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“A VISION OF INDIA

- Narendra Modi will allow the RSS a Party and Government-a balance”

by S L Rao

The Congress and all regional parties (Samajwadi, RJD of Lalu Yadav, BSP, DMK, AIDMK, YSR Congress, TDP, TRS, Shiv Sena, with NCP in a silent battle for supremacy of promoting Pawar's nephew versus daughter), are dynastic parties. They have succession confined to sons and sons-in-law, daughters and wives. As Pranab Mukherji is believed to have said (before he became President), Sonya Gandhi (the Family) is the glue that holds the party together. This is not true of the BJP, or so far, of the Biju Janata Dal (though Naveen Patnaik is also a classic inheritor), the Communist parties and the JD-U. The BJP and the Communists are democratic parties, with regular elections, though they also have close relatives being promoted. However, their membership decides on the Leaders. In the others, members accept the Family's leadership or they are marginalized or they are out. Policy options might be discussed but no opposition to the family decision is tolerated.

The BJP has the RSS as its control, which appears (the BJP experience in the first three months in government in 2014 has been ambivalent on this judgment) not to interfere in government policy decisions at the centre and the states. The RSS has ideological commitment but not on economic issues or even on security and foreign relations. It does considerable social welfare work among the Hindus. It provides the BJP with a legion of committed field workers who do intensive canvassing of voters. In return, a BJP government has to accept its views on issues like building a temple at Ayodhya, the vilification of Muslims, a 'moral' police in Karnataka, anti-Western attitudes to lifestyles and culture. Consequently every prospective head of a BJP government must pray for a shortfall in seats so that they head coalitions and can attribute "coalition dharma" to their not following RSS ideology. Vajpayee, Advani, Modi, Rajnath Singh, are graduates of the RSS training and may accept RSS views. However, for political reasons of gaining and retaining power, they might compromise on them. An independently strong leader like Vajpayee (and possibly Modi), can stand up and not go along. Vajpayee could not be ordered by the RSS. But even he took no action when there were communal riots in Gujarat under a BJP government. The RSS would certainly have disapproved if he had. Vajpayee's bold policy initiatives-the nuclear bomb tests announcing to the world that India was a nuclear power. holding out a hand of friendship to Pakistan despite verbal and military provocations, the road construction programme, the programme to bring all children into schools, and continuing with economic liberalization initiated by Narasimha Rao, had no prior consultation with the RSS. But he could not publicly and strongly condemn the killings in Gujarat in 2002. The BJP rule at the Centre was successful because the Prime Minister would not be a RSS puppet but did not challenge it.

The BJP had successful governments under Shekhawat and Vasundhara Raje in Rajasthan and the earlier regime in Uttarakhand. BJP governments in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Goa have shown good economic development and innovative administration. Human development indicators were above many other states. In the states where the BJP has ruled, the Chief Ministers are supreme. The party has not controlled the government. In all states except Karnataka there was little dissidence in the party, and what there was, was easily controlled. Karnataka BJP selected an inept Chief Minister whose emphasis on his caste, and open corruption (with a clear paper trail), led to his exit. BJP brought him back for his Lingayat vote bank, and might well regret it. Chhattisgarh, despite the *salwa judum*, created to combat the Maoists, and struck down by the Supreme Court, has been very effective in reaching social welfare schemes to the poor. Madhya Pradesh has also done. Goa has been transformed under the BJP. In all these states, the party apparently works in tandem with the government.

Congress ruled states have had more problems-whether in Maharashtra, Rajasthan Haryana, Uttarakhand, or Andhra. The problems have been of Chief Ministers with no political base and inability to combat dissidence, rampant corruption, Ministers using their powers to exploit women and also accumulate illegal wealth, suspect land transactions, and gross ineptitude. The Party HQ (i.e. the Family), does nothing about any of these issues until it is forced to act by media and public pressure. The longevity of Congress state governments appears to depend on their subservience to the party and Family. With a BJP government at the Centre it must be watched as to whether it will follow the Congress ways with the states.

In the Congress nobody dares to question any statement by the ruling family (presently three people). Mrs Sonia Gandhi fought for the Food Security Bill. No Congressman dared to contradict the misguided Act, though many saw its dangers to the economy. Many had felt that the Act came at a bad time for the economy, was excessive, ignored urgent investment priorities in agriculture and infrastructure, gave wrong incentives leading to far more food grains production than of other more demanded crops, and as with other welfare programmes it would reach only a fraction of intended beneficiaries. Similarly, the Party abandoned the Prime Minister when the Heir Apparent came out against an Ordinance cleared by the Cabinet, to safeguard the right of criminals to continue sitting in Parliament. So conditioned are Congressmen to obeisance to the Family, that there were paeans of praise to the Heir's foresight and rectitude. The MNREGA was pushed by the Leader because it was to get rural votes for the Party, despite the huge thefts from it. It has disrupted the labour market, reduced the availability of migrant labour for industry, wasted funds on "digging holes and filling them" instead of building assets, and failed to reach many intended beneficiaries.

Narasimha Rao was different from Indira Gandhi. He did not share her paranoia about a "foreign hand" trying to disrupt the nation. He believed in a more open economy, greater international trade and investment, in private enterprise as a stimulator of the economy, and wanted friendship with all nations. But he marginalized the Family. When he left office, the Family retaliated by deleting him from the Congress pantheon. The family strategy for the Party follows the Indira Gandhi precepts: don't allow anyone else in the Party to become too popular; always have strong dissidence within its state governments so that the Chief Minister is on his toes; use every instrument of government (CBI, Income-

tax, Enforcement Directorate, etc) to keep supporting parties, opposition, own Party members, in line; and not permit a whisper against members of the Family (including a son-in-law).

The BJP has managed to control dissidence. It seems to have learnt a lesson by presenting a more honest face as its Chief Ministerial candidates elsewhere. Having selected Narendra Modi as Prime Ministerial candidate, party leaders are publicly respectful to him. Even LK Advani was not permitted to keep opposing him.

What is to be seen is whether Modi has the political skills to negotiate with the diverse polity of India, and compromise when necessary. Equally, is he willing to act by what he says: that all Indians are equal irrespective of religion, caste and language? Unlike dynastic parties, he has the freedom to decide, and not be told to act accordingly by the Party. A truly effective Indian democracy requires the democratization of transparent political parties. All parties must accept India's rich diversity and not pander to any group.

say in a few subjects only" by S L Rao

Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister led India to a war that led to the creation of Bangladesh. She was titled "Empress of India" by the London Economist. Vajpayee called her Durga. In a few years she declared the Emergency, arrested most Opposition leaders and gave her second son Sanjay unbridled powers over the country. Congressmen meekly consented to her dictatorial powers. She asked for a "committed" bureaucracy, and a "committed" judiciary. She succeeded with the bureaucracy, It became so powerful that in the Manmohan Singh years, it had a stranglehold on government, with cushy post-retirement jobs, protecting corrupt colleagues, engaging in increasingly blatant corruption. The Congress litany in those years was that "there was no alternative" (TINA) to her to lead the Congress and keep it together. She marginalized competition in her party by inducting them to the Centre. They lost their support base. YB Chavan was an example. Jayapraksh Narayan was the towering pre-independence figure who opposed her. His opposition and the Emergency declared by Mrs Gandhi led to the creation of the Janata party government into which other political parties including the Jana Sangh merged themselves. He died and the Janata fell apart into its earlier constituents.

Today, Mr Narendra Modi's election campaigning and the diligent field work of thousands of RSS volunteers have given the BJP, apart from the work of an inept Congress party, government and Ministers, an overwhelming majority in the Lok Sabha. In a few months the BJP might well dislodge many of the remaining Congress and regional party governments in states. It will take little time for the BJP to control the Rajya Sabaha as well. With the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabah and most state legislatures

under BJP control, Mr Modi will have unprecedented power over his party, and central and state governments. His election speeches showed that he had a vision and a plan for transforming India into a developed nation, abolishing poverty and making India a global power. We have to wait for decisive reform actions from his government till then, maybe two years away. As with Indira Gandhi, murmurs have already begun which will become a roar, that “there is no alternative” to Mr Modi.

When Jawaharlal Nehru was Prime Minister, there were many potential successors. Many were powerful Chief Ministers or political leaders. Jayaprakash Narayan, S K Patil, BG Kher, BC Roy, Govind Vallabh Pant, Y B Chavan, S Nijalingappa, Devraj Urs, and many others could have succeeded him. Though he was immensely popular, with full control over the central government, and the party, the states had their own powerful leaders. He had to consult them. There was no talk that “there was no alternative” to Nehru.

There is one control over Mr Modi. That is the RSS. In the last three months it has demonstrated its clout. Ministerial appointments, top party positions, policies such as the ban on introduction of genetically modified seeds, all had the RSS imprint. Even the 49% cap on foreign investment in Defence industries appears to have the RSS “swadeshi” stamp. He has another consultant-the bureaucracy.

Through his brief period as P.M. Mr Modi has apparently consulted RSS on all important matters and there has been no reported conflict between them. Mr Modi is a strong person, who listens carefully, studies issues, and makes up his own mind. He is a modern man and his record in Gujarat shows that he uses technology, education, skills development, safe water, sanitation, and better employment to usher in development. Policies to introduce them will at some time conflict with the RSS.

Mr Modi seems to have compromised with the RSS on the opening of Defence to FDI. The Budget announced a 49% limit on foreign investment in Defence. This may not attract FDI to Defence soon. We can be confident that the limit will be raised to enable the foreign investor to have management control. The RSS will not like it. There will be other such situations where Mr Modi whose focus is on development prevents actions that might constrain it.

At the same time Mr Modi knows that he needs RSS foot soldiers to fight and win elections. He will have to compromise on some of the antediluvian ideas of RSS so that his progressive ideas in economic policy can be implemented to achieve development.

What are the likely RSS responses to important economic policy issues? “Swadeshi” is one of them. This could mean many things. Self-reliance was India’s policy in the 1950s till 1970s. It led to severe import restrictions. Even technology collaboration was restricted by measly limits on royalty payments. This is one policy that Mr Modi will never accept. As someone who has studied China’s development first hand, he knows that foreign technology and investment are vital for India to develop to another level. The RSS will find a compromise.

The RSS will be hostile to foreign investment. Remember Murli Manohar Joshi in the first BJP government saying “yes to computer chips but no to potato chips”. He was obviously in synch with the

RSS. But foreign investment in the 21st century might not be amenable to such discrimination. This is on area where there will be continuing conflicts between RSS and the BJP government.

The RSS might compromise by demanding strict regulation of foreign investments. This fits Mr Modi's plans to clean government of corruption and enable transparency. He might reform the whole system of departmental regulation by government and statutory regulation. Foreign investments will therefore be included in stricter regulation.

Another RSS bugbear is that of keeping foreign influences away. This would include attitudes to dressing especially by women, foreign movies, television shows, books about Hinduism and its mythologies by foreign scholars like Wendy Doniger, etc. These ideas might strike a sympathetic chord in Mr Modi and will keep peace with RSS.

It is in the spread of foreign cultural influence that the RSS is likely to make the most of its power over the government. RSS attempts will be to promote Hindu culture, Hindu prayers, epics, theology, etc. It will at the same time try to ban religious conversions. It might prevent Christian missionaries from spreading the Gospel of Christianity. There will be attempts to halt the incursion of foreign funds to Muslim madrasas. Certainly there will be attempts to make madrasas into regular and not purely Koranic schools. Mr Modi might not resist these ideas.

There will be attempts to give a strong Hindu orientation to education. This will clash with Mr Modi's vision of expanding the reach and quality of education and to bring in science and technology into education for all. He may not object to the emphasis now started in school education in Gujarat, on the "past glories" of the Hindu Rashtra. RSS will attempt to rebuild Hindu monuments taken over or demolished centuries ago by Muslim invaders who built Muslim monuments there. To safeguard the image of India as a safe investment destination Mr Modi may not permit such actions.

In the next five years of BJP rule we will see a more vocal and visible RSS. RSS ideas will penetrate into government poliices, as long as they have no possible adverse effect on economic development. Mr Modi's vision of a new India will stay. It may be more of a Hindu India. But this India will be better educated, skilled, healthy, use innovative technologies, live in better houses, in clean environments and with better infrastructure.

(1264)