported by the Mushawarat⁸⁸.

The fall of the Congress Party in the 1967 Uttar Pradesh Assembly Elections can be attributed to the role of Mushawarat. In some constituencies the Muslims damaged the prospects of the Congress. The Congress government lasted only for 18 days and Charan Singh after the defection from C.P. Gupta Ministry, installed the SVD government headed by him. It was admitted that mainly because of the opposition of Mushawarat the Congress had to step down. Later, it was felt by Muslims that they should enter politics directly and send maximum number of Muslims to the U.P. Assembly. Jamate-e-Islami did not concur to this idea. Thus a new political party named as Muslim Majlis came into existence in Uttar Pradesh. But it was decided that the Muslim Majlis shall be a federating unit of the central Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat and would co-operate with it in all matters relating to the community.⁸⁹

Dr Faridi was of the view that the Problems of Minorities, Scheduled caste and the Backward classes were the same. He called a convention of the backward classes, scheduled caste and other minorities which was held at Lucknow on October 12, 13, 1968. The convention decided to constitute an organization known as the Federation of Backward classes, Scheduled castes and Other minorities. Main emphasis was given on reforms of educational system, electoral reforms, establishment of welfare state, safeguarding of Muslim Personal Law, preservation of mother tongue, establishment of a ministry for backward classes, scheduled castes and other minorities, social reforms and religious trusts⁹⁰.

During 1971 Lok Sabha polls the Majlis renewed its policy and on invitation by Congress (N), Dr Faridi met Mrs. Indira Gandhi and appraised her of the grievances and problems of the Muslims. Mrs. Gandhi assured him that the Muslims grievances and problems would be looked into and sought support for the Congress. After getting assurance from Congress Party, Muslim Majlis decided to support it wholeheartedly. Muslim Majlis candidates contested in five constituencies however they all were defeated. Dr. Faridi claimed that the greatest achievement of the Majlis was that it had infused a sense of confidence and

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

courage among the Muslim community and had made them feel that they commanded balancing power in the politics of the country.

The promises made by the Congress were fulfilled. However the new Amendment Act of 1972 curtailed the autonomous and the Minority Character of the Aligarh Muslim University. This act completely alienated the Muslim Majlis from the Congress Muslim Majlis also decided not to support the Congress in the Assembly Elections of 1974 and made an alliance with BKD and SSP.⁹¹

In the 1977, Lok Sabha elections, the Muslim Majlis decided to support the Janata Party. Under this alliance two seats were allotted to the Muslim Majlis. The All India Muslim Majlis working committee met on April 28, 1977 and decided that the Majlis should have an electoral agreement with the Janata Party. In Uttar Pradesh Assembly Elections 10 seats were allotted to the Majlis out of 425 seats. Among the Majlis candidates there were Harijans, Qureshis and Ansaris. The main issues of Majlis were A.M.U, Urdu as second official language, representation of Muslims in government services and establishment of Urdu university at Rampur. Out of 10 candidates 8 were elected in U.P. Assembly Elections.

The Majlis had representation in the central as well as in Uttar Pradesh governments having one minister in each. But they never raised voice for Muslim problems or Majlis issues. The selfishness of Muslim legislators, rivalry with Muslim League and death of Dr. Faridi, lack of leadership had contributed to the poor performance and negligible role of the Majlis.⁹²

In later years the concept of Secular Nationalism drifted towards the Religious Nationalism. Religious Nationalism has primarily taken two forms; Muslim and Hindu Nationalism. Muslim Nationalism as said had emerged in the first half of the 20th century leading to the birth of Pakistan in 1947. Hindu Nationalism was to a quite extent a mirror image of Muslim Nationalism. According to Hindu Nationalists, Hindus must have cultural and political primacy in shaping India's destiny. The formation of Rashtriya Syawam Sevak Sangh, Bhartiya Jana Sangh, Bhartiya Janata Party, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal etc are some of the product of Hindu Nationalism.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 166.

Earlier the Congress central government had maintained its goal of socio-economic development and secularism as two pillars of Secular politics. As such all these strategies and developments led Congress in 1980 to manipulate communal themes at the highest level as part of its political strategy to attract support from masses. In the 1980 General Elections the Congress returned to power and during the first six weeks after the government formation Mrs. Indira Gandhi visited dozen of temples situated all over the country. Moreover the Central government thwarted the opposition government in the State by all possible means including the questioning of some secular principles in the name of stability at the centre and national unity. For example in Jammu and Kashmir the National Conference was blamed for discrimination manifested by Srinagar towards the Hindus of the State and against the anti-national role played by Farooq Abdullah.⁹³

With the Shah Bano affair the Indian Politics became more communalized. At the same time the judges expressed regret that no effort had been made by the administration to draw up a uniform civil code, as Article 44 of the Directive Principles Section of the constitution required to do it.⁹⁴

The Supreme Court decision angered the Muslim parliamentarians and organization like the Muslim League, the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Muslim Personal Law Board, which in 1973 had tried to have Muslims exempted from section 125 during a revision of the code of criminal procedure. These organizations also denounced the Supreme Court for presuming to interpret the Quran.

The Muslim Leaders regarded the verdict as an infringement on the cultural autonomy of Indian Muslims and called for Public Protests. All India Muslim Personal Law Board organized a 'Shariat Protection week' in October 1985 which demanded for upholding the status of Muslim Personal Law, the rally organized by it indicated the frustration and a sense of insecurity among the Indian Muslim.⁹⁵

According to Asghar Ali Engineer, a liberal Muslim reformer considered the above agitation as the biggest ever launched by Muslims since Independence.

⁹³ Jaffrelot, Christophe, *Op. cit.*, p. 330.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 334.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 335.

He thus explained the root cause of mobilization; firstly, the Muslim felt insecure because of the VHP's campaign following the Meenakshipuram conversions in Tamil Nadu. (various Ekatmata Yatras were organized and Ganga Jal was distributed throughout India in order to awaken the Hindu masses about their religious identity) and the Supreme Court judgment was then perceived as attempt to destroy the autonomy of their religion, secondly, for the Muslim leaders who articulated the protest movement this judgment was blessing in disguise as it had united all Muslims of different sects and opinions to oppose it.⁹⁶

The then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi promised to amend the Section 125 of the code of criminal procedure. On February 27, 1986, the government introduced a Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Divorce) Bill whereby a Muslim man would not be obliged to pay alimony to his divorced wife beyond the term of iddat. After that period, the divorced wife had to be supported by her family and if she had no relatives to care for her, magistrate could compel the waqf to provide for her needs.⁹⁷

On May 8, 1986 L.K. Advani the then President of Bhartiya Janata Party attacked the bill in the Rajya Sabha, claiming that it was directed against the interest of Muslim women, he was able to present the BJP as a party whose advocacy of a common civil code was based on a modern and progressive outlook. Moreover the illegal immigration to India of thousands of job seekers from Bangladesh and Pakistan was portrayed by the BJP as an organized Muslim invasion and infiltration into India. This argument became in the later years a standard element in the building of the specter of a threatening Muslim menace of destabilization, job snatching and exploitation of good hearted Hindu, which other parts of the Sangh Parivar had been building up for years.⁹⁸

Another cause for Muslim disenchantment was the Babri Masjid which had been legally contested by the Hindu and the Muslim organizations since the nineteenth century and was sealed for decades by the Britishers.

The Vishwa Hindu Parishad began its agitation in 1985 by filing a writ

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 336.

⁹⁸ Hansan, Thomas Blom., *Op cit* , pp. 159-160.

petition in the local court in Faizabad requesting a reopening of the disputed structure for Hindu worship. To everybody's surprise, a court order reopening the premises was issued within a week. In September 1989, the government allowed the VHP to undertake the Ram Shila Puja, a nationwide procession of consecrated bricks collected all over the country for the construction of a large Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. The government also declared the plot adjacent to the Babri Masjid to be undisputed. Six days later the government attempted to accommodate the Muslim protest by ordering the VHP to stop the construction work.⁹⁹

These developments only aggravated tensions between the Muslims and the Hindus. The Hindus in particular sided with their ideology promoting party that is Bhartiya Janata Party with its sister organization being the RSS, VHP and several small units. They had their say at national level due to the high stature leadership in the party. Whereas there was always a lack of powerful public leadership amongst the Muslims. In this vacuum, leaders such as the Populist Syed Shahabuddin who advocated cultural equality, and the conservative Imam Bukhari of the Jama Masjid in Delhi emerged as Muslim leaders on an outspoken and culturally conservative platform.

In order to consolidate the OBC within its fold V.P. Singh played the Mandal card. Commission report turmoiled the political scenario. In the 27 percent reservation for OBCs in government jobs the commission also included some backward caste Muslims communities which infact agitated the BJP.

In order to counter the Mandal mobilization of the OBC's by the Janata Dal the BJP acquired all possible campaign for temple construction at Ayodhya. Its the then President L.K. Advani undertook a Ram Rath Yatra from Somnath to Ayodhya. But on the arrest of Advani BJP withdrew its support from the National Front government.

During the Congress reign (1991) the Muslim leaders at a convention held on October 9, 1994 at Delhi demanded for reservation of seats for the Muslims in the government services. The convention was inaugurated by Sita Ram Kesri (Social Welfare Minister in P.V. Narasimha Rao government). He championed the

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 150.

cause of reservation for the Muslims. He had even gone to the extent of saying that the constitution be amended if necessary to give reservation to the Muslims. This all was done to appease the Muslim community which had just suffered the stroke of Babri Masjid demolition on December 6, 1992. These lucrative opportunities failed to revive the Congress Party's fortune which went blank after the demolition of Babri Masjid at Ayodhya. Moreover the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Samajwadi Party also expressed their desire of giving reservation to the Muslim community. But no party had ever made serious efforts.

To win back the Muslim vote bank the Congress Party Chairperson Mrs. Sonia Gandhi had apologized on behalf of the Congress Party for its inability to save the Babri mosque from demolition and denied an election seat to P.V. Narasimha Rao, a senior leader of the Congress Party and Prime Minister when the mosque was torn down. The Congress party had further promised to create a ministry of minority welfare.

The 2004 General Elections were a difficult one for Muslims. They were confused and bewildered especially after the appeal from the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to vote BJP- a party that has never hidden its prejudice towards the minorities.¹⁰⁰

The new-look BJP brought out a vision document that put aside earlier hard line issues like the Muslim Personal Law and special constitutional status granted to Jammu and Kashmir. On the other hand, the NDA adopted the Ram Temple construction in its agenda which made for the Muslims difficult to find out the real face amongst these gimmicks.¹⁰¹

There had hardly been any option for Muslims because the Congress's attitude towards Muslims has always been 'vote us but don't expect anything from us'. The regional parties proved hardly any difference for the Muslims. If Muslims voted for Mulayam Singh and Mayawati in U.P., they in effect would be voting for BJP because there was no guarantee that these parties may not hold up the BJP in Delhi after the elections.

In order to woo the Muslim community. The then Deputy Prime minister

¹⁰⁰ *The Times of India*, New Delhi, April 17, 2004.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

L.K. Advani disclosed during the election campaign for Lok Sabha (2004) that “some quite progress had been made in the past 6-8 months towards negotiated settlement of the Ayodhya dispute we have already made progress without giving any publicity to the formula being worked out to resolve the Ayodhya issue and I am confident that we will be able to reach an agreement involving Hindu and Muslim representatives shortly after the new government is in place and moreover NDA has no objection to it”.¹⁰²

He had claimed that there was a perceptible change in the mindset of Muslims in the country. It would be no exaggeration to say that the principal factoring removing fear from their mind was good governance by the Vajpayee government during the last five years. Negotiated settlement would not only strengthen Hindu-Muslim bonds but also unity and integrity of the country.¹⁰³

Moreover Atal Bihari Vajpayee during the election rally at Lucknow on April 27, 2004 urged the Muslims to stand by Mulayam Singh Yadav. He appealed the community not to desert Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav at this crucial juncture of election. His remarks took political circles by surprise, was the remark an outcome of concern over-increasing Muslim Sympathy for Congress or was it an attempt to strength the perception that there was a tacit understanding between NDA and Mulayam Singh Yadav.¹⁰⁴

The remark was certainly true in its respect because BJP was worried by the increasing Muslim sympathy for Congress and secondly after few months, it became apparent about the understanding between the BJP and the Samajwadi Party.¹⁰⁵

The Muslim intellectuals favoured the Congress party during the 2004 General Elections. They accused the Samajwadi party of having hand in glove with the BJP. Muslim organization like the Milli Council also expressed similar feeling urging Muslims to support the Congress in the elections (2004).¹⁰⁶

However Mulayam Singh Yadav remained unfazed. He had said that he

¹⁰² *The Times of India*, New Delhi, April 7, 2004.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *The Times of India*, Lucknow, April 28, 2004.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

was the only one who was responsible for fighting against the communal forces in U.P. The Bahujan Samaj Party had never entered into such debates. Instead the BSP believed in the principle of nominating Muslim candidates strategically.¹⁰⁷

Taking advantage of the general Muslim disenchantment with traditional secular parties and the growing political fad for communal and caste parties in the country, a group of Muslim Politicians thought of starting Muslim parties at the provincial level. Muslims constituted a large chunk of the votes in numerous assembly segments in Uttar Pradesh. If they voted as a united bloc, they could be the deciding factor in many elections. Two Muslim Outfits were formed in Uttar Pradesh Maulana Kalbe Jawwad of Lucknow formed, the People's Democratic Front (PDF) whereas Imam Ahmed Bhukhari of Jama Masjid Delhi, headed the other, the Uttar Pradesh United Democratic Front (UPUDF). The PDF attempted to bring together the All India Muslim Forum, National Loktantrik Party, Momin Conference of India, All India Muslim Majlis, Parcham party of India and the All India Muslim Mushwarat among others. Both blamed Secular Parties for neglecting the Indian interest of the Muslims and both came from a religious background.

In the Present era of caste and communal parties a move by Muslims to have Muslim Party seemed to be appealing and logical. After more than half a century to the independence of India, not a single political party has ever bothered for the socio-political and economic upliftment of Muslims rather Muslims are considered as a community responsible for the division of India and formation of Pakistan. Indeed, Muslims who live in India had nothing to do with Pakistan. They played no role during partition nor do they have any lingering sympathy for Pakistan. There is a perception that the Indian Muslims are the enemies of Hindus and are working to carve out another Pakistan. That is why the Sangh Parivar has been successful on this Hindu siege mentality and has managed to build a Hindu vote bank and has also marginalize Indian Muslim in Indian Politics. Both the Muslim Personal Law Board and the Babri Masjid Action Committee ostensibly worked to defend the Muslim cause but in actual terms they only indulged in the politics of cacophony using high decibel Muslim rhetoric. This tickled the Hindu

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

sense of siege and it was the BJP that soon became the Hindus Hero.

Therefore in the present age the people should keep aside the question of militant ideology of Hinduism or Islam and only progress and peace should be the motto.