

**Hindu Nationalism and the Evolution of Contemporary Indian Security** by Chris Ogden, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 257, INR 795

*Stuti Banerjee\**

The 2014 Indian elections gave the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) a clear mandate to form the government. In nearly more than a decade of coalition politics, it is perhaps the first time the leading party of the coalition is not dependent on its partners for the government's functioning. The mandate it received in the election led the BJP to become the single-largest party in the government and the Parliament, for the first time in over thirty years.

Since the elections, there has been widespread speculation on how the BJP will change or intends to change India. It has been accepted by the international community that India would now have a more *assertive* foreign policy that would concentrate on its economic development and further expand its defence preparedness. These conclusions have been drawn from the speeches made by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his election campaigns. It is speculated that there would be a 'gearshift' in India's security priorities and practices. This book by Chris Ogden thus comes at an opportune moment, as it examines the evolution of the idea of Indian security under the first NDA government led by the BJP. It analyses the contributions of BJP to the security identity of India.

---

\* Dr. Stuti Banerjee is a Research Fellow at the Indian Council of World Affairs, New Delhi.

ISSN 0976-1004 print

© 2015 Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

*Journal of Defence Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1, January–March 2015, pp. 103–108



The core ideology of the Party continues to be the same—a more secure and an economically prosperous India—but this has also evolved with changing times.

History plays an important role in the development of a country's national security, which is also based on a state's historical interactions, experiences and precedents. There are linkages between the domestic and foreign policies, with one influencing the other. Ogden has pointed out that security identity is different from state culture, in that it is neither a doctrine, nor an outlook or a plan (p. 11). It comprises of the political basis of India, derived from ideology and social fabric; the physical basis that defines the country; and the perceptual basis, how India and its leaders are viewed by the international community (p. 13).

The perceptions of threat for India, soon after Independence, were shaped by the horrors of Partition and communal riots. Thus, the Indian Constitution provided more power to the centre than the states on matters of security. This view prevails even today as the country battles threats from both within and outside its borders. Perhaps this is the reason why India has been unsuccessful in drowning any and all separatist movements: from the North-East to Punjab, to demands of greater autonomy from Tamil Nadu. The other issue that shaped the security identity of the new nation was the concept of safeguarding religious and caste minorities. The policy of positive discrimination was adopted to allow the minorities to access education and avail job opportunities.

The 1980s' India saw the use of religion and caste in politics, and in the 1990s the Mandal Commission gave rise to the phenomenon of caste-based political parties. The Indian State thus became vulnerable to the politics of caste and religion. Communal politics gained prominence and threatened the very character of a secular India, as declared in the Preamble to the Constitution. It was in this backdrop that the BJP became more prominent on the platform of the 'rise of Hindutva'.

The author points out that Hindutva was not narrowly defined (p. 51). It came to represent more than just religion, it was the embodiment of: the common people, the Hindus; the common language, Hindi; and the geography, Hindustan (p. 51). This has been the basis of BJP's domestic politics as well as foreign policy since its inception, and one can say without hesitation that it continues to be so even today. They felt that the concept of secularism as propagated by the Congress Party was discriminatory. The BJP also believed that the Congress was biased towards the interests of a particular region. Their distrust of the 'other'

manifested in the idea to promote education through the Hindi medium, the celebration of Hindu festivals with fanfare and closer examination of Ayurveda.

In economics, BJP has always been supported by the small and big businesses alike due to its pro-business stand. Its policy has been simply to enhance the economic power of India by encouraging more entrepreneurship. Before they formed the first NDA government, BJP had laid a lot of stress on *swadeshi* or the idea of a 'self-reliant nation'. They wanted to promote Indian business, especially in the defence sector. They were also wary of the United States (US) due to its support for Pakistan. Ironically, once in government, BJP laid the seeds of relations between India and the US that have borne fruits today.

It would be right to say that once in power, the dictates of the office meant that policies were driven as much by ideology and popular support as pragmatism. The author points out that this pragmatic approach was absent in India's security identity before 1998.

The other aspect that is of interest is the duality that BJP was able to present on nuclear weapons. They stated in their manifesto that they would, if required, conduct nuclear tests. To say that they conducted the nuclear tests to showcase India as a powerful nation, or to prove their strength to the domestic constituency, does not give the complete picture. The international environment also played a significant role in that decision. The global nuclear regimes, such as the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), around that time, were coming up for review and India was under pressure to join. The BJP took advantage of the situation to conduct the test, which it feared would not be possible after the reviews. The tests had a dual purpose—it projected India's capabilities to the international community, and domestically it fulfilled one of its manifesto agendas. The tests not only helped enhance India's image, they were also the first projection of 'the assertive Indian foreign policy' that was the highlight of BJP. This was a departure from the patterns of Indian foreign policy till then.

The rise of the political power of BJP coincided with developments in the mainstream media. The BJP was perhaps the first political party to use media and its outreach effectively to increase its support among the middle class. It used the media to legitimize its views on Hindutva, and ensured that they became the accepted norm. As stated before, after assuming power there were some changes in the security identity of

the BJP. This was because they had to compromise to the demands of the coalition partners, but it also had to do with the pressures of the office they assumed. The author points out that following the pragmatic approach, BJP had no objections to changing its views. It built relations with the US as it realized that the country would be a valuable partner in the economic development agenda. Thus, the party was flexible enough to be able to bring about a change in its policy. The elements it carried forward were Hindutva, swadeshi, a more assertive foreign policy, and military development and nuclear power. It evolved and changed them in the face of coalition politics. Nonetheless, the major achievement was that they were able to gather support of the people for both their agendas: Hindutva and economic liberalization. They were able to legitimize the shift in India's policy from politics of the centre to one that is right of the centre. It is an aspect that is visible in the manifesto and way of functioning of the current government.

Relations with the neighbourhood were of special importance to the BJP. Devoid of the baggage of the past, unlike the Congress, they were able to practise foreign policy differently. According to Ogden, on the Kashmir issue with Pakistan, the BJP was not swept by moral arguments and personal linkages, unlike the Congress, and their actions were derived keeping in mind the demands of statecraft. A similar approach was followed with respect to China, where BJP was successful in getting that country to *de facto* recognize Sikkim as part of India, in return for accepting China's sovereignty over Tibet (p. 112). Free from Nehruvian ideals, it forged partnership with the military government of Myanmar in anti-terror operations in the North-East, consequently helping India in its quest for energy security and to take steps to try and halt the encirclement of India by China. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) got a lot of attention in the bid to curtail China's forays, build on historical linkages, and establish foundations for future relationships. Thus, the BJP-led NDA Government was able to build a security identity for India that was not very different from their party manifesto, with few compromises. According to Ogden, a major reason for this success was that they were neither burdened by the blunders of the past governments, nor held hostage by tradition or ideals. They were starting afresh and building their own reputation.

In this interesting book, the author has also studied the systematic manner through which the BJP-led NDA brought about a change in India's foreign relations: moving from the non-aligned ambiguity,

moralistic Nehruvian viewpoint to a more assertive, realpolitik, pro-business, and pragmatic viewpoint.

The first example of this was the nuclear tests that focussed international attention on to India. They were to showcase a more 'muscular' India that could no longer be clubbed with Pakistan, but had to be viewed as a separate entity. India did not wish to be confined to the issues of the region but wanted to be seen as state with an international agenda. The success of the test was further enhanced by the diplomatic activism that was able to project the reasons for the tests. Allowing the US to pressurize Pakistan on behalf of India during the Kargil conflict was also a departure from the past and an example of India's new foreign policy outlook. Nonetheless, certain core areas such as relations with Russia were not abandoned for new friends, in fact the Republics of Central Asia were courted insistently.

The BJP was successful in bridging the gap between domestic and foreign policies. The pro-business, pro-capital and swadeshi was linked to the pro-US investment and technology exchange approach. It also involved the diaspora which was made to feel a part of the country's development. The need to extend close relations with Pakistan and China was correlated to the idea of 'Akhand Bharat' with all the disputed borders resolved. A better defence for the security of the nation was one of the reasons for the pro-Israel stand taken by the government. Thus, BJP was able to find linkages that would ensure that it had the support of the domestic constituency for foreign policy transformation. The substantive changes introduced in the norms structuring India's security identity were carried forward by the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA), thereby formalizing them. Today, these form the new security identity of India and the basis of its international relations policy-making apparatus.

Chris Ogden's book is commendable in that it has been successful in demystifying the BJP. The author has been able to show that the party is evolving in its ideology. It is changing and adapting itself to the world and technology around it. He describes it as a party that firmly believes in the idea of Hindutva ideology but understands that it has to be achieved within the limitations of coalition politics. When in power it did not abandon its policy objectives, but modified some and accepted changes in others. For a scholar studying Indian politics, this book would be a valuable read. It holds greater significance now than ever before as India is governed by the second NDA government led by the BJP. The volume

is interesting as one can find linkages between the security identity as developed by the BJP, implemented by the first NDA government, and the agenda of the present government.