

Nation-Building and Fragmentation in India --Implications of the General Elections

Panel 30

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India has just had her 14th General Elections to the Lok Sabha. There has been a great upset this time. The ruling coalition called the National Democratic Alliance(NDA), centred around the Bharatiya Janta Party(BJP) and the Prime Minister, A. B. Vajpayee, has been voted out of power. The Congress, the major opposition, together with a number of allies, having formed a United Progressive Alliance(UPA), have quickly stepped into the seat of the government.

While admiring the way parliamentary democracy has been at work in India through the half century and more of her independent history, and especially the way the government has changed as often as seven times out of nine from the 6th General Elections, 1977, **it may be worth looking at some the social forces at work in India which the recent Elections have thrown light on.**

India's Federal System:Decentralization Discontinued

First of all, we will take a brief look at the characteristics of the **federal system** in India.

Unlike some Western countries where a federal system has originated from an alliance in one way or another of several States, and the States have therefore the residual power, the Indian federal system has developed quite the other way round. There was an all-powerful Central government, and practically nothing else. The latter-day States were not much more than place names. Gradually, however, the beginnings of the present States came into being as the Raj began **conceding to the growing nationalist demands**. The Government Acts of 1909, 1919 and 1935 were important landmarks in the process. The Raj did not concede them for nothing. Rather they succeeded in dividing the Indian population by an increasingly sophisticated system of separate electorates, which sowed the seeds not only of the Partition, but of wide-spread communal hatred.

The devolution was halted at the time of independence, and the Constitution of 1950 was made, as far as the Centre-State relations were concerned, practically on the basis of the 1935 Act. Apart from the reorganization of the States on the linguistic lines, in several phases but most importantly in 1956, these relations have by and large remained till today as the constitutional framework.

The different phases of post-independence political history, the Nehru-Patel duumvirate, the Nehru era, the Prime Ministerships of India Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, **have all seen strengthening of the centralizing factors** in the Centre-State equilibrium. The Emergency was the most salient case in point, and it is doubtful whether the Shah Commission Report which looked into the

excesses of the Emergency period was seriously studied with the care it is worthy of.

The centralization has proceeded until 1998, when a number of regional parties made some spectacular electoral headway. Till then there were hardly more than a few of them worth the name, the Akalis or the DMK among them. But the Elections in 1998 were a watershed with regional parties obtaining 36% of the votes as against 19% on the previous occasion. This proportion has been maintained till now. **Their age has come**, together with that of coalition governments, although there may be fluctuations in the fate of an individual party. Those parties can be probably fitted into the federal system better than the large national parties. Their emergence was a **two-fold revolt**, against the upper-caste elites and against the centralization.

The arrival of the age of the coalition, however, has not done away with the centralizing features. For example, both the BJP and the Congress, the two major national parties, have not changed their behaviour. In both cases the party central leadership has practically **nominated a Chief Minister** for a State under their ruling. This was introduced by the Congress when India Gandhi was Prime Minister. After the recent Elections a BJP Chief Minister, in protest against the prospect of a "foreign" Prime Minister, submitted her resignation to the President of the party, which goes against the spirit and the letters of the Constitution.

Two more features of India's centralized federal system would be mentioned, although both are well known. One is the still strong grip of the **All-India Services** on the States. It is in fact much stronger than what the Constitution has originally stipulated because of the all-pervasive "License Raj". Second is the heavy **financial dependence** of the States on the Centre. About a third of the revenue in the combined revenue budget of the States comes from the Centre. The figure has been more or less the same for the past four decades.

We will come to some eye-catching aspects of the recent Elections.

Poverty and Social Subjugation

The first is the deep disparities between rich and poor, and their electoral consequences.

The favorite NDA slogan for the Elections was "**India Shining**". The term would sound admirable on the fashionable corners of cities like Gurgaon, with their ever-rising levels of conspicuous consumption. Production of cars, or other consumer durables, has been going up since 1980s, showing an equally ever-rising number of middle classes who have the purchasing power. Some of them are in the prosperous IT industry. One of them has recently advertised in a matrimonial column in a major Indian newspaper, giving his annual income as **Rs.1.1 million**. He was 28 then.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who are below poverty line(**BPL**). Recently the *Outlook* magazine (June 14) wrote how their number is allotted by the Central government to each State. The total number is 48.8 million families, and roughly corresponds to those whose monthly income is below Rs.350. The process will exclude from the definition, and from the fair price distribution, over 50 million families. No wonder the amount of the foodgrains distributed to them came up to only less than 10 million tons in

2000/1, when there was wide-scale drought and hunger in the countryside, and in the cities as well, and there was no dearth of foodgrains stock by the government. The BPL people, with families, will thus add up to around 40% of the population. Another source says that those living on \$1:00 or below constitute 34.7%.

The poverty often goes with **social subjugation**. We will turn to the case in Andhra Pradesh. According to some recent report, in districts of Andhra Pradesh like Nellore, Cuddapah, Ananthpur, in fact in the entire region called Rayalseema, the **Dalits** are still suffering from many-sided social disabilities. They are not allowed to use the village well, the only source of drinking water in the area, to wear sandals or ride cycles in the residential quarters of other caste people, to drink tea from the same steel tumbler from the teashop. Their children have to sit separately in schools, and their cricket team does not play with others'. They are **daily labourers** and thus have to put up with it all. The local politics are in the hands of such dominant castes as Naidus, Reddys, Kammas and Kapus. They are organized behind the BJP and its powerful local ally, Telugu Desam Party(TDP). In fact Nellore is the very home town of Venkaiah Naidu, the BJP President.

Suicides and Their Implications

We can't leave Andhra without touching upon a dreadful series of events happening here over the past seven years, of many farmers committing suicide.

In the agricultural year 2002/3, a drought year, the output of foodgrains dropped by 14%. It is not possible to know how much of agricultural work decreased because of this. The next year 2003/4 saw the best monsoon since 1994. But still Karnataka, for example, experienced a third consecutive year of drought, its rural economy virtually collapsed, and a large number of villagers from its northern districts have migrated to the cities.

In Andhra also the situation was not much better. The drought was said to be into the fourth year. Moreover, land was being fragmented, and cropping was more capital intensive and costly. Probably **what made Andhra distinctive**, because we at least do not hear nearly as many suicides elsewhere, was the fact that public investment in irrigation and other infrastructure was cut, and the availability of institutional credit reduced. The withdrawal of the government from certain sectors was to be seen everywhere, and BJP's *Vision Document* refers to the government withdrawing from "non-priority sectors". But here it seems the TDP-BJP combine was more keen on developing the cities, or the cities' shining side, than elsewhere. Otherwise how could one explain the death of over three thousand. Most of them are said to be small or marginal farmers and tenants, who could go only to the private money-lenders to borrow with exorbitant rates. The tragedy is going on even at this moment, after the change of the government both at the Centre and the State.

After discussing the suicides in Andhra at some length, P.Sainath concludes that "**Almost every sector of Indian democracy failed the AP farmer**; the Government and the political class; the tame intellectuals and planners. The human rights groups and a once-activist judiciary. And a media...". It would have taken time to bring home the incredible truth, because it is incredible, and almost amounts to starvation deaths. What was the thesis of **Amartya Sen** on democracy and starvation? Is not India a democracy? All

this would show the distance among different groups, and, if you like, **fragmentation**.

We will not go into the urban poverty. Suffice it to say that the slum population is increasing at the annual rate of 5%. It will double in 14 years' time.

One thing that went on quite efficiently under the NDA was the building of **highways and other roads**(Tavleen Singh wrote that only the Ministry of Surface Transport was bringing about change). But apparently the building of roads went ahead in such a way that **it did not contribute to the growth of employment**. In view of this, therefore, the most significant and welcome portion of the **CMP**(Common Minimum Programme), agreed upon by the UPA and the Left, designed on the whole for the benefit of the underprivileged, is its promise about employing one person each from the poor and lower middle class rural and urban family, **at least for 100 days a year, for the building of the "asset-creating public works" with minimum wages**, and the interim food-for-work programme. The creation of employment and the building of infrastructure are thus going to be put together, if things go fortunate enough. Mahatma Gandhi would have said khadi and related village industries in his own CMP.

"Expansion of the Democratic Space"

Now we will discuss how the Congress and its allies have won the Elections against the above background.

In spite of the social disabilities mentioned above, we will agree with Yogendra Yadav when he refers to the expansion of "**the democratic space**" that has been going on over the past decade. He attributes it to the Mandal factor, whose effect has spread beyond OBCs(Other Backward Classes) or North India, to the "Dalits, Adivasis, women, poor". It is apparent that they all belong to that part of India that is not "shining".

At the 4th **World Social Forum** held in Mumbai, January 2004, one of the dominant themes, as far as this writer saw, was the intended grouping together of the Dalits, Adivasis and the Muslims, under the initiative of the Dalits, under huge pictures of Ambedkar, against the enemies. The combined proportion of these three would in no case be as much as 40% of the population. It would seem, therefore, that when they talk of their enemies, singular or plural, they would have to face the majority of the population, and thus torpedo the possibility of a greater solidarity. Still it would seem that Yogendra Yadav's democratic space has got **something in common** with the intended Dalit-led grouping, and indeed many more. Both are about the wider movement from below to push out the vested interests, and it is this that has pushed the Congress and the allies upward, **rather than the Congress winning on its own**. It has lost miserably in such States as Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa, Punjab, and Chhattisgarh, where it got only from one to 4 seats each(in Bihar also it got only three but its allies dramatically increased theirs), and Kerala where it got none at all.

We will later see how the Muslim votes were won and by whom. Here we will see the cases of Scheduled Castes(Dalits), Scheduled Tribes(Adivasis), and OBCs.

There are 79 **Scheduled Caste constituencies** in all. The BJP got 21,

followed by the Congress's 14, SP(Samajwadi Party)'s 8, CPM's 6, BSP(Bahujan Samaj Party)'s 5 and others. All the above parties increased their seats at the expense of the BJP. The same applies to the 39 **Scheduled Tribe constituencies**, with the BJP still leading the Congress but with the margin of only one. The Dalits and the Adivasis have by and large shown disenchantment with the "India Shining" and the "Hindutva"(to be discussed later) slogans. Nellore constituency in Andhra is a Scheduled Caste one represented by the BJP. But this time it is the Congress that has been returned from there, a small but probably a significant indication of the expanding "democratic space".

The Mandal Factor

Then comes the **Mandal** factor. The upsurge of some rural-based intermediate jatis was already seen in the Southern and the Western parts of the country before independence. Then it came to North India. With the universal franchise, Constitutional guarantees for the "socially and educationally backward classes" or "other backward classes"(OBCs), and the State reorganization, those jatis, particularly in the Hindi-belt, soon involved themselves in a **dual fight over the land and land-use** against the well-entrenched upper caste groups on one hand, and the lower groups including Scheduled Castes on the other. Then came the Mandal Commission Report reserving 27% of the posts and places to the members of the OBCs. It was shelved by the Congress. But V.P.Singh's government put the recommendations into practice in 1989, which has fortified the position of the OBCs in such crucial areas as UP and Bihar.

A lot has been made of the conflict between **Mandal and Mandir**. It is not necessarily a correct representation of the ground reality as it was at the 1989 Elections that the BJP made a great stride, after the Congress government had served a full 5-year term. The Congress was antipathetic to Mandal since their feet had still been on the upper castes, Muslims, Harijans(Dalits) and Adivasis. The progress of the Mandir factor was more because of the corruption rampant among the Congress ranks, and the communal cards the Congress sometimes played. But after the adoption of Mandal there was an intense ideological battle between the two, leading to Ayodhya.

In the Elections the political outfits of the OBCs made a further headway, particularly in **Bihar and then in UP**. In the former, the RJD, a Yadav-based party led by Laloo Prasad Yadav, and a Congress ally, got 21 out of 40, 15 more, which accounts for most of the combined loss of BJP and its ally, JD(U) in the State. In UP, the two important regional parties, SP and BSP, were originally based on the Yadav-centred OBCs and the Dalits, respectively, but of late they have tried to expand those bases, and in the Elections they have taken an unprecedented number, 34 and 19, respectively, out of the total of 80, more than the BJP's 11 or the Congress's 9. Both of them, and Bihar's RJD also, have made an inroad into the Scheduled Castes(no Scheduled Tribe constituencies in UP or Bihar) and the Muslims.

There are certain enigmatic features attached to the State politics in UP and Bihar. The UP Assembly, for example, does not meet often. "This is a State run by ordinances and administrative discretion"(Vamdita Mishra). Many of the Members of Parliament and of the State Legislature are with criminal record, probably in higher proportion than elsewhere, revealing them as

oppressors rather than the oppressed. The two, together with Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, form the **BIMARU States** which are backward in terms of per capita income, basic social services like education and primary health care and basic infrastructure.

In spite of all this, however, it is true that at least on the electoral front, whether allied to the Congress or not, they have severely damaged the chances of the NDA to return to power. And this even apart from the anti-communalism factor which we will see presently.

In many Metropolitan constituencies also the NDA has lost heavily either to the Congress(Delhi, Mumbai) or to the Left(Kolkata).

If we look for something which has occurred spontaneously and from below during the near sixty years of India's independence, **the JP movement** would come to our mind. It ultimately led to the first non-Congress government at the Centre. And after that? We would exclude the Ayodhya movement(yatra and all that), which led to bloodshed, hatred and social divisiveness. The "democratic space" that overthrew the NDA could be seen as the successor to the JP movement, although there is no supreme leader, no catching slogan like the "Total Revolution", and so on. The catchword Mahatma Gandhi raised at the time of the Quit India movement, "**do or die**", would probably apply to the new government and its CMP. The government and the Congress must be well aware that if they do not do, they will meet their own political death before long.

Sardar Patel pitted against Gandhi

The second notable aspect of the recent Elections, is a **roll-back of communalism** by the people. It does not mean that the victory over communalism is decisive. But at least a significant beginning has been made.

It will be proper to look at the results in **Gujarat**, as it was here that, following the mysterious burning of a train at Godhra on February 27, 2002, a massacre of the Muslim population started the next day, and continued for three months. It was well organized, and probably pre-planned, by the sangh pariwar, a group of Hindu chauvinist organizations formed around the RSS. BJP is also among them. Unlike many riots so far, it has spread, or has been deliberately brought, **to the rural areas also.**

The whole carnage had been virtually sanctioned by the State government, bureaucracy and the police. After the Partition the Indian police was mainly **manned by the majority Hindus**, and was unduly suspicious of the Muslim minority and lenient toward the Hindus. Fine exceptions have been here and there, and on the occasion of Gujarat riots also some police officers have distinguished themselves by arranging the protection of the Muslims. The general picture, however, is as Asghar Ali Engineer, an eminent Muslim intellectual, writes, "I have conducted more than 150 police workshops and have seen raw prejudices among the police personnel"(*Secular Perspective*, May 16-31, 2004).

All this antagonism and hatred between the religious communities goes back to the days of the Partition, when the "**two-nation theory**" had been virtually forced upon, and the whole nation was divided according to religions, causing untold miseries on both sides of the newly created international boundary. The Partition was apparently a tragic failure, and mainly a handful

of Pakistani elite groups have benefited from it. To look upon the Indian Muslims as an enemy would be nothing but standing by the “two-nation theory”. **Gujarat was the only BJP-ruled State at the time**, and the main motive behind the pogrom was thought to be to consolidate the Hindu majority in preparation for the State Assembly elections due in that year. The BJP won by a large margin, and the same Chief Minister was installed for a second term.

The sangh parivar liked to depict the Muslims as terrorists, which would have fitted in well with the call for **anti-international terrorism**. The fact of the matter is that so far not a single Indian Muslim has been identified as an international Mujahiddeen, fighting in Afghanistan or elsewhere, until at least the Madrid bombing of March 2004.

Coming back to the Elections, almost all the poll surveys had predicted that, out of 26, the BJP would make a near clean sweep and the Congress would get about 2. The results were **the most startling** among the many surprises this time. The Congress won 12, which is 6 seats more than before but politically it means 10 more at least.

Although it is too early to say anything definite, a few things can still be said. The Congress took all the three **Scheduled Tribe seats** from the BJP. This would suggest that the tribes, who together with the Dalits joined the 2002 attacks upon the Muslims in force, had been disenchanted, either by “India Shining”, or Hindutva, or probably both. The Congress, on the other hand, lost one of the two Scheduled Caste constituencies that it had shared with the BJP. Which means the Congress won 9 general constituencies out of 21, and the indications are that they are in the **water-scarce** regions of the State which had not been benefited by the Sardar Sarovar Dam on the Narmada Valley.

Another factor is the **Muslim votes**. Was the Congress keen on getting them? It fielded candidates in all the 26 constituencies, but judging from their names none of them was a Muslim. Still, in the absence of any other organization that they could look up to, the Muslims, 9% of the State population, seem to have voted heavily for the Congress. The Congress was taking the Muslim votes for granted, rather than earnestly going for them. We would also assume that many Hindus who are concerned with the future of the communal factor have voted the Congress.

The half-hearted way the Congress faced the communal problem is evident in the fact that **Tushar Gandhi**, the Mahatma’s great-grandson, was refused the Congress ticket from Porbandar, the Mahatma’s native place. The Hindu chauvinists have long regarded the Mahatma as their enemy. In doing so they try to mobilize **Sardar Patel**, another Gujarati, in their support, by saying, as **Rajmohan Gandhi** writes, that Gujarat is Patel’s land. The Congress was defeated by the BJP at Porbandar. Could we not say, without giving a fight?

The Gandhian workers usually keep away from active politics. This may be in accordance with the Mahatma’s wishes. But in the Elections this time they are said to have actively fought the BJP.

Another significant factor was the **role of the judiciary** before and during the Elections. Already in September 2003 the Supreme Court said the Gujarat government should quit if it could not punish the rioters. In April 2004, it ordered that Vadodara’s Best Bakery Case, in which 21 accused were acquitted whereas 14 were murdered, should be retried, and that in the neighbouring Maharashtra. The Chief Justice of India, who had retired soon afterwards, told

a journalist "What do we do when the government does not act". These were bound to have some influence, perhaps not only in Gujarat. Incidentally in the first major conviction on the riots toward the end of November 2003, 12 were sentenced to life for killing 14 in Nadiad.

The Present State of Communalism

The Partition was mainly a British-Muslim League conspiracy. The Gujarat riots were a doing of the Hindu chauvinists. Was the Congress then innocent on both accounts? **It was not.** Confining ourselves to the post-Partition period, it often evoked Hindu, or for that matter other religious, emotion, particularly during the later Indira Gandhi era in the 1980s, It sometimes had a disastrous effect on the peace and social harmony among the people, particularly in the Punjab, Jammu-Kashmir and UP. Its Punjab policy ultimately boomeranged on itself and brought about death on the Prime Minister herself.

In the process it pushed out a number of people, by staging one split after another, who were not to the liking of Indira or the family. This has in itself helped regional parties to come up. In conjunction with personality cult this has led to a remarkable decrease in the policy-making ability of the Congress. Journalists of repute have lately said **of the Congress** that it holds conclaves but has no ideas(Tavleen Singh), it does not have a team and cannot guarantee a future to the voter(Shekhar Gupta), only Sonia is relentlessly campaigning but others are not seen and heard(Malvika Singh), it depends too much on Sonia and "doesn't have a single original thought or idea on how it will help the neglected poor"(Inder Malhotra).

Against this background where then did the sangh pariwar land India during the 6 years of the BJP rule, apart from Gujarat? The BJP got only 2 seats in the 1984 Elections when Rajiv Gandhi led the Congress to an all-time high. But by 1989 they made a great stride on the issue of **Ayodhya**, and again by 1991. They staged a nation-wide yatra by L.K.Advani, followed by another led by M.M.Joshi, and then by the demolition of the mosque at Ayodhya in December 1992. A CBI report says 8 persons have planned the demolition. The above-mentioned two are there, both of whom are among the 9 members of the BJP Central Parliamentary Board and former Cabinet Ministers. There is also one Chief Minister.

Thus, during the BJP rule, and for that matter **since the mid-1980s** when the sangh pariwar started the Ayodhya campaign, the communal hatred was spread, and polarization along religious lines deepened.

In the hilly Adivasi region of **Bharuch** district, Gujarat, for instance, the VHP, a sangh pariwar organization, has been trying to convert largely Christian Adivasis to Hinduism for fifteen years by inciting hatred against Christianity and Islam, whereas whatever development there had been introduced by missionaries. **Mumbai** is the most cosmopolitan city in India, but even there it is increasingly difficult for a Muslim to rent a room. At the time of Elections a Muslim carpet salesman in **Ahmedabad** said that if the BJP wins "we will continue to live in fear". At **Gorakhpur**, UP, at about the same time, the sitting BJP MP was saying "I want Muslim votes, too. But wash them in Gangajal first". He once told the people around him, when he heard the Gujarat riots, to count the Muslims, which would suggest the carnage could have taken place

outside Gujarat. The MP was reelected.

It is claimed that **Vajpayee and Advani**, represent two different streams of thought within the party. Kuldip Nayar, however, says that there is no substance in such a view, the Prime Minister has, for example, never thought of dismissing the Chief Minister of Gujarat after the riots, “they are constantly in touch with each other. No decision is unilateral.”, and “Vajpayee is at least **mistaken for a liberal at times**”. Therefore, a Muslim student is right when he says that the BJP makes “so much double-speak” and it is difficult to know “the real voice of the BJP”. What passed at the recent BJP national executive meeting in Mumbai is a case in point. The former Prime Minister said he had had enough, suggesting that he would resign, but the next day he said that had been a joke. Would it not be possible to assume that he allowed himself to be persuaded, was in fact willing to lead, was comfortable, was still indispensable, and no new leaders of his caliber were in sight. He remained there till the end, even though the party decided to go back to Hindutva. .

How then did the Muslims vote **outside Gujarat**? In Kerala and West Bengal, where the parties of the Left, led by the CPM, got a considerable number of seats, from the Congress and the pro-BJP Trinamool Congress, respectively, a large proportion of the Muslim votes must have gone for them. In Kerala the CPM fielded 13 candidates, and three of them were Muslims. So were 6 out of the 33 CPM candidates in West Bengal.

How about the UP, the largest State? We have already seen that it is one State where a **multi-party system** has been in existence with four major parties having contested the Elections separately. Out of the successful candidates the SP and the BSP has each got four Muslims, but the other two parties, the BJP and the Congress, the traditional patron of the Muslims, seem to have none at all. The Congress is still paying heavily for having conceded, during Rajiv Gandhi’s time, to the BJP’s demand concerning Ayodhya.

We do not have enough information on the **Christian** community. On the other hand there is a reason to believe that the **Sikh** community, including the Khalistanis, are happy with the inauguration of a devout Sikh as Prime Minister, the first ever from a minority community. The Sikhs have been victimized at the Partition, having abandoned everything they had in the then West Pakistan. They also suffered heavily from the divide-and-rule by the Congress culminating in the Operation Bluestar, and the Delhi massacre in 1984. One would be tempted to wonder if the gesture was intentional, on the eve of 20th anniversary of the Operation, by the daughter-in-law of the Prime Minister who ordered it.

Looking Ahead

Expansion of the “democratic space”, social harmony, creation of employment, alleviation of poverty, and, if we may add, reduction of military expenditure to be rerouted elsewhere, are thus the immediate tasks. Some of these are incorporated in the CMP. If we may go theorizing along these lines, we would hit upon a **developmental scenario which could be an alternative to the so far fashionable growth-oriented one**. When the new Prime Minister says his will be **aam aadmi’s government**, he must have had these things in mind. Still it would not be very much out of place to say that in the history of social sciences in India we find names like Radha Kamal Mukerjee(See

especially his *Planning the Countryside:First Report, 1946*), who have devoted attention to the ground-level development.

When the Mandal Report came out, many scholars expressed fear that its adoption would lead to more fragmentation of the society. They had of course reasons to do so. Looking back after a quarter of a century, it would appear that the fear was not as well-founded. The Report may have led to a countless number to raise their voice. **Keen observers have told us** during the Elections that “people will begin to ask more questions...the questions keep getting sharper”(T.N.Seshan), people will not vote according to their “inherited loyalties”(Prem Shankar Jha), or “ordinary, humble Indians” called “common man” wants “a decent standard of living” and points to “open drains, unbuilt roads, irregular supplies of electricity and water”(Tavleen Singh).

Certainly not all of these cannot be the product of Mandal. Still those questions and demands do represent the present level of Indian politics. Even if they are being channeled in all directions, and, in that sense, go fragmented, we would like to support V.A.Pai Panandiker when he says that it is the **democracy that can hold this diversity together**.

It may be added that the defeat of the BJP means a great deal, as it takes away a carrier of communal intolerance, hatred, and polarization. It would take a long time and sustained effort to do away with their legacies, which they have been building up for nearly 20 years. However, the fact stands that this was their **first, and historic, reversal**.

It goes without saying that much depends on the Congress. And particularly on its responsiveness. **They may do well to remember Mahatma Gandhi** in this connection. We are referring here to his pluralism and secularism, his non-violence, his stress on Indian languages, his idea for decentralization, his emphasis on personal initiative and non-dependence on the government, his concern with wide-spread under-employment, his devotion to labour and productive activities like khadi and village industries, agriculture and livestock, his preoccupation with safe water and other aspects of public hygiene, his stress on raising the standard of living, his regard for and sensitivity to the rights of the illiterate, underprivileged and women. The list may be even longer. **These have on the whole stood the test of time**. In the above we have been discussing the substance of the nation-building in India. **It would not be possible to do so without taking in as much as possible of Gandhi**.

Thank you.

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