

“Inclusive Development:” The Secular Framing Efforts of the Bharatiya  
Janata Party and the Role of Neoliberal Rhetoric

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A Senior Honors Thesis

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Submitted in partial fulfillment for Honors in Global Studies

April 2015

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## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Dr. Sara Smith for her patience and guidance with this project. I also would like to thank Dr. Michael Tsin for his assistance in completing the requirements of the honors program. Lastly, I thank my peers and Dr. Erica Johnson, who pushed me to complete my honors thesis and held me accountable throughout our GLBL 691H and 692H courses. The contents of this project represent months of learning and effort, not only in relation to the topic itself but also in learning about my own ability to undertake this level of work. I am sincerely grateful to all people who encouraged me to challenge myself and complete this thesis. Without the collective support of friends, family, faculty, and others, I would not be at this moment today.

## **The Bharatiya Janata Party's Move toward Power**

Secularism is a term interpreted in many different ways by different people. For me, it has always been something very simple – putting India First – designing policy, making decisions and taking actions in the best interests of the nation. When we look after India's interests, the interests of every Indian are automatically cared for.

-“India First” by Narendra Modi (2011)

Since even before its independence, political leaders have attempted to define India as a secular state. In his writings on the history and development of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, traces the roots of Indian secularism to the ancient civilizations of Mohenjo Daro and Harrapa; he states, “The Indus Valley civilization, as we find it, was highly developed and must have taken thousands of years to reach that stage. It was surprisingly enough, predominately a secular civilization...” (Nehru 1946, 65). The emphasis for Nehru is on the cosmopolitan and advanced trade system of the Indus Valley civilization, as he notes the “many contacts with the Sumerian civilization of that period” (Nehru 1946, 65). The Constitution of India further affirms this secular foundation of India's society through a legal lens, expressing both “freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion” and “protection of interests of minorities” as core principles of the nation (Government of India, 1950).

Yet, religiously motivated violence and the narratives of difference that contribute to violence suggest major challenges to a pluralistic vision of the Indian nation. Between 2005 and 2009, approximately 650 people were killed in communal violence while another 11,278 were injured (PRS Legislative Research 2011). Communal violence is defined by Horowitz as “lethal attack[s] by civilian members of one ethnic group on civilian members of another ethnic group, the victims chosen because of their group membership,” although how to adequately measure the

intent of violence is contested (2001, 1). In the Indian context, this reality of violence has often been connected to relations between Hindu nationalists and religious minority populations. Hindutva, or Hindu nationalism is a popular ideological stance that grew out of the Indian national movement. Sharma argues that Hindutva's general supposition is that "the nation is nothing but the physical and emotional outcome of Hindu aspirations" (2011, 4). In this society, "Muslims and Christians are 'outsiders' and could be part of India only after they accept the 'national culture'" (Sharma 2011, 4).

### ***Research Questions and Thesis***

Given this context of interreligious conflict, I focus this paper on analyzing the emergence and growth of India's ruling political power and prominent Hindu nationalist force, the Bharatiya Janata Party. I research specifically how the party has changed since its inception in 1980, and how it has shifted its political image from one that promotes Hindutva as its primary political project to a party that frames itself mainly through its promotion of neoliberal economic policy. The main questions that drive this research are: 1) Why has the BJP adopted a more moderate tone in regards to religion since 1996?; 2) What rhetorical strategies have BJP leaders used to construct a more moderate image?; 3) How does this rhetoric contrast with the BJP's identity before 1996?; and 4) What is the role of economic development discourse in portraying the BJP as a secular party?

To answer these questions, I examine the BJP's political documents and statements in two different time periods, 1980-1995 and 1996-2014. Within these documents, I examine examples of religious and secular content, discussing how the BJP has wielded these ideas over time. Based on this evidence, I argue that the national leaders of the BJP have secularized their message by centering their political emphasis on neoliberal-based economic development

policies and rhetoric, minimizing the role of Hindu nationalist ideological elements of the party that have been traditionally critiqued as militant and communal. I characterize the period between 1980-1995 as a time in which the party embraced its Hindu nationalist positions, while the period between 1996-2014 I describe as a time in which this party undertook this shift towards a secular, economic message. In drawing attention to this shift, I am speaking of the general trends of the national BJP party and its leaders who set the primary agenda for the BJP, and am not describing the entirety of the party as uniform in its approach to political messaging nor policy priorities. Indeed, as Chapter 4 and 5 describe, some actions of the BJP continue to connect with strong Hindutva viewpoints in religious terms, contrasting greatly with the rhetorical trends of the party at the national level.

Despite the secularization implications of the BJP's economic focus, I also hope to show how the BJP's adoption of neoliberal is consistent with its Hindutva ideological goals. I derive several thematic continuities between Hindutva and neoliberalism from Shankar Gopalakrishnan's (2006) theoretical research on the topic. I utilize three adapted ideas from Gopalakrishnan's work: 1) the BJP understandings of the role of the state as the implementer and enforcer of social and economic logic, 2) the BJP's rhetorical emphasis on national unity and an end to social divisions, first through the promotion of Hindutva morality and values and later through the promotion of free-market ideology and neoliberal logic, and 3) the BJP's grand vision of India's renewal that recalls a fabled and prosperous past. I use these continuities as markers through which I understand larger shifts in the party as in line with the BJP's Hindutva ideological foundations, while also recognizing the pragmatic nature of these changes in asserting a new image of the party.

### ***The Formation of the BJP***

Proponents of Hindutva have perpetrated the idea of a distinctly Hindu India since the country's independence, directly contrasting the secular narratives of early nationalist leaders like Nehru, Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, and Muhammad Ali Jinnah before his advocacy for an independent, albeit also secular, Pakistan (Tejani and Richman 2006, 45; Jawed 2009, 246-248). Since the early proclamations of Hindutva in 1923, this ideology has become increasingly embedded within the political party system (Chaturvedi 2003, 169). First through the formation of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) cultural organization in 1925, Hindu nationalists began to form groups dedicated to the promotion of their collective political ideals and cultural identity (Chaturvedi 2003, 170). While the RSS itself faced controversy for the role of former member Nathuram Godse in Mohandas Gandhi's death, individuals connected with the RSS network began to organize new Hindu nationalist political parties (Noorani 2000). This process occurred in the aftermath of the 1977 elections, during which the Bharatiya Jana Sangh and other Hindu nationalist groups formed the Janata Party and overtook the Congress Party (Chatterjee 1994, 14). Yet, after the Janata Party's election loss in 1980, the coalition dissolved and led to the formation of a newly branded Bharatiya Janata Party (Chatterjee 1994, 16). The BJP maintained three primary goals from the Jana Sangh and Janata Party platforms: the abolition of Article 370, which recognizes Jammu and Kashmir's special status, the replacement of the Minorities Commission by a Human Rights Commission, and the creation of a Uniform Civil Code (Chatterjee 1994, 16). Each of these main policy points is directly in contrast with the form of secular politics supported by the popular Indian National Congress (INC), which developed as an anti-colonial party in the late 1880s.

Why these policies began to resonate with the Indian public in the late 1980s and into 1990s is a result of the historical moment combined with careful political calculation by party

officials. Research by Nadadur suggests that the rise of Hindu nationalist parties in the 1990s can be attributed in part to their ability to highlight the idea of a threat to India's Hindu population (2006). Nadadur states that the changing demographic makeup of India, with an influx of Muslim immigrants coming into India along with high birth-rates among Muslims, served as targets for the BJP's strategy of stoking of Hindu anxiety (2006, 89). Oza's analysis agrees with this point of a crafted image of Muslim threat (2007). She notes in particular the violence inflicted on the bodies of pregnant women during the Gujarat riots of 2002, as some Hindu nationalist rioters saw Muslim women and children as carriers of a Muslim-dominated future (2007, 166). More modern instances of this idea are found in the idea of love jihad,<sup>1</sup> which some Hindu nationalist leaders have adopted as a common accusation to overstate and vilify occurrences of Hindu conversions to other religions, and to label these conversions as existential threats to India's cultural character (Sethi 2015; Bengali and M.N. 2014).

These types of narratives were compounded with the BJP's careful crafting of a political narrative that portrayed the Congress Party as passive and accommodating of extremism in the face of the Islamic threat. The BJP's harsh criticism of the INC's policy to ban Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* in 1988 demonstrates aspects of the BJP's tactical approach (Nadadur 2006, 102). Nadadur recalls, "the BJP highlighted... as evidence of the fact that Muslims were controlling the formulation of policy and were curtailing free expression, a bulwark of Indian democracy" (2006, 102). The BJP seized on these situations of apparent Muslim preferencing by the Congress party to argue that the Congress party was weak and afraid of the Muslim population. Nadadur also notes the BJP's frequent reference to the Islamic conquests of the Indian sub-continent that began in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, stating,

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<sup>1</sup> Refers to the predatory practice of romantic relationships between Muslim men and Hindu women. Is cited as a tool for conversion and tarnishing the honor of the Hindu community, although the prevalence of the practice is widely disputed (Sethi 2015).



The BJP campaign emphasized the fact that the Muslims were foreign invaders and had sacked and pillaged the Hindu population in the past. This led to the formation of a distinctly Hindu identity directed at preventing a similar Muslim invasion in contemporary times, an invasion that took the form of the perceived threat that the Hindu population felt from the Muslim minority (2006, 104).

This threat mentality that characterized the political messaging of the early BJP fits into the analysis provided by Fearon and Laitin on the construction of ethnic conflict in regards to ethnic violence (2000). The two authors note that many instances of effective group mobilization by political elites are framed as the work of a community to “prevent boundary ‘crossing’” or “create scripts of proper or heroic action” (Fearon and Laitin 2000, 874). In this case, the BJP has combined these two elements, calling on Hindus to protect themselves from this Muslim “crossing” by both voting for the BJP candidates and by engaging in communal violence to fight back against Muslim incursions.

The BJP first obtained a plurality of seats in the parliament in 1996, after arguably its most blatantly Hindutva-focused period (Nigam 1996). Its focus in the early 1990s on the Ram Janmabhoomi project, or the effort to build a temple at the supposed birthplace of Rama, and the subsequent destruction of the Babri Masjid served as a rallying issue for the BJP, as the party attached itself to the movement and worked to incorporate the Hindu pride in the mosque’s destruction into its own list of political successes (Oza 2007).

Yet, in 2004, the BJP lost power despite a high GDG annual growth rate of 8% (“Elections in India,” Wilkinson 2005, 160). Several theories have emerged to explain the BJP’s loss of power. Wilkinson argues that the Congress Party’s ability to form strong relationships with regional parties throughout India led to the BJP’s National Democratic Alliance coalition’s fall (“Elections in India,” 2005). However, Hibbard argues that the elections represented a repudiation of the BJP’s communalism and its inability to connect its economic goals to the

plight of the lower castes (2010, 173). He states, “Although many in [the lower castes] had supported the BJP when the party appeared to be defending them against communal antagonists, these same voters abandoned the BJP when its policies failed to provide tangible benefits” (2010, 173).

Despite whether this claim represents the true reasons why the voters of India shifted away from the BJP in 2004, the party markedly experienced a decline of popularity continuing on into 2009, winning just 116 seats compared to the 138 won in 2004 in the Lok Sabha general elections, which elects India’s lower house (BBC 2009). By 2009, some analysts began questioning the long-term viability of the BJP given its repeated failures at the national level. Rangaranjan argued that the public had become jaded about the party’s history of religious opportunism, and that the BJP’s nationalist branding of “Indian Shining” in 2004 failed to resonate in a country where “one in two children is malnourished” (2009).

Yet, only five years later, the BJP-led coalition won control over the Indian Parliament in 2014 (NDTV 2014). This reversal is particularly surprising given the role of Narendra Modi, the current Prime Minister of India, in the BJP’s momentum, as Modi has been implicated in the 2002 riots in Gujarat due to his role as Chief Minister of the state in 2002. The Gujarat riots began when a group of Muslims attacked Hindus on a train in the city of Godhra, killing 58 Hindus returning from Ayodhya (Varadarajan 2002, 6). Varadarajan notes that in the aftermath of these attacks, BJP leaders appear to have seized the moment to shore up Hindu support in Gujarat by framing the attacks as a severe threat to Gujarati citizens’ livelihoods (2002, 2-24). Modi’s framing of the initial train deaths as a premeditated terrorist attack, and his lack of action to mobilize police to quell the violence, call into question his responsibility for the violence (Varadarjan 2002, 7). Previous statements from Modi suggest a willingness to incite anti-Muslim

sentiment: he stated shortly after the World Trade Center attacks, “All Muslims are not terrorists but all terrorists are Muslim” (2002: 7).

Varadarajan claims that it was a combination of this effort to instill a perception of Muslims as a threat to Gujarat and the inaction of the Gujarati state government in the midst of the rioting that caused over 600 deaths and nearly 200,000 Muslims to flee the city (2002, 9). With a rising hostility toward Muslims already growing among much of the conservative Hindu population, Varadarajan claims that the government enabled these groups by providing “voter lists, gas cylinders, and transportation” to right-wing mobs, including members of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, a Hindu nationalist volunteer paramilitary group (2002, 9). Combined with this enabling of paramilitary forces was a lack of action from police and the Indian military deployed into the area. He writes, “In some places, the police assisted the mobs in hunting down Muslims. Elsewhere, they just stood by, or declared they had orders not to protect Muslims” (Varadarajan 2002, 9). This active violence and reinforcement of the idea of the Muslim threat, fostered by political elites and power holders, led to further incidence of violence and fomented a continuous debate over the causes and consequences of the Gujarat riots.

The allegations of government involvement in the religious violence led to the creation of a state commission to investigate the riots (Soni 2013). Yet, over a decade later, this commission, known as the Nanavati Commission, has been issued its 20<sup>th</sup> extension (Soni 2013). This extension is symbolic of the difficulty of finding clear answers about the riots, a factor which has helped Modi maintain his role as a public figure. The BJP’s effort to downplay Modi’s role in the Gujarat violence by portraying him as a figure of economic change and universal progress under his neoliberal platform (Jaganathan 2015; Mandhana 2014), despite the continued perception

among many that Modi is one of the primary faces of Hindutva (North 2014; Crowley 2014), leads directly to the question of the BJP's modern character and how these two concepts interact.

### *Hypothesis*

I argue that despite efforts to secularize its image through a strategy of centering its messaging on neoliberal policy goals, the BJP has maintained fundamental consistencies between its current political efforts and Hindutva ideology. While the BJP is indeed using inclusive development as a “secular” tool to legitimize its political mission both within the nation and outside of it, I argue that this effort is consistent given three major elements that connect Hindutva and neoliberalism: 1) The role of the state as enforcer of social and economic logic in both Hindutva and neoliberal-based societies; 2) The belief in an end to social divisions through the implementation of Hindutva and neoliberal ideologies; and 3) The promise of an age of renewal and transformation through the success of Hindutva and neoliberal political goals. To examine this further, my paper will consist of the following components: Chapter 2, which contains an examination of literature regarding theories of secularism, neoliberalism as a secular concept, Hindutva and neoliberal ideology, and political framing theories; Chapters 3 and 4, in which I analyze two key time periods (1980-1995 and 1996-2014) and the documents surrounding those time period to show specific moments of shift in the BJP's rhetorical strategy from a Hindutva-centered to neoliberal and development-centered message; and Chapter 5, in which I summarize the key findings in relation to the research hypothesis and future lines of research on this subject. Through this analysis, I hope to analyze key developments in India's democratic and religious history and to illustrate the role of religious and secular concepts in regards to political framing.

## Chapter Two: Conceptions of Secularism, Neoliberal Frameworks, and the Indian Context

In order to understand the primary motivations of the BJP's shift away from explicitly religious language and to situate my research within other studies of secular democracies, I will now turn to an examination of previous research on the following themes: secular vs. religious society, secular democracy, neoliberalism, nationalism and religion, nationalist political cycles, and the power of framing in politics. This literature review will also discuss the specific nature of India's democratic history among other secular democracies, helping me illustrate the unique perspective and goals of the BJP.

### *Defining Secular Society*

Before analyzing more carefully the concept of secularism within the context of democracy, I first discuss the conceptual framework of secularism as a political and social goal. Charles Taylor (2007) defines the secularization of society by examining the role of religion in public spaces (2007, 2). Discussing the claims of Western secularism, Taylor states:

“[Public spaces] have been allegedly emptied of God, or of any reference to ultimate reality. Or take from another side, as we function within various spheres of activity—economic, political, cultural, educational, professional, recreational—the norms and principles we follow, the deliberations we engage in, generally don't refer us to God or to any religious beliefs; the considerations we act on are internal to the 'rationality' of each sphere...” (2007, 2)

Thus, other institutional structures are privileged over religious faith in the search for “reason” and rationality, with religion seen instead as value systems based more in culturally specific notions of morality than an objective logic. Despite these notions of rationality, Taylor argues that secular societies do not necessarily inhibit the religiosity of populations, noting the high levels of religious belief in the United States despite its foundational emphasis on a separation between church and state (2007, 2). What defines these societies instead is their effort to push

religion to the margins, with the divine becoming merely an aspect of the transcendent and supernatural rather than embedded within the foundation of society itself (2007). In the case of the BJP's engagement in neoliberal and secular discourses, I understand the party's shift as a tactic through which it frames itself as part of the legacy of secular leadership within India's democracy.

Taylor argues that secular societies are a result of governments attempting to solve the problem of overlapping consensus, a term he borrows from John Rawls (Taylor 2007, 531). This concept problematizes the clashing perspectives of different individuals within a society that cause a situation in which no universally agreed upon basis for political principles is possible (Taylor 2007, 531). This problem of the overlapping consensus is one of the main drivers of secularism in the public sphere, as the construction of a non-religious space in which diverse individuals can each be present in a pluralistic construction of politics arguably provides the best outlet for political and social participation. Taylor argues that radical "horizontality" is also occurring in society, bringing previously marginalized voices to the political forefront through conceptions of equal rights of all individuals to participate in public discourse and the extension of equality under the law to all people through the extension of market principles (2007, 209).

Talal Asad argues that Taylor's view of secularization as helpful for minority voices is simplistic and overstated given the primarily European social movements that have led to the dominance of the secular discourse (2003). Rather than arguing that liberal democratic societies are consistently empowering marginalized peoples through the opening of the political process and through the promotion of political participation, Asad argues that there is "less and less of a direct link between the electorate and its parliamentary representatives— that the later are less and less representative of the socio-economic interests, identities, and aspirations of a culturally

differentiated and economic polarized electorate” (2003, 4). Given these challenges to Taylor’s idea of an open society in which diversity is naturally valued, Asad works to demonstrate that the “imagined community” of secular society is mediated through “constructed images” that promote certain ideas about what institutions are rational and worthy of holding power, and thus are a product of careful political calculation and framing (2003, 4).

Asad argues that these constructed images are part of a larger “modernity *project*,” emphasizing the ideological roots of this project as the basis for a secular movement (2003, 13). Indeed, Asad states that the concept of the secular is really one that was ideologically created by modernizers during the Reformation era: he describes his own study of secularism, “It is a major premise of this study that ‘the secular’ is conceptually prior to the political doctrine of ‘secularism,’ that over time a variety of concepts, practices, and sensibilities have come together to form ‘the secular’” (Asad 2003, 16). Through an analysis of the formation of modern understandings of Biblical scripture, Asad deconstructs the historical separation of religious or “sacred” discourses from “secular” ones, showing how these two seemingly dichotomous categories really were consistently intertwined, and became detached only through intentional political actions (2003, 23). Thus, largely European ideas define the modern interpretations of secularism, as European efforts to shift the relationship of church and state led to the formation of “the secular” as a concept itself.

While Taylor describes the marginalization of the divine in secular societies, Asad traces the development of secularism by discussing the creation of religious mythologies within the European context, noting the importance of the Reformation as a time that disconnected the conception of faith from nature, and instead placed faith within the context of the supernatural (2003, 39). In the context of Western European and American society, rapid technological

advancements of the Reformation and Enlightenment eras coupled with an interest by Western scientists in Greek philosophy and concepts of rationality led to a process of religion's disconnection with testable and verifiable fact (Asad 2003, 40).

Asad's explanation of the Western delineation of rational categories as separate from the spiritual helps explain why the BJP decided also to move toward strategies to downplay the religious-tones of its political messaging. Western ideas about the rationality of science versus religion pervade modern India, as the former British colony continues to be influenced by the legacy of European involvement in the region (Asad 1992, 12). Given secularism's historical importance, the BJP worked to craft a political message that could maintain aspects of its Hindutva platform while appeasing the secular tendency of Indian democracy since the country's independence.

### ***Eurocentric Distinctions Between Secular and Religious Societies***

Given this historical contention between understandings of secularism within India, it is important to note some key critiques of secularism as a concept and its connection to European-derived democratic liberalism. Mandair and Dressler (2011) describe a series of critiques regarding the identification and conception of religious versus secular political systems. First is the inherent Eurocentrism of this proposed religious and secular dichotomy, which was born out of a desire by Western Orientalists, missionaries, philosophers, anthropologists, historians, economists, and religionists to articulate and recognize the diversity of world cultures in terms of similarity and difference (Dressler and Mandair 2011, 15). In terms of what this means for the religio-secular paradigm, this colonial mindset established a system in which the beliefs of non-Western peoples could be recognized in the religious terms of Christian orthodoxy (Dressler and Mandair 2011, 15). As colonists interpreted their colonial holdings as societies that gave greater



reverence to religious values within their political systems, they stigmatized these societies as fundamentally religious and irrational in character when compared with European democracies (Dressler and Mandiar 2011, 15). This simplification allows for the twin assumption that colonial powers can be described as “secular” while non-European societies automatically receive an overstated label of “religious” due to their non-conformity with European ideas of separation between church and state (Dressler and Mandiar 2011, 15). Yet, this formation is not only problematic because of the assumptions formed within the generalizations of both secular and religious categories, but also because of the European colonialist application of this dichotomy into policy decisions in their colonial holdings. Because of colonial policy-making and the exclusion of non-Western cultural ideas from the contemporary human sciences and conceptions of rationality, Dressler and Mandair argue that colonial powers largely “ban[ned] [non-Western cultures] from entering signification (the realm of human intellectual and physical contact and interaction)” (2011, 15). Said’s *Orientalism* provides further evidence of colonialism’s influence in imposing constructed dichotomies onto “Eastern” cultures, as European scholars created the systems of meaning that are now commonly used to describe “the Orient” as religiously backwards (Said 1979). Judged as ideologically, politically, and religiously inferior, Indians thus were subjugated like many other colonized peoples, and the results of this subjugation continue in the modern era.

The legacy of these types of power dynamics continues to define the Indian context of secularism, although the Indian model of political secularism includes structures specific to the nation’s cultural context. Engineer (1998) traces the formation of Indian secularism to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, noting that previous to British colonial rule, feudal monarchs ruled portions of what became the Indian state according to the religious scriptures of the respective religious or caste

communities (1998, 4-5). He argues that from the beginning, the concept of Indian democracy was based in pluralism and the inclusion of minority communities, as leaders of the Indian National Congress hoped to establish broad legitimacy by including Christian, Muslim and Parsi within their executive structure in 1885 (Engineer 1998, 5). He argues that the desire to work within a framework of inclusion thus motivated the Indian national project (1998, 5).

However, Tejani does not support this viewpoint, and argues instead that secularism grew mainly out of efforts by the upper and middle-class Hindu majority to provide a counter-narrative to the idea of communalism, and an effort to establish a majority to protect against challenges from Muslims and Dalit communities (2007, 13-15). Tejani argues that as a counter-narrative to communalism, middle-class Hindu leaders were able to frame secularism as a narrative largely motivated by an effort to create a sense of security and belonging for lower-caste Hindus in order to broaden their political base (2007, 14-15). Despite this difference in understanding regarding the intention, Tejani agrees with Engineer that India's form of secularism emerged because of political concerns "closely tied to the particular historical contexts from which they emerged" and thus "did not replicate the narrative of history as staged in the West" (2007, 15).

Thus, a discussion of how Indian secularism is historically distinct is imperative, as it will help address how the BJP may be appealing to historical notions of secularism or how it alters those historical narratives to create new discourses of secularism. Barghava discusses the distinctiveness of Indian secularism by first grounding Indian secularism in the societal structure formed within the Indian Constitution (2007). He points to several Articles within the Indian Constitution as evidence of India's explicit commitment to a pluralistic vision of secularism, pointing out the protections afforded to religious minorities and the legal frameworks that

provide rights to individuals. He specifically notes Articles 25, 27, and 28, which respectively afford the rights of all persons to “freely to profess, practice and propagate religion,” to be protected from “any taxes, the proceeds of which are specifically appropriated in payment of expenses for the promotion or maintenance of any particular religion or religious denomination,” and to be protected from “religious instruction” and “worship” when attending an “educational institution” (Barghava 2007, 37-38). He also notes Article 15 as a foundational clause of equal protection, as it establishes the rule that “the state shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them” (Barghava 2007, 38).

Yet, in addition to these individual rights, Barghava argues that what distinguishes Indian secularism is the respect for the rights of larger religious communities. Article 30 is one example of this right, as it articulates the right of minorities to establish their own educational institutions (Government of India 1950). He analyzes two other key constitutional clauses, stating:

Even more significant are Articles 17 and 25(2) that require the state to intervene in religious affairs. Article 25(2)(b) states that ‘nothing in Article 25(1) prevents the state from making a law providing for social welfare and reform or the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.’ Article 17 is an uninhibited, robust attack on the caste system, arguably the central feature of Hinduism, by abolishing untouchability and by making the enforcement of any disability arising out of it an offence punishable by law. Both appear to take away the individual freedom of religion granted under Section 1 of Article 25 and to contravene Article 26 (Barghava 2007, 40).

Thus, as opposed to the strict separation of religion and state structures that often characterizes Western constitutional systems, the Indian constitution provides a template for both individual and community-based religious rights. Barghava states that this dual approach to addressing religious liberty within the constitution was developed from the sense that “India walked a tight rope between the requirement of religious liberty that frequently entails non-interference in the affairs of religious communities, and the demand for equality and justice which necessitates

intervention in religiously sanctioned social customs” (2007, 41). In a country with such religious diversity and history, Barghava argues that a lack of accommodation for “reasonable communitarianism” would have likely created more difficulty than clarity, thus leading the Indian constitutional framers to provide greater communal autonomy to different religious and ethnic groups (2007, 41).

Updahaya criticizes the current secular structure as too reminiscent of the British colonial views of India’s ethnic and religious heritage. He states that the Indian government “took on board the... view of India as a communally compartmentalized society,” and thus, the Indian brand of secularism “was not taken to mean the separation of religion from politics... [but instead] promoted the ideal of cooperation and unity among India’s ‘communities’” (Updahaya 1992, 817). This internalization of the British view of Indian communalism has led to a political dynamic consumed by majority-minority definition and tension. Updahaya argues that true secular democracy has not been tested in India, and instead, religious accommodations have led to a hegemonic majoritarian government which waivers between placating group tensions through the language of inclusion and conversely attempting to build support by stoking hostility, thus rallying a majority around a common cause (1992, 818). This is in large part because the Westminster model voting system adopted by India, which is defined by the first-past-the-post election system, has created a strong incentive for community mobilization as a tool for electoral success (Updahaya 1992, 830). In this system, even seeming moderates are pushed to build interest in their election through whatever means necessary, including building up the fears of the electorate in order to posture themselves as the safe choice (Updahaya 1992, 830). Updahaya argues that this majoritarian pressure has led to the promotion of Hindu-biased policies with only small concessions for religious minorities (1992, 831). While my analysis

focuses on the efforts of the BJP, it is important to understand these broader dynamics within Indian democracy to acknowledge the use of similar political tactics by other parties.

Hindu nationalist parties have uniquely critiqued the current constitutional policies that were created by the Congress Party as merely techniques to appease minority concerns at the expense of the majority (Reddy 2006, 173). As the primary Hindu nationalist political party in India, the BJP utilized this line of criticism to pose itself in opposition to the INC agenda. Partially in response to the criticism of the BJP as a communal party, the BJP has countered by decrying the Congress Party and its Nehruvian secular policies as “pseudo-secularism” (Reddy 2006, 173). One common point of criticism from the BJP is India’s lack of a Universal Civil Code. Reddy contends that the lack of a Universal Civil Code in India, which would regulate matters of civil and family law, allowed for the development of communities that self-governed many aspects of society, with this aspect of self-rule at least partially defining the identity of the people within these local courts’ jurisdictions (2006, 172). Thus, while the Congress Party held control during the 1980s, this autonomy allowed for groups to self-define the legal parameters of their communities, which in turn arguably led to the popularity of the Congress Party given its leniency on these legal issues (Reddy 2006, 172). The BJP eventually labeled this collection of policies as part of the pseudo-secular critique levied by the BJP and others, included the legal code flaws with the passage of the Protection of Rights on Divorce Bill, which barred Muslim women from appealing divorce decisions to any other law except the Shariat Islamic courts, the allowance of polygamy, and special accommodations for religious minorities in governmental and educational institutions (Reddy 2006, 172 and Tejani 2008, 9). As highlighted throughout my research, the consistent contestation of how secularism is manifested in society and its implications for India’s cultural character are key points in understanding the BJP’s use of

secular discourses. While the party created and utilized the charge of pseudo-secularism to garner the support of the Hindu majority, I argue that the BJP embraced some aspects of the big-tent and political potential of secular discourse most significantly in the late 1990s in conjunction with its neoliberal policy shift.

### ***The BJP and Hindutva's Anti-Colonial Response***

Before examining the BJP's more recent acceptance of neoliberalism as a tactic toward the secularization of its image and its efforts for global legitimacy, a short discussion of Hindu-nationalism's anti-colonial effort is necessary as it will help explain the BJP's frequent attempts to juxtapose the Indian state as in opposition to the West and will illuminate why the BJP's more recent shift is particularly notable.

As noted previously, the Indian National Congress, the party of Indian leaders Gandhi and Nehru, was established in 1885 and served as an organizing body for coordinating the Indian independence and anti-colonial movement (Jalal 2000). Yet, Jalal's history of India's nationalist movement underscores the multifaceted and varied approaches different political activists took during this time, as regional and religious nationalisms developed in conjunction with the more secular INC model (2000). While many of the INC leaders were Western educated and adapted ideas of non-religious governance, the history of British colonialism in defining communities combined with Indian citizens' adoption of more explicit religious identities and labels helped solidify these identities and strengthened thus strengthened religious nationalism (Jalal 2000). Various leaders across the political and religious spectrum were often in communication and conflict during this time about the ideal end result of the Indian state. Corbridge and Harriss illustrate this point through their discussion of Mahatma Gandhi's use of Hinduism as a tool of the nationalist movement (2000). The authors contrast the political power of Hinduism as

utilized by Gandhi with the Hindu nationalist discourses of Vinayak Savarkar, one of the earliest proponents of Hindutva: they argue that while Gandhi's Hinduism was a "non-textual kind which found room for the more ascetic teachings associated with Christ and the Buddha, as well as Kabir and Mohammed," Savarkar's posited that the realization of a truly vibrant Indian nation meant a definition of the state as distinctly Hindu in character combined with a subsequent military-industrial effort to cement India's status as a world power (Corbridge and Harriss 2000). Through the realization of this rhetoric, India would stand as a strong alternative to Europe, thus proving to the world the power of a Hindutva-based nation in opposite to secularism.

The BJP's political development in messaging can be interpreted as an attempt to realize Savarkar's conceptions of the ideal Indian state. My analysis highlights several instances of explicit, anti-colonial critiques within various BJP manifestos, as well as the party's larger efforts to establish "Hindudom" within India. Additionally, the continuing critique of the Congress Party's political approach to Indian's multi-religious community as pseudo-secular demonstrates the continuing legacy of conflict in defining a post-colonial India. I discuss each of these aspects of Hindu nationalism further in Chapters 3 and 4.

### ***Neoliberalism as a Secular Force***

Yet, despite the criticisms of the Congress Party's secular model, there are signs that the BJP also has developed its own discourse regarding secularism in India, moving away from more blatant Hindu nationalist tropes and adopting language of relative inclusivity. One of the key themes that the modern BJP promotes is the idea of economic development for all Indian citizens, as exemplified by its 2014 election motto "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas," which translates roughly to "participation of all, development for all" (BJP Election Manifesto 2014). Given the BJP's emphasis on economic development, and its neoliberal model of development, I draw on

Taylor's understanding of secular institutions perceived to be rational to argue that economics and development are defined by discourses that can be used as a rational counter-argument against those who would define the BJP as a religious party.

Bruce Berman (2013) connects neoliberalism with other aspects of secular knowledge creation, drawing comparisons between neoliberalism and approaches to knowledge that were shaped largely by European conceptions of modernity (2013). To understand the emergence of neoliberal ideology, Berman first describes how Western thought in the post-colonial era was shaped by Christian notions of a society headed toward oblivion given the feelings of European decline manifested in the collapse of the colonial system and world wars (2013, 62). Berman notes that these "apocalyptic" collective feelings were translated by some into new political movements, including both Nazism and communism, as both movements were concerned with the ultimate meaning of society, either through the formation of a "thousand-year Reich" or a "utopia of communist freedom and equality" (2013, 62). Underpinning both these social movements were notions of scientific advancement and objective truth as guiding forces for achieving a new economic and social reality.

Berman argues that the same privileging of the concept of objective truth was applied to neoliberalism, as Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman among others hoped to argue that free markets operate to produce an "ideal allocation of goods and services," thus creating a "society without conflict, rancor, or politics" (2013, 62). Just as in previous cases of describing the secular narrative, the neoliberal narrative attempts to portray itself as undeniable truth, and can be understood as one component of what Asad refers to as a "modernity project." Neoliberalism is merely another aspect of a Eurocentric approach to understanding societal advancement, as neoliberal-theorists seek to promote a system which they argue provides consistent and rational



outcomes based not on concepts of sacred truth, but instead on truth derived from human reason alone. The question of why the BJP, a party with deep connections to Hindu religious ideology, would be attracted to the concept of neoliberalism is bound up with this idea of rationality. I describe this further in the next section, highlighting specifically how neoliberalism serves as a tool through which the BJP can reframe its argument as one defined by rationality.

### ***The BJP and Neoliberalism***

Shankar Gopalakrishnan explores the linkage between neoliberal and BJP's Hindutva ideology in his 2006 article on the topic. Gopalakrishnan describes several "resonances" between Hindutva ideology and neoliberalism: firstly, in a reduction of social processes, neoliberalism privileges the idea that an individual's specific desires dictate their choices (2006, 2805). Thus in the example of engaging in racial discrimination, an individual is only demonstrating a preference, just as they would for their choice of one item or service over another (2006, 2805). Gopalakrishnan argues that this concept is similar to Hindutva leaders' reduction of societal dilemmas to that of individual choices. He states that the RSS and other Hindutva leaders originally sought to frame the problems of Hindu society as requiring "correct values" in upper-caste Hindu men, and presented the root of India's national problems as those of "character-crises" among the population (Gopalakrishnan 2006, 2805). Additionally, both ideologies accept the idea that social divisions within society are unnecessary. Hindutva leaders propose this idea by arguing that "genuine" society, shaped by the values of Hindutva ideology, produces perfect harmony between all groups within society (Gopalakrishnan 2006, 2805). Neoliberalism differs because it rejects the idea that different groups exist at all within society, yet, still offers a notion of harmony based on the perfect allocation of resources (Gopalakrishnan 2006, 2805). Lastly and perhaps most importantly, both Hindutva and neoliberalism offer visions of a utopian end state if

they are to be adopted. The 1998 BJP election manifesto provides this vision by “transform[ing]” India “into a benign global power, contributing her material, intellectual, cultural and spiritual energies... to save the world from the gathering civilizational crisis” (Gopalakrishnan 2006, 2805). Neoliberalism similarly imagines a world in crisis as stated previously, instead imagining a “utopia of a pure and perfect market” where all will be “free and prosperous” (Gopalakrishnan 2006, 2805). Thus, how the BJP sees itself in relation to both a national and global civilizational project, and how it frames the role of neoliberalism and development in this work will be key to my analysis.

Tommaso Bobbio argues that these neoliberal principles have been woven into Prime Minister Modi’s political narrative, as he states that the BJP has created a “political culture that merged religious traditionalism with neoliberal economic arguments” (2013, 123). Bobbio writes, “The propaganda on which Modi built his success does not place traditions and modernity in an antagonistic position. Rather, it is a combination of the two that underpins the path toward development and growth” (2013, 125). Indeed, Modi’s history of activism within the RSS, having served as a member of the organization’s volunteer force as a junior cadet, bolsters his credentials as a committed Hindu, while his appeals to the global market in order to attract investment to Gujarat serve to provide legitimacy on the international scale (2013, 125). Bobbio notes the importance of the bi-annual Vibrant Gujarat Global Investor’s Summits held by Modi, which began in 2003 as an external demonstration of Gujarat’s attractiveness for private-sector investment, and as an internal demonstration of Modi’s image as a truly Gujarati leader with the citizens’ interests at heart (2013, 126). This appeal to both internal and external elevates Modi’s appeal on the national scale, as his popularity among the majority of Gujarati’s and his efforts to appeal to larger national development interests through his interactions with international

investors both serve as a strategies to bolster the BJP's political clout and undermine the communalist charge.

### ***Political Framing Theories***

Given the evidence of the BJP's interaction with neoliberalism and appeals to Hindu communalism, I now review political theories of framing in order to understand how the BJP has effectively established itself as a mainstream political force. I will focus more specifically on how issue framing and representations of party values work in the context of election politics, since my analysis will focus on the BJP's rise to prominence in the context of several election cycles.

Sniderman and Theriault suggest several key components of how parties distinguish themselves in situations of electoral competition: 1) Political parties are not free to frame issues however they wish. They are constrained to electoral appeals consistent with their broader ideological commitments (2004, 141); 2) It is in the interest of political parties to frame issues in a way that will appeal to established points of view with a wide following (2004, 141); 3) When political parties contest an issue, citizens are exposed to a choice about how to think about an issue and a choice of how to respond to the way an issue is framed (2004, 141). I argue that these three elements each apply to the BJP's framing strategy.

Firstly, given the BJP's rhetorical promise of a renewed India based in the success of prior Hindu civilizations, the party seeks to frame its economic policies as a revitalization of India that will provide benefits to the whole of society. Secondly, the utilization of the language of inclusivity through its political motto serves as an appeal to the secular language that was propagated by Nehruvian leaders in the post-colonial period, thus maintaining, in theory, some commitment to the idea of a pluralistic India. Thirdly, by framing the Congress Party-coalitional

policies and interpretations of secularism as “pseudo-secular,” the BJP works to establish a counter-argument and promotes its own ideas of what secularism should be while lambasting the form of constitutional secularism brought about by the INC leaders.

Mikenberg’s analysis of agenda-setting practices among radical right-wing parties further emphasizes some of the trends that parties like the BJP undertake in order to maintain and build power (2001). He argues that holding office produces a “taming-effect” on these right-wing parties, as they rarely undertake significant policy change (Mikenberg 2001, 1). While he illustrates this point with an analysis of right-wing parties in four European nations, this argument may apply to the BJP case as well. Once the BJP achieved political power in 1998, it failed to institute some of the key religiously-based policies, including the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya and the creation of the Uniform Civil Code, which both appear in the 2014 election manifesto (BJP Election Manifesto 2014). Instead, the BJP coalition controlled Parliament during a time of remarkable economic growth, which has become the primary talking point of its newest manifesto (BJP Election Manifesto 2014). This non-religious emphasis on growth serves as a frame through which the BJP hopes to promote its image as a legitimate political force for all Indians while maintaining some of its old policies.

Given this overview of how the BJP’s rhetoric can be understood as secular and the context in which secularism can be understood as a political concept, I now move to analyze more specifically trends within the BJP’s election framing efforts in the hopes of drawing some conclusions about the BJP’s adoption of secular language. From this study, I hope to establish a comparison between the BJP’s original political techniques and its current methods, tracing these trends through the study of its official election manifestos and election speeches and policy documents.

## Chapter Three: The Swadeshi-Hindutva Project (1980-1995)

In order to understand the initial framing efforts of the BJP during its rise to prominence, I now explore the BJP's political strategies from 1980-1995, and explain how these demonstrate the party's promotion of various Hindutva-based ideological goals. I move in Chapter 4 to explain how the BJP's ideological goals have both changed and been maintained despite its shift to a new neoliberal economic platform and the removal of platform references to issues traditionally understood as central to the Hindutva-cause.

While I understand parts of this shift as pragmatic efforts to resonate with the majority of India's voters, I also examine this within a broader question of how the BJP shift relates to the specific form of secular democracy in India, and whether the BJP is embracing secularism or whether the shift is understandable as a development within a Hindutva-ideological structure. While I contend that party leaders indeed shifted most significantly toward neoliberal ideology and secular framing as they moved closer to majority control of Indian governance, I also draw several links between the two periods in relation to three major themes that characterize the BJP's political strategy, each of which is partially inspired by Gopalakrishnan's (2007) understanding of the relationships between Hindutva and neoliberalism: 1) the BJP understandings of the role of the state as the implementer and enforcer of social and economic logic, 2) the BJP's framing of its Hindutva agenda as one that will end social divisions and 3) the BJP's grand vision of India's renewal. Through examination of the BJP leaders' policy actions and ideological statements from 1980-1995, I hope to highlight both the continuities and changes in the BJP's political strategy in relation to these categories and move beyond the simplistic narrative the BJP's shift towards political moderation.

In this section, I explore these themes chronologically, discussing elements of the BJP's policy actions and stated beliefs between 1980-1995. I attempt to demonstrate how these three thematic areas of continuity between the two time periods operate even as political events and other elements shift over time in conjunction with the BJP's efforts to display itself as a modern party.

### ***The BJP as Enforcer of Hindutva Social and Economic Logic***

I use this overarching idea of the BJP's understanding of the role of the central government as enforcer of the social and economic logic for the nation as one area of continuity between the more conventionally communal and religiously-based period of the BJP's political between 1980-1995 and its current shift toward more moderate religious rhetoric from 1996-2014. This is one of three compelling "resonances" I have adapted from Gopalakrishnan's analysis of connections between Hindutva and neoliberal ideology (2006, 2805). Gopalakrishnan notes that Hindutva posits the role of the state as "watchman" and notes the remarks of Deendayal Upadhyaya, a Hindu nationalist leader who competed for power prior to the formation of the BJP, who claims that the state's responsibility is "dharma"<sup>2</sup> to "manifest the nations soul" (2006, 2805). In the case of Hindutva, this *dharma* translates itself into the propagation of a distinctly Hindu-vision for the state, with the mobilization of the Hindu population and symbols at its core.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, this ideological approach manifested itself in the as support for economic nationalism known as *swadeshi*<sup>3</sup> as well as through a constructed dialogue of a threat to "Hindustan." While *swadeshi* enforces the logic of Hindutva through its implication that Indian derived industries must be protected against the threat of foreign incursion into India's

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<sup>2</sup> Hindi for duty.

<sup>3</sup> *Swadeshi* as a phrase comes from the Sanskrit roots *swa*, which means self or own, and *desh*, which means country. Thus, *swadeshi* refers to the economic production of goods within and for one's own country.

markets, the strategic highlighting of “attacks” on India’s sovereignty and Hindu character pose a more direct picture of the importance of Hinduism as a source of collective meaning and morality in the face of consistent challenges by those the BJP claims would seek to destroy the state itself.

In this section, I will first examine the role of swadeshi in enforcing this logic before moving to examine several key examples of the BJP’s use of threat discourses as tools for political mobilization. I note the change over time in the tone of swadeshi-focused rhetoric even during this period I categorize as generally conforming with the BJP’s Hindu ideological roots, as these shifts foreshadow the embrace of neoliberalism and use of more secular rhetorical strategies in the future. I will discuss how these changes fit within the greater logic of the BJP’s Hindutva goals in Chapter 4.

### *Swadeshi*

Swadeshi is an economic ideology that rose to prominence out of the colonial context in India in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mohandas Gandhi used the term to advocate for “home industry” or the production of Indian goods rather than the importation of basic products into the former colony (Bayley 1986, 285). Since that time, the term swadeshi has been connected with a nationalist history that calls on Indian citizens and the Indian government to contribute to the economic vitality of the state by refusing international imports and preferencing national companies (Hansen 1999, 85).

As the Indian National Congress Party shifted national policy toward the incorporation of more foreign corporations and capital in the 1980s, Hindu nationalists in groups such as the RSS and the newly formed BJP strongly criticized these actions as antithetical to the swadeshi mission and a betrayal of Indian industry (Biswas 2004, 117). Yet, Lakha notes that the BJP’s

swadeshi-focused rhetoric shifted notably after it gained achieving political power, as foreign investment barriers were removed and foreign private involvement in the Indian insurance industry was encouraged (2007, 83-87). This section will focus on statements from the BJP's economic resolutions between 1980-1995, as this period contrasts greatly with the post 1995 period. In this section, I illustrate how the BJP rhetoric on swadeshi reflects the larger ideology of the BJP that supports the state's role in promoting the realization of specific social and economic logics.

Perhaps the most directly obvious appeal to the swadeshi dialogue are the statements from the BJP on its displeasure with the Congress Party's actions regarding the influence of foreign capital, enterprise, and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) within the Indian economy. Examining this from the party's beginning in 1980, a consistent emphasis on the Congress Party's appeasement of foreign interests is projected within the narrative of the BJP, as leaders attempt to frame the party as the home-concerned rather than globally focused party of the Indian majority.

At the news of the Congress Party's proposal for a Special Drawing Rights<sup>4</sup> loan of 3.9 billion rupees,<sup>5</sup> or approx. \$5.68 billion in 1981, the BJP immediately began to criticize the poor financial management of the Congress Government as well as the binding conditions of the loan, which required the end of several protectionist policies aimed at keeping farmer profits high (BJP "New Delhi" 1981, 6-10; IMF "India and the IMF" 2014; Nossiter 1981). The National Executive of the BJP stated, "The massive loan will encourage big business and foreign monopolies to indulge more in the luxury of unnecessary imports (BJP "New Delhi" 1981, 10)." This statement highlights the BJP distrust of foreign investment and the emphasis on avoiding

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<sup>4</sup> The SDR is an international reserve asset, created by the IMF in 1969 to supplement its member countries' official reserves (IMF "Special Drawing Rights Fact Sheet" 2014).

<sup>5</sup> India's national currency.



imports which could harm domestic producers. Additionally, the party describes the transaction as a dramatic blow for the nation, stating that the BJP “rejects the acceptance of this IMF loan having strings which are detrimental to national interests and are humiliating” (BJP “New Delhi” 1981, 10). This language of the humiliation of India under the Congress rule lingers throughout the entirety of the BJP’s political critique as a growing contender party, and I will return to it later in other sections of this study.

Additionally, I argue that the BJP’s critiques of the Congress at this stage rest in its since-discarded ideological stance that India’s economy could only flourish if Indian business was at the heart of national economic progress. In positioning themselves as arbiters of the state’s social and economic goals, as well as the associated morality that is attached to these goals, the BJP’s emphasis on Indian-based industry suggests a belief in the superiority of India as a whole. This notion is not unlike other nationalist ideas of exceptionalism, but given the BJP’s additional emphasis on India’s distinct Hindu-nature and the need of the state to enforce that Hindu-nature, I argue that the party’s swadeshi stance in reality is in reality a reflection of the BJP’s desire for the state to embody the Hindu-soul Gopalakrishnan highlights in his analyses.

The majority of the tone regarding foreign investment and interference by IGOs in the Indian economy is one of betrayal that harms the Indian majority. In its 1983 National Executive report from Lucknow, the BJP laments the multinational corporations’ presence in India, criticizing the “disgusting lack of faith in [India’s] engineering competence” (36). It demanded in the report that the Government change its economic priorities “which have promoted a five star culture, preferred swimming pools in five-star hotels to drinking water in problem villages, and imports to indigenous endeavor” (BJP “Lucknow” 1983, 36).

L.K. Advani's rhetoric from his 1987 statement to the National Council of the BJP is equally hostile toward foreign investment and multinationals. He describes multinationals' influence as a "continuing invasion" and castigates the Congress for its willingness to "sign away" "nearly all of the big contracts" (Advani 1987, 16). He calls instead for a "boost to domestic production and exports based on total mobilization of national resources" (Advani 1987, 17).

In the early 1990s, the strength of the rhetoric began to be qualified by statements that recognized the importance of global trade networks and the potential benefits of some foreign imports. Instead of using the harsh language that previously characterized by statements of "disgust" and cries of ending the "invasion," the BJP economic statements of 1990 call for a "thorough debate" regarding the importance of various imports and foreign collaborations (1990, 98). The document concedes that in "areas such as defence, communication, energy conservation, population control, coal washery etc.... we need modern technology urgently" (BJP "Madras" 1990, 98).

I argue that this shift not only demonstrates a pragmatism and realization among the BJP of its need to compete economically on the whole, but also again reflects the larger connection of the BJP's efforts with its desire for a strong Hindu state. The signs of the party's shift toward the embrace of a free-market system of economics come only after the recognition of its strategic disadvantage in several important development areas. In order to support the growth of Hindu-state, the party decided to ease its ideological preferencing of Hindu businesses, instead opting for an economic model which accounted for some basic needs that it believed empowered the state to remain competitive.

This shift toward an acceptance of globalization and further opening of the market continued throughout the 1990s, as the BJP statements on the matter demonstrate leeway especially in regards to specific modern technologies: the party states in its 1992 report from Sarnath, “The role of foreign capital... should be limited to specified areas of national growth. The unfettered entry of foreign capital and multinationals, except in high technology areas, should not be permitted” (120). These qualifications come from a general movement closer to political power, and thus a need to show a willingness to accept foreign technology and multinational involvement in situations that could both provide both economic and political benefits to the state. Indeed, by 1995, the rhetoric has shifted so greatly that the BJP proclaims it will “welcome foreign investment in high tech and infrastructure sectors” (150).

As a whole, I see these moves as the beginning of ideological compromises rather than contradictions. While *swadeshi* demonstrates a fundamental concern for India’s superiority in generating its own economic growth, the move toward acceptance of further foreign inputs is also an attempt to establish Indian superiority, although it abandons the idea that this must always be a result of solely Indian actions. Given that *Hindutva* ideology imagines an India inseparable from Hinduism, I now move to examine perhaps the most notable instance of the BJP’s political goals during the 1980s and early 1990s and the effort to promote Hindu symbols and Hindu nationalist identity within the state.

### ***The Babri Masjid Demolition***

Perhaps the most famous example of *Hindutva* extremism is the destruction of the Babri Masjid holy site in India. *Hindutva* proponents demolished the mosque in the hopes of constructing a temple to Rama, the avatar of the Hindu god Vishnu whose birthplace is claimed to be in the same location as the Babri Masjid (Jaffrelot 2007, 279-280). The Babri Masjid itself

dates back to 1528, when the mosque was built in Ayodhya during the rule of the first Mughal emperor, Babur (Jaffrelot 2007, 279). Given the references to Ayodhya being the birthplace of Rama found in the ancient Ramayana texts, Hindu ascetics in the mid-1800s claimed that the mosque was built atop the birthplace of Rama (Jaffrelot 2007, 279). This claim reemerged in post-independence era India when idols of Rama and Sita, the goddess counterpart to Rama, were placed within the mosque in 1949, causing thousands of local Hindus to travel to the site to pay homage to what was considered a religious miracle (Jaffrelot 2007, 279-280). In relation to the BJP, the issue emerged to political prominence in 1984 as a political and cultural project of the Vishva Hindu Prashad, a right-wing Hindu ideological group in alignment with the values of other Hindutva groups like the RSS. The VHP orchestrated a first procession in 1984 to Delhi with hopes of convincing the government to act and repurpose the space of the mosque for a Hindu temple; however, the assassination of Indira Gandhi hindered this project, and the issue lay dormant for another five years until proponents of the Rama Temple project reinvigorated the effort (Jaffrelot 2007, 280). I analyze BJP leader's statements on and available histories about the BJP's role in the Ram Mandir movement, highlighting these leaders' framing of the project's importance to India as a whole. While much analysis has been done on the Ayodhya issue, the documents available citing specific rationales for BJP leaders' involvement are limited.

Former BJP President Advani attempted to justify the BJP role in the Ram Janmbhoomi movement just one year before the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992 (282). Advani himself played a crucial role in mainstreaming the issue within the BJP party structure, as he capitalized on the growing momentum around the movement by Hindu nationalists and began a yatra, or pilgrimage in the form of a procession, to Ayodhya in 1990 (Jaffrelot 2007, 281). The Advani-led yatra brought thousands of Hindus to the mosque and served as a symbolic catalyst for the

mosque's eventual destruction in 1992 at the hands of Hindus (Jaffrelot 2007, 281). In the context of a formal interview, Advani dismissed the necessity of justifying that the Rama birthplace is indeed in Ayodhya, stating "If crores<sup>6</sup> of Hindus believe that [Ayodhya] is the birthplace of Rama, I would expect the State as well as other sections of opinion in this country, especially the minorities, to respect that opinion and say... we are not asking you to prove this" (Jaffrelot 2008, 283). I interpret this as another example of Gopalakrishnan's argument of the state as the "watchman" and "enforcer" given Advani's willing embrace of a Hindu-version of truth as legitimate despite the disputed nature of the issue. He goes on to de-emphasize the notion of India as a Hindu-country within the interview, drawing comparisons with other liberal democracies and stating, "Every country has a cultural ethos. Even if Italy is called a Catholic State or great Britain a Protestant one, they are still regarded as liberal. But if India is called a Hindu State... why does it become communal?" (Jaffrelot 2008, 283). These actions demonstrate an effort to normalize the idea of a Hindu-based state. Yet, what he does not acknowledge is the role of the BJP in solidifying at Hindu-ethos in India. He underplays the role of cultural enforcers like the BJP and other Hindu nationalist groups in defining religion's role in the state, instead suggesting that India in its own right is a naturally Hindu-state.

Indeed, even after the destruction of the Babri Masjid, Advani maintains a similar tone on the importance of the Ram Mandir movement. In an interview with the India Express, he stated, "The Ayodhya movement, according to the BJP, is not just for building a temple. It is a mass movement—the biggest since independence—to reaffirm the nation's cultural identity" (Jaffrelot 2008, 291). Cultural identity for Advani includes the premise that the Babri Masjid represents an affront to Indian history, as a sign of the Muslim "other's" incursions into a society

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<sup>6</sup> One crore is equal to 10 million.

that is first and foremost a Hindu cultural center. These statements run directly counter to Advani's claims of support for aspects of the secular state: he stated in 1992, "The BJP is unequivocally committed to secularism. As conceived by our Constitution makers, secularism meant... equal respect for all religions... We believe that India is secular because it is predominately Hindu. Theocracy is alien to our history and tradition" (291). I argue that this claim is largely disingenuous, and only applies after Advani advocated for the normalization of Hinduism as the basis for Indian society. While Nehruvian secularism allows for various religious communities to continue some basic elements of autonomy independently of each other, it does not position religious values as the basis of societal morality. Advani's statements and the destruction of the Babri Masjid do just that, suggesting that India must first be understood as a Hindu nation without accommodation of other religious groups.

The destruction of the Babri Masjid serves as a symbolic action that illustrates the BJP's commitment to a sweeping Hindu nationalist vision for society. Yet, even in this time period of symbolic Hindu domination, the BJP leadership worked to normalize a Hindu-dominant position by framing the action itself within the acceptability of the secularist discourse. While the radicalism of the agenda is clear in the eventual action of thousands of Hindus to tear the mosque down themselves, the necessity of maintaining a sense of political legitimacy in comparison with the legitimacy of the Congress Party weighed on the BJP, and I believe it is for this reason the party nuances its ideological desire for the state as an enforcer of religious power.

### ***The End of Social Divisions through Hindutva***

A second aspect of Gopalakrishnan's theoretical connection of Hindutva and neoliberalism I adapted is the idea that both systems envision an end to social divisions through the perfect application of either Hindu ideology or neoliberalism. Hindutva activists writing

directly prior to the formation of the BJP claimed that the universality of Hindutva ideology offers a moral code in which “(social sectors) form an infinite spiral with no inner conflicts and no tensions” (Gopalakrishnan 2006, 2080). I will discuss how the BJP’s use of neoliberalism also embraces this idea of the end to social divisions in Chapter 4.

I recognize that discussing Hindutva ideology as one that posits an end to social division may seem counterintuitive given the previous discussions on instances in which proponents from the BJP highlighted the “Muslim threat” to galvanize the population to action in instances like the Babri Masjid destruction. However, I recognize a parallel rhetorical effort by the BJP within these actions to justify Hindutva as promoting peace under the condition that all of India’s citizens accept Hindutva’s legitimacy.

One clear example of the BJP’s use of Hindutva as an ideological tool through which to end the concept of meaningful social divisions is demonstrated by its effort to establish a uniform civil code in law within India. The controversy over the Shah Bano case of 1985, and BJP’s reaction to this incident and subsequent argument that it provided evidence as to why a uniform civil code of law is needed within India, depicts the party’s use of Hindutva as a mechanism through which to attempt to eliminate some social divisions. I use this category with some hesitation still, hypothesizing that this elimination of the perception of social divisions is only truly advocated for those situations in which Hindutva already holds a privileged position. The details of the Shah Bano case are well known in India, as Shah Bano, a divorced Muslim woman, sued her husband for maintenance (Rudolph and Rudolph 2002, 35). Given India’s lack of a uniform civil code, and its reliance instead on a Nehruvian secular model which allows for religious courts to make judgments on personal law, the Shah Bano case was seen by the BJP as an example of the Congress Party’s failed secularism and senseless appeasement of minority

communities rather than as a legitimate understanding of multi-religious dynamics within India (Chowdry 2003, 101). While the Supreme Court at first upheld Shah Bano's right to a monthly maintenance payment from her husband, this decision was later overturned as the Congress Party adopted the "Muslim Women's Bill" in parliament and stated that Muslim women had no right to obtain maintenance payments (Chowdry 2003, 113).

Hindu nationalist groups were outraged over the action to overturn the initial ruling, seeing the actions of the Congress Party as capitulation to the wishes of conservative Muslim groups (Chowdry 2003, 116). There is some truth to this critique, as Chowdry states that progressive Muslim groups wrote many statements at the time in support of the initial ruling, legitimizing the ruling within the context of Islamic law (2013, 115). Yet, these actions failed to prevent the Congress Party and national leadership at the time from changing the ruling and maintaining the role of religious courts in deciding these matters.

While the circumstances of the Shah Bano case led to concerns from individuals across a spectrum of Indian society, I understand the BJP and Hindutva critiques as in line with these actors' general disapproval of pluralism in the "post-division" Hindu-based moral society. Chowdry notes that the BJP and Hindu-right often focus on the Muslim community's practices of polygamy and divorce by repudiation, which they argue lead to significant struggles for Muslim women (2003, 116). While portions of this critique may be accurate, there is little effort by the BJP or other proponents of Hindutva to discuss the diversity of opinions within the Muslim community on these issues (2003, 116). Instead, these religious distinctions take on the character of shaming Muslim communities and stereotyping Muslim communities as a whole.

The BJP further capitalizes on this rhetoric by connecting these depictions of Muslim amorality with the additional threat discourse of Muslim incursion into Indian society



(Golwalkar 1966, 232). M.S. Golwalkar, an ideological leader of the R.S.S. and key influencer of the BJP stated in his book *Bunch of Thoughts*, “Even today, Muslims, whether in high positions of government or outside, participate openly in rabidly anti-national conferences... We are asked to believe that such elements are the sons of this soil!” (1966, 232-265; found in Jaffrelot 2006, 126). Thus, at the core of the BJP Hindutva ideology during this time was an idea that non-Hindu participation in the Indian project was inherently flawed if non-Hindus do not first accept the supremacy of Hindu values. Instead, the BJP derives its ideology from the position that Hinduism must form the morality of society, and other groups must adhere to these ideological stances. In sum, Hindutva promotes the dissolution of social divide by accepting the absolute supremacy of Hindu ideology without room for other viewpoints. While the Shah Bano case illuminates a legitimate debate over the nature of the Indian law, the BJP’s rhetoric reinforces ideas of its sense of ideological and moral superiority, and postulates an active role of the state in enforcing this superiority.

### ***Hindutva Vision of India Transformed***

One of the clearest points of linkage between Hindutva ideology and neoliberalism is the idea that the adoption of these ideological stances in the form of public policy as well as individual acceptance will lead to the ideal society. Gopalakrishnan notes that Hindutva leaders in 1979 claimed that their “world system” would lead to India being “one with the whole of mankind” (2006, 2805). While this rhetoric is loftier than that proposed by modern proponents of neoliberalism, who embrace the Thatcherite decree “there is no alternative,” both neoliberal and Hindutva activists make claims that these systems provide the best foundations for civilization.

I characterize the time period between 1980-1995 as a time in which the BJP was generally more concerned with the realization of Hindutva-based transformation of society.

While I have noted slow moves toward neoliberalism in my previous discussion of swadeshi, the writing, speeches, and interviews of this time period more directly project a vision of a grand Hindu-based society. While secular models of society often also establish utopian prospects and goals for societal progress, Hindutva ideology is unique in its use of religiously-derived values as the moral fabric for creating the ideal society. The Hindu nationalist effort to enact social change through the removal of protections for minority religious groups and the subsequent promotion of Hindu nationalist political goals defines the aspects of the BJP's vision for India renewed.

The previously cited actions of the BJP during this period all demonstrate manifestations of this ideology. The three categories I have created based on Gopalakrishnan's work are not mutually exclusive, but instead demonstrate the network of ideas that form the basis of Hindutva thought. In supporting the Ram Janmbhoomi project, the BJP leadership embraced a vision of India in line with the vision of the most ardent Hindu nationalists. L.K. Advani often refers back to the Ayodhya effort as a time of Hindu "self-renewal," suggesting that the action was necessary to reassert India's rightful historical identity (Advani 2008). Most of the contentious actions and policies of the BJP embrace a similar ideal of re-establishing a Hindu golden age, including the party's response to the Shah Bano case and its push to remove special status for the Jammu-Kashmir region. In their critique of the Congress Party's policies on these items as pseudo-secular, the BJP leaders reinforce the idea of an India whose identity is defined by the Hindu nationalist interpretation of the enforcement of Hindu values and an awakening of India's Hindu majority. It postulates an India made successful by the unity of its people, who together embrace the idea of the nation as the locus of Hindu culture above all other aspects of Indian identity.

As a whole, the BJP embraced these ideas and methods of framing its political mission from 1980-1995. Driven by the desire to mobilize the Hindu majority and to reclaim a narrative

of India's cultural past, the BJP emerged as a national party through its dedication to Hindu nationalist ideas and its stark opposition to the INC's accommodations to minority and religious communities. This combined with the swadeshi economic strategy helped to establish the party as an eventual foil to the INC after years of marginal success. Only after the mobilization of the Rath Yatra effort did the party truly emerge as a potentially dominant political force, and its success in the 1996 elections demonstrated the BJP's move from a network of regional Hindu nationalist activists to a legitimate national power.

## Chapter Four: The Neoliberal Shift (1996-2014)

In this chapter, I discuss the BJP's transition away from explicitly Hindutva-focused rhetoric and toward a new political rebranding of the party as a neoliberal economic power. I argue that this neoliberal rhetorical and strategic focus is part of a larger effort within the national leadership of the BJP to secularize its image. I begin this chapter with a discussion of the 1996 General Election in India, which marked the first time that the BJP established a plurality of seats in the Lok Sabha parliament. I move from here to discuss how the BJP changed its ideological image over time, transitioning slowly to frame themselves as a party rooted in secular values while deemphasizing the religious character of its party. I demonstrate the complexity of this change in framing rather than oversimplify the effort, ending this section by noting two contradicting moments and continuing discourses of the BJP's history from 1996-2014 that contradict this secularization shift. In addition to these contradictions, I argue that while the BJP has established a new political focus in its adoption of neoliberalism, these changes must be understood as efforts to incorporate old aspects of its political mission into a new logical framework and discourse rather than a full abandonment of the party's prior Hindutva efforts. To express this, I return to the three sub-section themes of Chapter 3: 1) The BJP as Enforcer of Neoliberal Social and Economic Logic; 2) The End of Social Divisions through Neoliberalism; 3) The Neoliberal Vision of India Transformed.

My research focuses on the linkages between the ideas of Hindu nationalism and neoliberalism, and I draw from Gopalakrishnan's analysis to demonstrate the consistency of Hindutva with the BJP's new neoliberal strategy during this time. I also demonstrate how neoliberal economics establishes ideal conditions in which Hindutva ideology can continue to hold its influence without the BJP's explicit political effort to promote it. While the previous

chapter focused on demonstrating how Hindutva alone worked within three broad political sub-projects, this chapter more carefully focuses on the similarities and connections of Hindutva and neoliberalism. As ideologies, both Hindutva and neoliberalism allow political elites within the BJP to utilize the power of the state as the enforcer of social logic to promote the end goals of the Hindu nationalist political movement, and I focus this Chapter on analyzing these actors' tactics.

### **The BJP Establishes (and Quickly Loses) Control**

The 1996 elections marked a turning point for the BJP in terms of the party's political power, as the Hindutva rhetoric and actions that characterized its first 16 years of existence helped the party establish a broad base of support compared with a weakening Congress Party. The election marked the first time in its history that the BJP won a plurality of seats in the Lok Sabha parliament, taking 161 seats compared to the Congress Party's 114 (Nigam 1996). However, given the single-member district system for India's parliamentary vote, the BJP won this plurality with only 20% of total votes, less than the 28% won by the INC (Nigam 1996). The BJP's advantage in parliamentary seats was a result more of its more widespread and strong regional popularity in the largest Indian states. Additionally, the percentage of votes won by the BJP was nearly the same as the BJP's previous election vote total at approximately 20%, while the Congress Party experienced a striking decline from 36.6% in 1991 to 28.8% in 1996 (Nigam 1996).

Additionally, Nigam notes that analysis of the BJP's quick growth from its formation in 1980 is often oversimplified and gives too little credence to the importance of pre-BJP Hindutva parties that eventually led to the BJP's creation (1996, 1160). While the BJP did indeed make strides from its 7.3% vote total in 1984 to the 20% in 1996, seeing that twelve year time gap as indicative of the growth of Hindu nationalism minimizes the importance of pre-BJP Hindutva

parties such as the Jan Sangh Party which won a small number of seats beginning as early as 1952 (Nigam 1996, 1160).

The platform of the BJP in this initial victory maintained the Hindutva character of previous policy and ideological stances. Chowdry highlights these similarities, noting the nationalist mission of the platform that calls on all “patriotic Indians” to assist the BJP in the “reinvigoration” of a “proud, prosperous, and strong India” as opposed to a nation marred by the “subjugation of our ancient land” (2003, 16). This reference recalls the legacy of British and Muslim rule, and its the anti-colonial call reinforces the idea of the BJP as the true party of transformation, with the Congress Party serving merely in a transition role between colonialism and a vibrant Indian future.

Yet, despite this electoral success, the BJP soon faced serious political embarrassment, as the party’s governing coalition collapsed after just 13 days of rule (Ganguly 1997, 129). BJP Prime Minister Atal Vajpayee and his cabinet resigned before a scheduled no-confidence vote, leaving a coalition smaller parties not affiliated with the BJP or Congress to govern India until the next elections in 1998 (Ganguly 1997, 130). Thus, in asking what pushed the BJP toward a new frame to use for in order to shift future political results in the party’s favor, the pressure of forming a formidable and lasting central government that demanded the respect rather than mockery of opposition parties was key to the calculation after this collapse.

The result combined the already occurring developments of India’s neoliberal shift with the BJP national party’s continual erasure of more explicitly religious material from each subsequent election manifesto. To demonstrate this, I focus the next sub-section on the shift away from Hindutva rhetoric in the party’s formal policy documents and towards a greater emphasis on global development policies rooted in neoliberal economics. I then discuss the

neoliberal shift in comparison with the categories I derived from Gopalakrishnan's analysis. Lastly, I note several events that show a continuing divide between the BJP national party's effort to frame the party as modern and secular and the reality of continued incidents that point to a more militant Hindutva character within the party.

### **Election Manifestos: The BJP Shifts Its Framing (1996-2014)**

The BJP Manifesto of 1996 continued the Hindutva rhetoric of the early 1990s, with party leaders advocating for the centrality of "cultural nationalism" in their leadership strategy through the implementation a plan grounded in the four principles of good governance: *swadeshi* or "economic nationalism" *suraksha* or "defense of Indian sovereignty," *shuchita* or "an anti-corruption agenda," and *samrasata* or "empowerment" (Chowdry 2003, 103). The national BJP leadership understood Hindutva as a common ideology underlying these four principles, as Chowdry notes Advani's words at the time: "I see Hindutva as inextricably woven into the humanism of the land" (Chowdry 2003, 103). This declaration from 1996 matches the earlier claims of Advani and the actions of BJP leaders in the early 1990s in their calculated denial of the communalist charge. Instead, the primary defense from Advani and others became the argument that Hindutva is simply a cultural fact of Indians' collective heritage (Jaffrelot 2008, 283).

The BJP largely maintained this Hindutva-centric platform moving into the 1998 elections, including the full incorporation of Jammu-Kashmir into India, the construction of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya, and the creation of a Uniform Civil Code prominently in the larger policy document. As in the 1996 manifesto and Advani's statements, the BJP sought to create a vision of Hindutva as a cultural constant of India rather than a distinct ideological project. The 1998 manifesto claims:

Every effort to characterize Hindutva as a sectarian or exclusive idea has failed as the people of India have repeatedly rejected such a view and the Supreme Court, too, finally endorsed the true meaning and content of Hindutva as being consistent with the true meaning and definition of secularism (BJP 1998, 4).

This effort to defend Hindutva against charges of communalism shows the BJP's fear of being defined only within the context of its Hindu ideology. It shows an increasing awareness of the potential for the party's past actions to be critiqued as dangerous. Yet, instead of retreating from the idea of Hindutva in this platform, the BJP instead embraces it, arguing that even the Ram Janmbhoomi project demonstrated that "Hindutva has immense potentiality to re-energize this nation and strengthen and discipline it to undertake the arduous task of nation-building" (BJP 1998, 4).

Economically, the approaches promoted in the 1998 manifesto continue the transition between swadeshi and neoliberal policies. While the platform maintains the swadeshi and economic nationalist rhetoric that decries the quick liberalization of Indian industries and the influence of the IMF, these critiques are paired with calls for further integration of Indian industries into the global economy (BJP 1998, 10). The party describes the situation as one in which the Congress "surrendered" to the IMF with a "gun at its head," and that the subsequent structural readjustment and loan agreement created an atmosphere not of genuine liberalization but instead characterized by "more opportunities for corruption" (BJP 1998, 10). The platform decries the leadership of past administrations, announcing:

[The] economy of India has come under tremendous pressure because of misguided tariff reductions and an uneven playing field for Indian industry. The BJP is fully aware that, when it comes to power, it will be inheriting a badly managed economy and a badly directed reform process. The broad agenda of the BJP will be guided by Swadeshi or economic nationalism (BJP 1998, 11).

Thus, the BJP puts forward a clear message of Swadeshi, appealing to a nationalist image of Indian politics and economics that serves Indians first, and criticizing the globalization reforms



of past leaders, but then directly undercuts traditional understandings of swadeshi. Indeed, in the same section of the platform, the BJP goes on to discuss the necessity of liberalization and integration into the global market. There is an inevitability in the way the BJP describes liberalization reforms in its 1998 platform, demonstrating a tremendous shift from the near-universal condemnation of foreign investment in the 1980s when compared to this period. The platform states:

The Government and Indian industry need to evolve a consensus on the time span required to enable our industries to adjust to the exacting demands of international competition. It means rapid, large-scale internal liberalization, but calibrated globalization so that the Indian industry gets a period of seven to ten years for substantial integration with the global economy (BJP 1998, 12).

The one area of distinction from full liberalization that would occur in a true neoliberal regime is the one reference to “calibrated” globalization. This rhetoric enables a nuanced view of economic globalization and liberalization that establishes the middle ground for neoliberal reforms to occur in conjunction with protectionist economic goals.

On the whole, the 1998 BJP Manifesto is defined by its continuation of traditional Hindutva ideological platform ideas combined with a conflicted position on economic globalization. The economic language is rooted in populism and anti-corruption rhetoric. While not providing a clear indication of the party’s distinction from previous policies promoted by the Congress Party or the United Front coalition of smaller parties that ruled from 1996-1998, the platform directly attacks the poor leadership of previous administrations and promises an economic approach will lead to the success of the Indian state.

The conflicting nature of the BJP’s approach in balancing its nationalist image with a new acceptance of liberalization reforms contradicted its critiques of the INC. By 1998, the BJP largely had completed the shift in its economic policies toward a full embrace of the neoliberal

reforms that began under the INC's rule in the early 1990s (Nayar 2000, 793). Nayar confirms this point, stating:

The empirical proposition that emerges from a review of the actual record of the BJP during its first time in office, as against the stated ideology, is that there is nothing really distinctive about the BJP governance in relation to economic policy [when compared with the economic policies of other parties] (2000, 793).

This point illuminates the continuation of the neoliberal policies, and the disconnect between the intended image of the BJP as a fresh economic viewpoint for a country marred by inequality and an economic system that did little to help the *aam aadmi* or the “common man.” Patnaik's (2007) analysis of the increasing rural poverty from 1999-2000, during the BJP's first period of true political leadership, highlights this point, reinforcing the tenuous nature of the BJP's contradictory message.

The BJP's 1999 Election Manifesto and the analysis of Nayar further confirm the BJP's continuation of neoliberal reforms, as the BJP de-emphasized *swadeshi* in favor of cutting bureaucratic constraints on business (BJP 1999). After opposition parties labeled the BJP's initial budget as distinctly *swadeshi* in its focus, the BJP crafted its second budget in 1998 to push liberalization faster than any party previous to it (Nayar 2000, 807). BJP Commerce Minister Ramakrishna Hegde approved this second budget, which included phasing out restrictions on consumer good imports, harming a significant portion of Indian manufacturers (Nayar 2000, 807). Nayar also notes the pragmatism of this move, as political elites and the influential *Times of India* newspaper praised the BJP as a “pragmatic and progressive” party after making these economic shifts (2000, 807).

The 1999 manifesto was coordinated in conjunction with other coalition parties of the National Democratic Alliance, which is the formal name of the coalition the BJP formed in 1998 in order to establish a governing majority (National Democratic Alliance (NDA) 1999). This

coalition included smaller regional parties including the Janata Dal Party, Shiv Sena, the All India Trinamool Congress, and the Indian National Lok Dal (Chakrabarty 2006). Notably, references to swadeshi in the 1999 platform diminished considerably, as did the BJP's references to the Ram Mandir movement and the Uniform Civil Code effort. The manifesto as a whole is shorter and more focused in populist rhetoric than others before it, with sections focusing on the "eradication of unemployment" and "education for all" (NDA 1999). The 1999 manifesto demonstrates the pressures of operating in a coalitional government for the BJP, as economic policy took precedent over the more controversial elements of the BJP's previous platform. Jaffrelot argues that the BJP will likely continue to undergo the same processes of radicalization and moderation as the political climate dictates, and argues that both the party's Hindutva focused periods and its current neoliberal efforts are motivated primarily by a larger hope of securing votes and appeasing coalition parties (2013, 876-894). These calculations highlight the difficulty in explaining a clear trend in the BJP's political development, as it demonstrates the uneven and contradictory approaches within a party of hundreds of national and local leaders.

After five years of leadership as the largest party of the NDA coalition, the BJP faced new elections in 2004. The rhetorical developments expressed in the party's national manifesto from 2004 demonstrate a continued move away from explicit references to Hindutva and instead frame the party as one focused on broad-based improvement of Indian economic conditions (BJP 2004). Compared with the fifteen mentions of Hindutva and the strong defense of cultural nationalism in the 1998 manifesto, the 2004 manifesto touches on Hindutva only twice (BJP 2004, 7). It argues, "Hindutva is not a religious or exclusivist concept. It is inclusive, integrative, and abhors any kind of discrimination against any section of the people of India on the basis of their faith. It rejects the idea of a theocratic or denominational state" (BJP 2004, 7). Again, there

is a continuation of the effort to maintain the phrasing of Hindutva in the party's political mission, but a concurrent effort to state that Hindutva should not be understood as a threat to non-Hindus. While the creation of a Uniform Civil Code and the construction of the Ram Mandir are both featured in the manifesto, these topics are relegated to small points, and the Ram Mandir effort notes an additional commitment to "amicable resolution of the issue through dialogue for starting a new chapter in Hindu-Muslim relations" (BJP 2004, 3). This shift suggests an attempt by the BJP to make aspects of Hindutva palatable and inclusive to both non-Hindus and secular Hindus who typically characterize the party as communal and divisive. As will be discussed later, several events call into question these efforts to frame Hindutva as an inclusive term and minimize its religious roots. However, the BJP's effort to frame themselves as an inclusive party at the national level is notable and shows its attempts to balance its need to appease the Hindu nationalist backers that founded the party with the need to embrace the big-tent nature of national politics.

In regards to economics, the 2004 platform calls for an acceleration of reforms aimed at ensuring India's global competitiveness. The party's primary economic platform points include "Making India a major exporting nation, a global manufacturing hub" and "Preparing India for the momentous shift taking place in the world economy, in which low-cost economics can score a big march over high-cost economies by building competitive strengths" (BJP 2004, 2). While not explicitly mentioning economic liberalization in conjunction with these economic points, the language here provides a stark contrast with the anti-globalization rhetoric of the 1980s. The rhetoric recognizes a role for India that is externally focused, utilizing its own comparative advantage in low-cost labor and manufacturing costs as powerful tool to influence more developed nations. Additionally, on the eve of the 2004 elections, the BJP government instituted

a new wave of liberalization efforts in its January budget, including a reduction of tariffs on foreign imports from 25% to 20% and proposed free trade agreements with growing economies in Southeast Asia (Nayar 2005, 72).

In conjunction with this globalization framing and recognition of India's manufacturing advantages was the BJP's use of the catchphrase "India Shining" to frame its 2004 platform. Despite the promise of this discourse, Brosius and Luce, respectively, agree that this narrative of a universally improving India under the BJP was simplistic and ignored the varied experiences of urban versus rural communities, with rural communities still experiencing largely static rates of poverty (2009, xiii; 2010, 206). Luce suggests the BJP's failure to adequately account for the growing class divide or appeal more directly to Hindu nationalist social organizations led to its 2004 election downfall, as the marginalization of the typical Hindutva narrative led to the disillusionment of Hindu nationalist activists with the BJP's platform (2010, 173). Despite this, most scholars agree that while Congress Party Leader Sonia Gandhi was able to frame the INC platform as responding to the needs of the "common man," the Congress Party's coalition secured victory because of the Congress leaders' willingness to embrace coalition building and alliances with regional parties, reversing the precedent of earlier elections (Nayar 2005, 74-75; Wilkerson 2005, 153-167). Thus, while the turn away from Hindutva ideological points may have been deemed a failure for the party in terms of garnering support in the election, other factors were likely also influential in explaining the BJP's 2004 election loss.

During its period as the primary opposition, the BJP showed signs of once again growing its political power with electoral victories in Gujarat in 2007 (BBC 2007), a BJP stronghold, and Karnataka in 2008 (BBC 2008). While the victory in Gujarat demonstrated the maintained power of the BJP in the state, as well as the continued popularity of its then Chief Minister Modi, the

Karnataka victory demonstrated the BJP's increasing popularity in South India, as it was the BJP's first victory in a southern Indian state (BBC 2008).

Yet, despite these signs of regional popularity and the small margin of defeat by the BJP in the 2004 general elections (Nayar 2005, 74), the 2009 election results marked a stunning backwards slide for the party (Jaffrelot and Verniers 2009, 12). The party platform continued the 2004 trend of moving away from explicitly Hindutva ideas that characterized the early BJP policy positions (BJP 2009). Like the 2004 manifesto, the descriptions of the role of Hinduism in Indian society include a defense of Hinduism's influence as one that promotes religious harmony and the foundation for secular democracy. The 2009 manifesto introduction notes:

The Vedic Rishi... declared that 'Ekam Sad Viprah Bahudha Vadanti' (truth or reality is one but wise men describe it in different ways). This is essentially a secular thought in the real sense of the term because it accepts that one can follow his own path to reach the ultimate (BJP 2009, 5).

This explicit framing of Hindu texts as secular differs from Advani's previous nuancing of Hinduism as merely a component of the culture of India, and instead moves further to frame the influence of Hinduism as the moral source from which secularism flourishes in India. Apart from this short component of the introduction dedicated to recalling India's Hindu influences, the only other references to Hindutva ideology are an acknowledgement of then- BJP leader Advani's role in the Ram Mandir movement, notably referred to as a moment that "initiated a powerful debate on cultural nationalism and the true meaning of secularism," a short statement of assurance to solving the Jammu and Kashmir conflict, and the continued call for a Uniform Civil Code (BJP 2009, 8, 35). The main emphasis of the platform was three secular concepts meant to contrast the BJP from the Congress Party, who had held the primary leadership role since 2004 as part of the United Progressive Alliance coalition of parties (BJP 2009, 1). These concepts were "good governance, development, and security" with a call for Indians to reclaim the

historical economic and political success of the subcontinent and recall their roles as leaders in enterprise and critical thought (BJP 2009, 1). Given the BJP's previous efforts to critique the Congress Party as mired in corruption, political weakness, and poor global leadership, these methods of attack were largely a continuation of previous BJP claims.

The most prominent of these themes is development, which is mentioned fifty times within the manifesto (BJP 2009). In connection with its neoliberal shift, the BJP argues that it will actively promote reciprocity in further liberalization efforts on an international scale; in the party's section on "International Trade Agreements," the BJP states, "The BJP shall fight against the protectionist trend which is emerging in some developed countries... The BJP will safeguard the interests of our vast technical manpower and ensure maximum market access in future agreements depending upon the offers made by the trade partners" (BJP 2009, 24). The BJP clearly sees an advantage in promoting a neoliberal agenda, focusing its efforts on appealing to the urban middle and upper-class members of society who benefit from increased trade and technological advances (Patnaik 2007, 3132). This appeal to the urban elites failed to adequately address the struggles of the rural poor, and Patnaik argues that the rural community experienced increasing hardships under the neoliberal agenda, as deflation and an easing of protectionist policies in agriculture led to both the reduction of profits and an increasing debt burden for farmers (2007, 3132-3134). While the 2009 BJP manifesto includes the plight of the farmer and commits to an agenda that reforms the agricultural sector (BJP 2009, 22-23), the party leaders attempts to pin the blame for farmer conditions on the Congress Party ignores the BJP's role in continuing and even bolstering the policies of the INC. As a whole, the BJP's failed to convince both voters and potential coalition partners that they could distribute economic success to the

masses, and the loss forced the party to once again reflect on potential changes to shift the political climate in its favor.

The latest results of the 2014 national election indicate a sea change in the BJP's political fortunes. Capturing 166 of 189 contested parliamentary seats, the BJP's NDA coalition reemerged after a 10-year hiatus from power to establish the clearest non-INC political majority in India's democratic history (Sridharan 2014, 30). Analysis to unpack the reasoning for this resounding shift is limited given the recent developments; yet, existing analysis points to several factors to explain the public dissatisfaction with the Congress Party's control of parliament from 2004-2014. Chibber and Ostermann argue that the BJP effectively utilized "vote mobilizers, a group of individuals who actively help a campaign but who are often neither members nor partisans" to secure political victories in areas that had previously been INC strongholds, drawing on Prime Minister candidate Narendra Modi's image as a transformational candidate to appeal to this aspirational group (2014, 149). Ganguly's composite analysis of several viewpoints suggests that the INC's "lackluster leadership as well as its failure to sustain economic growth or to curb the country's stratospheric levels of corruption" also contributed to the BJP's success (2014, 56-60). Sridharan suggests that "the BJP's success at employing a message of market-friendliness against Congress's penchant for populism" may have been key in the BJP victory at a time in which the rhetoric of open development polled significantly better than antipoverty subsidies promoted by the INC (2014, 31-21). Thus, while there are multiple factors that could explain the BJP's victory, the party's explicit embrace of neoliberal policies and its framing of these changes as promoting the welfare of all Indians appear to have resonated with a significant portion of voters.



The introductory portion of the BJP's 2014 election manifesto underscores this acceptance of neoliberal economic ideology as the BJP's preferred tool for growth (BJP 2014, 2).

It declares:

We have wasted more than half a century. Many other countries, even with smaller size and lesser resources, have surpassed us in development parameters. Another reason for this is that the governance in these decades was marred by lack of trust, leading to excessive controls... The so-called "liberalization came in (sic) the 1990s, but it was half-hearted. It didn't work because the rest of the eco-system remained the same. However, the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century showed some light under the NDA rule. India started being reckoned as an economic superpower. The six-year rule of the NDA had given the Nation many firsts, building an image in the international community (BJP 2014, 2).

The contrast between the image of a stagnant and corrupt INC and the leadership of a bold and innovative BJP defines this passage, as the 2014 BJP returns to the tactics of previous party leaders in framing the post-Independence political dominance of the INC as a period of failure. With a nod to the "India Shining" campaign of 2004 in the reference to six-years of growth, the BJP frames itself as a party that will fundamentally transform the Indian political and economic landscape, shaping the nation into an international beacon of success.

In addition to this introductory emphasis on the BJP as a party of economic and political renewal, the manifesto section on "Industry- Modern, Competitive and Caring" highlights initiatives that tie directly to the party's liberalization efforts. Despite the inclusion of an appeal for a "caring" economy that recalls the swadeshi concepts of the past, there are no mentions of swadeshi within the manifesto (BJP 2014). Key aspects of the most recent platform include "cutting the red tape, simplifying the procedures [to do business]," "[setting up] World class investment and industrial regions as global hubs of manufacturing," and emphasizing that "Government will not get in the way of the freedom of individuals to start and operate legitimate businesses" (BJP 2014, 29). While Sridharan notes that these economic points may have had little salience given the "large fractions of respondents from a cross-section of classes [who

showed] little knowledge of economic policy regarding matters such as government spending or foreign investments,” the multi-level aspirational language of the platform arguably led to the perception of the BJP as a party of genuine change (2014, 32). Thus, the policy consequences of neoliberalism likely had less impact than the rhetorical power of the language of inclusive development, further reinforcing the importance of the BJP’s electoral strategy.

Reforms since the election appear to indicate the BJP’s commitment to these liberalization goals. Ganguly notes the BJP’s decision to move the cap on defense sector foreign investment from 26% to 49% and its sale of 5% of the government stake in the state-owned Steel Authority of India as evidence of liberalization and privatization efforts (2014, 59). Thus, while it is unclear whether or not the BJP will follow through on the majority of its economic platform points, including a vast infrastructure improvement project and a return to the 6-7% GDP growth rates of the previous NDA administration, the efforts of party leaders to include further liberalization promises in their 2014 manifesto are now translating into real political consequences.

### **Uncovering Connections between Hindutva and Neoliberalism**

As I did in Chapter 3, I now shift to a discussion based on Gopalakrishnan’s work on the areas of resonance between Hindutva and neoliberal ideology. Given the prior analysis that highlighted the BJP’s continuous acceptance of liberalization as a key part of its political character throughout the late 1990s and 2000s, I focus this section on a closer examination of the language within the BJP manifestos. I focus on three broad categories of analysis derived from Gopalakrishnan’s original work on the subject: The BJP’s use of neoliberalism as a tool to enforce social and economic logic, its framing of development as a tool to end social divisions, and its use of the language of liberalization to transform and renew society. These adapted

categories are intended to provide a nuanced approach to understanding the BJP's neoliberal, and thus, secular-seeming shift. By understanding the similar logics of Hindutva and neoliberalism in regards to the role of the state, I argue that narratives which highlight the BJP's economic focuses as evidence of true transformation within the party in regards to its religious roots are oversimplified given the connections between the two ideological categories. Instead, my analysis of the BJP's election manifestos suggests a framing of old and new aspects of its political mission into a new logical structure and discourse rather than an abandonment of the party's prior political efforts altogether.

### ***Neoliberalism and Hindutva as Tools to Enforce Social and Economic Logic***

As I argued in Chapter 3, the Hindutva ideology professed by the BJP provides a direct role for the state as enforcer of Hindu cultural identity. It is the logic of Hindutva that made swadeshi such a critical concept of early BJP understandings of just economic policy, as swadeshi's emphasis on producing an economy created by and for Indians worked directly in conjunction with the BJP's efforts to frame themselves as the party most concerned with the needs of the Hindu-majority. In terms of social policy, the BJP's active participation in the early 1990s in the Ram Janmbhoomi movement showed a willingness of the party leaders to not only use the rhetoric of Hindutva to secure votes from the Hindu nationalist population, but also to directly translate this rhetoric into material action. Other acts of violence, such as the Gujarat riots of 2002, reinforce this point further, as the BJP has willingly abandon efforts at times to portray themselves as interested in a multi-religious vision for the country in exchange for aggressive pursuit of Hindu nationalist goals.

Theoretically, neoliberalism and the rhetoric of a free and open society would run directly counter to this state-based enforcement of social logic. Indeed, Gopalakrishnan states that

neoliberal ideology's emphasis on "individual autonomy and freedoms" is "the most glaring tension" between neoliberalism and Hindutva, and would seem to suggest the natural secularization of the BJP given its embrace of these concepts of openness (2006, 2806). Yet, Gopalakrishnan counters this thought with a further description of the necessary conditions for neoliberal societies: he states, "Neoliberalism holds 'the market' to be supreme. This 'principle'... constrains all action, not just state action. Those whose choices disrupt the 'market' by creating collectives, such as trade unions, are apt to find their 'freedom' sharply curtailed" (2006, 2806). Thus, even in a neoliberal scheme, there is a clear enforcement role for the state and others in ensuring the uniformity of neoliberal efforts. While in Hindutva, religion is the supreme source of social and economic logic, neoliberalism posits an ideal world defined by the purest form of its implementation in society.

The consequences of this role of the state as enforcer of neoliberal logic is demonstrated in the lamentations of writer and activist Arundhati Roy regarding the liberalization efforts of both the INC and the BJP. She states:

The Congress Party opened India's markets to corporate globalization. It passed legislation that encouraged the privatization of water and power, the dismantling of the public sector... It forced cutbacks in government spending education and health... The BJP took this forward with pitiless abandon (Roy 2011, 14).

While Roy clearly is against the neoliberal shift and its results, her description highlights the active role of the state in changing the political landscape within India to accommodate a global, neoliberal economic regime. Yet, despite the loss of the state's autonomy over aspects of economy through these reforms, the BJP consistently emphasizes that its reforms are meant to lead the country to economic power and the according political strength. Thus, as Ayodhya was a demonstration of the BJP and Hindu nationalist's ability to demonstrate their strength within the nation, the economic changes are framed as opportunities for the BJP to demonstrate

international strength and leadership. Even as the BJP promoted policies that increase the power of multinational corporations and foreign powers, its 2014 platform maintains some of the rhetorical calls for collective strength that characterized previous, swadeshi-focused economic platforms (BJP 2014). The 2014 manifesto, “As Vivekananda had said, ‘All power is within you. You can do anything. Believe in that.’ Yes, the power lies in the people of India, in the inner sanctum sanctorum of Mother India” (BJP 2014, 3). This reference to Sri Vivekananda recalls a cultural figure critical in bringing information about Hindu religion and culture to European and American powers at the 1893 Parliament of World Religions, thus remembering a moment of Hinduism’s international influence and strength. The BJP’s mission since its inception was to establish a non-Western nation known for its military and economic strength. Given this underlying message, the economically-focused 2014 manifesto must be understood as a project in the BJP demonstrating its pride in the potential realization of a strong state rooted in Hindu and neoliberal values. The full economic success of the BJP is meant a message to the world of Indian, and thus, Hindu power.

### ***Neoliberalism as a Force to End Social Divisions***

In Chapter 3, I used the example of the Shah Bano case and the BJP’s corresponding argument for the creation of a uniform civil code as evidence of the party’s use of Hindutva as a force to end social divisions. I made this argument based not on the idea that Hindutva more fully allows for equality under the law for all religious groups, but instead I argued that the state enforcement of Hindutva envisioned by the BJP during this period would effectively end “appeasement” of religious minorities and instead work to establish the supremacy of the BJP’s idea of Hindu values in Indian society. Thus, social divisions end through the forceful implementation of one set of cultural norms and values.

Yet, in the current iteration of the BJP, the party has pursued a strategy to secularize its image through the use of the language inclusive development (BJP 2014). The BJP's 2014 slogan, "sabka saath, sabka vikas," or "participation of all, development for all," combats the perception of the BJP as a party that reinforces communalism (BJP 2014). This language was often used throughout the campaign in concert with proclamations of the BJP's aid of Muslims in pursuing development (Rahman 2014). In a February 2015 speech, Modi took this rhetoric further, stating "India first" is the government's religion (Joshua 2015). This statement directly contrasts with Advani's previous claims that defined the cultural character of India as distinctly Hindu and his argument that the recognition of Hinduism as the binding of Indian society would lead to the promotion of equality within India (Advani 2008). What it instead proposes is the possibility of a societal development plan that will promote universal social uplift. Modi even contrasted the BJP plan with the political strategy of the INC, stating, "We believe in economic development, while you play the politics of votes, letting Muslims languish in poverty" (Rahman 2014). This language recalls the charge of pseudo-secularism in its reference to rival parties' "playing the politics of votes" while shifting the narrative to a more secular political focus in comparison to the thorny issues of the Uniform Civil Code.

The response of Muslims to this rhetoric of universal inclusion under a development framework has been mixed. Rahman's interviews with a cross-section of Muslims prior to Modi's election demonstrates strong reactions both in favor of this development rhetoric and others that remember the BJP's bloody past in Gujarat and Ayodhya (2014). The diversity of these viewpoints, from comparing support for Modi with "asking the Jews to support Hitler to escape the gas chamber" to recognizing the BJP as a party that "single-handedly transformed Gujarat into an example of development for other states," demonstrates the exact reasoning for

the BJP's pursuit of this "development for all" rhetoric (Rahman 2014). While the majority of Muslims Rahman interviewed at least recognize the role of the BJP in stoking tensions in the past, the present context compels some of these same individuals to consider the possibility of the BJP to provide fresh political leadership and spur economic improvements (2014).

The historical trajectory of the "development for all" narrative coincides with the neoliberal shift of the party. The slogan as a whole represents the unification of several political ideas that have shifted throughout the BJP's political history, with the present iteration being the clearest attempt to promote an image of the BJP as a modern secular party in tune with India's diversity. The first connection point is the historical narratives related to *swadeshi*, which the BJP framed as an economic project intended to fight against the elitism of the Congress Party's economic policies (BJP "Lucknow" 1983, 36). While the BJP's policy preferences have shifted significantly since the 1980s, party leaders remain concerned with projecting an image of the party as responsive to the needs of India's citizenry and the long-term collective strength of the country. The more recent 2004 BJP campaign, which emphasized "India Shining," connects to the effort to portray the party as concerned with economics over religious projects. Yet, while the 2004 BJP leaders faced the challenge of framing their platform as aspirational and a sign of real change after six years of their NDA government's control, the 2014 leadership capitalized on the call for inclusive development.

Substantively, the BJP and Congress Party's strategies during the 2014 election differed little in their approach to garnering support. The INC also utilized a broad and inclusive slogan to summarize its platform: their primary slogan was "har haath shakti, har haath tarakki," which translates to "power in every hand; progress for everyone" ("BJP Taunts Congress" 2014). While this similarity demonstrates the obvious point of both parties' competition to secure public favor

with messages of inclusivity, the BJP's acceptance of this discourse, and its coupling with statements that directly address Muslim communities, shows the party's larger effort to align itself more closely with a secular image. The 2014 manifesto promotes unity and the success of all groups as its primary goal, and the party's strategy of outreach to groups it historically marginalized shows a recognition of the power of development discourses to ease the potential fears of social divisions flaring as a result of the BJP takeover.

Lastly, the language of neoliberalism also leverages the aspirational language of economic development to reframe the responsibility of the government to citizens. While the broad language of economic development and its promises through the implementation of neoliberal policies suggests an improvement of the social and economic positions of all people, the concept of neoliberalism also carries with it a belief in rugged individualism and thus also individual blame for economic failure. Indeed, the 2014 manifesto states that the government will not "get in the way of individuals" who intend to open businesses (BJP 2014, 37). From this viewpoint, individuals maximize their own productivity, and those who fall behind face the removal of the social safety net.

### ***Neoliberalism and a New Golden Age***

As I discussed in Chapter 3, the BJP framed its political projects through the lens of "renewal" throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, and its actions reinforced aspects of the Hindu nationalist cause. While the BJP national leadership shifted away from embracing Hindutva discourses as its central political messaging tools from 1996-2014, the party's focus on the promises of neoliberal development serves largely the same purpose in legitimizing the party as a force through which a new age of Indian strength will arise.



As mentioned in previous sections, the language of the 2004 “India Shining” campaign and the 2014 “Development for All” discourse both build into a larger image of the party to lead India into a new age of prosperity. The 1998 platform envisions this role of the BJP in creating not only a vibrant India, but also in responding to the needs of the global community: it states,

[The BJP’s vision] is a vision to see India, the world's oldest cradle of civilization, transform itself yet again into a benign global power, contributing her material, intellectual, cultural and spiritual energies to change the paradigm at the global level to save the world from the gathering civilizational crisis (BJP 1998, 2).

This recognition of the BJP’s India as an example for the entire world is reminiscent of American exceptionalism, which Advani cited in his autobiography as an ideal model toward which India should move (2008). What is additionally interesting is the increasing economic framing of this renewal over time. While the 1998 manifesto vaguely describes the cultural background of India and its role as a place of prosperity, each subsequent manifesto gives more detail of the economic prowess of ancient India. The 2004 document states:

India is an ancient civilisation with a rich cultural and spiritual heritage. We have perennial rivers, fertile land, hardworking kisans<sup>7</sup>, industrious workers, skilled artisans, great intellectuals, a robust scientific and technological establishment, and capable entrepreneurs (BJP 2004, 1).

This list adds a sense of the material history of Indian success, evoking images of plenty aimed at garnering the broad support of voters concerned with economic uplift. The 2009 manifesto expands on this point even further, listing details from centuries old accounts of Indian industry and technology: it states, “History tells us that India was a land of abundance. The country has been blessed with great natural fertility, abundant water and unlimited sunshine. According to foreigners visiting this country, Indians were regarded as the best agriculturists in the world” before moving into approximately two full pages of these historical accounts (BJP 2009, 2). In

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<sup>7</sup> farmers

the most recent manifesto, the BJP offers a more concise yet clear discourse regarding a return to India's economic past (BJP 2014, 1). The manifesto says:

India was respected for its flourishing economy, trade, commerce and culture. It had an international outreach from Korea to Arabia, from Bamiyan to Borobudur and beyond. Before the advent of Britishers, Indian goods were internationally recognized for their quality and craftsmanship. India had a much bigger role and presence in industry and manufacturing than any nation in Europe or Asia. It had a well-developed banking system and equally renowned businessmen, along with its financiers, who were contributing to create a flourishing and progressive economy. According to Sunderland, India was also one of the greatest shipbuilding nations and consequently had an access to international markets. Indian prosperity held the world in thrall. It was this wealth which attracted the foreigners - from Alexander to the Britishers.

This passage exclusively draws on a past vision of India. Yet, it does so to juxtapose the vibrancy of that society with the image of a modern society that has lost its way. Only through an appeal to this past, and a mobilization of modern day “businessmen,” “financiers,” “industry,” and “wealth” that India will reclaim its past greatness.

The larger purpose of exposing these three resonances with Hindutva ideas is to demonstrate that the discourse of development cannot be separated from the project of political power pursued by the BJP. While the policy positions and framing tactics of the BJP have shifted, its vision for a singularly unified and globally powerful nation remains. My analysis is not intended to judge whether or not the BJP will be successful in realizing its development goals, or whether the voting population in India accepts the BJP vision for India's future. This research will require further probing into both the reasons behind the BJP's electoral success in 2014 and the ground-level changes in India's social and economic situation as the BJP-led government progresses in its goals. Instead, what I have argued in this chapter points to the increasing influence of neoliberalism and the language of development as a tool to secularize the party's image while subsequently maintaining the vision of India's renewal and transformation

promised by the Hindu nationalist rhetoric previously more central to the BJP's messaging and actions.

***Continuing Concerns: The Persistence of Hindutva Violence and the Rhetoric of Division***

While my larger analysis points to the trend of the national party toward an image of inclusivity, secularization, and a central economic focus, I do not intend to oversimplify the complexity and diversity of viewpoints within the BJP, nor fail to recognize the troubling instances of violence and anti-Muslim sentiments some BJP leaders have openly supported and instigated throughout the late 1990s and the entirety of the 2000s. The 1998 nuclear weapons tests and the 2002 Gujarat riots, among several other notable cases, each point to a continuation of conservative Hindutva interpretations of society.

Oza's analysis of the 1998 nuclear tests implemented by the BJP recalls the image of the militarized Hindutva nation early Hindu nationalists envisioned as they began to mobilize as a political force (2006, 103-133). Indeed, in 1953, Hindu nationalist leader Savarkar stated that Indians must "welcome the 'secret and science of the atom bomb to India and make it a mighty nation'" (McKean 1996, 89). Upon the successful implementation of the nuclear tests, former BJP Prime Minister Vajpayee echoed this rhetoric, stating, "Millions of Indians have viewed this occasion as the beginning of the rise of a strong and self-confident India... [T]he greatest meaning of the tests is that they have given India shakti, they have given India strength, they have given India self-confidence" (Oza 2006, 103). This framing of the nuclear tests as demonstrating national power connects with the rhetoric of economic power promoted in the manifestos I analyzed earlier in Chapters 3 and 4. Yet, it also demonstrates a clear acceptance of the notion of the Muslim threat, as the BJP argued that tests were necessary to prevent the credible threat to national security from Pakistan's government and other Pakistani militants

(2006, 114). Not only did this move contrast the inclusive discourse that the BJP slowly adopted during the late 1990s and 2000s, but it also alienated the international community in its brazen defiance of international nuclear non-proliferation agreements (Oza 2006, 126). Oza notes that the BJP leaders employed anticolonial rhetoric after the United States imposed sanctions against the government in response to the nuclear tests; in official statements from the BJP about the sanctions, party leaders stated, “India is not worried about sanctions,” attempting to demonstrate India’s new power in opposition to United States or European micromanagement efforts (Oza 2006, 126). Yet, Oza notes that the BJP paradoxically responded to the sanctions by further compromising India’s economic autonomy through increased liberalization efforts, and thus further increasing India’s interaction with the international community (Oza 2006, 126).

As a whole, the nuclear tests were a definitive show of military force that juxtaposed the power of Hindu-majority India with Muslim-majority Pakistan, as well as showcased India’s growing military power to the world. These actions are the embodiment of the earliest Hindutva hardliner ideas of a militarized Hindudom, and apart from the Ayodhya movement, may show most directly the results of the implementation of Hindutva as political policy.

While I have discussed the Gujarat riots in some detail throughout this thesis, I return to them now to highlight the BJP’s blatant appeal to Hindu nationalist sentiments in both its response and lack of response to the riots. In the wake of the brutal killings of 58 Hindu nationalist volunteers in February of 2002, BJP leaders promptly blamed the Inter Services Intelligence unit of Pakistan (generally known as ISI) for the Godhra deaths (Brass 2003). Yet, news reports and analysis of the situation quickly created significant doubt about these accusations (Brass 2003). Instead of a de-escalation of tension, local BJP leaders and their allies in the RSS and the VHP helped to mobilize crowds of Hindus, fleeing before the most serious

rioting began (Brass 2003). Brass notes the collective failure of the BJP at the national and local levels to maintain any semblance of equal protection under the law during this time. He states,

It is necessary to underline the implication in this pogrom not only of the BJP state government, its members, and its agents, but also that of the government of India, led by the BJP... Most significant was the failure to dismiss the Gujarat government, under Article 356 of the Constitution of India, for its inability or unwillingness to maintain law and order (Brass 2003).

This failure, as well as the willingness of the BJP to embrace then-Gujarat Chief Minister Modi as its primary leadership figure today, provides a stark contrast from the language of BJP concern of Muslims and minority communities as perpetuated in recent policy manifestos. While I believe the BJP has continued to secularize its rhetoric in response to the critical discourses that have emerged since the Gujarat riots labeling the party as communalist and implicating the BJP in anti-Muslim pogroms, the continued prominence of leaders like Modi and Advani suggests a fundamental contradiction between the rhetorical promise of an inclusive India and the vehemently Hindu nationalist actions of these figures.

Further analysis of the BJP is necessary to demonstrate the extent of the party's interpretation of Hindutva efforts, as well as its commitment to enacting similar militarization and even violence in the future. The recent popularity of "love jihad" accusations against Muslim men and declarations against religious conversions by some BJP leaders suggest that the power of explicitly Hindu nationalist ideas about the threat to India's cultural character remains strong. Despite the national party's shifts towards secularization and the greater emphasis on economic development in defining its political mission, the lack of uniformity among party leaders at the national and local level in promoting a secularized message, and the troubling instances of violence and militarization promoted by BJP activists, suggest a prolonged conflict between these contradictory aspirations within the party.

## Chapter Five: The Modern Hindutva State

“सबका साथ, सबका विकास।” (*Participation of all, development for all*)

-Narendra Modi’s official campaign slogan (2014)

In this project, I have studied the rhetorical shift of the BJP toward an economically-focused and aspirational message and away from explicit Hindutva goals. I have argued that this move is consistent not only with a pragmatic turn toward populist policies but also as a tool to progress aspects of the BJP’s previous Hindu nationalist goals. Drawing from Gopalakrishnan’s work, I have both demonstrated the BJP’s coordinated effort to centralize neoliberal economics within its political platform while also discussing the implications of these moves in the establishment of the Hindu nation.

After developing a framework for understanding the unique form of secular democracy that India adopted in the post-partition era, as well as the parallel development of Hindutva ideology, I focused Chapters 3 and 4 on the BJP’s use of religious and secular rhetoric, utilizing Gopalakrishnan’s study on the resonances between Hindutva and neoliberalism as a template through which I argued that the BJP’s Hindutva beliefs are consistent in many ways with the party’s neoliberal shift. While I have found that the BJP has moderated its religious messaging since the late 1990s as well as adopted the tenets of neoliberalism, I argue that these actions can be seen as strategies in pursuit of the same political goal: developing an image of the BJP as the modern leaders who will lead India to a revival of its Hindu golden age.

Yet, both the current movement towards moderation and the religious posturing of the 1980s and early 1990s must be seen as attempts by the party to establish popularity among a majority of the voting population. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the BJP’s embrace of Hindutva ideology and its emphasis on divisive religious issues were intended to generate dissatisfaction

with the religio-political status quo among India's Hindu majority, and to posture the BJP as more responsive to the needs of the common man. The party's ideological stances on issues ranging from the construction of the Ram Mandir at Ayodhya to the party's harsh stance on Muslim immigration into the country not only reflect the desires of the party's Hindu-dominated leadership but also show the BJP's understanding of these moments and responses as mechanisms through which it could elicit votes and appeal to both Hindu nationalist fears and pride.

Yet, with its failure to win multiple elections after 1996 and its newfound role in international politics, the BJP took significant steps to minimize its emphasis on religious issues and instead has focused on contrasting the party's economic platform with that of the Congress Party. This acceptance of the liberalization and a globally focused economic policy of largely mirrored the economic reforms within the Congress Party in the 1990s. The BJP has taken advantage of the growing lack of trust in the Congress Party's ability to affect real economic change for the majority of India's people, as the Congress Party has been rocked by corruption scandals and stagnant poverty despite that have destabilized its political hegemony since India's independence. Given these factors, the BJP's strategy to promote the image "inclusive development" and modernization allows it to take advantage its image as a growing party with the fresh political leadership necessary to shift the status quo for middle-class Indians. Yet, the connection of these economic goals with the project of Hindu supremacy and larger goal of a Hindu world power connects the BJP's neoliberalism with Hindutva, and as a whole demonstrates the BJP's manipulation of the social and economic pressures that have defined Indian society since independence.

While my findings suggest that explicit religious references have indeed been tempered in recent years, I do not intend to suggest that the more explicit Hindutva ideological tenets of the party are truly gone. Moderation of the party's national political messaging at the level of central governance has not meant a full embrace of inclusivity in rhetoric or action by all members of the BJP. Indeed, the recent trend of several BJP officials to decry the existence of love jihad demonstrates some party officials' efforts to continue the Muslim-Hindu divide (Mishra 2014). Uttar Pradesh's BJP Chief Lakshmikant Bajpai claimed in an interview with the Times of India, "In our state, 71 of 100 crimes are against women," Bajpai said. "It is shocking but true that 99.99% of the accused in these crimes are Muslims. The UP government is defending 'love jihadis' while victims are murdered or harassed by the police" (Mishra 2014). The lingering tension between the national messaging of unity and an inclusive vision of the party's platform with the continued belief by some within the party that efforts to curtail the Muslim threat to India's character must be central to the BJP's efforts both highlight the disconnect between the BJP's current framing and its historical role in society. Whether the party will truly reconcile these extremes remains unclear, as does the question of who will truly benefit from the economic liberalization efforts that have historically led to disproportionate growth and few gains for the lower-class citizens.

Further research is necessary to understand the implications of the neoliberal shift and secularization of the BJP's national message within all levels of the party's leadership. One question that must be answered is how leaders and proponents at all levels understand these changes, and whether they continue to accept the more explicitly Hindutva elements of party ideology as central to the BJP's mission. Additionally, the question of how these changes have been internalized by leaders and the citizenry is highly important, as it is unclear whether these



shifts represent a wider acceptance of religious inclusion as a political goal, or whether the power gained from its strategy of moderation could embolden proponents of Hindutva to attempt more drastic Hindutva-derived societal changes.

Given the short time that the Modi-led government has currently held power, time and careful analysis of the political dynamics in India will likely illuminate the true intentions behind the BJP's rhetorical and economic strategies. What is clear is that the BJP's move toward neoliberalism in many ways fits within its model of understanding Hindutva ideology. Economic development as a central political goal provides a basis through which the BJP has established the idea that India is moving toward a revival, powered in part by the richness of Hindu traditions. Included in this economic discourse is the language of non-discrimination and the rationality of economics, which the party argues will benefit all citizens, even the groups it has previously marginalized. However, the rhetorical contradictions within the party at some points in this process, with various local, state, and national leaders taking different positions on key religious and societal debates within the country, suggest that the party as a whole is still processing whether or not it is in the process of a true ideological shift or merely a reframing of the Hindutva tenets that have always characterized the party. While my research argues that the neoliberal shift is another aspect of a larger Hindutva project and remains consistent in several key ways, further research is needed to illuminate how the linkages between Hindutva and neoliberalism manifest themselves within the collective psychology of the party moving forward.

This analysis carries implications for other societies in which the religious right exists as a powerful force in national politics. To the extent that religious parties face marginalization in secular democracies, other examples of religious parties' efforts to secularize their images through economic rhetoric could illuminate key trends in understanding the role of religion in an

increasingly globalized society. Given the large variety of post-colonial democracies around the world, examining the political successes and failures of parties that either explicitly embrace religiously derived goals or use secularization techniques similar to the BJP could provide interesting comparisons and also underscore the uniqueness of the BJP's effort within the secular, independence-era history of India.

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